

Multifaceted Life of Women: A Study of Rabindranath Tagore's Short Stories

Dear Author,
Please provide **ABSTRACT, KEY WORDS** and **REFERENCES must be in MLA pattern**, for this paper with the proof urgently otherwise your paper may be transfer for next issues until above are received.

Abstract

Keyword: Please Add Some Keywords

Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore is known world-wide as a poet. He is the only Indian to get Nobel Prize for Literature. He has also written nearly a hundred short stories and his short stories too are world renowned and as brilliant as his poetry. Most of his stories highlight the rare qualities of Indian woman such as godliness, courage, piety, obedience, love, devotion, sacrifice and kindness etc. His short stories depict the struggles and sufferings of women, their stereotyped roles and the change they bring in society by their inner strength.

Tagore portrays women with such marked diversity that every woman portrayed in his works presents a different saga of multifaceted life she lives. Capturing the hues of such life depicts Tagore's unchallenged dexterity as a narrator.

Tagore was greatly concerned about the position of women in the society and how she is treated there. Tagore, being a sensitive man, tried his best to understand women in all spheres of life i.e in their joy and sorrow, hope and despair, their yearnings and their dreams. Tagore found in the Indian women of his country an immense store of wealth and strength –their courage expressions. His short stories highlight the struggles and sufferings of women, their stereotyped roles to fight against all odds, their will power to survive under the worst possible conditions and oppression, their forbearance, their self-sacrificing attitude, and gentleness in their behaviour. It was quite painful for him to see so much human treasure being wasted for nothing.

Tagore had the unique psychological intellect not only to peep deep into women's minds but also tried his best to understand and analyse their strangeness through his stories. He brings out the fact before the entire world that Indian women are highly responsible, most sacrificing, loving, obedient, meek, submissive, religious, brave and kind at the same time. They adore their husbands and are loyal to them, love their children deeply from the core of their heart, and give due reverence and consideration to their parents and their in-laws as well. Indian women know very well what their responsibilities are towards their family and towards the society they live in and they try their level best to fulfill them. His short stories depict the inner and outer lives of women with great sensitivity and understanding that one can peep into their lives both as they appear and as they are in real life situations.

The present paper deals with Tagore's two short-stories- The Story of a Muslim Woman and The Silent Girl (Subha). An attempt has been made in this paper to discuss the way women are ill-treated and oppressed right from their birth, how their voice is suppressed or how they are made voiceless and finally how circumstances force them to willingly change their identity. Sometimes women become more confident, powerful and strong but at times circumstances compel them to surrender.

Tagore in The Story of a Muslim Woman begins by reminding us of the times when birth of a girl child was considered inauspicious in the society. This was the fate of Teenmahal Talukdar Bangshibaadan's family. The situation becomes even more pathetic when we come to know that the

Geeta Phogat

Dept.of English
Bpsmv Khanpur Kalan,
Sonipat

parents of the girl child are already dead and everybody is of the opinion that there wouldn't have been any cause to worry if the child too had died with her parents. Kamla was a very beautiful girl and as desired by fate she was brought up by her uncle-Dangshi very affectionately. However her aunt was quite cunning and never accepted her as a member of the family. She always used to curse her for one thing or the other. She always complained that Kamla had been left by her parents only as an impending doom on their heads.

She was of the opinion that Kamla had brought all misfortunes for the family, she meant evil and ruin and only her death could save the family from disaster. Her uncle at times helped her with clothes and other things but all this was to be kept as a secret from her aunt.

Kamla grew-up and her uncle started looking for suitable bridegroom. The proposal came and Paramananda Seth the son of Mochakhali, who was already married, was considered the suitable bridegroom in spite of Kamla's resistance. The Seth family was very rich and powerful. The boy was very fashionable and proud of his wealth, of which he had plenty. He was quite impressed by Kamla's beauty and wanted to marry her irrespective of the opinion of the girl whether she wanted to marry him or not.

The marriage was settled not because the bride wanted it but because the bridegroom and his family wanted it and the opinion of the girl was of no use. In fact nobody cared to know what she wanted. She kept on crying and pleading before her uncle but all in vain. He said that till now the girl was his responsibility but after her marriage she is the responsibility of her in-laws or her husband because now he doesn't have strength to protect her, to look after her.

