

Tagore as a Feminist: Reflection from Tagorean Literature

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Abstract

Revelation of the female psyche, their predicaments, trials and tribulations and their resistance towards oppressive social forces are strong elements in the writings of Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore's writings, especially his novels and short stories bring out the erased portion of women's experience and show tremendous sympathy and understanding towards the plight of women which was quite an unfamiliar trend for most work of that period. Set in the Nineteenth Century Colonial Bengal, Tagore's writings portray the problems within Hindu custom and patriarchy, the uproar of spiritual and intellectual tension between Bengali Renaissance and tradition marked by the emergence of Colonial education and lives of Bengali, Hindu women in the juncture of all these social events. Controversial issues such as remarriage of Hindu widow, co-cremation, the need for female education, their emancipation and the oppression caused through social injustice have found significant place in his writing. Thus his writings are valuable documents of societal changes in its relation to larger social context of gender, nation, and politics. His female characters come from diverse social settings and are inspirational as they struggle for space and autonomy. Through his works, Tagore is seen to break the false conventions of his society and thus liberating women from their bondages. Tagore's role in alleviating the minds of the Bengali reader is acknowledged anonymously today. Hence, this paper is an attempt to closely examine his writings towards the subversion of patriarchy and a force bringing changes in perspective on such issues. In doing so this paper not only looks at Tagore's selected works through a feminist lens but it also studies Tagore's own upbringing, influences from his family and the role of liberal education which he received leading him to write great humanist prose and poetry which are still read extensively. In gist, this paper explores

women's lives through Tagore's writings and how he projects women as the most significant transformative factor within social dimension.

Introduction

Feminism is a doctrine which encourages inclusion, individual identity, and recognition. In the Nineteenth Century, women were considered to be substandard and all the power was given to men. Women have long been marginalized and excluded from the power dynamics on the false notion of intellectual and physical inadequacy. They are always represented as the second or 'the other' gender. Women and their lives have long been one of shift dependency. The societal system is such that before marriage they are the accountability of their fathers, then of husbands and at last, of their sons. They are not given any free space or liberty to make their own choices and to live freely. Such problems can be traced back to the age old notion of perceiving women as home makers and the emphasis on their marital responsibilities alone. Even in literature we see a long passage of struggle for identity on the part of the women writers or writings depicting women's experiences. Thus literature has always engaged in portraying, disproving and approving women's lives, their predicaments and their place in patriarchal society.

Women's writing and writing consisting of women's experiences have a difficult history of reader's reception. Starting from books of feminist criticisms to women's literature such as *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, *Second Sex*, *Laugh of Medusa*, *A Room of One's Own*, *Sultana's Dream*, *Padmarag* all emerged as response to particular crisis which were later known as waves of feminism. From Gynocriticism¹ to radical feminism² all were initially received with suspicion and criticism as they questioned and challenged the long held assumptions of power relations. The same struggle can be seen in Bengali writers too as they depict the concept of

¹ The study of feminist literature written by female writers inclusive of the interrogation of female authorship, images, the feminine experience and ideology and the development of female literary tradition.

² A feminine perspective that calls for a radical reordering of society in which male supremacy is eliminated in social and economic contexts.

emancipation of women. To further illustrate my point I have chosen Rabindranath Tagore, Asia's first Nobel laureate (1913), who is a vital and convincing figure in the world of Bengali Literature. But he is equally read for his emphasis on social reformation including upholding the values gender equality. The universal appeal or universality of his writings is now well accepted across the boundaries of nation and continent. Essentially known for his poetry, Tagore was additionally a dramatist, social reformer, philosopher, writer, and a prolific essayist, a critic of life, society and art. Much of his books and stories are written in the view of twentieth century colonial Bengal. His novels and short stories encompass vast range of issues. The issues of social inequality, religion, human relationships, human mind, society's false standards and contemporary political tensions have often found their way in his writings. We find a prolific writer, an observer, a critique, a theorist and the voice of a humanist coming across his writings. In Tagore's fiction, Women are illustrated in variety of ways. Tagore purposes the society of his times and develops his writings by relating them with ordinary Bengali Hindu family life. He criticizes the existing social injustices in his representation of the demoralized women who become conscious of their roles in society as well as the resources dormant in their own individuality. Through his long literary career Tagore explored woman as "the most creative transformative factor within social life" (Mandhub 1). However, in this paper I will largely focus on the representation of women and issues which are integral to the lives of women in light of some of the writings of Tagore. The demoralized behavior on women has long existed in our society. The space and the importance which women occupy in literature is hence a debatable issue, whether in Eastern or Western tradition. This was one of the reasons behind my interest in Tagore and the interest to place him as a feminist or at least as an author who demonstrates substantial amount of work on women. Other than my interests in his work as a Bengali, I find

Tagore extremely aware of the condition of women and I find him to give significant time and thought on this subject which interests me as a student of Literature and also as a woman, personally.

Rabindranath Tagore has shown a remarkable understanding of female mind and gave ample space to women and their lives and narratives in his novels, short stories and plays. Women from different social class, cast and character are present in his works. There are multiple perspectives, dynamic characters and diverse narratives in his works which one cannot miss. Tagore talks about the problems with 'Hindu patriarchy' where patriarchy is a very chauvinist system that allows the subjugation of women in terms of power, education, position etc. In India, patriarchy mostly endures via the sake of religion. Hindus blindly pursue Ramayana which is a immense example of gender biasness. In the name of religion, Hindu patriarchal society gets all the right to disgrace and dominate women. In an article by Alison Macdonald , it is stated that "traditional upper caste Hindu family strict ideas of honor and shame, purity and pollution dominate a woman's life and strict hierarchies of age and gender dictate the ways in which women and men behave towards each other. Women are expected to be dutiful, respectful and submissive wives and self-sacrificing mothers" (Macdonald 2). Tagore has shown an extraordinary notice of the plight of women in his Hindu society. The issues of dowry, early marriage, domestic violence and passivity of women have come out in his wonderful stories. In the midst of these social obstructions, female education is shown as a greater need in the Tagore. *Nashtaneer* or *The Ruined Nest*, is a good example of that. Then again, in the novel *The Sand of Eye*, Tagore portrays how the force of eagerness and desire can weaken any relation from its roots. Tagore also shows how a man disrespects the union and promises with his wife under the corrupt wishes of sexuality where he has no capacity to overcome it. It demonstrates the wrong

treatments and disenchantment of a dishonest husband towards his naive and almost uneducated wife who never suspects his betrayal. At the center of the narrative we have an educated, self-conscious woman named Binodini who was windowed at her youth and her emergence in a traditional Hindu family, her inclusion in their relationships and her actions shape the novel as much as it problematizes the concept of 'respectable'.

In most of the stories and novels, Tagore has shown the possibilities women have of which they themselves are generally kept unaware. His works show how women were denied autonomy and in turn the possibility of their personal growth was also demolished. In *The Ruined Nest* we can see the male ego and false sense of pride is hurt when they come in touch with a woman who is not naive and unintelligible.

