



Society In The Literature Of Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay: A Study Of “Bangal Nidhiram” And “Moyna Kothay”

Sunanda Ghosh^{1*}, Dr. Prasanta Chakraborty²

^{1*}Research Scholar, Department of Bengali, Cotton University, Guwahati, Assam, India

²Associate Professor, Department of Bengali, Cotton University, Guwahati, Assam, India

Citation: Sunanda Ghosh et al (2023). Society In The Literature Of Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay: A Study Of “Bangal Nidhiram” And “Moyna Kothay”, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 29(4) 6241-6248

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v29i4.11342

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay’s literary works offer a vivid portrayal of nineteenth-century Bengali society, marked by deep social inequalities, rigid orthodoxy, and emerging modern consciousness. His narratives capture the harsh realities faced by women, including restricted mobility, denial of education, child marriage, dowry demands, and severe forms of domestic abuse. Through *Moyna Kothay*, he exposes the suffering of Prabhabati, whose life reflects the systemic cruelty inflicted upon brides, driven by greed, superstition, and patriarchal authority. The story illustrates how religious hypocrisy and caste prejudices were strategically used to justify violence and discrimination, revealing the contradictions within so-called pious households. Similarly, *Bangal Nidhiram* highlights the oppressive dowry system, economic hardships of ordinary families, and the duplicity of socially respected figures who exploit tradition for personal gain. Alongside these social critiques, Trailokyanath also depicts the transformative influence of Western education, which encouraged the younger generation to question oppressive customs and aspire toward social reform. His works demonstrate a tension between conservative forces and progressive thought, making them important documents for understanding the transitional nature of nineteenth-century Bengal. By blending sharp satire with realistic social commentary, Trailokyanath not only exposed societal flaws but also advocated for humanitarian values and modern sensibilities. This study analyses how *Moyna Kothay* and *Bangal Nidhiram* reflect the socio-cultural dynamics of the time, particularly issues related to women’s status, dowry, and religious orthodoxy, thereby establishing Trailokyanath as a significant voice for social awareness and reform.

Keywords: Nineteenth-century Bengali society, Women’s status and oppression, Dowry and domestic abuse, Religious hypocrisy, Western influence and modernity, Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay’s social critique, etc.

Introduction

The nineteenth century was a defining period in the socio-cultural history of Bengal, marked by profound contradictions, transitions, and tensions. While the century witnessed the rise of Western education, modern rational thought, and early reformist movements, it was simultaneously burdened by deep-rooted social prejudices, rigid orthodoxy, and oppressive customs that shaped everyday life. Women in particular bore the brunt of these inequalities, being denied basic rights, education, and autonomy. Early marriage, dowry, domestic abuse, and the constant fear of social ostracism severely restricted their physical and emotional freedom. Religious dogma and caste hierarchies further strengthened patriarchal control, creating an environment where injustice often remained hidden under the guise of tradition and moral duty. Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay, one of the prominent literary figures of the age, observed these realities with profound sensitivity and insight. Through his writings, he exposed the contradictions of nineteenth-century Bengali society and critiqued the hypocrisies embedded within its socio-religious framework.

Trailokyanath’s works, including *Bangal Nidhiram* and *Moyna Kothay*, serve as powerful lenses through which the social landscape of the time can be examined. In *Moyna Kothay*, the tragic life of Prabhabati

reveals the brutalities inflicted upon brides under oppressive marital norms and dowry-driven greed. Her suffering, manifested through physical abuse, child marriage, deprivation, and extreme subjugation, reflects the condition of countless women who lacked a voice within the patriarchal household. The narrative also exposes how religious purity, caste bias, and societal expectations were wielded as tools to justify cruelty and suppress dissent. The story is not merely the tale of one girl, but a symbolic representation of the larger suffering endured by women in the period.

Similarly, *Bangal Nidhiram* offers a critical portrayal of the dowry system and the economic pressures borne by common families. The narrative highlights how social prestige, caste superiority, and material greed governed matrimonial alliances. Trailokyanath masterfully intertwines satire and realism to reveal the moral decay hidden beneath respectable social identities. His depiction of characters who lead dual lives, pious by day and immoral by night, emphasises the hypocrisy prevalent in society.

