



Women Empowerment in “Rabindranath Tagore’s Selected Short Stories”

Dr. Rashmi Vajpayee

Assistant Professor, Ph.D., SET Qualified (English Literature), MA (English Literature) MBA (Finance & Marketing)

Department of English, S.M.B.Government P.G.College, Nathdwara (Rajasthan, India)

ABSTRACT

Rabindranath Tagore is regarded as one of the pioneers of the Bengal Renaissance, which took place during the 19th century. He has presented Indian literature with numerous memorable characters, many of whom were women. Tagore’s heroines were courageous and powerful while also being flawed and vulnerable. They fought for equivalent status in society and refused to bow down to the expectations of society in a way that was rare for the time. Tagore's female characters have such distinctiveness that have made his short stories so paramount to the world in the twenty-first century. Some Tagorean female characters suffer from their sociocultural atmosphere, whereas some try to rebel to find a way out. The present study aims to examine the perspectives of Tagore's female characters presented in his short stories.

KEYWORDS: Charulata, Binodini, Mrinmoyee, Mrinal, Kamala, Kalyani, Strength, Intelligence, Culture, timelessness, Feminism, Colonial India, Emancipation, Woman Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION-

Rabindranath Tagore's characterization of women in his literary works illustrates his progressive beliefs and reflects the socio-cultural circumstances of late 19th and early 20th century Bengal. Tagore's female characters are often multi-dimensional, manifesting strength, power, sharpness, and a deep sense of self-awareness. This paper explores several of his most prominent female characters, depicting the complexity and depth with which Tagore approached the representation of women. Rabindranath Tagore wrote about the actual women of colonial India in all their natural glory, when they were far ahead of it, maybe even to the present day. Women encounter questions of purity, sexuality, domesticity, and, self-identity. Almost all of his female characters were plotted in conventional ways, but they were all quite strong. His women's liberation conquest was ahead of its time. As a result, one of his most meaningful contributions to society is the characterization of women in his craft.

1. BINODINI From Chokher Bali

Binodini, a widow, is another powerful character created by Tagore. Binodini denies the strict rules that widowed women in Bengal needed to stick to. Binodini’s character, despite its shades of grey, is vital as she does not accept her destiny and risks to seek what she feels she deserves. Binodini is unwilling to fit into the role of a lonely widow and is reluctant to forgo her emotional desires. She is smart and intellectual, and she attempts to be more than just an inauspicious widow. She disobeys societal norms with her intensity and liberty. Unlike the customary portrayal of widows as idle and submissive, Binodini is dynamic and strong, aspiring to carve out a room for herself in a society that desires to marginalize her. What do you see me as, tell me? I am not like other household women. (Tagore, "Chokher Bali" 55). Binodini's relations with Mahendra and Bihari indicate her complexity. She is both a manipulative seductress and a helpless woman longing for love and recognition. Her character questions the strict expectations placed on women, especially widows, in her society. Tagore’s Binodini challenges societal expectations of widows through her passion and refusal to serve tolerant femininity. Am I to spend my whole life in this sorrow? Can I do nothing? (Tagore, "Chokher Bali" 140). Binodini’s intellect allows her to control her environment and maintain her independence, questioning the social norms imposed on widows. I don't know, really I don't, what I am to you, and where my place is in your life (Tagore, "Chokher Bali" 120). Towards the end of the story, Binodini retreats to living in women’s shelters and brings about as much modification as she can to improve the condition of

women. Binodini highlights the importance of education when she says, "If I had been uneducated, like other widows, I would have been able to easily endure the society's negligence."

2. CHARULATA From Nastanirh

Charulata is a lonely housewife who falls in love with her brother-in-law. She initially finds it hard to stay inactive at home and shows interest in learning music. Charulata does not have an affair but is unknowingly attracted to the attention she receives from her trainer, brother-in-law, and friend. Through Charulata and the restlessness in her mind, Tagore analyzes the vision of women taking the reins of their passions and ambitions and making a choice out of her own determination. Her husband's busy schedule is the cause of her isolation, and in her brother-in-law, she finds imagination and the passion to dream. Charulata's strength is seen in her quiet suffering and the aftermath emotional freedom. She bears the restrictions of her traditional marriage with quiet grace, aspiring scholarly fulfillment and emotional freedom. Every day I bind my entire being, what if I find freedom today? (Tagore, "Nastanirh" 78).

