



REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE FICTION  
OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE:  
A STUDY OF HIS SELECTED WORKS

BY

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines selected works of a larger than life literary figure, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), with a special focus on his female characters. Works selected for the study are novels *Binodini* (1903), *Gora* (1909), *The Home and the World* (1916) and *The Broken Nest* (1921), as well as several short stories. A visionary and a social reformist, Tagore, among several other sociocultural, political and religious issues that he addressed in his works, recurrently sought to resort the circumstances of women as mothers, wives and child brides in his fictional writings. As an expression of this, he portrayed all his female characters, especially in the works selected for this study, in a new and convincing style, by consciously and conspicuously moving away from tradition and age-old conventions. Tagore spoke of and felt the need for women to be seen and heard beyond the home. His sympathy for child brides and widows are showcased extensively in many of these narratives. He categorically rejected the traditional concept where women were expected to be confined to the *zenana*. His passion for freedom was so far and wide that he felt that the liberation and freedom given to men should also be extended to women. He said that women had that natural expression to her, a cadence of restraint in her behaviour, producing poetry of life. She has been an inspiration to man, guiding, often unconsciously, his restless energy into an immense variety of creations in literature, art, music and religion. In the process, justifying the need of women to be liberated from the shackles of home, Tagore rejected all forms of religious extremism and cultural conservatism. This thesis also examines selected Hindu scriptures to examine how the effects of blind conformity to these scriptures had resulted in women being enslaved, bound and bonded by men in the name of social progress and stability. In the thesis I have highlighted how women can be both good at home and at the same time extend their radiance beyond home so that they grow intellectually. In doing so, Indian women discover their self-worth as individuals and find agency in their being, moving away from the shadow of the men. This is Tagore's unique prescription for the emancipation of women, who were otherwise living in a hierarchical, andocentric social system.

## خلاصة البحث

تبحث هذه الأطروحة في أفضل الأعمال الأدبية المختارة لرابيندرانات تاغور (1861-1941)، مع التركيز في شخصياته النسائية. والأعمال المختارة هي روايات بيندوني (1903)، غورا (1909)، البيت والعالم (1916)، محطم نيسثيس (1912)، بالإضافة إلى بعض القصص القصيرة. وتناول المصلح الاجتماعي والمفكر تاغور في أعماله العديد من القضايا الثقافية والاجتماعية، والسياسية، والدينية، كما يتطرق كثيرا في كتاباته التصويرية إلى ظروف المرأة كونها أمًا، وزوجة، وطفلة عرائس. وبهذا التصور، يشكل الكاتب الشخصيات النسائية، خصوصا في الأعمال المختارة لهذه الدراسة، والتي تناولتها بشكل جديد ومقتنع، حيث اتخذت جانبي المشاعر والوضوح، بعيدا عن التقاليد والأعراف القديمة. وتحدث تاغور بكل أحاسيسه عن حاجة المرأة في الظهور وإبداء الآراء من خلف أسوار البيوت. كما يظهر دائما عطفه على عرائس الأطفال والأرامل في العديد من حوارات قصصه. ويرفض تاغور المفهوم التقليدي الذي يصور المرأة ويحصرها في (زينان). ويبرز تاغور أيضا عاطفته بشكل كبير في تحرير وإعطاء المرأة حريتها كما أعطي الرجال. وكان يقول بأن النساء لديهن تعبيرات طبيعية، تضبط إيقاع نفسها في سلوكها، مما ينتج للحياة معاني شعرية متميزة. واعتبر المرأة إلهاما للرجل من خلال توجيهه، وفي أغلب الأحيان تقوم المرأة من غير قصد بتحويل طاقات الرجل المضطربة إلى تشكيلة هائلة من الإنشاءات الأدبية والفنية والموسيقية والدينية. وللتعامل مع ذلك، يجب تبرير حاجة المرأة للتحرر من القيود المنزلية، حيث يرفض تاغور كل أنواع التطرف الديني والتحفظ الثقافي. لذلك تقوم هذه الأطروحة بالبحث في كتب هندوسية مقدسة مختارة، للبحث عن كيفية تأثير الالتزام الأعمى لتلك الكتب المقدسة في استعباد المرأة وربطها والتصاقها بالرجال، تحت مسمى التقدم الاجتماعي والاستقرار. وأبرزت الباحثة في هذه الأطروحة كيفية قيام المرأة بواجباتها الكاملة في المنزل، وخارج أسواره، مما قد يساعد في النمو والنضج الثقافي لهن. وبالقيام بذلك، تكتشف المرأة الهندية نفسها وقيمتها كشخصية لها كيانها ووجودها، بعيدا عن ظل الرجال. هذا هو التصور الفريد لتاغور في عتق رقاب النساء من الأنظمة الاجتماعية والهرمية.