This study seeks to explore how these two works reflect the socio-cultural conditions of nineteenth-century Bengal, focusing on themes such as women's status, dowry, religious conservatism, and social hypocrisy. By analysing these narratives, the research underscores Trailokyanath's role as a keen observer and critic of his times, whose writings continue to hold relevance for understanding both historical and contemporary social issues.

Significance of the Study

The present study holds considerable significance as it examines the works of Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay as vital literary documents that illuminate the socio-cultural realities of nineteenth-century Bengal. Through narratives such as *Bangal Nidhiram* and *Moyna Kothay*, Trailokyanath exposes a society marked by orthodox conventions, patriarchal power structures, caste restrictions, and widespread social injustices. Analysing these texts enables a deeper understanding of the period, particularly the harsh conditions faced by women, who were subjected to early marriage, dowry pressures, domestic violence, and severe limitations on education and autonomy. Prabhavati's tragic experiences in *Moyna Kothay* stand as a representative of the systemic oppression endured by countless women of that era, making the work an essential resource for studying gendered suffering and societal attitudes of the time.

Furthermore, the study is significant because it highlights Trailokyanath's critique of religious hypocrisy and caste-based discrimination, themes that reveal the contradictions between outward piety and inward moral corruption. Characters such as Maschachak, who publicly uphold religious ideals while privately engaging in immoral and exploitative acts, serve as powerful embodiments of the duplicity prevalent in nineteenth-century society. Examining these portrayals provides insight into how oppressive traditions were maintained under the guise of religious purity and social respectability.

The research also contributes to a broader understanding of how Western education and modern ideas began to influence Bengali society, encouraging critical thinking and challenging entrenched customs. Trailokyanath's works document this transitional moment, capturing the tension between conservative forces and the emerging reformist consciousness among the youth.

Ultimately, this study is significant because it positions Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay as an important social critic whose literature not only reflects historical realities but also inspires reflection on continuing social issues. By analysing his narratives, the study enhances our understanding of nineteenth-century Bengali society, contributes to feminist and social-historical scholarship, and underscores the continuing relevance of his critique in contemporary discussions of gender, justice, and social reform.

Description

Time never stops. With the passage of time, society has undergone numerous changes, and people's lives have taken various turns. Each turn is a witness to different changes. Just as the 19th century differed from the previous century, the current social system is vastly different from that of the 19th century. As time progresses, this difference will continue to grow. The social life of the 19th century was not as smooth as it is today. Although social imperfections still exist today, the social life of the 19th century was fraught with difficulties. Women were denied basic rights, let alone equal rights. Religion, self-interest, and class divisions have become obstacles to social progress. The shackles of religion had bound people so tightly that even the slightest social awareness and humanity had been erased from their minds. On the other hand, the influence of Western education and culture brought about a wave of modernity that had a profound impact on 19th-century society. This impact was not limited to food, clothing, and behavior but also extended to the inner world of women. The new generation of youth had begun to question the old social order and was not willing to accept anything without critically evaluating it. As a result, 19th-century society was divided into two groups: the conservative and the modern-minded youth. This characteristic of the 19th century set it apart from other centuries. Although the conflict between these two groups had hurt society in many ways, it had also helped to break free from many shackles. Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay was one of the many writers who reflected the various aspects of 19th-century society in his works. No social issue escaped his attention. He conducted an in-depth study of women's status, education, the true nature of people's faith in religion, food habits, clothing, politics, and more. He was able to pinpoint the ailments of society and express them in his own unique way through his writings and sharp critiques. Each of Trailokyanath's works reflects the social life of the 19th century. However, we will focus on his notable works, "Mayna Koathay" and "Biral Bala".

Through these stories, we will analyze the social landscape of the 19th century, highlighting issues such as women's status, the dowry system, and religious hypocrisy. We will also determine the author's stance on these social injustices. For the sake of convenience, we will divide our discussion into several sections, including women's status, dowry, and religious conservatism or hypocrisy.

The status of women in the 19th century was deplorable. Women's sphere of activity was limited to the four walls of their homes. Men, on the other hand, had the freedom to move around and make decisions. They had access to education and could shape their own lives, but women were denied these basic rights. Society expected women to confine themselves to household chores and childcare. The fear of being ostracized and labeled "unfaithful" was ever-present. Women were not encouraged to develop their own interests or think critically. In the story "Mayna Koathay", we hear Prabhobati's mother saying as follows:

"ami stree lok; valo mondo bujhite pari na." ¹

This statement reflects the societal attitude towards women at that time.