Tagore has pointed out women's loneliness and imprisonment as a result of the monotonous life of domesticity and economic reliability. In the short fiction "The Wife's Letter", from the collection called *Golpo Gucchcho*, we find Mrinal to fight for her suppressed identity covered under the identity of 'Mejho Bou'. This transformation from being a wife to a male lineage to an independent woman does not happen all on a sudden. Tagore gives an extremely plausible explanation in which he records Mrinal's reaction through her own voice and her coming out of her marital bond which is symbolic in many sense. Not only Mrinal comes out of the family or the lane or the house in particular, she comes out of the long sustained cycle of patriarchy as well.

Today, after a long stretch of agony, women have now comprehended their rights and position and gradually, they are now refusing to accept men to be superior. Today's women are significantly more self-directed and aware of fighting against patriarchal roughness however in Tagorean age, they really did not think about their position, power or rights and the vast majority

of them used to consider their husband as God. Tagore's perspectives on social equity and appreciation for women are extremely convincing and applicable to the truth of women in the twenty first century.

To develop my thesis, I have chosen Rabindranath Tagore's popular novel *The Sand of Eye*, novella "Ruined Nest", short stories; "Wife's Letter" and "Punishment" and finally the two poems "I won't let you go" and "An Ordinary Girl" to portray the problems within the nineteenth century colonial Bengali Hindu patriarchal society which affected the lives of Bengali, Hindu women in the juncture of Controversial issues such as remarriage of Hindu widow, co-cremation, the need for female education, their emancipation and the oppression and identity crisis. Along with these will have a study on Tagore's own upbringing, influences from his family and the role of liberal education which he received leading him to write great humanist prose and poetry writer.

Chapter 1

Portrayal of Women and their lives through Tagore's short stories and novella: Marriage, Education and Society in Nineteenth Century Bengal

1.1 *The Ruined Nest* as an examination of desire, stigma and isolation of women

This chapter is devoted to the discussion of women, their spiritual, psychological and sexual needs from the marital bond and their husband. Tagore has talked about all sorts of important issues like female education, position and empowerment etc but he did not neglected the inconsequential issues of women's life. Through these prose works Tagore has explored the various dynamics of gendered relations. In the Nineteenth century colonial Bengal, the female education and participation was questioned. 'Sati' was under the consideration of social reformation. On that time, thinking about a woman's psychological need can be proved as a matter of hilarity and discredit. In "The Ruined Nest" (Nashtaneer) we can see the female character Charulata being a complete facilitated woman with a good, educated, rich and supportive husband, Bhupati. Though being unaffected from all kind of traditional sufferings, the relationship between the husband and wife could not hold its value till the last and the nest turned out to be a ruined nest. In this novella, we can see a triangle Relationship among Charu her husband, Bhupati and brother-in-law, Amol. The friendship between Charu and Amol is stigmatized at one point when Charu is awakened and she becomes conscious of her strong affection towards Amol. This awakening creates problems for both of them and for the marriage as well. But what Tagore explores is not the stigma rather what makes Charu ruin her marital bliss, her nest or neer.

Charu was taken to be a girl of adoration to Bhupati because of their age gap and early marriage. He even could not see that his 'little' wife got maturity and now she wants to be loved and cared like a mature wife. She wants time and recognition. To quote Tagore, in his "a moment of self awareness", he identified that, "Charu needs a companion; the poor thing has nothing to occupy her all day" (Three Women 4). He could not even understand that Charu needs him too. He always remained busy with his profession and showed less interest in Charu's works comparing to Amol. On the other hand, because of the absence of proper attention, love and time from the husband, Charu slowly creates a substitute emotional relation with Amol which she for the most part remains unaware. If we try look at the problematic relations and the reason behind it, we can see that Tagore has pointed out the deeply rooted psychosomatic crisis in Charu. Amol and Charu were almost same age and they had almost nothing to do or no serious responsibilities in a well off household. The ample and abundant leisure resulted in friendship which made Charu forget about the absence of Bhupati from their conjugal life. Moreover, they soon discovered a mutual interest, literature and writing. Amol was a contributor and an aspiring writer and he introduced Charu to his world of writing and soon Charu developed a keen interest in reading contemporary Bengali fiction.

As the plot progresses Amol becomes a good companion to Charu. He knew that she was lonely and so he "never rested without making her do something for him" (6). The understanding gap with Bhupati persuade the relation with Amol and it has started to "keep her heart alive and fulfilled" (6). Charu's expectation to Bhupati died in such a way that, when the idea of gardening came on her mind and Amol asked Charu to inform for that, Charu said, "he might just order an Eden Garden from some English gardener" (Three Women 8). She also added that "there's no fun if I tell him" (8). With the passing time, Bhupati remained alone with the name tag of

husband and became a dull figure to Charu where on the other side, Amol captured the position of Charu's excitement. In another part of the novella, we also see that Amol become famous and found his admirers outside home and starts spending less time with Charu. Observing that Bhupati asks Charu, "Has your tutor escaped?" (16). In reply Charu said "even as my husband you have no time, never mind someone else". (16) This reflects that, in the deep of her mind, Charu's all expectation of care, happiness and love got died and Bhupati even could not understand as he always remained busy.

The patriarchal society never tries to understand why the female characters or Charu was emotional towards Amol and why she cared so much for him that caused her her marriage with a seemingly perfect husband Bhupati. In all cases stigmatized relations the blame is bestowed upon woman without giving it a good thought. Even in the course of "The Ruined Nest" we see Charu's isolation and alienation from her home and her marriage while Amol remains in the safer realm. R.K.Gupta, in his article, *Feminism and Modern Indian Literature* has said that, "the traditional literary interpretation of women's role and status in society began to be seriously questioned" (Gupta 4) in Nineteenth century Hindu Indian society. Conversely, the men who actually are the main culprits and losers of managing a relationship are not even questioned or marked. In between, the relation that Amol and Charu shared is still a question because in the so called patriarchal society, this is neglected in the name of dignity or religion. The person who commits this is shameful, but again if the fault is of a man, it can be forgiven like Mahendra in *The Sands of Eye*, but a woman cannot be. Even when Amol understood the consequences, though knowing of Charu's frustration and failed marriage life, he left her without showing any reason or clarifying his objective towards ignoring her.

In the contemporary Tagorean society, there is no place for women's feelings or what she wants but the values are given to the self-centered male perspective which is so narrow and shameful. They never ever accept their fault of giving no space to wife or to the relation but again reacts against the consequences. Amol's reply to Charu's letter reaches in Bhupati's hands and a deep uncertainty sets in. Bhupati becomes disgusted at the betrayal of both personal and professional life. This may be seen to mark the disappointment of male writing when it tries to function inside the private sphere. Bhupati not only throws his own writings into the kitchen fire, but he also Charu's. The communication gap between Bhupati and Charu and also the age gap created a dimensional flow in the story. Addressing to Simon D' Beaviour, *the Second Sex*, where she criticized woman as objectifying as a second sex, we can feel its essence in Charu completely. For Bhupati, his first preference remains to his works, Charu is absent there. When this negligence of Bhupati again creates a relation between Charu and Amol, Amol further takes Charu as an object of option to leave in time.