## **APPROVAL PAGE**

The dissertation of Mangala Bhavani has been approved by the following:

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where it is otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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*This thesis is dedicated to all women out there*

*and*

*To my sons Dinesh and Ananda*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In her novel *A Room of Her Own* (1929), well known feminist Virginia Woolf opined that the history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting than any other epic of liberation underlining the weaker sex's never-ending pursuit to seek and establish their rightful identity beyond the confines of time. Miti Pandey (2003) confirmed this thus: "In every country and in all ages much has been written on the basic nature of women and there is no virtue or vice known to man which has not been ascribed them" (p. 22). She adds, "Eve to Mary in the West and from Goddesses to demons in India, the highest and the lowest stations have been assigned to women. [A]nd the interminable controversy goes on" (p. 22). Pandey's views may be interpreted as follows: regardless of where they live, women have endured both glorification as well as humiliation. The expectation for them to beget children through matrimony cuts across race, religion and culture. Women are also more likely to experience sexual and domestic violence than men. Women's role as "reproducers" is a particularly important vocation that all women share regardless of culture. Shawn Meghan Burn (2004) confirms: "One more important thing that women have in common which is that more or less they live in a patriarchal society" (p. 3). The discrimination against women is as old as time. Romila Thapar (1984) aptly commented: "The status of women in India has varied in different historical periods and in different regions of the country, and has also been subject to differentiation according to class, religion and ethnicity" (p. 73). While contending that women generally suffered suppression and domination within the boundaries of a patriarchal

system, Thapar, however, obviously steered clear of confirming commonly held beliefs that the oppression and/or discrimination against women had had a grim historical uniformity spanning centuries.

This research seeks to discuss women from a man's point of view. The works are not those of a run of the mill man but gems from the great literary giant Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) – a playwright, poet, novelist, short story writer and above all, a great thinker. His works, with special emphasis on the short story format, vividly highlight women's innumerable contributions to the home and the world at large underlining the need for their being noticed and cherished. A Nobel Laureate to boot, despite several decades after his passing, Tagore is still perceived as the eternal, quintessential ambassador of Indian culture to the rest of the world.

Probably the first from the Asian subcontinent to be awarded a Nobel prize, Tagore's literary height stretches beyond the borders of his general fame as a poet. His multifaceted talent encompassed myriad forms of prose such as novels, short stories, dramas, articles and essays. His accomplishments include painting and musical compositions popularly known as Rabindrasangeet. Their undying appeal is permanently etched in the hearts of Bengalis. To cap it all, Tagore was a humanitarian, philosophical and patriotic social reformer par excellence. The national anthems of India and Bangladesh are his compositions.

The United States of America and United Kingdom understood Tagore's sterling worth as a writer after the publication of *Gitanjali* [Lyrical Offerings] wherein his discovery of inner peace by exploring themes of divinity through endeavours of human love is vividly documented. At home in Bengali and English, Tagore rendered his works into English himself thereby ensuring the verses did not adversely suffer the loss of sheen during translation. Tagore's cosmic perception of a universal

brotherhood full of compassionate egalitarianism stems from the lyrical tradition of a cult of devotion prevalent in Hinduism termed “Bhakti”.

The system of identifying a kind of oneness with divinity is generally known beyond India’s borders as *Vaishnava Hinduism* or simply *Vaishnavism* and understood as a relationship between mortal humans and the immortal perception of divinity. Writing the foreword to Tagore’s poems published first in 1912, William Butler Yeats observed: “These lyrics – which are in the original, my Indian [friend]s tell me, [are] full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention – display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life” (William Butler Yeats in the “Introduction” in *Gitanjali*, 1913). Generous praises from litterateur Ezra Pound drew the attention of the Nobel Prize committee. Pound wrote: “There is in him the stillness of nature. The poems do not seem to have been produced by storm or by ignition, but seem to show the normal habit of his mind. He is at one with nature, and finds no contradictions. And this is in sharp contrast with the Western mode, where man must be shown attempting to master nature if we are to have great drama” (Harold M Hurtwitz, p. 15).