Prabhobati's mother made this statement when she asked her son, Suresh, to extend a helping hand to Prabhobati's parents-in-law, who were in a pitiful state. It was not uncommon in those societies for women to think of themselves as weak or lacking in confidence. Most women shared similar thoughts about themselves. Prabhobati's words also reflected the same sentiment. For her, enduring unbearable torture at her in-laws' house without complaint was the ultimate purpose of being a woman. According to Prabhobati, who says as follows:

"ami meye manush. Kosto sohjyo korite meye manush prothibite jonmogrohon kore. Tahar por ei ghor amake cirokal korite hoibe, such hoileo amake ei ghore thakite hoibe, dukhyo hoileo amake ei ghore thakite hoibe. Bap vai raja hoileo meye manusher pokkhe se ghor ichu nohe. Eirup vabiya ami chup koriya chalam." ²

Certain social norms and decisions are ingrained in women from a young age, and they often accept these decisions as the guiding principles of their lives, adapting themselves accordingly. In this case, men had the authority to make decisions regarding women's lives, including those related to their well-being. Women were not allowed to think about their own interests or make decisions about their own lives. The ideas that pushed women into darkness were reflected in the words of Bhudhar Chattopadhyay, the editor of "Bedbhasya", who says as follows:

"vogoban monu likhiyachen stree jatike kokhono swadhinota dibe na, tini streediger swadhinotar biruddhe onek slok lipiboddho koriya giyachen. Sei sokol sloker prokrito uddeshyo ei je streedigoke swadhinota dile tahate sontan utpadon, sontan protipalon, grihokarjyo o pobitrota nosto hoite pare." ³

This highlights the patriarchal mindset that dominated society, where women's roles were limited to specific duties, and their freedom was restricted.

Families would also raise their daughters differently compared to their sons. The family played a significant role in shaping women into confined individuals. According to the book "Strishikshabidhayak" published by the School Book Society:

"bap maye lekha porar kotha kohen na. kebol kohen je ghorer karjyo kormo, radha bara na shikhile porer ghorkonya kemon koriya chalaibi. Songsarer kormo dewa thowa shikhilei swoshurbari sukhyati hobe. Notuba okhyatir sima nai. Kintu gyaner kotha kichui kohen na." ⁴

Marrying off daughters at a young age was a common practice in society. The idea was that early marriage would help girls gain experience in childbirth and household management. This was a significant obstacle to women's education. Before girls could even understand anything, their guardians would get them married. In the story, Prabhobati was married off at the tender age of nine. Although her father, Mustafi, was not entirely in favour of marriage, he might have agreed under social pressure and Maschatchak's persuasion. When Maschatchak proposed marriage, Mustafi said as follows:

"amar meye ekhono choto." ⁵

Such child marriages often lead to dire consequences in girls' lives, such as widowhood and Sati. Additionally, due to a lack of education, girls were unable to develop a sense of protest and defend themselves. They would often accept the prevailing social disorder as normal. As a result, minor girls would become victims of inhumane situations like bride torture. In the story, we see the picture of torture inflicted upon Prabhobati. The root cause of this torture was the greed of Maschatchak and his son, as well as the obsessive-compulsive behavior of Maschatchak's wife. Prabhobati suffered from her mother-in-law's obsessive behavior in the name of maintaining purity. According to the author:

"songsarer kajkormo bisoye swasuri thakurani eirup onek upodesh diyachilen. Kintu sokol somoye provaboti tahar adesh moto kaj korite parito na. bason satbar gongajole na dhuiya vromkrom hoyto choybar dhuito. Ekbar, duibar, tinbar, charibar, pachbar, choybar, koybar dhowa hoilo, arale bosiya swasuri thakurani taha goniya dekhiten. Shitkale sondhyar por kono kono din hoyto se mathay valo koriya gobar jol dhalito na. kodachar jacob mustafir konya ar koto valo hoibe! Sejonyo swosur sasuri tahake ekebarei dekhite pariten na; swami odhor, tahar much dorshon koriten na." ⁶

