CONCLUSION

The writings of Asia’s first Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore are a saga of recognizing, observing, analyzing and grabbing all that is termed pure and pious humanity, the essence of one and all irrespective of caste, creed, religion and race. Any endeavour of generalizing this multifaceted literary genius is bound to land the researcher into an unfathomed sea of overt and covert spheres of dilemmas and tensions that demand radical solutions at the transitional phase of the society. His writings not only reveal human psyche and predicament but also unfold the trial and tribulations of the oppressive force of the society trying to shape it. Tagore’s novels and short-stories have brought out the ignored portion of women’s experiences and reflect unconditional sympathy and understanding towards them which was something rare and unfamiliar trend in the contemporary period of creative writings.

Rabindranath Tagore came into limelight with the publication of his epoch making work, Gitanjali and won the heart of the East and the West by winning Nobel Prize of Literature for the same in 1913. But, his genius as a poet has always overshadowed his versatility as a novelist and short-story writer. His novels and short-stories are set in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century colonial Bengal and highlight the oppressive customs and patriarchal values and their impact on women. His writings also expose the conflict between traditional values and the Bengali Renaissance and images of Hindu woman at the juncture of all these social events. No doubt, Tagore was a great poet, novelist, story-teller, essayist, painter and musician but above all, he was a great philanthropist who loved freedom of the soul and celebrated ‘Self’ in all of his creative writings. As a sensitive writer, he noticed the controversial issues of child-marriage, Hindu widow-remarriage, co-cremation, lack of female education, oppression in familial and social spheres and narrow-mindedness of the society.

The women characters of Tagore come from all sections of the society who have to struggle hard for their identity and liberty. Radical in
temperament, he wished to break the sham and dogmatic conventions and wrote about women liberation from the age-long rotten bondages. The role of the novelist in sensitizing the gender-biased society is to be studied objectively. This study has endeavored to understand Tagore’s perception and presentation of all aspects of womanhood compiling a range of comparisons with their modern counterparts. Moreover it also examines various religious, social, familial and literary influences that worked in shaping his mind and personality in a very comprehensive way that his creations are still relevant and thought-provoking. It is also an intellectual marathon to draw a clear and broad picture of women of the contemporary Bengal through Tagore’s fiction who seem transformed from meek and submissive beings to reformative energy reservoirs of the society.

The creative writings of Tagore not only reflect his philosophical, spiritual and nationalistic ideals but also for presenting different images of women. He is equally read for portraying women characters who are far ahead of their time and don’t hesitate in the least to register their voice openly and boldly. His women protagonists are active, real, interesting and rebellious to break the clutches of society. In fact, they have the power to overshadow their male counterparts. Many of his heroines criticize social injustice, oppose the demoralizing of women and negate to accept injustice as their destiny. As the writer himself believes that women are the most creative transformative factor of the society, his women also realize their worth and power. Mulk Raj Anand believed that Tagore’s humanism was more than a mere philosophical doctrine and one can witness it in his courage to inspire and to lead women during the times of challenge.

Women in Tagore’s novels and short-stories challenge the rituals and bondages imposed on them against their will and wish to come out of the darkness of the patriarchal oppressive system. A remarkable understanding of the society by the writer can be seen in his creative writings which have ample space for women of all classes. His heroines are dynamic as well as sensitive enough to get moulded according to the changing stream of life. Tagore has
presented various images of women. The range of his literary canvass varies from creative forces to destructive forces. They are mothers, wives, beloveds, widows, fiancés, friends, guides, motivators and critics. If at one moment, they are kind and benevolent enough to sacrifice their life for the welfare of their families, then at another moment, they are bold enough not to suppress their innate desires under the heavy hand of conservatism.

