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TAGORE'S PERCEPTION AND PRESENTATION OF WOMANHOOD: COMPILING A RANGE OF COMPARISONS WITH THEIR MODERN COUNTERPARTS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history: Received: 11-04-2025 Received in revised form: 01-05-2025 Accepted: 12-06-2025</p> <p>Keywords:</p> <p><i>Rabindranath Tagore, Women, Womanhood, Comparisons, Modern Counterparts</i></p>	<p>Literature reflects life's constant changes. Society and authors work together to portray the social, cultural, economic, and psychological conditions of any particular place and time. Authors who have watched life and predicted its outcomes capture women's images. These writers foresaw the consequences. When society changes, writers are the first to report it. Tagore's romantic vision of women changed as he aged. Later in his career, he criticizes society and portrays his female characters as rebellious. His early heroines are subservient and silently suffer patriarchal persecution. These ladies inspired Tagore's heroines. Tagore's ladies are politically rebellious, innovative, and strain Bengali society's bounds. They are "New Women" in actuality. The New Woman may survive by removing herself from dead relationships while maintaining her social status and legal rights. She is smart, confident, well-educated, and self-sufficient. Tagore's novels and short stories have illuminated a hitherto overlooked aspect of women's existence and shown unconditional love and sympathy for them, which was unique in contemporary creative works. This study compares Tagore's depictions of femininity to modern ones.</p> <p>© 2025 The Authors. Published by IASE. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).</p>

INTRODUCTION

The social structure of any given civilization is another essential factor that either enables or restricts people's ability to participate in the process of image formation. Therefore, there is only one party that may take on the role of the picture's creator, and the exclusive proprietor of the rights and benefits associated with the production of

the image is this one party. This is the fundamental principle that underlies all patriarchal civilizations, in which women have always been relegated to the background and all images have been crafted by males who have risen to the position of superiority or first place and defined everything as subordinate to women. The establishment of this hegemonic power structure is controlled and confirmed further

with the assistance of religion, which is a sacred weapon that is used to manage everything. This power structure controls and affirms itself. The position of women in Indian society has historically been one of the most precarious, and the social model has been the primary contributor to this problem from the beginning. Some of the more heinous crimes committed against women include marrying early sometimes even before the girl reaches puberty having a considerably older groom than the child bride, selling young girls to older men, abusing child brides physically, and prohibiting widows from remarrying (Bhattacharya and Sen 25- 26).

Not only do Tagore's creative writings represent his philosophical, spiritual, and nationalistic beliefs, but they also show a variety of distinct portrayals of women. Tagore was a prolific writer. Equally well known for his portrayal of strong female protagonists who are decades ahead of their day and who don't hold back in the least when it comes to making their voices heard in an outspoken and uninhibited manner. His female heroines are strong, independent, intriguing, and real people who are trying to break free from the constraints of society. In point of fact, they possess the ability to completely eclipse their male counterparts.

A good number of his heroes speak out against societal injustice, fight against the demoralization of women, and refuse to accept that unfairness is their inevitable lot in life. Since the author of the work thinks that women are the most innovative and transforming force in society, the protagonists of his works are likewise aware of their value and authority (Biswas 20).

In the novels and short tales written by Tagore, the female protagonists defy the rituals and bondages that are forced on them against their choice and express a desire to emerge from the shadows of the oppressive patriarchal society. The writer has a wonderful awareness of society in his imaginative writings, which include significant roles for women of many social levels and provide adequate room for them. His protagonists are strong and independent women who are yet emotionally attuned enough to be shaped by the ebb and flow of life. Tagore has shown a number of different types of ladies. His literary canvas covers a wide spectrum of topics, from powers that are constructive to forces that are destructive. Mothers, wives, beloveds, beloved exes, widows, fiancés, friends, advisers, motivators, and critics are all titles that may be used to these women. If, on the one hand, they are kind and selfless enough

to give their life for the sake of the wellbeing of their families, then, on the other hand, they are brave enough to not stifle their natural impulses in the face of the oppressive pressure that is imposed by conservatism (Sapowadia 148).