A neighbor witnessed the mental and physical torture inflicted upon Prabhobati. The author writes as follows: "protibeshini bolilen,- protidin dui ekbar minse, magi ar chora dudher bachake prohar kore. Ki bolibo go ! nidarunvabe prohar kore. Chorkeo lok emon nisthurvabe prohar kore na ; ar bina dose prohar kore." ⁷

This highlights the dark side of 19th-century family conflicts, where daughters-in-law were subjected to physical and mental torture by their in-laws, especially their mothers-in-law. Prabhobati's physical condition

deteriorated due to excessive labour day and night. She fell ill with a fever and cough, making it difficult for her to breathe. When her father called a doctor, it was revealed that:

“meyetir dui dikei nimoniya hoiyache. Dui diker swash-proswas jontro bondho hoiya zaiteche. Pira otishoy kothin.”⁸

Notably, Prabhobati's in-laws did not arrange for any medical treatment for her. It was her father, Mustafi, who went to his son-in-law's house, called a doctor, and got her treated. The cause of her illness was excessive and continuous work in water, inadequate food, and inhuman physical abuse. When Prabhobati's mother undressed her, she saw that:

“sorbange kalo kalo dag. Kono sthane gol, kono sthane lomba dag. Onek sthaner chal uthiya giyache. Ghayer moto sada hoiya dogdog koriteche. Shorirer je somudoy sthan sorboda bostro dara abrito thake, seisokol sthaneo seirup dag.”⁹

Prabhobati told her mother that the reason for her fever was that her husband, Adhar, became violent when he found a root in his rice. The situation escalated, and her mother-in-law scolded her. When her father-in-law came home in the evening, her mother-in-law told him about the incident. Then, the three of them burned her body with a hookah pipe and tongs, causing the marks on her body. Prabhobati said as follows:

“swasuri amake onek tiroskar korilen. Sondhyar por swasor bari asile tahake tini sei kotha boliya dilen. tahar por tamak khaibar kolke o cimta agune poraiya tinjone miliya amar sorboshorire cheka dilen. Tai amar gaye eirup dag hoiyache. E beter dag nohe. Seidin ratrie amar jor hoilo.”¹⁰

Despite doing all the household chores, including cooking, Prabhobati didn't get enough food to eat. Her mother-in-law would intentionally give her less rice, leaving Prabhobati with hardly anything to eat. Due to hunger, Prabhobati would feel dizzy, and to alleviate her hunger pangs, she would eat tamarind leaves. In her own words:

“jokhon kacha tetul na thake, tokhon mutha mutha tetul pata chibai.”¹¹

Prabhobati, a victim of such abuse, succumbed to pneumonia at the tender age of 14. The doctor hinted at her impending death. When Mustafi wanted to take Prabhobati to Kolkata for treatment, the doctor said as follows:

“kahake loiya jaiben? Ar se somoy nai. Somoy thakite se ayojon korile hoito.”¹²

This fever wasn't just for a day or two; she had been suffering for quite some time. Despite her condition, her in-laws left her on a torn mat on the floor without any medical treatment. They didn't even bother to stay by her side, fearing they would become impure by touching her. As a result, Prabhobati met a tragic end. Prabhobati, the bride, is not just a character; she represents the oppressed brides of the conservative society of the 19th century. The attitude towards women during that time was reflected in the *Amrit Bazar Patrika* (25/05/1869), of which testimony appears as follows:

“stree jatir prokrit kolyan kamona kore emon loker sonkhya bongo deshe oti olpo ache. Kulkaminidigoke obogga kora odhikangso lokeri prokriti. Kotokgulo loker prokriti eto tibro je naridiger mongolarthok ekti bakyo shunileo nitanto biroktto hon. Jinni orup kotha utthapon koren tahake bidrup opoman korite truti koren na. meye manuser pokkho somorrthon koren bidhay tahadigoke ‘mege’ boliya upohas koren.”¹³

Not only did society have such thoughts about women, but newspapers of that time also reported cases of physical and mental torture of women. According to the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* (30/07/1868):

“bidon streete kono bykti apon streeke duhschoritra sondeho koriya hatur dara tahake emoto prohar kore je, tahar jibon songsoyaponno. Streeloktir mathar khuli vangiya mostisko bahir hoiya poriyache.”¹⁴

