



IJMRRS

**International Journal for Multidisciplinary
Research, Review and Studies**

Volume 1 - Issue 2

2024

© 2024 International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research Review and Studies

Gender Dynamics in Rabindranath Tagore's Works: A Closer Look at Women Characters

Shubhojit Bhattacharya

Throughout the 19th century, long-standing patriarchal ideologies and structures had a significant influence on Indian women. The majority of women were confined to the house, where their responsibilities were dictated by their relationships with males as mothers, wives, and daughters. Women rarely had access to school since society prioritized taking care of the home over personal development or career goals. The rights and liberties of women were severely restricted by prevalent customs such as child marriage and sati, which is the act of burning widows. Compared to men, women had fewer legal rights, particularly with regard to inheritance and property ownership. Both domestic and British colonial-influenced reform movements began to challenge these norms.

Rabindranath Tagore wrote extensively on women highlighting the oppression they faced within the domestic household and the outside world. If we carefully examine Tagore's short stories like "*Chokher Bali*" or "*A wife's letter*" we get an insight into the societal structure which existed at that time. Saikat Banerjee (2018) writes 'Tagore's depiction of his women characters in his short stories leave a deep scar in the mind of the readers as the portrayal of the characters are done in a very realistic manner. The prevailing patriarchal set up of the society during Tagore's time angered him as he was a firm believer that the patriarchy stifled the very basic human rights of woman. In the short stories of Tagore, patriarchy presents itself as a significant socio-cultural force that orders and demands its own discriminatory social structure'

Tagore attacked the social issues like Widow Remarriage, caste system, child marriage and patriarchal attitude. He often depicted women as strong, complex and self aware individuals. Characters like 'Bimala' in *The Home and the World* (1916) or 'Charulata' in *The Broken Nest* (1901) showcase inner conflicts between personal freedom and societal norms. On the other hand, education played an important role in his works. In *Chokher Bali* (1903), 'Binodini' is portrayed as sharp, educated widow who uses her intellect to navigate her circumstances. Tagore provided his female characters the ability to control their feelings and decisions. They maintained their identity and dignity despite tragedy. *Chandalika* (1938) explored the themes of

caste, gender and spirituality. As the protagonist belonged to a lower caste, her identity reflected the systematic dehumanization faced by the marginalized communities. *Ananda*, a Buddhist monk, defies caste-based purity standards when he takes water from *Prakriti* (the protagonist)/. This action exemplifies an egalitarian mindset that emphasizes each person's inherent value regardless of their status in society.

Tagore in his story titled '*Musolmanir Golpo*' or '*The story of a 'Muslim Girl'*' (1941) explored the themes of cross-cultural relationships and religious identity. The story is about a girl named '*Kamala*' who was saved from the hands of dacoits by a Muslim man named '*Habir Khan*' resulting in being disowned by her own family. Khan allows Kamala to practice her religion freely and never persuaded her to convert to Islam. The story which was written during a time when nationalist spirit was on the rise, captures Tagore's conviction that India should be inclusive. Through Kamala's journey, Tagore celebrates the human spirit's eternal resilience while criticising society divisions. The narrative demonstrates his faith in the ability of love, compassion, and selflessness to transcend gender, class, and religious boundaries.

In India in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the intricate relationships between caste, gender roles, societal patriarchy, and religious identity are profoundly explored in Rabindranath Tagore's literary works. His works, especially his novels and short stories, provide a vision of inclusivity, empowerment, and spiritual equality while also criticising the repressive social institutions that oppressed women and marginalised people. Tagore's characters, particularly his female characters, are far from being passive; they are strong, self-aware, and frequently defiant of social norms, reflecting his faith in the transformational potential of human dignity. Tagore depicts the complex challenges faced by women who are torn between their own desires and strict social expectations in pieces like *Chokher Bali* and *The Home and the World*. Frequently questioning conventional notions of femininity and domesticity, characters such as Binodini and Bimala traverse intricate emotional and social landscape. In addition to humanising their hardships, Tagore's depiction of these characters challenges the patriarchal structures that restrict their liberties. As demonstrated in *Chokher Bali*, his emphasis on education demonstrates his progressive idea of empowering women by knowledge and self-awareness, enabling them to take charge of their own lives even in the face of tragedy.

Beyond gender, Tagore's stories explore more general caste and religious identity concerns. He explores the dehumanization experienced by underprivileged groups in *Chandalika*, challenging social hierarchies and promoting social and spiritual equality via the protagonist's journey. Similar to this, Tagore discusses intercultural relationships and religious inclusion in *Musolmanir Golpo*. Set against the backdrop of a growing sense of nationalism, Kamala's story perfectly captures Tagore's vision of an inclusive and peaceful India. She and Habir Khan have a connection that goes across societal and religious boundaries, demonstrating the power of respect, love, and compassion to heal long-standing wounds. The story emphasizes Tagore's belief that the universal principles of mankind are more timeless and important than the arbitrary divisions brought about by gender, caste, or religion.

The significance and influence of Rabindranath Tagore's writings never go out of style. They encourage critical thinking and change while acting as a mirror reflecting the socioeconomic realities of his era. His complex depictions of women, under-represented groups, and interfaith relationships present a picture of a just society built on respect and understanding. In addition to criticising the repressive systems of his day, Tagore encourages future generations to imagine and strive for a society in which all people might live in equality, freedom, and dignity.

References

1. Banerjee, Saikat, Exploring Gender in the Selected Short Stories of Rabindranath Tagore (December 9, 2018). St. Theresa Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, Vol.4 No.2 July-December 2018.
2. Sihe, S. & Jaipur National University (SADTM Campus), Rajasthan. (2017). Gender Identity & Narrative Perspectives in Indian woman autobiographies. In *IJRAR- International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews* (Vol. 4, Issue 4, pp. 336–337).
3. Krishnaraj, M. (2012). The Women's Movement in India: a hundred year history. *Social Change*, 42(3), 325–333.