Various pulls worked together in shaping the personality and literary genius of the writer. Young Rabi was highly influenced by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and his progressive ideology. The influence of his highly intellectual and learned father, Maharishi Debendranath Tagore was immense on his mind. Along with this, social services of Ishwar Chander Vidya Sagar and his earnest efforts to legalize the widow-remarriage had a tremendous impact on his psychology. Later on, Tagore gave space to the theme of widow-remarriage in many of his novels and short-stories. The literary revolution that came with Bengal Renaissance stimulated the creativity of the writer to a great deal. His friendship with many eminent scholars, poet and novelists enriched his intellectual horizon and he emerged as one of the greatest Bengali writers of his time. Along with this, the spiritual and intellectual culture of the Tagore family laid a deep impression on his sensibility. His father, mother, brother and especially, his elder sister-in-law, Kadambari Devi, encouraged Tagore to a great deal and made him realize his capabilities. Her sudden death left him shocked and he became more mature and serious towards life. As Zamindar his interaction with poor peasants and common folk gave him deep understanding of human life. He came to know different lives, their problems and these experiences turned into themes for his writings. Tagore’s creative writings portray various sensitive and courageous images of woman from all the walks of life.

His novels and short-stories highlight the matrix of married life because of various reasons such as lack of understanding between man and woman, presence of in-laws, extra-marital pulls and omnipresent social-cultural influences. Moreover it has been highlighted that how in the contemporary
Bengal the act of domestic tyranny by husbands was a mode of easing the
effect of the colonial tyranny implicated on them in the outside world. Wives
were treated as private property and only the status of mother of sons gave
them some security in the family. *A Grain of Sand* presents how Rajlakshmi
humiliates Annapurna for not bearing son and calls her ‘envious womb’. It is
important to note that most of Tagore’s heroines are childless even after many
years of marriage, be it Bimala of *Home and the World*, Charu of *The Broken
Nest* or Kumudini of “The Gift of the Sight” and it adds to their humiliation
and mental tortures. Sometimes incompatibility with husband or intrusion of
‘third person’ shatters the married life. In *A Grain of Sand* the arrival of a
young widow, Binodini plays havoc in the married life of Asha and Mahendra.
It is because of the extra-marital affair of Mahendra and Binodini that innocent
Asha undergoes through a lot of mental sufferings. In *Home and the World* also
entry of Sandip as the third person in the married life of Bimala and Nikhil
creates the chaos. The revolutionary and passionate talks of Sandip encourage
Bimala to step out of the four walls which has been the ultimate world for her.
He openly flirts with her and calls, “Goddess of Plenty” and “Shakti of
Womanhood”. Under the charismatic impact of Sandip, she starts doubting the
merits of her husband but the novelist doesn’t allow her to fall from the
standards of morality and at last she understands that the world in any way
can’t be different from home and to lose one in order to gain other is sheer
stupidity. *The Wreck* presents the marital matrix of Kamala and Nalin not
because of sexual attraction towards ‘The Third One’ but because of destiny.
The moment Kamala realizes that Ramesh is not her husband and she has been
living with a stranger for a long time, she doesn’t take even a single stance to
leave him and goes in search of her real husband, Nalinaksha. Her character
presents a perfect example of Entwicklungsroman, i.e. the ‘maturation of inner
powers’. Here the ripening of her ‘inner power’ highlights her increasing
strength of taking decisions. Tagore infuses the empowerment skills in his
heroines for it leads to their radical growth beyond the strictness of the
traditional society and gives them a chance to re-form gender identity.
‘Spots of time’, a literary technique vital for structural benefits as well as for the evolution of characters is witnessed in many of Tagore’s works. It is epiphanic in Joycean sense that serves a moment of unusual insight which transfers the protagonist from mere a sensory awareness to the spiritual vision of truth beneath the worldly considerations. As Stephen learns from auditory impressions and David Copperfield from observation, Tagore’s women also learn through ‘spots of time’ moments which give them sudden powers to interpret the meaning of life. When Kamala gets the first glimpse of her husband Nalin, she feels the moment of sudden awareness of life. This mystic experience sets her free from the bondages of socio-cultural obligations and she catches an ultimate intimation of truth beyond the veil. This single moment lifts her to an entire new plane of existence. A similar revelation is experienced by Bihari, when he witnesses the beautiful, deep and dark eyes of Binodini in moonlit night. This mystic vision washes out all the misjudgments against her. Likewise, the moment Bimala pushes Sandip with full force and his head strikes the corner of the table; she realizes that all the music in their relation has suddenly stopped. For her the moment becomes the ‘spot of time’, an instrument of orientation with her own real self.