Tagore's female protagonists come from a wide variety of social backgrounds and are forced to fight fiercely for their right to be themselves and their independence. He wanted to break the false and dogmatic traditions, and he wrote about women being liberated from age-long horrible bondages. He had a radical temperament, and he wanted to achieve this. An impartial study has to be done on the part that novelists play in bringing awareness to the gender prejudice that exists in society. Through the course of this research, an attempt has been made to comprehend Tagore's perspective and portrayal of all facets of femininity by gathering a variety of comparisons with their contemporary analogues. In addition, it investigates the numerous theological, societal, family, and literary forces that had an impact on the development of his intellect and personality. This is done in such a comprehensive manner that his works are still considered to be thought stimulating and relevant today. It is also an intellectual marathon to paint a clear and comprehensive

image of women in modern Bengal via Tagore's literature. Women in Tagore's fiction seem to have been converted from meek and subservient beings into transformative energy reservoirs of the society.

TAGORE'S PERCEPTION AND PRESENTATION OF WOMANHOOD

In his writings, Rabindranath Tagore, the first Asian to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, reveals a strong enthusiasm for social change with the goal of eradicating what is corrupt in society. His books and short tales often deal with societal concerns like as reform and transformation, and he goes into considerable into discussing these topics. His novels and novellas demonstrate his sharp observation regarding societal biases and prejudices towards the poorer portions of society. His novels and novellas are well-written. He was deeply troubled by the situation that women found themselves in inside society. He had the impression that the current position of women as "secondary" or "second-sex" was the result of a wide variety of inhumane dogmas and harsh practices that had been perpetuated by patriarchal society for many generations. Tagore, in his role as Zamindar, was required to spend a significant amount of

time in the countryside; during this time, he had the opportunity to interact directly with the common people of Bengal. At this point, the awful truths of their life were laid bare in front of him. When he saw the awful circumstances that the married ladies of Bengali were in, it broke his heart. He had a solid understanding of the conventional Hindu perspective on the idea of a house and on the institution of marriage.

Tagore explored the challenges that married women face, particularly their isolating circumstances within the context of the joint family, in a number of his novels and short tales. All of the heroines in the stories, whether it is Binodini from "A Grain of Sand," Kamala from "The Wreck," Charu from "The Broken Nest," or Kumudini from "Relationships," are going through some sort of emotional or societal difficulty. His novels shed light on the complexities that can arise in married life as a result of extramarital affairs, the excessive influence of in-laws, particularly mothers-in-law, and incompatibility between the husband and wife. They also highlight how their limited domestic space can be eroded as a result of social and psychological factors. An impartial examination of his works of fiction, including novels and short tales, drives home the point that his brand of

liberalism was not the same as the liberalism practiced in the West. Unrestrained liberty was repugnant and stifling to him as a state of being. He turned his back on the freedom that had the potential to be harmful and had no concept of control. He was adamant in his conviction that the individual must undergo change before society can be transformed successfully (233).

The patriarchal ideology has been used to establish communities and cultures, as well as religious texts, epics, mythologies, and laws, all over the world. There is nothing inherently feminine about women being relegated to subordinate roles in society; rather, their status is the legacy of male-dominated customs. When women attempt to highlight their identity within the "normal" and "natural" flow of life, males often use the terrible practice of social ostracism to exile them from society. This is a practice that is perpetuated by men because of their dominant social position. Tagore intimately saw the inner moaning of tender-hearted widows who were forced to comply by taboos, superstitions, and decrees, and he articulated it in his writings. Tagore was born in Bengal, India. He also brought attention to the plight of married women, who are often excluded from the natural flow of life and made to go through

the ordeal of surviving without the love and care of their spouses and the families they belong to Harimohini and Anandamoyi of Gora are two examples of women who have been shunned by their families and communities because of their sexual orientation. After the death of her husband, Binodini in *A Grain of Sand* is similarly put in the position of having to live a Spartan lifestyle. Tagore raises the contentious topic of rape within the context of a marriage for the very first time in *Relationship*, in which Kumudini is subjected to a great deal of pain and anguish at the hands of Madhusudan. All of these stories urge readers and reviewers to investigate the fundamental reasons behind a wide variety of societal and family issues. He is not an advocate of the limitless freedom that mankind should have (51).