What, however, lured me into this research was Tagore’s vision to reform the society. This theme was etched in many of his works. *The Home and the World* (1914), for example, is a novel wherein Tagore convincingly commented on the possibility of the extension of women’s role beyond the confines of domestic sphere influencing the society at large, especially the mindset of a pronounced patriarchal society prevalent in India during his time.

This trend of Tagore began at the turn of the twentieth century itself. Strong characters such as Charu, Binodini, Sucharita, Anandamoyi and Bimala in *The Broken Nest* (1901), *Choker Bali* (1903), *Gora* (1910) and *The Home and the World* (1914),

respectively, underline and stress upon the strong message against gender discrimination. Tagore's heroines subtly demand the right of women to be loved and loved sans the confines of the fettered and cloistered societies that had long ago become anachronisms.

Undoubtedly, Tagore's persistent interest in women's liberation and emancipation appeared out of place during his time. Despite many considered pillars of society slamming him in the name of patriarchal supremacy, Tagore insisted on according his women characters equal status encouraging their voicing angst and anger against exploitation. Without pontification, Tagore weaved some of his male characters in such a way to second his own views with a firm politeness unique to his novels.

In *The Broken Nest*, the heroine Charu's husband Bhupati accords freedom to his wife to passionately pursue her preference for literature. Speaking through Nikhil in *The Home and the World*, Tagore urges womanhood by exhorting the conservative female protagonist Bimala to express her opinion on complex political issues like nationalism. Not surprisingly, Tagore in a public lecture under the heading 'Woman' thus said: "At the present stage of history of civilisation is almost exclusively masculine, a civilisation of power, in which women have been thrust aside in the shade. Therefore, it has lost its balance and it is moving from war to war" (Athenaeum Reading Room- online source).

Tagore's exhortation to the civilisation hurtling at tremendous speed toward multiple catastrophes due to its innate one-sidedness always climaxed in the demands of the fairer sex emerging from society's shadows to impart wisdom and claim their rightful share in power. These strong opinions on Tagore's part partially led to the abolition of evil practices such as *Sati* (widows immolating themselves on their

husbands' funeral pyre). The views were expressed during an era of a staunchly conservative system loaded against women being bloodied under the scarlet, buckled heels of stifling patriarchy. More importantly, Tagore's ability to express his opinion in subtly acceptable beautiful expressions that were accepted by the aforementioned society underline his being a realistic visionary far ahead of his time managing to ensure the restoration of parity to womankind as a workable solution. It is this sense of extremely passionate humanism that has mainly necessitated this research, and the research hopes that the findings justified it in the final analysis.

## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

It would be interesting to begin this section with a quote taken from, again, the same lecture delivered by Tagore on "Woman":

Women are endowed with the passive qualities of chastity, modesty, devotion and power of self-sacrifice in a greater measure than man is. ... This passive quality has given women that large and deep placidity which is so necessary for the healing and nourishing and storing life. ... I do not mean to imply that domestic life is the only life for a woman. I mean that the human world is the woman's world, be it domestic or be it full of other activities of life, which are human activities... the domestic world is the world where every individual finds his worth as an individual, therefore his value is not the market value, but the value of love; that is to say, the value that God in his infinite mercy has set upon all his creatures (Athenaeum).

Never one to fling caution to the winds, Tagore was extremely cautious. Even as he emphasized on women's stellar roles in the society, he did not upset any traditional appellation by calling for their eschewing domestic duties and responsibilities.

This domestic world has been the gift of God to woman. She can extend her radiance of love beyond its boundaries on all sides and even leave it to prove her woman's nature when the call comes to her. The time has come when woman's responsibility has become greater than ever before

when her field of work has far transcended the domestic sphere of life (Athenaeum).

He concludes that while the home is a place better for women than men, he goes on to say that women should not restrict their presence to just the home. If she can love at home, she can also spread love outside the home.

The essence of his lecture is what Tagore, through the character Nikhil in *The Home and the World*, tries to reason with the female protagonist of the novel Bimala that she has to step out of her domestic duties as she has the capacity to contribute much more. It is worth noting here that Bimala is not presented as a perfect wife. At least for a while she has her flaws exaggerated but is reconciled later in the novel as she comes to her senses. Tagore's views are of significance here as he clearly states that a woman who steps out of her home does not make any less a wife or mother. He says that the woman will know instinctively when the call comes for her to perform her domestic duties. This is Tagore's idealism but it does not happen in real life, and Tagore illustrates in the form of Bimala that his ideals are not foolproof.