Tagore’s sensitivity finds a vent in his short-stories also where he etches various images of women in form of Kusum, Chandara, Kumudini, Kalika, Kalyani and Anila who are struck in the turmoil of life. Kusum, a young widow who is not allowed to claim her right over happiness, commits suicide by drowning herself. Tagore blames the shallow moral codes of the male-dominant society for the death of hundreds of widows like Kusum. If on one side, Kusum commits suicide; then on other side, Chandara of “Punishment” prefers to die than to live with a husband who chooses his brother over her. Similarly in “House number One” and “The Gift of Sight”, Anila and Kumudini become rag dolls in the hands of their ever dominating husbands. Whereas Kumu manages to settle the turmoil of her married life after a lot of struggle, Anila decides to leave the house and husband behind. Thus, Tagore’s female protagonists display three-dimensional traits, revolting against
all types of boundages whether it is at individual, familial, social or at the national level. They all find themselves ringed in the whirlpool of the matrix of marital life, but with the serenity of their character and humility in accepting mistakes they manage to overcome the problems.

Being Pirali Brahmins, Tagore’s family was quite modern in comparison to the contemporary society and this made him liberal and open-minded and with the passage of time he became even more radical. Through his fictional narratives, he has graphed the need for women empowerment and also proved that with their efforts and resistance women have paved an altogether new way for themselves. It is through his fiction that Tagore exposes the social restrictions imposed upon women without any basis inducing inferiority complex in them. Like modern day feminists, he attacks the social injustice done to them through the medium of his writings. In Gora, A Grain of Sand and Relationships, he has highlighted familial and social ostracism of women which is a constant source of torture for them since ages. Tagore defines ostracism and its wide ranging psychological impacts that affect individual’s societal status as well as well-being at multitudinous levels. His novels and short-stories highlight that sense of belongingness makes an individual feel safe and connected; however, loss of belongingness may lead a human being to the lower pedestal. Tagore depicts the mute sufferings of the ostracized women who are declared burden on the family. Through the images of Harimohini, Binodini, Kusum and many women like them, he exposes the condition of child-widows who are left without any support of the family. They are forced to lead Spartan life devoid of all colours and pleasures of life. The mejobau of Zamindar family in Home and the World is a perfect example who is bound to live a degraded life after the death of her husband. Her attachment with her brother-in-law is a matter of deep concern for Bimala. No matter how hard Binodini tries but at last she also surrenders her wishes under the weight of patriarchal society and moves to Kashi with Annapurna, the only place left for widows.
The writer makes a bold plea depicting the ostracism of woman within the institution of marriage as he discusses the issues of marital incompatibility in *Relationships* and *Gora*. Anandamoyi is insulted and rejected not only by her relative but by her family also for her liberal life style. Her husband and son don’t want to touch the food prepared by her and it leads to her miseries and humiliations. Tagore deals with the controversial issue of marital rape through the story of Kumu and Madhu in *Relationships*. Kumu faces emotional and moral turmoil in Madhu’s house as his wife and the physical submission to her husband and unwanted pregnancy make her feel sick. The situation of another widow Shyama but in love with Madhu is worse than Kumudini. She is emotionally and physically exploited by Madhu and he uses her body to boost his wounded male ego. His other heroines such as Nirupama, Haimanti and Subha are also sailing in the same boat and suffer for not meeting the demands of the society and sentenced to one type of ostracism or the other. Through his creative writings, Tagore appeals to the male-dominating society to understand the mute sufferings of the poor women and be kind to them.