Tagore was able to inspire a great number of people by his works, but he made it quite apparent that he would not walk the road of violence and killing. His perspectives on women and their role in the independence fight were quite evident at all times. Women in current-day Bengal were becoming a symbol of post-reform, modern ladies who imbibed the ideas of the Bengali Renaissance while yet maintaining their ties to the old culture. They were seen as an

inspiration to man, a guiding force, and a restraint to his restless energy; nonetheless, the participation of women in political freedom was a double-edged sword not just in the setting of India, but also in the world of the West. This was a problem for two reasons. In point of fact, after their political independence has been secured, women are made to work in the kitchen once more. The idea of cosmopolitanism that Tagore instilled in his nationalism is profound. His nationalism is not just associated with geographical concerns; rather, it is intertwined with the concept of "Vasudhvakutumbcam," also known as "The Universal Home." The contrast between East and West is illustrated exquisitely throughout his body of work. Although his first experience with the West was through the English colonization of India and it also included many excursions to foreign countries, he opposed every form of mechanism or rigidity in nationalism. This was despite the fact that his primary experience with the West was through the colonization of India by the English. Tagore's books explore a wide range of topics, including the many facets of nationalism and the part that women played in the independence fight. He had the guts to create strong female characters who were

distinct from those of his contemporaries, such as Ela, Saudamini, and Kalyani, amongst others (Sinha xiv).

Tagore was extremely critical of governmental and commercial aggression, and he most certainly did not believe in the utilitarian spirit of the Western world. Tagore does not look well upon the wives who, in the name of the national independence struggle, cast off their responsibilities to their husbands, children, and other members of their families. In addition, he does not support the idea that young people should drop out of school to participate in the movement. During his lifetime, Tagore was subjected to criticism in the West as well as in nations such as Japan for his condemnation of nationalism. But in the present day, it is essential that people throughout the world have a deeper comprehension of his ideas on nationalism. Instead of perceiving the world as being divided into pieces by small home boundaries, his nationalism is founded on logic and fact. His nationalism does not regard the world as being torn up into fragments. Because he was a citizen of the globe, he wasn't just concerned about Bengal or India; he was concerned about the entire planet. Tagore continued on his path through life with the intention of

constructing a new nation that was adorned with influential thinkers who have the capacity to choose between good and evil. In order to achieve this goal, he founded Shantinikaten in Bengal before to the country's independence as a hub of culture and intelligence (Das Gupta 04).

Tagore's writings provide a significant amount of light on the radical thinker, free spirit, and inclusive ethos that he had. He was the first writer to give women equal room in his writings, and in some cases even more space than males. In spite of the fact that it was a highly contentious topic in modern culture, this author with a liberal worldview did not object to the idea of women performing on stage. The women in Tagore's books and short tales struggle to carve out a place for themselves in society while being raised in environments that are sexist, unclean, and confining. Women are not willing to accept age-old traditions and conventions that make their lives miserable as a result of the weight of society, despite the fact that religious dogmas see women as the second sex and as being inferior to males. In point of fact, women are known to exhibit greater spontaneity than males. Tagore has crafted a cast of female protagonists who, in addition to being emotionally resonant and intellectually

perceptive, growing in knowledge, culture, and maturity during the course of their stories. His female characters may brag of this dual combination, which is quite uncommon in the colonial Bengali fiction of the 19th and 20th centuries. His new concubines are well-educated and able to read, write, compose poetry, and converse intelligently about political and philosophical matters. They have the ability to present explanations, question, reject, and reconstruct their identities by fighting against the roles and stereotypes that are stereotypically assigned to them and mindless societal practices (Deb 100).

Binodini is without a doubt the most revolutionary and brave female character in all of Tagore's writing, and she holds the top spot in this category without a doubt. She is a "new woman" in every sense of the phrase. She has been hailed by the literary community for her pioneering work in a fresh literary subgenre within the Indian canon. Additionally, Asha takes pleasure in her role as Tagore's new girlfriend in a certain way. Even though, in the beginning of the book, she is seen as nothing more than a China doll, as the story progresses, she grows up and becomes a powerful lady. Lolita, the straightforward protagonist of *Gora*, with the ability to outdo everyone