Dowry was another major reason for bride torture. In many cases, the in-laws would torture the bride due to dissatisfaction or greed for dowry. Sometimes, the in-laws' sinister intentions were hidden behind the torture. They would kill the bride and arrange a second marriage for their son to get more dowry. Prabhobati's in-laws tortured her, hoping to get dowry. Prabhobati's words make it clear, as demonstrated as follows:

“ami moriya gele cheler punoray bibaho diya ihara onek taka paiben. Seijonyo ihara amake eto jontrona den ar seijonyo pet voriya amake khaite den na. iccha je, na khaiya ami moriya jai. Ta eibar ihader monoskamona siddho hoibe.”¹⁵

As a woman, Prabhobati's description of her situation is a testament to her suffering. Maschatchak, Prabhobati's father-in-law, took advantage of his friendship with Prabhobati's father, Mustafi, and borrowed 500 rupees from him. When Mustafi couldn't repay the loan, Maschatchak pressured him to take the money from his office, and later, when Mustafi couldn't repay, Maschatchak didn't return the money. Instead, he considered it as dowry and embezzled it. Maschatchak didn't hesitate to put Mustafi in trouble for his own benefit. Maschatchak's statement goes as follows:

“takar jogar korite pari nai, ta ami ki koribo! Konyar bibahe amake tumi ekti poysa dao nai. Hajar takar kom aj kal ar ekti meye par hoy na. amake n ahoy ei pacshoto taka dile ! aj Jodi tomar onya moriya jay, taha hoile putrer bibaho diya onayase ami dui tin hajar taka pai.”¹⁶

Maschatchak is a typical character of a greedy and conservative person. Such characters can be seen not only in the 19th century but also in the centuries before and after. He proved himself unworthy not only as a father-in-law but also as a friend. Mustafi, being deceived by him, felt so ashamed that he considered suicide as an easy way out. When Prabhobati was bedridden due to severe physical abuse, Mustafi and his wife rushed to her side. To save their son and hide their own misdeeds, Maschatchak blamed Prabhobati for everything and threatened to remarry his son, citing societal pressure. Maschatchak said as follows:

“o bou e ar amader kaj nai. Gun koribar jonyo se din se amar cheler vater vitor shikor diyachilo ! kon din amar cheleke mariya felibe . omon rakkhosi bou e amar kaj nai.; putrer ami punoray bibaho dibo. Koto loke amar sadhyo sadhona koriteche.”¹⁷

Later, when Adhar was drowning in a boat accident, Maschatchak begged Mustafi to save his son's life. Behind his desperation to save his son's life was not just paternal love but also the greed for money, as he had already planned to remarry his son for a large sum of money after Prabhavati's death. Maschatchak pleaded, saying as follows:

“oi cheleti vinno rithibite amar ar kichu nai. Uhar bibaher somondho hoiyache. Ograhayon mase uhar bibaho hoibe. Onok taka paibo. Amar cheleke bacha vai.”¹⁸

The story “Bangal Nidhiram” also highlights the pathetic situation of common people due to the pressure of dowry. One of the characters, Ekakari, a Kulin Brahmin, wanted to marry his daughter to a Mahakulin Nidhiram. However, meeting the demands of a Kulin groom was beyond his means. The author writes as follows:

“sokole eto taka chahiyachilen je, ekkorir vita mati bikroy korileo se taka hoy na.”¹⁹

Ekakari had previously failed to arrange his daughter's marriage with Nabinu, the son of the zamindar of Jaidebpur, due to financial constraints. Ekakari said:

“ami tahar pitar nikot giya hate poita joraiya koto kadilam . tini tin hajar taka chahilen! Tin hajar taka kono purushe kokhono chokkhe dekhi nai . jemon uccho asha koriyachilam , seirup fol paiya aste aste firiya asilam.”¹⁹

The greed for dowry spread like a disease in society, leading to social decadence, including polygamy. Women were the primary victims of polygamy. No woman wanted to live with a co-wife, but women were forced to accept the rules set by patriarchal society. Due to dowry demands, parents would often lament the birth of a daughter and pray for a son. This led to an increase in female feticide and infanticide. Marrying off daughters has become a significant burden for ordinary families due to dowry demands. The newspaper “Sulabh Samachar” reported on the dowry demands of the time, highlighting the exorbitant demands made by grooms:

“M.A othoba charTi pash kora chele – akbori mohorer moton erup chele pawa durrlov. Tahader dor hirar angti, muktora mala, moy chain, sonar ghor, ghorar suter rupa bason, 70/80 vori sonar olonhkar, jorowa gohona 2/4 khoni ebong nogod dui hoite tin sohosro taka, khat shojya provriti. Pitol, kasar dansamogri oboshyo ritimotoi thakibe.”²¹

A poet also wrote a poem against the dowry system, highlighting the increasing demands made by grooms and their families. In this connection, the following excerpt may be exemplified:

“boro bejay dor barale borer bishwobidhyaloy
Banglay konyadan zoto grihosto lokera mara jay'
Na hote entrens pash, chay go rupa thala gelash,
B.A sonar garu, M.A te sorboswo chay.”²²

Therefore, the purpose of marriage was to improve one's economic status, and Maschatchak was no exception. People like Mustafi and Prabhavati, who were ordinary citizens, became victims of this system. Religious orthodoxy was a significant aspect of the 19th century. Many superstitions and blind beliefs were prevalent in the name of religion. People would often discuss and debate various issues, big or small, and the fear of being ostracized for not following religious norms was ever present. Those who claimed to be the guardians of religion and its propagators often practiced what they preached in secret. In the story, Maschatchak was considered a pious person by the common people. However, he was involved in some illicit activities, including the trade of forbidden meat. The author writes:

“jahaje jogaibar nimitto ki mangser tini thika loiyachen, afiser lok tahake oti poriskar koriyai bolilo. Kintu se mangser nam shunile hindur pran byathito hoy; se jonno tahar nam e sthane likhit hoilo na. drobyoti ki, ar bodh hoy, taha sposito koriya bolite hoibe na.”²³

Maschatchak was not only a religious person but also a wealthy one. Therefore, despite knowing his true nature, people would not dare to question him openly. As Trailokyanath aptly said, ‘When one has wealth, there is no limit to respect and dignity.’ The 19th-century attitude towards religion is further reflected in the conversation between two ordinary people. One of them says as follows:

“shudhyachar, khadyakhadyer bichar, sondhya, ahnik, jop, puja, ei sokol holo dhormo. Tahar modhye khadyakhadyer bichar hoilo prodhan dhormo. Tahar sakkho dekho- brohmohoty, go hotya, stree hotyakorile lok jativrostoy hoy na, kintu okhadhyo vokkhon korile lok jativrostoy hoy. Orrthaparrjoneer sohit dhormer kono somondho nai.”²⁴

This highlights the hypocrisy of the time, where people like Maschatchak could engage in illicit activities and still be considered respectable, while ordinary people like Mustafi would be ostracized for minor transgressions. Sea travel was considered taboo for the devout in the 19th century. Those who traveled abroad were often ostracized or shunned by society. Trailokyanath himself faced such problems in his personal life, which he reflected in the story:

“radhanather kutumbo bilat giyachilo, sei oporadhe radhanathke tini ekghore korite chesta koriyachilen.”²⁵

The concept of purity in the name of religion is a realistic portrayal of 19th-century family life. While maintaining purity is undoubtedly beneficial, excessive obsession with purity can lead to family conflicts.

Prabhabati was a victim of such conflicts. According to her mother-in-law, she was not a pure woman. Bama Kawrani's description of Maschatchak's wife reveals her obsessive behaviour:

"boro shuchibai! Boro pitpite! ... dingaiya poth choliten. Amra nich jati. pache amader batas gaye lage, tai amadigoke dekhile dosh hat dure giya daraiten." ²⁶

This highlights not only the obsession with purity but also the prevalent caste system, where upper-caste individuals would avoid lower-caste people. Trailokyanath, being a strong critic of such social evils, used this narrative to critique the hypocrisy of the upper class. In a situation where Maschatchak and his wife were struggling financially and physically, it was Bama Kawrani, a lower-caste woman, who cooked for them, highlighting the importance of humanity over caste and social status.