In *The Ruined Nest*, we have never seen Charu accepting the feelings for Amol. It is true that she got attracted towards him and he seemed to be a best company for her. She cried due to their separation and Amol's wedding and leaving them for London. Still we could not find her being weak with telling the truth to her husband or Amol. She wished to pass her life with taking care of her husband and valuing him which proved her being a loyal wife. It is her choice, her strong will power and her independency of mind. At last when Bhupati was going to Mysore, Charu at first wanted to live with him telling that, "take me along with you, don't leave me behind all by myself" (71), wanted to start the life again with forgetting the pasts related to Amol. Bhupati refused to take her but with a sudden change of mind, when he wanted her to go along with him; we can see Charu being very strong and obvious of the destruction of their

relation. She just uttered two words, “never mind” (72). Actually, Charu understood that, physically may be she could have her husband back, but mentally he was far miles away. Her lack of psychological and spiritual support ruined her nest and snatched her only identity of being a married woman. Thus, we can find Charu becoming the victim of severe emotional breakdown which destroyed the marital bondage.

The study on feminism remains incomplete if we ignore male characters, their perspectives and deeds. In the twentieth century, male used to take female as an ornament of the house. In *The Ruined Nest*, Bhupati is represented as an example of obtuse and self centered man who himself destroyed everything. He remained so busy with his work that he unacknowledged the loneliness of Charu. He understood Charu’s being different day by day but did not ask her for the reason. It is like; he himself has made some boundary lines which Charu could not cross. He himself questioned and answered. He is the perfect representation of those male characters who always take themselves superior to other and never accepts own fault. He decided to leave Charu but did not try to know why all these happened. In an article, Tagore’s Liberated Women, author Mary M. Lago said that,

Tagore's male characters, in contrast to such women, has been frequently commented upon; what makes the men in these stories so hard to forgive, whether they act from admirable or despicable motives, is their mindlessness. They behave like automatons plugged into a social system that they do not question until, having ignored the first faint signals of something short-circuited in their relations with the women in their lives, they receive a really severe jolt, the reason of or which they seldom understand and frequently do not try to analyze. (Lago 5)

In case of Amol, we can see the reflection of male chauvinism in him. He is seen unable to accept the writing capability of Charu and her appreciation. Amol tried to act as a good friend and well wisher but after a certain time when Charulata came out with her talent of writing literature; he could not bear to see a woman with success. Male mind is more drawn to those women who have a combination of beauty and ignorance since their intellect could be threatening. Here I would like to cite from Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the rights of Women* where she claimed that for male, innocence of a woman is "the natural effect of ignorance". She criticized John Milton for whom "women are formed for softness and sweet attractive grace". It is condemned by Mary Wollstonecraft that "the minds of women are enfeebled by false refinement" from where a woman gets the idea of being subordinate. In the name of natural law which expresses women to be substandard both physically and psychologically compared to men, male society intoxicates women psyche to believe that they are "inferior to the male" (Wollstonecraft 166). Hindu men and the society of nineteenth century have the ideology that male are the superior and female are inferior who do not have any right or capacity to move with them and for this reason, when a woman proves herself capable, the fear of typical male mind comes out. On this note, the domination of Amol was beyond limits. He subjugated Charu mentally which seemed like he is playing emotional game. He accepted Charu's company when he needed her and again, when he felt, he rejected her completely. His ego is completely unable to accept Charu as a better writer. He published her writings without putting a second thought as probably; he felt that it will not get that much of appreciation like his works. When critics compared Charu's writings with Amol and choose it as a better one, his male ego got hurt. He is also included in that type of male who try to take all the decision easily and feel that they have all the rights to dominate the mind and emotion of women. He left Charu

without telling any reason and his sudden changed behavior gave Charu a severe pressure. He could feel everything but did nothing as he did not felt like as it was just a womanly feeling for him which means nothing. In Kate Millets *Sexual Politics*, she focused on power relation between men and women and asserted that, in patriarchal society's ideology, a peculiar norm is set for women that they should behave in a certain way in any situation (Millet 4). According to her, it becomes a critical and vulnerable issue to men if a woman gets education and tries to participate with them in taking decisions. The male bigotry cannot accept a woman having more priority or better position through her intellect or capability.

1.2 “The Wife’s Letter” and “Punishment” as subversions of patriarchy

“The Wife’s Letter” is a wonderful short story written in epistolary form³ told from the perspective of a self educated married woman Mrinal who examines her position and her identity within and without her marriage. Mrinal opens the narrative through a letter addressed to her husband explaining and making statement on the cause of her departure from her marriage which was considered as a sacred realm for women. Unlike the other female characters from Tagore’s short stories, Mrinal is shown to have intense power and self-confidence in choosing own fate and identity. She is portrayed as an educated woman whose way of thinking and judgments are very different against gender subjugation and violence. This is the reason for which women education in Nineteenth century was not appreciated. Education for women was long abhorred and discouraged as it was thought to ruin martial harmony. The general notion was that education will give women the power to question injustice done to them. It could break the stigmatized mind set up of women who believed men to be superior and powerful. Mrinal in “The Wife’s Letter” and Charulata in ‘The Ruined Nest’, are all writers in their own truth and it

³Highly subjective and intimate form of narration without the interruption of the author.

is their writing that questions patriarchal ability. In the very beginning, we have seen Mrinal to get married only for her beauty but not for her talent and intelligence. In the long term of her relationship with her husband and in laws, there is a huge gap between their thoughts and logics. As she had no child to bear and she is unable to bear one, there is a maternity need in her and when she gets Bindu as a submissive and violated girl, her motherhood and womanhood upraises. All the thoughts, logics and questions that Mrinal dealt with has nothing to do with her husband as he never tried to understand her. The name tag of 'mejo bou' was given because of the relation with her husband but when she was fighting for the dignity and life of Bindu, she found no one beside her, even her companion, husband went against her. The starting and end of the letter clarifies all these. In the beginning, Mrinal stated "To Thine Auspicious Lotus-Feet" but when she end describing all her sufferings, humiliation and disagreement with the family, she announces her leave. The decision of breaking the relationship down, she ends with saying "Removed from the Shelter of Your Feet" (14) which is strong irony on the face of patriarchy. Girls under Hindu Patriarchal domination on that time could have the only identity of their husband. Husband's house was supposed to be their own house and they were always meant to abide by the decisions of their husbands and in- laws. Thus, this indicates that how vulnerable the relationship was on that time. Even now, a man never surrenders his logics and so called dignity before women no matter how right she is in her decisions.

Mrinalini's letter to her husband was a result of her sufferings, submissiveness in the in laws house for years. With contravening all the relationship with her husband, Mrinal clarified her need to write a letter to the husband which is an indicator of the gap between the two of them. She was so disgust to her husband and in laws that she risked her only identity of being a married woman and came out of the shelter. Mrinal opted for going on a pilgrimage to Puri while

her husband was back in Kolkata, doing his office work. She also stated that the letter is not from their 'daughter-in-law but from a woman who has a self-governing relation with the world and its initiator. She affirmed there that it is not the end of her life to step front towards the world, because death takes only valuable beings and she got nothing from the society and hardly considered as valuable. Society can abandon a person, a woman but God never abandons his creation. Mrinal believed that society forsaken Bindu, disused her for everything but "God didn't abandon her" (12). No matter how much power society imposed on her, all these influences have a certain limit but the power given by God after death has no perimeter. She claimed that "by your turn of whim and your custom graven in stone, you could keep her life crushed under your feet forever, but your feet weren't powerful enough. Death was stronger" (12). She made her point clear by saying that "she's not a mere Bengali girl anymore, no more just a female cousin of her father's nephews, no longer only a lunatic stranger's deceived wife. Now she is without limits, without end." (13).