3.MRINMAYI from Samapti (The Conclusion)

Mrinmoyee, the protagonist of "Samapti," is a fiery and rebellious young woman who opposes traditional expectations. Mrinmayi is a confident young woman who struggles with the lack of choice women had in her society. She is wedded off to an intellectual bhadrolok (well-off gentleman) who falls in love with her distinctive persona. She does not accept her destiny or respond to her husband's love and marital desires towards her. Her wedding to Apurba is initially fierce as she struggles to adjust to her new role as a wife. If I conform, then I'm fit for a household; otherwise, I'm a girl of the wild. (Tagore, "Samapti" 48). She asks her husband about the lack of choice she had in the marriage, which indicates the issue of women being expected to be speechless agents of society. She says "All the rules are wrong. Did anyone try to find to what I like? You like me, and I should follow all the rules". She finally accepts her husband, as he does not try to change her; however, it is on her own time and by her own choice. Mrinmoyee's character arc from resistance to acceptance reflects a nuanced understanding of personal growth and the negotiation of individuality within societal constraints. Mrinmoyee in "Samapti" resists traditional expectations and ultimately finds a balance between her uniqueness and her role as a wife. Mrinmoyee Says, "If I conform, then I'm fit for household; otherwise, I'm a girl of the wild. (Tagore, "Samapti" 48). In Sampti, the protagonist is a youthful, fun-loving woman who enjoys her freedom. Over the course of the story, she gradually begins to accept her husband and reciprocate his affection, doing so at her own pace and by her own choice.

4. MRINAL from Stri Patra(A Wife's Letter)

Mrinal is a progressive woman who leaves the house of her orthodox husband and in-laws. The story is told in epistolary form, where Mrinal writes a letter to her husband telling the many ways in which she felt suffocated. Unlike Mrinal's elder sister-in-law, who undoubtedly accepts the patriarchal system, and the needy, orphaned Bindu, who commits suicide, Mrinal's education does not permit her to do the same. After a chain of miserable circumstances, Mrinal recognizes that women have no independence in a tyrannical society where women are supposed to be inferior. Mrinal says, "I am not just the youngest daughter in law of your house. I am me... It took me 15 years to understand the position of women in your house and your society... I want to breath freely now".

Set in the late 19th century, Stri Patra is the story of Mrinal, a woman wedded into a zamindar family. Mrinal is described as an intelligent and focused woman who feels stuck in everyday domestic life after marriage. Her intellect is noticed as a drawback, and her beauty appears to be the only thing society appreciates. As the story progresses, she is familiarized with Bindu, the widowed cousin of Mrinal's sister-in-law. Bindu's hardship makes Mrinal even more conscious of the patriarchal and domineering nature of her in-laws. After Bindu commits suicide, Mrinal becomes completely disappointed with the concept of household and matrimony. In her letter to her husband, she clarifies her decision to leave him, to finally get her independence.

In a period when women were not allowed to vote, and formal education was prohibited. Stri patra got banned in 1829, Dowry deaths swelled in Bengal. The letter is a consideration of 15 years of Mrinal's heartless marriage. Mrinal is married into a well -off family in Kolkata to the second son. Because of her good looks she became the trophy wife. Through the 15 years of marriage, Mrinal hides away and composes poetry in the cowshed every day, mourns a miscarriage, and sees the suicide of the mistreated, low-caste relative in the home, whom she raises for years as her daughter.

She elopes from home in quietness to the beaches of Puri. In front of the ocean and under the monsoon skies, she abandons her identity. In the world of 20th century India, Mrinal did not see poverty or physical abuse, but that is exactly the concept that Stri Patra imparts the deserved significance to the domestic displeasure and mistreatment, which are not dramatic acts of brutality. That women (and men) should seek more than the standards of apparently happy marriage that the custom glorifies. If marriage is the sacred union of a woman and a man, that union is only possible when both sides stand on equal ground; otherwise, they simply fail to exceed their material reality. A woman does not enter the institution of marriage with the only purpose of service to the man and the household. Our individualism is so much more than that. And it often needs invoking the courage to hear our inner voices and reassess the roles created for us but not necessarily by us. We can or cannot determine to be a wife, a daughter-in-law, or a mother. And still of what our choices might be, it is so important to have our inner lives known.