else. Her fieriness, earthiness, and temperament are causes for concern for the entirety of her family due to the fact that she does not shy away from voicing her opinions in the slightest. In the same vein as Lolita, Sucharita is likewise an educated Bhramo girl with a contemporary worldview; but, in contrast to Lolita, she possesses a temperament that is more even-keeled. As is the case with all of Tagore's other protagonists, Kumudini of *Relationships* stands apart from the typical ladies of Bengal. She triumphs as a victor and becomes what we refer to as Tagore's "new woman" as a result of her powerful will power and unwavering resolve. Tagore's heroines take precedence over his heroes in the poem's confession of love. Both Binodini and Saudamini's characters provide us with examples of their courageous behaviour. In "Letter from a Wife," Tagore paints a very daring portrait of a woman by using the character of Mrinal to do so. Mrinal wants to write her actual name rather than the nomenclature of "Mejo Bou," which is a declaration of her freedom and uniqueness apart from her spouse. It is possible to count this as her second birth. Kalyani's decision to take part in a nationalist movement is a step forward in the direction of self-expression via

something that was more or less dominated by males. New women have the self-assurance to organize their lives, and this decision is a stride in the right direction. Her brazenness in investigating the boundaries of women's liberation sets her distinct from the typical Bengali young ladies. The character Sohini from "The Laboratory" is similarly a lady who does things in an unusual way. In point of fact, she is Tagore's heroine with the most courage. The character of Sohini is very subversive and dismantles the popularly held stereotyped image of a nice Bengali lady. The "eklachalo" ideology is something that the female characters in Tagore's novels adhere to. It's not that they are disconnected from the modern flow of civilization; rather, it's that they are self-sufficient enough to take care of themselves even when no one is there to assist them. Some people believe that every item of creation is a reflection of the personality of the person who made it. The writer has a wonderful awareness of society in his imaginative writings, which include significant roles for women of many social levels and provide adequate room for them. His protagonists are strong and independent women who are nevertheless emotionally attuned enough to adapt to the shifting currents of life (Anagol, 2014).

Tagore has shown a number of different types of women. His canvas encompasses everything from powers that are constructive to forces that are destructive. Tagore's early perspective on women may be described as being more romantic in nature; yet, as his life progressed into its final stages, his views on women evolved to become more mature. Tagore's writings, whether fictional and nonfictional, consistently demonstrate his commitment to egalitarianism and humanism at the general level. The capacity to speak up against male-dominated family structures, patriarchal systems, and gender inequity came to him as a result of his journey from the traditional to the contemporary and from micro to macro concerns.

CONCLUSION

Tagore's female characters stand out from other ladies of their time for their unique qualities. They have a greater sense of maturity and openness to life, as well as the ability to assert their rights and liberties. They are not only more capable than the hero of the narrative, but also more capable than their counterparts in other countries. This is an indisputable truth that cannot be disputed. By fighting against conventional roles and mindless social practices,

individuals have the ability to present arguments, question, reject, and reconstruct their identities. Binodini is unquestionably a "new woman" in the literary world that Tagore inhabited. She has been hailed by literary critics for her pioneering work in a fresh literary subgenre within the Indian literary canon. Her choice to reject Mahendra and to turn down the marriage proposal of Bihari actually makes her one of the most courageous heroines that Tagore has ever written about. She evolves from a potentially dangerous seductress who is only a clone of "a second poison tree" into a formidable lady who has the capacity to wipe out the male characters in the narrative. A Grain of Sand evolves into the novel of Binodini's, as well as Asha's and Rajlakshmi's, development of their inner selves throughout the course of the story. This book is a masterpiece because it reflects Binodini's quest for knowledge of the world and criticizes the harsh society's attitude towards women. Both of these themes are explored throughout the book. Binodini's battle to establish who she is within the confines of the bourgeois society is shown by her need to assert ownership over her personal space.