Here, the dimension of women-women relationship came out in the form of relationship shared by Mrinal and Bindu. It is the relation of emotion and identity. The arrival of Bindu actually gives a new way to Mrinal to think out of the boundary of her in laws. Bindu, a girl of fourteen years has no one but elder brothers who have exploited her. She is just an ordinary girl with 'ugly' look before which she lost her value of being a nice and kind hearted woman. Mrinal cultivates this ordinary girl, who quickly becomes an eyesore for the whole family including her own elder sister. Everyone is eager to disgrace her out of the house. At time of Swadeshi movement, the girl named Bindu got chicken pox and all tried to banish her out of the house but then Mrinal upraises her voice to look after her. Mrinal uses the appearance 'o je Bindu' ['After all, it was Bindu'] (525) repeatedly to indicate that her identity is objectified as a little matter

whose presence makes no sense to anyone. The complete singularity of her objectivity is marked by the proper name 'Bindu'; who is nothing but a point of object which has no value.

The beginning of Mrinal's letter to her husband represented her disgraceful married life and her relation with her in laws. In the Hindu nineteenth century patriarchal society, from childhood, girls were taught some kind of typical superstitions in the name of religion that heaven lies under the feet of husband. The relation of Mrinal with her husband disgusted her so much that she decided to leave it for the sake of own mind which could not bear violence anymore. Mrinal always knew that she got married only for her beauty but not for intelligence as on that time and on that society, intelligent girls are taken as a curse. For a woman, intelligence is a misery.

The Mrinal-Bindu relationship was beyond understanding which was ornamented on the womanly alliance and a recompense for Mrinal's abortive motherhood. The dark nature of the people in the society of west Bengal regarding beauty of a woman has a shameful representation in Tagore's stories. Women are given value regarding her beauty and objectifying owns self. They are kind of a plate full of fruits to be served before the husband and in laws. In case of Bindu, she is trickily being banished by given marriage to a mad person as for people, her black shed deserve nothing more than that. She is a matter to get used and utilize as a worker of house hold. After a long passage of time, Mrinal plans an escape for Bindu from her so called in laws with the help of her brother Sharat but it seems too late because by that time, Bindu has already burnt herself. Actually it's not a suicide but a murder of womanhood in the so called patriarchal society which is full of violence and mental frustration, which indicates itself as a caretaker of the society but kills its value. Being the decision takers, the in laws of Mrinal hide and "destroyed the letter" (Letter 12, translated by Prashenjit Gupta) given by Bindu and this gives

the ultimate form to the story leading towards the end. With the hide and seek of valuation, beauty and frustration, Mrinal finally declares the death of her relationship with her husband. The death of Bindu makes her independent of all sorts of relationships and through it, she finds her eternity as Mrinal says, ‘Mrityu tomader cheye boro...shekhane Bindu kebol khurtuto bhaier bon noy, kebol aparichito pagol shamir prabanchito stri noy. Shekhane she anonto’ [‘Death was stronger. In her death Bindu has become great; she’s not a mere Bengali girl anymore, no more just a female cousin of her father’s nephews, no longer only a lunatic stranger’s deceived wife. Now she is without limits, without end’] (Letter 13, translated). For Mrinal, this death is the celebration of life—‘Oi to mrityur hate jiboner joypataka urchhe’ [but the proud standard of life flies from the hand of death!]; it is the death of body and mind and independence of soul that binds Mrinal and Bindu in the final run.

Dependency or independency depends on a person and his/her situation. Women are brought up in a certain way that all they have a tendency to sacrifice, sometimes for family or for society or sometimes for own dignity. It is a very ordinary scenario of male dominated society as they have constructed the system in such a way that can easily dominate a girl or woman. For this reason, we can see the sister in law of Mrinal failed to understand her capability and without doing anything, she rejected her sister. This was the difference of an educated and beautiful woman with an uneducated woman who was not beautiful enough. The sister- in-law’s lack of beauty suppressed her to a lower position in her mind and that’s why she could not speak up against the violent behavior of the family. Moreover, she failed to identify her power and position because of her lack of education and confidence on own self. She had the hegemonies that her marital bond was her only way to lead life and she had no right to think beyond or against this.

Mrinal's husband is another instance of male supremacy that we can see dominated by his family. We can hear his voice hardly ever in the novella. The presence of power relationship is seen here. Being a woman, Bindu is abused and tortured a lot by her cousins in her own house. Throughout the novella, we can see Mrinal pointing out and criticizing all the wrong deeds done by her husband and in laws. Every time she is seen to fight alone for rightness. Where the relationship of husband- wife is meant as sharing and caring for each other, this always remained absent in Mrinal and her husband's relation. Mrinal reveals the true color of Hindu patriarchy through her narrative which questions the customs of public morality valued by the educated, middle class Bengali family.

In the short story "Punishment" Tagore talks about the disgraceful condition of women who have been perpetual victim of gender violence and exclusion. The whole story reflects how women in India are getting victimized by the male members in their day to day life. Through this story, Tagore is questioning the uneven social structure, customs and husband- wife relation. Tagore's Punishment undoubtedly reflects the segregation of women from the main stream society. The man-women relationship is socially constructed by the manipulation of power and the force of domination.

The characters, Radha and Chandara are signified as the victim of male supremacy in the cast system of rural Bengal. These two women argue with one another and always rely on the decisions of their husbands. This shows the traditional beliefs and hegemonies of these women and how they push own selves unknowingly towards the control of patriarchal society. Wives are taken so trivial to the male that only for the failure of giving food, Dukhiram easily "plunged his knife into" Radha's "head" (Punishment 14). Female or wives are just like optional beings or the other sex who are only the object to control and use. If we focus on Simon D' Beauvoir's *The*

Second Sex, we can easily link ourselves to the categorization of women as an object. The most surprising role is played by Chidam who tried to save his brother by accusing his wife as a executioner of Radha. His pretention to care for Chandara is nothing but the exploitation of the value of women. With that he also abused his duties towards his wife while he took shocking decision for her just to save his brother. Chidam always takes women as weaker sex comparing to men and they must live a submissive life. His mentality stoops so low that he believes that one can easily have wife if the wife is gone or died but once brother is lost would be lost forever. Women are “defined and differentiated with reference to men” (*The second sex* 3) and same thing happens here. For Chidam, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential” (*The Second Sex* 3) who is his brother, Dukhiram. On this note, Chidam decides to save his brother and puts all the blame of the murder on his wife Chandara. Ramlochan is the first man who came to know about this murder and in the sudden presence of Chakrabarty, Chidam puts all the blame on his wife that “in their quarrel, chotobou stuck at Barobau’s head with a farm knife” (Punishment 15). Chidam asked Chadara to take all the blames on herself and said that “Don’t worry- if you do what I tell you, you’ll be quite safe” (Punishment 17). This clearly points out that how much his marital relation has a value to him and what the life of Chandara means to him. He tries to use her as a puppet which has no option then to follow its master. After hearing to her husband, Chandara felt very helpless and surrenders herself modestly. What remains uncanny and concealed is her state of mind as she pushes herself towards the gallows calling it her last bond. Here Tagore presents us with an ambiguous ending which needs its readers to fill in for and engage into the meaning making process.