Tagore’s time was the time of great political upheaval. Gandhi emerged as the greatest name on Indian political scene. As a prophet, Tagore had foreseen the evil and corrupt effect of the capitalist relationship on Bengal in particular and India in general and was not convinced with his ideals of politics. Earlier, he was quite enthusiastic about his participation in freedom movement and wrote various patriotic songs but sudden breakdown of communal violence disturbed his belief and he never allowed any of his disciples to participate in violent activities. Though, nationalism has always occupied a prominent place in his creative and literary writings but he was against any hypocrisy and corruption in political parties and their leaders. In his celebrated essay, “Nationalism” and many poems Tagore advocated the freedom of India but he was also not very comfortable with the participation of women in freedom moment. However, he faced a lot of criticism for his attitude about nationalistic movement. Bimala of *Home and the World* soon realizes the true face of violent activities and returns home. She understands that the world
can’t be different from the home and to rob one is to be unfaithful to other. Through death of Sandip and fatal accident of Nikhil, Tagore highlights that violence is not the solution of any problem. The novelist was not very happy with the nationalistic symbolism of women as ‘Mother India’ or ‘Shakti’. He denounces this practice in *Gora, Home and the World* and *Four Chapters*. He believed that the path of terrorism was sheer wastage of youth’s energy and would lead to nowhere. He shows that possessive attitude of Ela and her party for Nation is no attitude at all. In his essay, “Personality”, Tagore emphasizes the life giving force of woman which can’t be aggressive or devastating. Same theme is reflected in several other essays such as “Indian Marriage”, “Women as Human Beings”, “Women” and “Women’s Education”. In *Gora*, women characters such as Sucharita, Lolita and Anandamoyi help Gora to realize the true meaning of nationalism and work as a positive force in his enlightenment. Hypocrisy and dogmas are debunked by the novelist through his women and they emphasizes that true patriotism is not in wearing *khaddar* or putting *tilak* on the forehead, it is in helping the poor and needy ones. In “Purification”, through the character of Kalika, he criticizes the corrupt politicians who misuse the youth and their energy for their personal benefits. Kalika is the representative of those hypocrites who pretend to be the greatest nation lovers, but hate the poor. In “The Unapproved”, through the story of Amiya, it is highlighted that freedom struggle cannot be termed as a well defined space for women because it is informed with all kinds of complexities of the political life and dangers. It also brings to the fore the pathetic and horrible conditions of the freedom fighters in colonial India. It is due to this reason Tagore has not encouraged women to take part in mass politics. He seems to get influenced by his Irish friend and poet, W. B. Yeats, who was also not pleased with violence and hatred in politics.

The initial attitude of Tagore about women was on the romantic side, but in the later phase of his life, his perceptions about women grew mature. Earlier his women are passive and accept the miseries and oppressions of patriarchal society silently but later on he turns into a vehement critic of social evils and
depicts his women characters very rebellious. There is a mark influence on the sensibility of young Rabindranath of the women of his family. They actively participated in reading, writing and private theatrical performances which was something exceptional for the women of the Bengali bhdralok. Women of the Tagore family such as Indira Debi, Hiranmayi Debi, Sarala Debi and Pratibha Debi are examples of “emancipated” women. Women of Tagore’s fiction are a reflection of these women. Tagore’s women are also radical and creatively dynamic in pushing the borders and boundaries of the contemporary Bengali society. In fact, one can call them ‘New Women’. The New Woman could survive shunning the burden of dead relationship and still maintain social status protected by legal rights. She is intelligent, confident, educated and self-supporting. Tagore’s constant travels to the Western world and exposure gave him insight to paint such courageous and bold female characters. His travel narratives such as “Diary of a Traveler to Europe”, “Diary of a Traveler to the West” and “Letters from Europe” interrogate the role of women in new and modern perspective. Tagore’s women are very different from rest of their contemporaries. They are more mature and open to life and know how to grab their rights and liberties. There is no gainsaying the fact that they are capable enough to out shine not only the hero of the story but also their foreign counterparts. They can give reasons, interrogate, reject and reconstruct their identities by struggling against stereotypical roles and mindless social practices. Binodini by all means is a ‘new woman’ of Tagore’s literary sphere. As a forerunner of a new genre in Indian fiction, she has received high acclaim from critics. Her decision of rejecting Mahendra and turning down the marriage proposal of Bihari truly makes her one of the boldest heroines of Tagore. From a potential destructive seductress, a mere clone of “a second poison tree”, she develops into a powerful woman who has the potential to efface the male characters in the novel. A Grain of Sand becomes the novel of the growth of inner self, not only of Binodini but of Asha and Rajlakshmi also. This novel is a master piece in reflecting the striving of Binodini for the knowledge of the world and criticises the attitude of cruel society towards women. Binodini’s
hunger to claim her space marks her struggle to define self in the hostile environment of the bourgeois society.