In another story, "Bangal Nidhiram", the character Uddhab, a Brahmin by caste, leads a double life. By day, he is a devout Brahmin, but by night, he engages in robbery and murder. He is willing to sacrifice Nidhiram, another Brahmin, without hesitation. When revealing his identity to Nidhiram, Uddhab says:

"ektu dure giya uposthit hoile sorrdar bolilo – ami ke jano? Ami uddhob dada. Mod khaiya sedin tomar pranbodh korite uddhot hoiyachilam. Vagyokrome tumi sedin rokkha paiyachile. Aj sada chokkhe tomar maha khaite amar probritti hoilo na." ²⁷

This highlights the hypocrisy and duality of characters like Uddhab, who claim to be pious but engage in heinous crimes.

Trailokyanath's works, such as *Kankabati*, *Domru Charit*, *Bangal Nidhiram*, and *Moyna Kothay*, remain timeless and relevant even today. They highlight the major social issues of his time, including the status of women, bride torture, dowry, and the hypocrisy practised in the name of religion. He skilfully portrays these concerns and ensures that wrongdoers receive appropriate punishment, thus offering a powerful commentary on the injustices prevalent in society.

His writings not only criticise the conservative and orthodox nature of nineteenth-century society but also reveal the growing influence of Western ideas on Indian life. Trailokyanath incorporated modern thought into his works, inspiring the younger generation to think critically and independently. Through his literature, he championed progress and opposed social injustices, encouraging people to free themselves from rigid traditional constraints.

Moyna Kothay stands as an important reflection of the society of his era and his views on it. It remains a valuable text for understanding the social conditions of the nineteenth century and appreciating Trailokyanath's vision for a more enlightened and progressive society.

Findings

The study reveals several important insights into nineteenth-century Bengali society as portrayed in the works of Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay. A major finding is the deeply oppressive condition of women, who were denied education, autonomy, and basic human rights. Women's lives were confined within rigid patriarchal expectations, and they internalised these beliefs, as seen in the self-submissive statements of Prabhabati and her mother in *Moyna Kothay*. Their experiences demonstrate how societal norms conditioned women to accept suffering as their destiny.

Another key finding concerns the prevalence and brutality of bride torture. Prabhabati's physical abuse, burn marks, starvation, and overwork illustrate how dowry-driven greed and patriarchal control resulted in inhumane treatment of young brides. Her death at fourteen due to neglect and violence underscores the fatal consequences of such customs.

The research also finds that the dowry system was a widespread social evil affecting both wealthy and impoverished families. In *Bangal Nidhiram*, Ekakari's helplessness in meeting dowry demands reflects how the system placed unbearable pressure on ordinary households. The text reveals a direct link between dowry, financial ruin, and polygamy, showing how girls were perceived as economic burdens.

Another significant finding is the exposure of religious hypocrisy. Characters like Maschatchak, outwardly revered as pious, engage in immoral activities such as illicit meat trading. Trailokyanath highlights how purity, caste, and ritual observance were manipulated to justify oppression while concealing moral corruption.

The study also finds that Western education and modern ideas introduced a shift in social consciousness. The younger generation began questioning oppressive customs, signalling the early stages of social reform. This tension between orthodoxy and modernity becomes a recurring motif in Trailokyanath's narratives.

Finally, the research concludes that Trailokyanath's works serve as powerful social documents that critique injustice while advocating for empathy, rationality, and reform. His satire, realism, and moral vision together provide a comprehensive portrayal of social life in nineteenth-century Bengal.

Discussion

The analysis of Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay's *Moyna Kothay* and *Bangal Nidhiram* reveals a complex and deeply layered representation of nineteenth-century Bengali society. Through these narratives, Trailokyanath constructs a realistic yet critical portrayal of social practices governed by patriarchy, caste restrictions, religious orthodoxy, and economic pressures. His depiction of women's lived experiences is particularly

striking. Characters such as Prabhavati illustrate how women internalised social expectations that they endure suffering and remain confined within the household. Their acceptance of prescribed roles reflects both societal conditioning and the lack of access to education that prevented them from resisting oppressive norms.

A major point of discussion emerges from the portrayal of domestic violence and bride torture. Prabhavati's severe abuse, ranging from physical injuries caused by burning implements to chronic starvation, shows the brutal reality faced by many young brides. Her story exposes how dowry greed, superstition, and familial authority combined to strip women of dignity and security. The narrative also highlights societal complicity, as neighbours witness the violence but remain powerless or unwilling to intervene.