In Punishment, we can see, there were severe conflicts going in Chandara’s mind hat “Chandara stared” at her husband, “stunned; her black eyes burnt him like fire. Then she slowly

shrank from him, as if to escape his devilish clutches. She turned her heart and soul quite away” (Punishment 19). This is probably the silence of the spirit of a woman who faces pressure, threat and domination everyday by the male and the society. The silence gives them a long way to life through the acceptance of death. Chandara was so shocked, exhausted and disgust that she confessed “I killed her” (20). Her assertion of guilt was so powerful that each person around there got shocked. She was so broken that with criticizing her husband, she said, “I shall give my youth to the gallows instead of you” (21). In spite of Chidam’s inadequacy of money, Chandara accepted life as it was, encouraging herself that at least Chidam loved her and that was sufficient. On this note, Chidam’s sudden decision of saving his brother changed everything. May be, this was Chandara’s escapism from the brutal male dominated household and society. She had to confirm that she is “someone” too; not just a woman who is just a matter of mercy or proved as guilty whenever it is needed. On that point in time and circumstances, the only way she could do it was by accepting the penalty of the murder which she did not commit. Her insistence on her confession and the way she constructs her own fate towards the gallows can be seen as a subversion of patriarchy. Arka Chattopadhyay in his article “I write therefore I am: Feminine inscription between desire and Jouissance in Tagore” says, “Patriarchy, like all other forms of totalitarian ideology, is built on a fantasmatic notion of the whole and I would claim that the point where death (of a woman) interrupts and even haunts this discourse is where this fantasy of the whole collapses. The death-point is a discourse in lack and it is impossible to totalize this point” (3). She understood that only death can give her the superiority in her life and can free her from this world of unequal power relation and counterfeit traditional bond.

Chapter 2

Portrayal of Women and their lives: Reflection from the novel *The Sand Of Eye*

Choker Bali or *The Sand of Eye* is a novel by Tagore published in the early twentieth century where he represented the social condition, clashes in conjugal life and perplexity of human psychology. It is a novel of that time when West Bengal was going through the changes in case of education, belief system and social reformation regarding Colonialism. The whole story centers three main characters; Binodini, the widow; Mahendra and his wife Ashalata.

In this part of my thesis, I will talk about the main character Binodini who is portrayed very negatively in the novel. At the very beginning of the novel, we can see Binodini as a well educated girl and whom Mahendra's mother, Rajlakshmi chose for her son. She knew that Binodini's thoughts or choices will get more preferences to Mahendra. It was an irony of fate that Mahendra refused to marry her and Binodini got married to an elder person. At a very early age, she became a widow. In a society where girls were like a burden, we can assume what was the condition of the widows on that time. Binodini was deprived of all rights, economy, support, care, position as well as love. Alison Macdonald has affirmed that, "Although Binodini is a widow she is also a young woman, she has passion for life and lustful desires yet she also desires a family and motherhood and it is this intermingling of all conflicting aspects of femininity that stands to question the 'purity' and homogeneity of the female ideal" (11). When she saw Asha, an uneducated woman having all these facilities, her intellectual mind could not bear this for long. Her hidden wishes came out in the form of jealousy. In her mind, she knew that she had all the ability to have the position of Asha and unintentionally started to feel envious of her. Mahendra and her relation compatibility was very high as both were educated. The character, Binodini,

could not hold her importance till the last. Her spiritual thoughts got more priority before her desires and needs. With the criticism of the society, she was clear that her desires were wrong and they could never be accepted by the society and that's why, at last, she repented and left for Kashi at last.

The other female character Asha is portrayed as a very complex character throughout the novel and we can see her shift from immaturity to adulthood. She implicitly provokes Mahendra to meet with Binodini which proved adequate to ruin her marriage. This was her immature behavior like an innocent child who has no sight to look for the consequences. With her lack of understanding, she becomes the victim of Mahendra and Binodini's adulterous relationship. Asha was supposed to question and reject the marriage but she did nothing without accepting Mahendra back. Just like other Indian girls of twentieth century, she was given the ideology of positioning husband at the place of God and he should not be questioned. It is the very Indian Traditional view of portraying husbands as it is created by the male dominated society itself. Being a traditional believer, we can feel the lack of qualities of a traditional housewife in her. She had no idea of domestic chores and at the same time, she could not reject her husband like a modern Bengali woman. The ending of the novel depicted Asha as more critical character and I believe Tagore intentionally did it to represent the power of a woman when she is broken and cheated; how a sudden occurrence can divert a woman from innocence to maturity. It was her innocence of being stubborn to present Binodini, her Bali before her husband but their treachery made her matured and experienced. Being a Hindu Bengali house wife, she forgave Mahendra but could not accept him as she could not suppress her inner self. Mahendra always made fun of her relationship with Behari but she never ever thought anything wrong for Behari which could be proved deceitful towards Mahendra. She did not voice any protest against her husband's

wrong doings but in her heart, she separated Mahendra from the divine relationship of husband and wife. Her respect died and she chose the way of mental freedom from the burden of marital bond. Tagore characterized the changed 'Asha' in the novel with the lines like, "This Asha had no diffidence, no inadequacy; this Asha was confident of what she was doing and she wasn't begging for protection from him" (123). Here, through this, Tagore has shown the power of a woman through forgiving the guilt and choosing own identity by letting go all the wrong and misdeeds.

Asha is embodied as such a woman who always seemed to be regulated by her husband or in-laws just like a puppet. She is given the camouflage of a 'perfect wife' who never challenged husband's decision or went against him. Her unexpected modification gave a new dimension to the novel. Many critics question Tagore that why he made Asha win at last and gave her too much power. I think that Tagore had not made triumph an adolescent character but he transformed an immature soul to a mature one who could take decisions by herself. If Tagore believed on the false definition of 'wife' and 'woman' given by the society, he would never transform Asha from a suppressed and weak girl to a liberal and strong woman. Therefore, while mentioning about Binodini, Tagore completed his novel by punishing her. From the beginning to the middle, Binodini is characterized as a very tough and confident woman. Tagore made his character consider that all her actions were indulgence and immoral. It compels us to consider that the writer intentionally opposed his heroine. I suppose that Tagore tried to put a line between positive and negative stance. Society of that time could never understand the psychology of a widow woman character. Like I mentioned before, no one questioned Mahendra but everyone criticized Binodini; Tagore tried to give his character a superior place. Before the society, he made Binodini lose but if we go in deep, it was the celebration of Binodini's will power and

freedom of choice. That's why, when Behari wanted to marry her, she had the power to reject him. Tagore tried to portray that a woman is so strong that she can easily handle or change her wishes. Asha ends up becoming a self regulated woman where on the other side; readers are given a new insight to think about Binodini's intellectual and spiritual crisis. The balance tells us that a woman should value own ideologies and fight for existence. She must keep in mind that society will never ever come to give her rights but it is her duty to ensure own rights and position.