Such are the customs and traditions of our society. You give birth to a child, bring her up and then all of a sudden you feel that you can't look after her or protect her so get rid of her. How can one feel that? Why can't one think that when one can't protect or look after one's own child who else will? And this is what the author wants the readers to think over through this story. Do parents ever feel the same kind of insecurity regarding their male child?

I suppose never, then why do we as parents, brothers, sisters or other relatives create this kind of atmosphere in our society for our own innocent girl children? They do have the right to live, to think and to decide for themselves. Why should we always force them to do what we want them to do?

As the bridegroom belonged to a very rich family, there was no end of pomp and splendor in the marriage. The marriage ceremony came to an end and now comes the time for departure of the bridal party. The bridegroom set out with the bride through Taltori fields. The party was attacked by Madhu Mollar, the brigand leader on its way to its home town. Madhu Mollar had a very bad reputation and it was generally believed that nobody could escape him. Most of the Bhojpuris were put down as per his commands.

Kamla was left all alone and when she was coming out of the palanquin in order to hide her in the

bushes some old Habir Khan came to her rescue and he ordered everyone to clear out.

No one had the courage to oppose Habir Khan or even to stand before him and face him. They had all run away including the bridal party. The bridegroom who had taken a vow a little while before to protect the bride was also nowhere to be seen. Old Habir helped Kamla and consoled her saying that she was like his own daughter and that she should not be afraid of anything.

He asked her to accompany her to his house because this place was not safe for her. Being a Brahmin's daughter Kamla hesitated to go to a Muslim's house but Habir assured her that in her house she would be safe and would stay like a Hindu girl. He told her that as long as he was alive no one could harm her. He also said that true Muslims honour devout Brahmins as well.

Habir brought Kamla to his house. Here she was free to live according to her Hindu rituals, customs and tradition. In one of the wings of the house there was a Shiva temple with all arrangements for practicing the Hindu way of life. An old Brahmin came there and told Kamla that this was just like a Hindu Home where she could preserve her caste and he would help her do her prayers.

Kamla did not have any problem in Habir's house but she was quite upset and wanted to go back to her house. She requested that her uncle should be informed and he will take her back home. Though Habir was unwilling and almost sure that her family wouldn't accept her. He said that Kamla was mistaken. Kamla insisted and Habir unwillingly took Kamla to her uncle's house. She went in and he waited for her outside, almost sure that she wouldn't be accepted and thus she would come back.

She requested and pleaded before her uncle not to desert her but her uncle replied that theirs is a Hindu family and nobody would accept her back. If they do, they would lose their own caste too. Her aunt as usual cursed her and shouted at her and called her 'Ominous Wretch.' Kamla stood there for a while with her head bent low as if perplexed and undecided.

She had many questions in her mind of which she didn't have answers. What to do? Where to go? What to say? Whom to say? Who would listen to her? And then she comes out and goes quietly with Habir as the doors her uncle's house were forever closed for her.

At Habir's house her life changed completely. She was free to do anything. She was at liberty to practice her Hindu customs and traditions. The respect, love and care she received at Habir's family, she had never received at her own place. The wing in which she was living was called Rajputuni's wing and having come here it seemed that she enjoyed the status of a queen.

There was no end to the warmth, love and care she received here. It is said that this wing was called Rajputani Wing because a Nawab had brought home a Rajput woman and she was provided separate quarters where she could preserve her faith. She worshipped Lord Shiva. She also provided shelter to other Hindu Begums in this wing and all of them had the freedom to follow their customs and

beliefs. (perhaps the reference may be to Emperor Akbar's Rajput Hindu wife Jodhabai to refer to his religious tolerance) It is further believed that Habir Khan was the son of that Rajput woman. Habir didn't adopt his mother's religion but in her memory he had taken a vow to provide special shelter for oppressed and ostracised Hindu women of the society. During those times aristocratic Muslims used to respect devout Hindus. Time passed quickly, Kamla grew up. She became emotionally attached to Habir's second son Karim.

