

Feminism in the Works of Rabindranath Tagore

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Abstract

Born 1861 to Debendranath Tagore and Sarada Devi, Rabindranath Tagore started writing at the age of six. He was the first Indian and the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize for literature for "Gitanjali". Known for his vast collection of poems, prose, plays, stories and novels, Tagore put women in the forefront in his works to convey feminism very strongly. Being a progressive thinker, his writings were based on bold subjects that were far ahead of the time. He strongly believed in fighting for women's uplift using his pen as a weapon. Focusing largely on emancipation, his writing campaigned for women's liberation, equality, freedom, justice, power, dignity and rights. Tagore's Women have always been on the periphery of society in conservative patriarchal set up. Their voices have begun to be heard only in the recent times. Their representation in literature has largely been a reflection of the same conformist traditions. When Tagore appeared on the literary horizon, women were portrayed as acquiescent, traditional, timid and silent entities. Most of his contemporaries depicted women as bound by customs and traditions. Tagore is quite unconventional in portraying women in the tradition of his contemporaries Bankim. Chandra and Sharat Chandra and in fact here he surpasses them.

INTRODUCTION:

Tagore's progressive and feminist outlook is evident in his portrayal of bold courageous and assertive women. He probed deep into the mind of women and presented myriad forms of their persona very sensitively. Tagore's plays acquaint his readers with the social conditions in which women were placed. He has created unforgettable women characters. The treatment of women and their position in society was of serious concern to Rabindranath Tagore. Being a sensitive person and a great poet, his understanding of women was profound. His portrayal of their joys and sorrows, hopes and despair, their yearnings and their dreams is genuine and perceptive. Among many aspects of Tagore's humanism, his portraits of

women stand out as the most impressive feature. In Tagore's play Chitra, woman has been shown as embodiment of inner strength, love and beauty. Tagore's play Chitra is a dramatic sermon on the theme of true love. This lyrical drama, first published by the Indian society, London in 1913, the year Tagore received the Nobel Prize. The Play Chitra is based on the story of Mahabharata. It is the English translation of Chitrangada, a Bengali play published in 1892.

Chitra is the first clear elucidation of feminism in India by Tagore. This play is a work of superlative art and a vision of ideal beauty. Tagore's conception of human love finds a striking expression in Chitra. Krishna Kriplani describes the play as the most fascinating and the most

satisfying examples of Tagore's genius. The play Chitra revolves around Chitrangada.

Tagore's progressive and feminist outlook is also evident in his portrayal of bold courageous and assertive woman character Chandalika in his famous sociological play Chandalika. Chandalika is a sociological play written by Rabindranath Tagore. This play is based on social discrimination, women's identity and universal concept of love. It is a two act play. There are three characters in the play (Prakriti, her mother Maya and Anand a Buddhist monk). The play Chandalika is a story of a girl from the untouchable caste of India. This girl is Prakriti. She is the central character of the play. Her life as an untouchable woman is full of sufferings, rejection and ridicule. The Bhikshu's words have brought an awakening in her and have given her a new awareness of herself. Prakriti has now become conscious of her status as a human being, on no way inferior to any other. A feeling of self-respect or self-esteem has taken roots in her heart. Prakriti proves herself a very sensitive kind of girl.

Tagore depicts Charulata of "Nashtanirh", wife who remains secluded within the walls of her house and finds solace in her brother-in-law Anmol. Anmol not only comforts her and brings out of boredom but also influences her to write for newspaper. Charu's confrontation with her husband about her inclination towards Anmol shows how Tagore put boldness in his characters.

In Noukadubi, Hemnalini refuses to marry her brother's friend Ramesh. Another Protagonist Kamala in the same story, when discovering that the person she is staying with is not her husband, immediately abandons his home and goes searching for the person she was actually

married to. The female characters are shown strong enough to stand for their rights. Tagore took up the deprived life of a widow – Binodini - and her sexual emancipation in a love quadrangle tale "Chokher Bali". A story of distrust, adultery and lies, the novel also highlights the dictatorship of a patriarchal society where young girls were married off to much older men and left to become widows at an early age that caged their root to freedom.

Rabindranath Tagore brought into the forefront the sexual desires of a woman, which even today is considered taboo, reflecting his liberal approach to the topic.

Shesher Kobita, probably his most lyrical novel, presents Labanya as a strong-willed, highly educated, free spirited woman who hails from a middle class family. A woman with high ethos, Labanya falls in love with Oxford-returned Amit. Their love blossoms and ends with marriage.

Tagore was vehemently opposed to discrimination on the basis of gender. Besides this, he placed before the whole world the ideal to self-reliant in Indian woman fighting not for their own rights and desires but also for those of subjugated nationality and downtrodden humanity. Through his plays he has presented very sensible and revolutionary picture of a common woman.

CONCLUSION: Feminism in Rabindranath Tagore challenges the traditional view of woman as the weaker sex. His female protagonists are subversive as they defy the accepted norms of the society and present women confident in their choices of life that they themselves make. His women characters in his plays-Chitra, Srimati, Prakriti, Malini, Sumitra,

Aparna and Nandini-all of them have significant status of their own. They are shown self-sufficient and self-reliant. They remain victorious by proving their faith, assertiveness and strength to achieve their purposes but still they are full of love, compassion and motherly care for humanity. All these women can be role models for the modern women. Tagore is

highly successful in redefining tradition through the portrayal of his women characters who certainly presents an antithesis of the conventional model of women. They defy hegemonic structures and dismantle the constructs of patriarchy. Having minds of their own, their portrayal bears out that Tagore was far ahead of his age in his attitude towards women.

References:

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