Mahendra is raised as a beloved son by his mother Rajlakshmi and so, he has no sense of feeling guilty while doing any mistake. He married Ashalata out of possessiveness as Behari, his friend, agreed to marry her. Here, we can see the actual picture of domination that, the male has all the power to marry whomever he wants but the female is even not asked. The whole situation represents Asha as a doll or object that she can belong to anyone. It was like that Mahendra is making fun out of it. First he said "Behari, don't let go of this girl' (*The Sand of Eye* 7). Later on, again he said, "But I don't want to put you to any trouble. Let relieve you of your burden" (8). This clearly shows the position of women of that time.

In *The Sand of Eye*, Tagore has represented the character Mahendra according to the reality of the social system of twentieth century. Mahendra is a Bengali 'Bhadralok' who got all sorts of facilities in his life from his mother and aunt. Being the only hope of the two widows, Rajlakshmi and Annapurna, he had no boundaries of his deeds whether they are wrong or right. All the situations and facilities that are given to him made him believe that he can do anything he wants and there is no one to question it. He gets in to treachery because he was well known that society implicitly gives him the consent for it. Tagore has made us think that the falseness or adultery is done by a male so society accepted it but if the same thing would be done by

Ashalata, the consequences would be different. Probably the society would reject her or like ‘Sita’ from *Ramayana*⁴, she had to give the proof of her purity. All are supposed to be questioned, both male and female, but in this case, the wife herself remained reconciled. Mahendra also knew that this immoral act would be forgiven as in the deep of his mind; he knew that society can only blame the women not the men. The convention of the society itself has created this way for him or male figures like Mahendra. On this note, we can understand that Tagore is questioning the patriarchal setup or typicality of men through the character, Mahendra.

When the matter is about marriage, in twentieth century, most of the girls were not given any option or nobody used to ask about their choice or preferences. It was all about the preference of the groom. People believed that it should be the girls who must change own taste or identity to fit themselves with their husband. That’s why, when Rajlakshmi, Mahendra’s mother was talking about the marriage and Binodini, she said that, “I’m sure she’ll appeal to your modern tastes” (*The Sand of Eye* 1). It sounds like only it was Mahendra whose taste mattered. The novelist introduced Mahendra as a “completely incapable”(1) person who never respected the “desires of others” (1). When he went to visit Asha with Behari for getting married, he addressed Asha as “orphan” and “hopeful” (7) which sounded like he was doing a favor on her. He behaved such irresponsibly that it diminished his position completely. Marriage seemed a game to him. At one moment, if he was convincing Behari to marry Asha, on another moment, he himself was trying to involve in it. Mahendra behaved so careless that it became a question mark on Ashalata’s capability and freedom. Mahendra was so blind in his pride that he tried to put himself at the place of God. He believed that only he has the right on Asha’s life. He said, “I must take my wife’s life in my own hands, or it won’t be right” (11). He force fully tried to

⁴ A Sanskrit epic poem ascribed to the Hindu sage and Sanskrit poet Valmiki.

educate Asha and kept her away from doing anything which represented her as a villain before her in laws. He behaved like typical male who cares no one but only himself. This type of male believes that woman is just like a puppet that is meant to give pleasure only. Thus, through Mahendra, Rabindranath questioned the typical male attitude which views woman as inferior and weak.

Chapter 3

Representation of Women's lives and experiences in light of the poems "An Ordinary Girl" and "I won't let you go"

The wish to distinguish a single person who used depersonalization successfully and broke down the phenomenal portrayal of women, of course, he was none but Rabindranath Tagore. We should remember that Tagore belonged to the world of poetry where it is quite ungrateful not to say anything about his poems. Without knowing how he depicted woman in his poems, we cannot make any conclusion, because, the world of his poetry was real dimension. Without it, we cannot complete our observation of portrayal of women in his writing.

Tagore was more vivid in poetry rather than prose, and of course, "I won't Let You Go" was one of his most vivid poems where he showed his original creativity. The poem is about relationship between daughter and father, where Tagore revealed modern tension and showed that how a father was finding his daughter in the "mother earth". In the poem, the image of woman was as powerful as nature, where his daughter was portrayed as the countenance of the nature. Alternatively, nature is the source of life, which gives the courage to overcome all obstacles. Nature is very powerful aspect of Tagore's writing. Of course, sometimes, Tagore portrayed the dark side of the nature but that was for the sake of saving the child of nature. Nature was the symbol of care, where in the poem; he depicted woman face in the nature where she won't not let her beloved one's go.

In the poem, father had to go to his work place because vacation was finished but daughter won't let her father go. However, father had no choice not to go because the idea of modern world inherited several tensions. For the sake of prosperity, we had to kill our emotions. Father realized that love of his daughter was so powerful that he could overcome the tension. He

felt that love always tied us in a harmony. He said, "...how can what/ love be ever alienated from me?"

Urbanization created loophole, where alienation was the most painful experience, but father knew that his daughter loved him so much that he did not feel alienated. Whatever he looked in the sky, he found his daughter face in the image of mother earth. The nature tied him with his daughter, where he portrayed his daughter's face as grant as nature. He said,

"Yes, I've seen her pale face

No different from the face of my daughter four,

So quite, so hurt and nearly lost in the door-edge"(li 28-30)

Therefore, father portrayal his daughter in a face of nature where nature is as quiet and hurt as his daughter. He picturized nature saying that,

"...Mother earth,

Holding the littlest gress stulk to her breast

Says with all her power: I won't let you go."

He found his daughter in nature because his daughter was as lovely as mother earth where she also said, "I won't Let You Go". Therefore, in the poem, Tagore depicted women as a symbol of love and care, which was also source of life in his migrated world.

His wife's eyes were "moist" but nevertheless has no time/ to shed tears, no, not a minute," because she was too busy to organize her husband's goods. She thought if her husband felt "the need for this or that" and he would not find any of it in abroad. Therefore, love of wife also symbolized as a care in the poem.

Some people found autobiographical connection with this poem, where they assumed, Tagore wrote the poem on his migration where he migrated to Calcutta from Shilaidaha. The

protagonist was none but Tagore. What even he was or not, he showed us his notion of image of woman and also the picture of woman was very powerful in his life. He found aesthetic beauty in woman's love but society was not as thoughtful as Tagore.

In "ordinary woman", he showed how society injures woman, where society stigmatizes woman to inherit a belief that they (woman) are very ordinary. The protagonist of the poem mentioned herself "ordinary woman" five times. This anaphora had deep meaning where the tool of comparing those women with western woman was a tool of hegemony. This poem had some postcolonial aspects where Tagore showed how society made woman ordinary. The protagonist of the poem wanted to pass M.A in a poem of Sharatchandra. She understood that education could make her special because she knew she had beauty but she hadn't education like Western woman. She did not use flowery words like lizy. She was questioning about value and prices and said, "Are gold flowers with diamonds real? And yet they are."(Ordinary Girl li 58)

Maloty was a woman from colonial state where society inherited British imperialism and men established themselves in the light of British culture but woman were not allowed to be the part of it; because oriental women were in the worst position of the society. Maloty said, "They don't know French or German,/They know how to weep" (li 83-84).