Presence of Anandamoyi in *Gora* adds a new meaning and range to Tagore’s women. Sucharita and Lolita are far ahead of their times and emerge as strong and courageous. Kumudini in *Relationship* is not a formidable being; she stands for justice and truth. She represents both strength and limitations of female bound in a society conditioned by patriarchal values but her subtleness lends a different charm to her personality. Her firm determination not to bear cruelty even after the birth of child makes her the new woman of Tagore’s literary genre. Mrinal of “Letter from a Wife” manages to assert her individuality and independence separate from her husband. Her assertion can be marked as her second birth. It is a journey from a mere daughter-in-law to an individual. Like Nora of *A Doll’s House*, she sheds the burden of unwanted responsibilities. Likewise, Kalyani of “Woman Unknown” has the courage to say ‘no’ to dowry and decides to live her life alone serving the county and society. She truly and surely is a ‘new-woman’. Sohini of “The Laboratory” is also a non-conventional woman. In fact, she is the boldest of Tagore’s heroines. Her role is quite subversive and she deconstructs the popular stereotypical representation of good Bengali woman. She is beautiful, intelligent and brave and knows how to tempt men and use them according to her wish. She manipulates Nandakishor and makes him pay off her debts. She has extra-marital affairs and Nila is the result of one such affair, but she hardly cares to hide the fact. Despite having strange habits, she truly loves her dead husband and wishes to establish a world-class laboratory for him. She has the courage to confess her faults openly and feels no remorse for them. Sohini exemplifies Tagore’s radical sensibility in the final phase of his literary career.

Tagore is unconventional in portraying women. The present study has made an attempt to showcase the universal appeal of images of women in Tagore’s fiction beyond the limitations of time and space. The feminine side of Tagore’s individuality was not too ardent, rather he believed in the concept of *Ardhanarishwar* - an image in Hindu mythology made up of the combination of
half-god and half-goddess and this mythical understanding gave him a keen insight in the heart of women. Tagore could capture the swift changing colours of the moods of women. Whereas most of the male characters in his fiction are weak, emotionally barren and indecisive, his heroines are the source of imaginative and productive energy, bold, courageous and talented. They have the potential to handle the situation and pressure in the best possible manner. Even in their defeat, they are victorious. Tagore’s heroines are strong enough to stand alone in the battle of life, but they are not aloof, rather they are considerate, loving, self-sacrificing and full of milk of human kindness. Rabindranath Tagore’s whole life is an attempt to give woman her due place and respect. He highlights that modern woman’s identity is no longer limited to the role of a mother or a wife. Now, woman is demanding her right and wants to be seen as an individual. As a great humanist and social-thinker, he has given voice to the voiceless, identity to the invisible and space to the spaceless. He never pays a second thought to his bold stand in championing the need of the liberation of women. Tagore’s personal life reflects how difficult it would have been for him to deviate from the compelling pressures of social conditions of the conservative society of his time, but his radical attitude gave him courage to swim against the flow. He was the first writer who gave equal or perhaps more space to women in his writings. His women exude an unprecedented creative freedom, sometimes slip because of the blows of severe criticism, but finally, emerge as winners. The egalitarian approach and universal humanism of Tagore remain an integral part of his fiction and non-fiction. His journey from traditional to modern, from micro to macro issues gave him power to voice against the male-dominated family structure, patriarchal system and gender inequality. He has painted wide range of women through his creative writings which will be remembered by the world for the ages to come.

In nutshell, this study is a modest attempt to clear the mist settled around the persona of a great humanist whose writings have been a medium to bring change in the perspective and belief of the society. It is evident that
Tagore should not be projected as an ardent feminist, as labeling him one would be a wrong verdict. He was a great philanthropist who wanted balance in the society and harmony home as well as in the world. His fiction imparts the understanding of social reality which is the ultimate need of the hour since realization can only lead to balance.