

Tracing Influence:

Phulmoni O Karunar Bibaran and *Rajmohan's Wife*

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We may begin with the question of naming fictional characters. Here is a list:

Labanga
Champaklata
Taramoni
Tilottama
Kamalmoni
Shanti
Rajanigandha
Hemangini
Heera

A devoted reader would have already guessed that these are, with some alterations, names of female characters in Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's novels. Will it be surprising if I add that these are randomly taken from a list of girls' names drawn up by the wife of an English missionary, Hannah Catherine Mullens, as part of a manual of education for Bengali Christian women in 1852? Of course, the notable missing names are Kapalkundala, Kundanalini, Bhramar, Rohini and Indira. Or Ayesha, Jebunnisa, for that matter. But, one may infer from the list Bankimchandra's close acquaintance with Mrs Mullens' text, *Phulmoni O Karunar Bibaran*, a work of fiction published in 1852. There seems to be