The introduction of Anandamoyi into Gora gives Tagore's other female characters fresh

depth and dimension. Both Sucharita and Lolita are incredibly brave and powerful, which is a reflection of how far ahead of their time they were. In Relationship, Kumudini is not an intimidating entity; rather, she is a champion of justice and the truth. She exemplifies the power and restrictions that come with being a woman in a culture that is dominated by patriarchal ideas, yet the fact that she is so unassuming gives her character a certain allure all its own. The fact that she is so resolute in her resolve not to submit to brutality, not even after giving birth to a child, distinguishes her as the new woman of Tagore's literary genre. In "Letter from a Wife," Mrinal is able to establish her uniqueness and independence in a way that is distinct from her relationship with her spouse. It is possible to consider her declaration to be her second birth. It is a long road from being a simple daughter-in-law to being an independent person. She frees herself from the load of unwelcome duties, much like Nora in "A Doll's House." Similarly, Kalyani, from the story "Woman Unknown," has the guts to refuse to pay dowry and makes the decision to spend the rest of her life helping the community and society on her own. She is in every sense of the word a "new-woman." The character

Sohini from "The Laboratory" is another unconventional female character. In point of fact, she is Tagore's heroine with the most courage. Her part is pretty subversive, and she does an excellent job of deconstructing the widespread stereotyped image of a decent Bengali woman. She has a captivating appearance, a sharp mind, and a strong will, and she is confident in her ability to seduce men and use them to serve her purposes. She uses her power and cunning to coerce Nandakishor into paying off her obligations. She has extramarital affairs, and her daughter Nila is the product of one of these encounters; yet, she makes no effort to disguise the fact that she has done so. She had some peculiar habits, but she loved her late husband very much and wants to construct a laboratory that is on par with the best in the world for him. She has the guts to own her failings in front of others, despite the fact that she does not feel any regret for them. Tagore's final work, Sohini, illustrates the radical sensibility that he developed throughout his literary career.

Tagore presents women in a manner that is not traditional. The purpose of this research was to investigate whether or not Tagore's depictions of women in his works of fiction had a universal appeal that transcends the constraints of time and place. Tagore

believed in the notion of Ardhanarishwar, which is an image in Hindu mythology made up of the combination of half-god and half-goddess. This mythological knowledge gave him a great insight in the heart of women. The feminine part of Tagore's nature was not too passionate. Tagore had the ability to portray the rapidly shifting hues of the emotions that women experience. In contrast to the majority of the male characters in his literature, who are often feeble, emotionally void, and unable to make decisions, his heroines are strong, courageous, and brilliant individuals who serve as a source of creative and constructive energy. They are capable of responding to the circumstances and the pressure in the most effective way that is open to them. They have won regardless of the outcome of the match. Tagore's heroines are strong enough to stand alone in the struggle of life, yet they are not aloof; rather, they are compassionate, caring, self-sacrificing, and filled to the brim with the milk of human kindness. The entirety of Rabindranath Tagore's life might be understood as an effort to accord woman the place and respect that is rightfully hers. He draws attention to the fact that a woman's identity in today's society is not confined to the roles of a mother or a wife. Today's

women are fighting for their rights and want to be acknowledged as unique individuals. He has given voice to those without a voice, identification to those who are invisible, and space to those who do not have any space. He is a great humanist and social thinker. He never gives his courageous stance advocating for the right to freedom for women even the slightest amount of second consideration. Tagore's personal life is illustrative of how challenging it would have been for him to diverge from the powerful constraints of social conditions in the traditional society of his day. However, Tagore's radical outlook provided him with the confidence to go against the grain of society during his lifetime. He was the first writer to give women equal room in his writings, and in some cases even more space than males. His ladies exhibit a level of creative freedom that has never been seen before, and while they occasionally fall short as a result of the blows of severe criticism, in the end, they come out on top. Tagore's work, whether fictional and nonfictional, always demonstrates his commitment to egalitarianism and humanism at its most fundamental level. The capacity to speak up against male-dominated family structures, patriarchal systems, and gender inequity came to him as

a result of his journey from the traditional to the contemporary and from micro to macro concerns. Through his innovative works, he has portrayed a diverse assortment of ladies, all of whom will be remembered by people all around the world for many years to come.

In a nutshell, the purpose of this research is to make a humble effort to dispel the haze that has accumulated around the persona of a great humanist, whose writings have been a channel to bring about change in the viewpoint and belief of the society. It is self-evident that Tagore should not be portrayed in the media as a passionate feminist, as doing so would be an incorrect judgement, and the term "feminist" should not be used to him. He was a wonderful benefactor who worked towards achieving peace at home and in the globe, as well as maintaining equilibrium in society. His literature enlightens readers on the nature of social reality, which is the most pressing requirement of the day, given that recognition is the only path to equilibrium.

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