"Then one day she told Habir Khan, 'Baba, I know no other religion; the fortunate soul whom I love is alone my religion. I never found any divine grace in the religion that deprived me of all love, and discarded me beside the garbage vat of neglect. Their gods brought me only disgrace everyday, which is still fresh in my memory. It is in your home, Baba that I first tasted love. Here I have discovered that life had a value even for a wretched girl.

I worship that god alone who has given me shelter, which means love and honour to me. That diety alone is my god; he is neither Hindu nor Muslim. Your second son Karim is the one whom I have accepted in my heart; with him my work, my religion, my being has become identified. Convert me to a Muslim; I have no objection. I think I can preserve both religions.'"(Streer Patra and Other Stories, pg.318-19)

Life went on and Kamla was renamed Meherjan. Now comes the time of the marriage of her cousin, Sarla her uncle's second daughter. Her marriage was also arranged as gorgeously as Kamla's own marriage. And now also the bridal party was attacked in the similar way. Moreover this time the bandits were determined to retaliate as they had failed in their earlier attempt but Habir Khan was again there, in his Godly incarnation, this time he was more determined to protect and to take care.

When the bridal party started running away deserting the bride in the palanquin, her own sister Kamla who was deserted by her own family came to her rescue because Kamla didn't want that her sister should meet the same fate as she had met. She told Sarala not to be afraid of anything because she had brought a shelter for her sister from someone who provides shelter to everyone irrespective of caste or religion.

Kamla brings her sister back to her uncle's home and requests him to accept her because she has not been dishonored by anybody. She also asked her uncle to inform her aunt that she never knew that she would repay them in this way, for whatever they had done for her. She gifted her sister, Sarala with a red silk saree and brocade cushion and wanted her never to forget that she has a Muslim sister to protect her if she is ever in distress or any problem.

Thus Kamla who herself was once helpless and alone comes out to be a strong and independent woman goes out of the way to help her sister, Sarla because she doesn't want that Sarala should suffer like her. Thus the present story exemplifies the emergence of a strong female character who realizes her worth and identity in a house which is free from the caste pragmatic and the barriers of religion though

it is neither the house of her parents which she was forced to leave nor her husband's by whom she was left on the way on her wedding day.

Kamla discovers her new identity and her new self in a stranger's house where she enjoyed all kinds of freedom and where there were no restrictions upon her.

"Subha" is another heart-touching tale of the isolation of a beautiful girl who is deaf and dumb by birth. She is the youngest of the three daughters of Banikantha. Subha is born into a financially sound family. Her elder two sisters are married to proper men and given a proper dowry in due course of time. Subhashini, called Subha, is a mute child. The irony in her name is that the word Subhashini means one who speaks well and sweetly but her fate is opposite. She will never be able to speak or hear.

Her mother feels a sense of shame which she never overcomes when the family realizes that Subha will always be a mute girl. She was born in those times when congenital impairments of children were considered as sign of a moral defect or depravity in the mother. Her mother tries to love her but she can hardly force the emotion. Her father loves and accepts her whole heartedly .She was a silent weight upon the heart of her parents. They lived in a small village called Chandipur.

When the little innocent girl, had finished her household chores, she crept quietly to the banks of the river nearby. She had realized from her earliest childhood that God had sent her like a curse to her father's house, so she kept herself away from ordinary people and tried to live in the company of nature. The sounds of nature echoed together with the trembling of her heart. "They became one great wave of sound which beat upon her restless soul. They were her real language, in which she talked with Nature" (Dodd 35). She understands that there is close affinity between her and nature.

Her only friends in the house were the two cows whom she loved, cared and fondled. Whenever she was hurt, she would run to these dumb friends for consolation and relief. Subha also had another companion named Pratap who was a fisherman. He was the youngest boy of the Gosains. His family had accepted long ago that he will never amount to anything. He was a simple fellow and his sole interest in life is casting his fishing net. He appreciates the silence of the girl as talking might frighten the fish.

She enjoys seeing him cast his net.

Subha was growing. The thought of her marriage filled her parents with anxiety and care. Finding a suitable match for Subha was not so easy.

At the back of the mind there was always a fear whether she would give birth to children with the same impairments she has. Subha communicates with her family members using gestures and everybody understands her in the family. Subha was bold enough to accept her fate and had learned to live with her physical limitations and never complains.