Nikhil wants to liberate Bimala from the bondage of domestic life into the wide world outside, even when she is not aware of her bondage. He feels that his wife is like a caged bird. This expression is very much in line with Tagore's view on freedom of self. In this context, Nikhil's home with all the luxuries of a wealthy life, his willingness to extend freedom to his wife, unsolicited, easily testifies to Nikhil's magnanimity and belief in women's emancipation in the first and second decades of twentieth century Bengal.

Tagore's short stories often focused on the struggles of women and girls in traditional Indian society. Many of these tales are concerned with marital relationships and the various forms of estrangement and conflict between husband and wife. "A

Wife's Letter" is narrated by a woman writing to her husband describing the injustices imposed upon married women. In the tale of "Vision", a woman goes blind after which her husband begins to neglect her and falls in love with another woman. In "The Exercise Book", a young girl (child) married off is robbed of her freedom to write, as it is viewed as a threat by the husband and her in-laws.

To appreciate Tagore's conviction in championing the cause of women's liberation, it would be relevant to discuss briefly women's status in India from a historic perspective.

In ancient times or the pre-Aryan period (500BC-550AD), inhabitants of India were probably some sort of mixture of that we might call "Afro-Dravidian". According to R.P. Sharma, it is probable that India has been inhabited for hundreds of thousands of years and the original natives, however, may have been very primitive tribes scattered over vast tracts of land and divided into small pockets (vi). At some time, may be thousands of years ago, waves of Afro-Dravidians began to pour in to conquer the natives and to spread all over the country. These ancient inhabitants, used to give the status of goddess to women. At that time, women enjoyed no less than the status of Laksmi (goddess of wealth) in the household. B. Paken supports this claim as he says in the pre-Aryan agricultural society Mother Goddess (Shakti) was worshipped; in the Harappan civilisation there was also the practice of mother worship, and matriarchate existed as in Greece (Sharma, R.P. 1995, XVIII). Pakem adds:

From time immemorial people all over the world have practiced and followed the matrilineal structure, Gradually, the matrilineal system was affected due to the advent of different religious philosophies and agricultural practices, new systems of trade and commerce and the development of science and technology. The effect was so much that a large number of such societies disappeared and gave way to patrilineal systems. However, in some pockets of the world as among the African,

South-East Asian and Oceanic tribal communities, where the processes of social change were very slow, the remnants of the system still continue to exist (XVIII).

In India too, it is held by many scholars that matriliney existed in the pre-Aryan days, and later on the Aryan system of patriliney was superimposed upon it. The fact that Mother Goddess is still worshipped with attention and respect in various forms as a benevolent Mother as well as a destroyer of evils and demons is attributed to the matrilineal base in Indian culture. Pakem contends that there are still traces of such matrilineal societies in some parts of Kerala, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh.

That women of ancient times had immense power is further evidenced from a South Indian epic *Chilapathikaram* as presented by R. Parthasarathi (1993) in *The Chilapathikaram of Illanko Atikel* which talks of a king who unjustly killed the husband (Kovalan) of Kannagi and she had such powers that she burnt the whole kingdom of Madurai to ashes for the wrong done to her.

Ancient women in India also had a say in every aspect of their lives. As A.S. Altekar (1978) pointed out, the women had the right to choose their own life partners through a process called *swayamvaram* in which grooms were assembled and paraded in the house of the bride for selection. In those times, women were not confined to the domestic arena, but they were also part of religious teachings and learning (Kumkum Roy, 1999, p. 25).

During the Vedic era (1500-600BC), the status of women began to decline with time. Gender inequality started encroaching into the society. Women's status degraded to such an extent that they were not given the freedom that was available to even *Sudras* (the lowest caste of ancient Hindu society). Women were not given basic rights and they were barred from religious practices; political freedom was beyond their reach. As Vedic age progressed, the status of women deteriorated and till the

time of *Smiritis* (religious scriptures of Hindus), the condition became so bad that women were not allowed free access to education and were confined to domestic duties.