Trailokyanath's critique of religious hypocrisy forms another essential aspect of the discussion. Characters like Maschatchak outwardly uphold ritual purity and social respectability while simultaneously engaging in morally corrupt activities. This duality uncovers the contradictions within nineteenth-century religious and caste systems, where adherence to ritual was valued above ethical conduct.

Furthermore, the tension between orthodoxy and emerging modern values is evident throughout the texts. Western education encouraged the younger generation to question harmful traditions, symbolising an ideological shift in society. Trailokyanath's nuanced portrayal of this conflict demonstrates his awareness of a transitional era where old and new worldviews collided.

Overall, the discussion shows that Trailokyanath used satire, realism, and moral insight not merely to depict society but to interrogate its injustices and provoke critical reflection.

Conclusion

Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay's writings, particularly *Moyna Kothay* and *Bangal Nidhiram*, serve as significant literary records of nineteenth-century Bengal, capturing the social, cultural, and moral dimensions of the time with remarkable clarity. The study concludes that these works offer powerful critiques of entrenched social evils such as dowry, child marriage, gender discrimination, domestic violence, and religious hypocrisy. Prabhavati's tragic life stands as a symbolic representation of the systemic oppression faced by countless women, revealing how patriarchal norms and economic greed shaped their suffering.

Through characters such as Maschatchak and Uddhab, Trailokyanath exposes the moral contradictions of individuals who publicly uphold religious and caste codes while privately engaging in unethical behaviour. His treatment of these figures underscores the hollowness of ritualistic piety and the urgent need for genuine ethical reform.

The study also concludes that the influence of Western education played a transformative role in generating new social consciousness. Trailokyanath's works document this ideological shift, illustrating how younger generations began challenging outdated customs and seeking rational, humane alternatives.

Ultimately, the research affirms that Trailokyanath was not only a storyteller but a profound social critic. His literature functions as both a mirror reflecting harsh societal truths and a catalyst urging progressive change. The timeless relevance of his works lies in their capacity to illuminate persistent issues surrounding gender, morality, and social justice, making them indispensable resources for understanding both the past and its continuing implications in the present.

References

1. Saha, Nirmalkumar (ed.). *Troilokkhyonath Rachanaboli* (2nd Volume), January 2005. p. 40
2. *Ibid.* p. 59
3. Chanda, Pulak (ed.). *Naribishwo*. Gangchil. July 2008. p. 65
4. Basu, Swopon, & Choudhuri, Indrajit (ed.), *Unish Shotoker Bangali Jibon o Sanskriti*. Pustok Biponi. November 2003. p. 198
5. Saha, Nirmalkumar (ed.). *Troilokkhyonath Rachanaboli* (2nd Volume), January 2005. p. 16
6. *Ibid.* p. 35
7. *Ibid.* p. 37
8. *Ibid.* p. 41
9. *Ibid.* p. 39
10. *Ibid.* p. 40
11. *Ibid.* p. 41
12. Saha, Nirmalkumar (ed.). *Troilokkhyonath Rachanaboli* (2nd Volume), January 2005. p. 42
13. Basu, Swopon (ed.), *Songbad-samoyikpotre Unish Shotoker Bangali Nari*, January 2024. p. 65
14. *Ibid.* p. 110
15. Saha, Nirmalkumar (ed.). *Troilokkhyonath Rachanaboli* (2nd Volume), January 2005, *sahityom*, p. 41
16. *Ibid.* p. 24
17. *Ibid.* p. 42
18. *Ibid.* p. 50
19. Saha, Nirmalkumar (ed.). *Troilokkhyonath Rachanaboli* (1st Volume), January 2005, *sahityom*, p. 170
20. *Ibid.* p. 172

21. Basu, Swopon (ed.). Songbad-samoyikpotre Unish Shotoker Bangali Nari, January 2024. p. 25
22. Ibid. p. 25
23. Saha, Nirmalkumar (ed.). Troilokkhyonath Rachanaboli (2nd Volume), January 2005. p. 22
24. Ibid. p. 34
25. Ibid. p. 62
26. Ibid. p. 56
27. Saha, Nirmalkumar (ed.). Troilokkhyonath Rachanaboli (1st Volume), January 2005. p. 183