But her family had a different plan for her and her life is completely shaken rather she was picked up from her roots and completely ruined. Nobody understood her union or association with nature that was her only solace.

Her father decided that they should move to Calcutta. It was heart-rending for her to leave the stream, the cows, the Nature and her friend, Pratap. Subha went to the cowshed to bid farewell to her only friends and comrades of her childhood. She fed them with her hand; she clasped their necks; she looked into their faces, and tears fell fast from their eyes which spoke for her. Subha left her room, and flung herself down on her grassy couch beside the river which she loved so much. It was as if she threw her arms about the Earth, her strong, silent mother, and tried to say: 'Do not let me leave you, mother.'

Put your arms about me, as I have put mine about you, and hold me fast.' Subha's heart was so full of pain and distress which nobody else could feel or share. Sisirkumar Ghose is of view that "Subha has a rare Lucy-like rapport with Nature" (81). The close affinity between man and nature is wonderfully depicted in this story. The Nature, the stream, the cows are major characters here. A dumb girl sharing her joys, sorrows and other emotions with dumb beasts is a touching sight. Here a human being becomes one with the nature and one with the animals. One does not find any difference between the dumb cows and dumb Subha and dumb Nature.

The pity is that the physical deformities cast one out of the society. Isolated, one then makes company with Nature and animals. How heart-rending it is to Subha to leave her cows, the stream and the Nature! Stronger is her relation to animals and Nature than to human beings. The reason is obvious. Nature is her mother. She was plucked away from her mother when the family decided to shift to Calcutta. Her tragedy started from here.

Subha's marriage was fixed by her parents. The bridegroom's party was not informed about her physical deformity. Her displeasure, sorrow and tears had hardly had any effect on the proposer or her parents. The marriage was fixed on a day, which promised to bring good luck. The husband's work lay in the West, and shortly after the marriage he took her there. Within a week everyone in the locality came to know that the girl was dumb.

Nobody could feel or hear the sobbing of the heart that was deeply hurt. That marriage supplied Subha with everlasting miseries. She didn't have much but she lost whatever she had. She lost Nature but did not gain man. One can guess what might have happened to Subha when her dumbness was disclosed. The author leaves it to the reader to think about the tragedy, the sufferings, the pain and humiliation Subha might have gone through for no fault of hers.

She hadn't deceived anyone but her condition can neither be explained nor understood. She might have looked around for some kind of help, to tell everyone that she is not responsible for what had happened but all in vain because there was none who could read her face and understand her and she had no language to express herself. She missed the familiar faces who could understand the heart of a dumb girl and prove her innocence.

The irony in the story is that Subha was forced into this relationship by her own parents and she had no other alternative but to surrender. In the

words of Srinivasa Iyengar, she was soon abandoned by her husband for another, as casually as one exchanges one pencil for another; but has not the dumb girl – even she – feelings of her own? Just as the great Spanish painters poured love and understanding into their pictures of the dwarfs maintained by royalty and runaways with his limitless compassion and love. (76)

It is really pathetic that Subha, a sweet, lovable and innocent child of nature is denied all possibility of self expression. This innocent human heart is even denied the comfort and solace of pouring out her sorrows into sympathetic ears and receiving words of love, consolation and encouragement from loving lips.

Thus Tagore discusses the different phases of women's life- how she is accepted and treated by her parents and other family members at her own home, at the home of her in-laws, in the society in which she lives and how she is oppressed and punished for the fault which she had not committed. All this sometimes gives birth to a new woman who is confident and capable of making her own decisions but at times they have no other alternative except to surrender to the circumstances. Tagore's deep insight into human minds leaves the readers wonder-struck.

References

1. Dodd, E.F. Tales from Tagore. Madras: Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1966.
2. Iyengar Srinivasa. Rabindranath Tagore: A Critical Introduction. New Delhi: Sterling Publications Private Limited, 1987.
3. Tagore, Rabindranath. Kabuliwalla And Other Stories: Selections From Galpaguchchha I. Trans. by Rattan K. Chattopadhyay. New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan 2010.
4. Tagore, Rabindranath. StreerPatra And Other Stories: Selections From Galpaguchchha 3. Trans. by Rattan K. Chattopadhyay. New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan 2010.