During this period, the *Manu Smriti*, also known as *The Laws of Manu*, a work of an ancient teacher of sacred rites and Hindu laws outline the ways in which individuals should protect their families and conduct themselves in public in accordance with Hindu customs and practice. *The Laws of Manu* stands midway between the old law books and the new, forming a link between the ancient and the modern “legislators”. These will be covered in detail in the next chapter.

Sanjay Kumar (2006) opines that many of the codices in Manu itself are actually put in place to protect women (p. 24). Unfortunately, throughout history women have been vulnerable to rape and other forms of attack and thus, according to Georg Buhler, Manu devoted many chapters of his books to the proper treatment of women within one’s family. Despite this, Kumar does not deny that in practice, the “Laws of Manu” have also caused grave mistreatments of Hindu women as well. To support this argument, Buhler says in verses 146 through 149 of chapter five, it is noted that Manu also prescribed that women should never do any activity independently or try to separate herself from her male family members.

The Medieval period (550AD-1526AD) is often said to be the Dark Ages for women. There were many foreign conquests which contributed to the further decline in the women’s status. Altekar said that when foreign conquerors like Muslims invaded India, they brought with them their culture and among others, for Muslims, a woman was the sole property of her father, brother or husband and she is not to have any will of her own. This seems like, in a way, a continuation or extension of the “Laws of Manu” as discussed earlier. During this time too, the native Indians wanted

to shield their womenfolk from the Muslim invaders. As polygamy was a norm for these invaders, they picked up any woman they wanted for a wife. In his article, Altekar argues that the *purdah* became imperative to the women for self-protection against these men and the women's movements came to be even more restricted. Families started looking at girls as a burden and women were at the receiving end in the men's world (p. 66). It would be interesting to note that the concept of women being a liability was already there even before the Muslim invasion. According to Susan Wadley (1995), "A husband is a Hindu woman's main support and once a woman becomes a widow she is not only viewed as a burden economically, but from 'Laws of Manu' (Chapter 3, Verse 57), they are also viewed as a liability" (p. 45).

The ill-treatment and injustice done onto women evolved into new atrocities such as Child Marriage, *Sati* (widow burning), *Jauhar* (mass suicide) and restriction on education for girls. These were either to transfer the burden of caring of girls to the husband as in child marriages or in some instances widow burning to totally exterminate women without a male partner so that families are not burdened with caring and guarding their honour. Tagore's view on each of these is apparent from his works; in short stories like "The Exercise Book" and "The Ghat's Story", Tagore highlights the injustice done to young girls through child marriage. In *Choker Bali*, he portrays the young widow Binodini as someone worthy of life and even remarriage, thus opposing *sati*. Bimala in *The Home and the World* is educated even after marriage and Tagore through Nikhil expresses his desire for the wife to actively engage in gaining knowledge and in *The Broken Nest*, Charu is given the freedom to pursue her passion for writing poems.

The status of Indian woman during the colonial period (1818-1947) is a sort of paradox where on one hand she was accorded more liberty and freedom, and on the

other, she was mutely suffering the violence afflicted on her by her own family (mostly in-laws) members. However, there are exceptions. In the short story “Subha”, she suffers in her in-laws’ home because even in her parental home, I tend to think she is considered a burden. However, this is due to the pressure from the society that the ultimate thing for a girl is to be married off and therein lies her salvation in life. With this pressure, the parents schemed to get rid of her by marrying her off to a man by concealing the fact that she was mute. Superficially, urban women in modern times might have achieved a lot, but in reality, they still have to travel a long way. The women have left the secured domain of their homes and are now in the battlefield of life, fully armed with education and talent, and the pursuit goes on.

Eunice de Souza (2002) says thus of this period, “From Vedic times to Buddhist nuns, bhakti saints and so on, there were women who spoke with astonishing freedom, but since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, ideas about women’s emancipation started to trickle in from the West” (xiii). In 1911, we have Rani Chimnabai of Baroda lamenting that public matters in India are almost entirely in the hands of the men and that the good of woman is the good of man” (p. 15).

Vinod Tagra (2006) finds this relevant, “Once the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru said that you can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of women” (p. 45). This is absolutely true as women of a nation, being a huge part of the population, are the mirror to its civilization. If women enjoy good status it shows that the society has reached a level of maturity and sense of responsibility, while decadent images conjure up if the opposite is true. The story of Indian women is thus as old as the history of Indian civilization.