Maloty considered that God had wasted his time to create woman like Maloty. She claimed that why God had created her as an ordinary woman. She always prayed to God but she knew it was impossible to accept her wish. Therefore she wanted to read a story where an ordinary woman like Maloty would be given priority. Maloty mentioned Sharat Chandra, contemporary writer of Tagore, where he was not curmudgeon like God. She thought that God was curmudgeon because he had power but he did not use it for the sake of ordinary woman.

She wanted to go to Europe because she had belief on intellectuals from there who could understand the value but she hadn't any faith in writers of own country. She expected that European people would understand her. She wanted everyone to discover her not for her intelligence but for her being a woman. Here, in this poem, we have seen Tagore admire woman not for her intelligence but because she was woman.

By this way, Tagore used very different picture of woman, where Maloty is represented as a very common woman in the country. Tagore also pointed that no one wrote poem on that common woman. He criticized his contemporary writers because of not writing on it.

Finally, Maloty did not finish the story. She did not express her final destination. I assume, she wanted to show that she would be successful if she had a chance. The thought process of women in colonial Bengal was so limited that Maloty only wanted to win and become successful against Naresh. She just dreamt to have respect from him and prove him as a failure. Finally she realized that god was not helpful to fulfill her dream. Then she said that God has wasted his power to create ordinary woman. This was a common concern of contemporary woman or can be seen as just a common scenario of that time.

In the poem, Tagore has signified woman in a very different manner from his contemporary poets, where he showed that value system was changed by the impact of British imperialism, where oriental men accepted western culture but women were not included with them. Oriental men dominated women saying that occidental women were more attractive and confident. Maloty pointed that education is the tool that gives power to western women and only that can make her more attractive and flourished. Here, the matter of distress that no one had given her the opportunity. That is why she wanted a story where woman like Maloty would prosper in life through education.

The poem was very relevant in that time because Tagore lived in a colonial state where power and position of oriental woman was worst. Tagore showed the picture of the society throughout the poem. He wanted to find the way of salvation of these poor souls where education could be the possible way. The consequences of the colonial state were therefore a matter of anxious concern when he realized that the position of woman would be changed if woman were educated; because education would give them the inspiration to express themselves. His contemporary poets were interested to show the picture of woman in a heroic manner, where woman achieved everything throughout her sadness like Shakuntola. Shakuntola was a mythological character, who achieved her success throughout her sadness. Tagore questioned his contemporary writers on reflecting every women figure and characters in the form of Shakuntola. Tagore showed difference between reality and mythology. He prescribed to write on reality. Therefore, in the way, Tagore depicted woman throughout the eye of society where he showed the availability of misrepresentation of women but in his mind set, he needed a real picture of women. Maloty was that picture which was common in every part of the country on that time.

Chapter 4:

Influence of Colonial education on Tagore

Twentieth century can be taken as an era of science, technology and expansion. Societies and people were civilized and they believed on the impact of western education for the betterment of the society. They were enlightened in case of societal progress and education but insulate behind in establishing the position of women. Women themselves were not conscious of their rights. As a result of lack of women participation in different aspects of society; if society developed one step, it failed twice in number. According to John Stuart Mill in his book, *The Subjection of Women* (1869)⁵, both women and society are lagging behind because of the absence of women education and improvement and that's how, evolution is getting affected. Mill asked for equal contribution of women with men in societal development, politics and education etc.

During or after the colonial period, the impact of colonial education and Bengal Renaissance were massive on Bengali civil society. This is reflected through the education, people's beliefs and literary pieces. Despite its tremendous impact on the intellectual scenario of Bengal and India it could not disperse the false conventions and customs held against women. Colonial education was greatly resisted by local intellectuals on the ground of nationalism and tradition. The concept of 'Sati-dah'⁶ or 'child marriage' was still there which made women's life troublesome and unfeasible. The traditional belief of people got hurt, customs and religion were questioned. Some people remained unchanged and some started moving towards openness in case of thoughts and beliefs. For instance, if we look towards the short story "Haimanti" by Tagore, we can see the difference between belief system in the form of Opu's father and father-

⁵ a book by John Stuart Mill who is a English philosopher and the supporter of Utilitarianism

⁶ An obsolete Indian funeral custom where a widow immolated herself on husband's pyre.

in-law. Both of them were educated with colonial education. one has accepted the knowledge of colonial education to break the false societal customs; another neglected and opposed it completely. That's why; Haimanti's father gave more priority to her education rather than her age. On the other hand, she was given married to Opu for the interest of dowry but not for her beauty or education. When Haimanti's father failed to give the dowry, the in- laws started questioning of her age. They started giving her so mental pressure that it led her towards death. Though of having enough education, Opu's father remained unchanged towards tradition and so was Opu. He did nothing to save his wife's dignity. He was educated and it created sense in him that he should protect his wife and go against society but he did nothing like that. Being educated could not change his traditional mind setup. Moreover, his giving the example of Lord Ram who went against Sita to follow the tradition and customs is the incarnation of traditional male from the society where Ram belonged. He said that his teachings and upbringings never permit him supporting his wife and prioritizing her. Thus, the colonial education formed two different groups of people who went with or against the change and social reformation.

There remained controversies among critics concerning Rabindranath Tagore's support of women's equal opportunity. His way of representing women is so complex that as the reader, we get confused of his thought process and mindset. Society, where he had been brought up was the reason of his intricate way of representing. People from his family had different ideologies concerning diverse issues. Rabindranath's father, Debendranath Tagore was very adorable to him. Rabindranath tried to follow his mindset, beliefs etc. Conversely, relation between Rabindranath and his grand- father Darkarnath was questionable. The family environment was quiet independent as they were free to come out with own ideologies. Masoumeh Moradi in an article named "Tagore Enlightens the position of Women in Society" has said that

Rabindranath Tagore maintained that a wholesome education must educate the mind along with the senses. Tagore was brought up in a family atmosphere where freedom was emphasized- freedom of language, imagination, spirit and mind”(2). That’s why, when the Brahmo society was formed, the family members supported it and after that, they again supported colonial education and Christianity. Rabindranath had deep impact of false customs and beliefs in him and as an example to it; we can focus on *The Sand of Eye*. In this novel, we can see a widow being suppressed and punished by the writer at the end. All her emotions are represented as sin and they are neglected. It questions Rabindranath’s supporting or opposing the *Bedh*⁷ where it is said that woman who idealizes husband, gives birth to a boy child and never goes against husband, is the perfect and ideal woman. (Atharba Bedh, Shukumari Vhattacharya 10). In my previous discussion, I have mentioned that probably Rabindranath did it to avoid the clashes that could come out for his supporting Binodini and to leave his readers in a confusing state.

While studying in abroad at a very young age, his impression towards women became more positive. He understood the need of women participation in education, politics or decision making. His further novels, short stories are the example of his altered mind regarding women freedom and autonomy. His sudden change does not mean that he was the blind admirer of colonialism or colonial education. He fought for something which can be proved beneficial to society and women. If he followed western civilization blindly, he would never ever questionize their discrimination in voting system where women had no voting right. He chose education as a way of women freedom of choice and liberty. He tried to change the way of looking at women. He wanted women not to behave like servants but to behave like perfect companions to their husbands.