5.KALYANI from Aparichita (The Unknown Woman)

Kalyani is the protagonist of Tagore's story, Aparichita. In the tale, Kalyani is set to wed Anupam, but her father breaks off the match on the wedding day due to the demands of dowry from the spouse's uncle. After a few years, with a guilty conscience, Anupam

proposes marriage to Kalyani again. However, the liberated protagonist refuses his proposal and informs him about the new path her life has taken. Rather than letting her cancelled marriage be an obstacle, Kalyani experiences the world to discover her goal and identity. She devotes her life to educating needy women and helping them lead a life of dignity. Through Kalyani, Tagore depicts a woman opting to find meaning other than marriage without allowing patriarchal traditions to dictate her importance in society.

6.KAMALA from Musolmanir Golpo (The Story of a Muslim Girl)

In a short story set in the 19th century, Tagore introduces us to Kamala, an orphaned girl raised by her uncle and aunt, who considered her a burden. Soon, Kamala's marriage is set with the son of a wealthy man. Nevertheless, their wedding procession is attacked by thieves. To her shock, her fiancé and other relatives all ran, leaving her at the mercy of the attackers. She is saved by Habir Khan, a decent Muslim gentleman, who takes Kamala to her house. When her aunt and uncle refuse to accept her back, Kamala stays with Habir Khan. She discovers a better life, full of respect, at her new home, where she has the space to practice her own religion and make her own preferences for herself. When the robbers attack Kamala's cousin Sarala, she is no longer scared. She protects her cousin with help from Habir Khan and returns her safely to her house. Through the story, we see the growth of Kamala after gaining freedom and respect from a gentleman Habir Khan.

CONCLUSION

Rabindranath Tagore in India is regarded as one of the pioneer short story writers whose writings express maturity. He is considered as the reformist of the modern Indian short story writings. Tagore has been very successful in portraying women's psychology in his short stories. Tagore entangled his short stories about the subjects which were close to his heart. He had the art of knitting human sentiments around social problems like equality very **complex**, delicately and effectively. Tagore gave all the liberty to his heroines to make their decisions, even though initially they seemed to be insane. Only he could think of that at a time when women were not allowed to do so in the common households. Equality in relations, especially husband-wife relations, was one of the main characteristics of Tagore's short stories. Most of the time, he wrote what he noticed in contemporary society, but at times, to share his message with the people and also to bring changes in society through his writings, Tagore projected what he wanted to see in his society.

REFERENCES

- 1)Bhattacharya, S. (2011). Rabindranath Tagore: An Interpretation. Penguin Random House, India.
- 2)Banerjee, S. (2017). Emancipated Women in Rabindranath Tagore's Selected Short Stories.
- 3)Bannerji, H.(2020) "Women, Gender, and the Family in Tagore", The Cambridge Companion to Rabindranath Tagore. CUP.
- 4)Chakrabarti, Santosh, Studies on Tagore, Critical Essays, New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2004
- 5)Goody, J., & Tambiah, S, J. (1973). Bridewealth and Dowry. Cambridge University Press, p 17.
- 6)Hardgrove, A. (2005). Review of the book Dowry Murder: The Imperial Origins of a Cultural Crime. Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History, 6(2), doi:10.1353/cch.2005.0031
- 7)Tagore, R. (1916). Aparichita. (Meenakhshi Mukherjee, Trans. 1992). India.
- 8) Tagore, Rabindranath. "Chokher Bali." "Rabindra Rachanavali". Visva-Bharati, 1955.
- 9) Tagore, Rabindranath. "Nastanirh." "Rabindra Rachanavali". Visva-Bharati, 1955.
- 10) Tagore, Rabindranath. "Samapti." "Rabindra Rachanavali". Visva-Bharati, 1955.
- 11) Tagore, Rabindranath. "Shesher Kobita." "Rabindra Rachanavali". Visva-Bharati, 1955.
- 12)Tagore, R. (2007). The Complete Works. General Press, New Delhi.

WEBSITES-

https://www.parabaas.com/rabindranath/articles/gSwapan_musolmani.html

<https://www.thedailystar.net/life-living/news/the-faceless-strength-women-zainuls-art-4029896>