It would be relevant to talk briefly about Tagore from a biographical point of view. Tagore was the youngest son of Debendranath Tagore, a leader of the

Brahmo Samaj, which was a new religious sect in nineteenth-century Bengal and which attempted a revival of the ultimate monistic basis of Hinduism as laid down in the *Upanishads*. He was educated at home, and although at seventeen he was sent to England to study law, he did not finish his studies there. In his mature years, in addition to his many-sided literary activities, he managed the family estates, a project which brought him into close contact with common humanity and increased his interest in social reforms. He also started an experimental school in Shantiniketan where he tried his Upanishadic ideals of education. From time to time, he participated in the Indian nationalist movement, though in his own non-sentimental and visionary way, and Gandhi, the political father of modern India, was his devoted friend. They did have disagreements on nationalism but both men had great interest to reform the society, and freeing the women from conservatism was something both men were passionate about. Tagore was knighted by the ruling British Government in 1915, but within a few years, he resigned the honour as a protest against British policies in India. The Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to Tagore in 1913, the first Asian to be bestowed such a title.

Tagore had an early success as a writer in his native Bengal. With his translations of some of his poems, he became known in the West. In fact, his fame attained a luminous height, taking him across continents on lecture and friendship tours. For the world, he became the voice of India's spiritual heritage and for India, especially for Bengal, he became a great living institution.

In 1921, Tagore established Viswabharati University. He gave all his money from the Nobel Prize and royalty money from his books to the University. Tagore was not only a creative genius, he was also quite knowledgeable in Western culture, especially Western poetry and science. Tagore had a good grasp of modern, post-Newtonian

physics, and was well able to hold his own in a debate with Einstein in 1930 on the newly emerging principles of quantum mechanics and chaos.

In 1940 Oxford University arranged a special ceremony in Santiniketan and awarded Tagore with a Doctorate of Literature. Tagore passed away on August 7, 1941 in his ancestral home in Calcutta.

### **Tagore on the Individual**

Tagore had given a vivid account of the individual and society. He started with human nature. He said that the natural law of human nature is sociability, and in fellowship man finds his true refuge in society (*A Tagore Reader*, 1961). He voiced his views on several issues and on society he had this to say, “A man has two sides—one the individual and the other the society, it means that for him society is an equally important aspect of man.” Tagore had regarded the individual as the product of society. Society provided the environment in which the individual’s personality flourished. He wanted to view the individual’s personality in the background of cultural configuration. To Tagore, society had to perform an important role in the life of an individual. Tagore had given more importance to society than to the state. In this context, Tagore had given equal prominence to men and women. What is good for men, is good for women. This is very relevant to the thesis as through the character Nikhil, for example, he tried to tell Bimala that the family is an extension of the society and he felt just like a woman performs at home in a family, she needs to spread her presence to the society. He said, after all women have the capacity and capability to be beyond just a homemaker. As he pointed out:

Creative expressions attain their perfect form through emotions modulated. Woman has that expression natural to her – a cadence of restraint in her behaviour, producing poetry of life. She has been an

inspiration to man, guiding, most oftent unconsciously, his restless energy into an immense variety of reations in literature, art, music and religion. This is why, in india, woman has been described as the symbol of Shakti, creative power (*Creative Unity*, 1922, p. 157).

This is his conviction about women and how powerful they are and we see the female characters in the selected works not letting Tagore down in any way as far as his expectation of women is concerned.

### **Tagore on Freedom**

His views on Freedom are described thus, “A dependent man’s happiness and prosperity are restricted and guided by his master’s will.” Freedom is the most valued object. Tagore has laid special emphasis on freedom. He believes that the right of being one’s own master is the greatest of man’s rights (*Creative Unity*, p. 132).

To him as he says again in his book *Creative Unity*, freedom refers to the freedom from bondage to the dead weight tradition and custom, freedom from the burden of ages, from the narrowness of mind and outlook, and freedom from fear. It signifies freedom from the “insult of dwelling in a doll’s world where movements are started through the brainless wires. It means freedom of the mind, freedom of the spirit to rise above the narrow self and realize kinship and unite with fellow-beings. This is the basis on which Tagore had called for women’s liberation.

He only has freedom, ideally loves freedom himself and is glad to extend it to others. He who cares to have slaves must chain himself to them; he who builds walls to create exclusion for others builds walls across his own freedom; he who distrusts freedom in others loses his moral right to it.

Freedom was realisation for Tagore. It was not only a sense of independence but an attainment of the higher ideals of the harmony of relations. Perfect freedom is