⁷ Hindu’s holy book which is written in Sanskrit.

The aforementioned paragraph talks about the belief system which was influenced by the colonial system that Indians themselves must “believe in the unworthiness of their traditional customs and embrace the new forms of a civilized and rational social order” (Chatterjee 3). Taking Mrinal as an example, we can focus on Tagore’s portrayal of self realization and consciousness. One of the effects of colonialism in India was the education of women. Education gives the sense of freedom, courage and power to fight for one’s own ideologies. Tagore’s female character Mrinal is portrayed as a knowledgeable person who also had the capacity of writing poetry. Her beliefs and different way of thinking became the point of precaution and jealousy to her in laws because education gives the right to question the negative attitude of the patriarchal family and society. The twentieth century India had the vision for the women to get educated. At the same time, it was supposed to bear in mind that such education of women should never force the questioning power to the male domination. Thinking of the position of consideration with the constrained and dominated womanhood of India, Tagore’s “colonial mind was able to transform this figure of the Indian woman into a sign of the inherently oppressive and unfree nature of the entire cultural tradition of a country” (Chatterjee 5). Male chauvinist mindset was afraid of female education as it gives the power of reasoning. Education enhances the sense of rightness which gives birth to a new woman who can raise her voice against the wrong and injustice. The idea of “new women” is a result of colonial education”(Chatterjee 8) of India and defined as a “subject to a new patriarchy”(Chatterjee 7). The new women with the belief on individuality has the power to seek for own identity as an entity.

In case of Mrinalini and her sister in law, we can see the major difference occurs because of individual ideologies and self reliance. As an educated and sensible woman, Mrinalini tried to fight against the negligence and grievance done to Bindu; though she had no bondage to her.

Mrinal had the sense of rightness working very powerfully in her thought process. On the other hand, we can see her sister in law having no power and courage against the negligence of the patriarchal society. She never ever opened her mouth or fought back for her sister to save her from the cruelty of male centric society. We see her to cry in vain, hide her tears from the family and then rejecting her sister. She was so surrounded with the patriarchal customs that when Bindu was sick, she could not even go to meet her. Mrinal on the other hand, though untied by blood, stayed with Bindu to look after her. Thus the "new" woman was quite the reverse of the traditional Hindu wife who must not disagree with the decision of her in-laws or husbands. This also gives the sense of tradition versus modernity. Tradition taught women to sacrifice but modernity gives the right of freedom of choice. In the colonial India, the sense of modernity was upraised with education and thus developed the female thought process.

We have seen Mrinal navigating between tradition and modernity at a same time. She never rejected the traditional knowledge of being obliged to her husband and in laws. On the other side, the surroundings and the society was so dominating and wrong that the sense of autonomy got raised in her with own set of beliefs. It gave her the decision of being alienated from the subjugated society. With this, we can come to a point that she had the sense of modernity and had the characteristics of modern woman to think over an issue and then do what is supposed to be done. "The discourse of Indian" colonial education "thus offered new positions to women as the signifiers of an essentialized "Indianness"" (Sinha 4). She not only broke the traditional superstitious ideologies to remain under the guidance of in laws but also followed own thoughts and decisions to get separated from her husband.

The working of self consciousness is present in Mrinal which gave her the power to come out from marriage which often functions as an oppressive force delimiting women. In her in-

law's house Mrinal was nothing more than 'mejo bou' restricting her possibility of an individual. Kate Millet also states the similar in *Sexual Politics* that family "are both a mirror of and a connection with the larger society, a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole" (Politics 12). In the end of her ultimate realization Mrinal comes out from her martial title 'mejo bou' to become Mrinal herself. By rejecting patriarchy and marriage as the solace of her existence Mrinal chooses the path to autonomy. Being a great adherent of social reformation, Tagore made this character a simple talented intellect girl who fought for her peace of mind and broke the traditional notion of the duties of women in the society. He represented her modern ideology and a woman with thinking capability who had all the power to question the society. He made her choose her own way to live with own free and self regulated concepts.

In the Nineteenth century Colonial Bengal, women had no voice to fight against violence and unbearable domination. Through giving education to the fictional characters, Tagore significantly tried to give voice to women to struggle for their existence. If we look forward to Hiamanti, her education could not let her support the violence of her in-laws. She could not bear the falsity of her mother in law when she lied about her age. She protested against it all of a sudden. Her education gave her the power to understand the mind setup of Opu and that is why, she never asked for his support or shared anything with him.

Education made Binodini understand her capability and position which she deserved. Her fate left her widow but she deserved more. That is why, when she saw Asha, an uneducated and immature girl having all sorts of facilities, her educated soul could not bear it. Education created a tension between her intellectual and spiritual mind. Her intellect mind also could not bear wrong activities done by her. So, we can see her to punish own self at last for her wrong judgments and activities. Actually, it was a conflict in her mind of tolerating the patriarchal rule

of the society which disapproved widow woman to have any power and violated them at every sphere of life.

To analyze Tagore's support towards education, we can take *The Ruined Nest* as another example. It also reflects the traditional verses modern mind set up. Like Opu from Haimanti, Amol also could not disregard his predisposed mind towards traditions and customs. He could not appreciate Charu who was a better writer than him. His prejudiced psyche could not see her prevail over him. On the other hand, if we evaluate Bhupati, his mind was completely in favor of modern thoughts and he appreciated Charu for being a superior writer. Thus, the colonial education and its impact created an rational and spiritual tension among the educated people in case of gender violence and equality.

Conclusion

“Everything comes to us that belongs to us if we create the capacity to receive it”

- Rabindranath Tagore

Tagorean novels and short stories are the depiction of female condition and typicality of male chauvinism. In the Nineteenth Indian Hindu society, most of the women were suppressed or deprived. Society used their sentiment or quietness as a tool to restrain them. Till now in this twenty first century, the situation is almost the same. It is high time that women should fight back for equality, education and position. They should keep in mind that they are not made but born. Women fought beside men at Nationalist Movement but they were given no free public space. Huge constitutional changes are made to develop women position in India but still the mindset of society and male are not changed. These are the same men who pray before Goddess like Kali, Sharashati and then, humiliate their wives or daughters. The portrayal of women in Tagore is the authentic image of women violence in India or West Bengal. Till now there are women like Bindu or Asha who have no confidence in them. The ending of the women characters like Mrinal or Charulata is the teaching from the literary pieces. He tried to prove that, yes, a woman can live alone and lead own life. She needs no one's sympathy or support. The change in Ashalata or the decision of Binodini teaches the whole female society that now it is time to point out the mistakes done by men and they no longer can be ignored. Tagore has celebrated the triumph of women through his writings and finally taught us that, autonomy or equality is nothing to be given, but matters to earn for own self. Thus, through using all these short stories, novel or novella of Tagore, I have tried to focus on the conflict between colonial and desi education, the intellectual and spiritual crisis of women, the bloom of social reformation, female education.

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