SUMMARY

The social set of any society is also an important aspect which allows or inhibits the participation in the process of creation of the image. So, only one party is there to act as creator of the image, and the benefit and liberty of creation of the image lie with this party only. This is the basis of all patriarchal societies where women have always been in the background and all images have been created by men who acquired the superior or first position themselves and designated everything secondary to women. The creation of this hegemonic power set up is controlled and affirmed further with the help of religion which is a sacred tool to govern everything. The condition of women in Indian society has always been sorrier and the root of the evil has been lying in the social model. Early marriage even before puberty, much older groom than child-bride, sale of young girls to older men, physical maltreatment of child-brides, prohibition of widow remarriage were some of the major evils against women.

The writings of Rabindranath Tagore, the first Nobel Laureate of Asia, present a great zeal of social reform to eradicate what is rotten in the society. The issues of social changes and reforms find place in novels and short-stories and he discusses them at length. His novels and novellas reflect his keen observation about social biasness and prejudices against the weaker sections of the society. He was highly disturbed with the plight of women in society. He sensed that the status of ‘secondary’ or ‘second-sex’ of women is the outcome of a whole range of cruelties and inhuman dogmas implicated by the patriarchal society for centuries. As Zamindar, Tagore spent a pretty long time in the countryside and here, he came in direct contact with common folk of Bengal. Here, he was introduced with the harsh realities of their lives. His heart moved to see the dreadful condition of the Bengali married women. He was well aware of the orthodox Hindu ideology about the concept of home as well as marriage.
In his novels and short-stories, Tagore has described the problems of married women and especially, their isolated condition in the joint family. Whether it is Binodini of *A Grain of Sand*, Kamala of *The Wreck*, Charu of *The Broken Nest* or Kumudini of *Relationships*, all heroines are struggling emotionally or socially. His novels expose the complexities in the conjugal life which may be the result of extra-marital affairs, over influence of in-laws, especially mothers-in-law and incompatibility between husband and wife, and highlight how their small domestic space is thrashed due to social and psychological factors. An unprejudiced analysis of his novels and short-stories brings home the idea that his liberalism was not the liberalism of the West. For him, unbridled freedom was distasteful and suffocating. He rejected the freedom that could be destructive and knows no control. He had a strong belief that if we are not reformed within, the society can’t be reformed.

Throughout the world, societies and cultures—religious scriptures, epics, myths and laws have been constructed according to the patriarchal ideology. The secondary position of women is not a feminine feature, but it is the result of social tradition under the control of men. The social ostracism of women is an evil practice by the ever dominating men to banish them when they try to emphasize their identity in “normal” and “natural” stream of life. Tagore closely witnessed the inner groaning of tender-hearted widows who had to abide by taboos, superstitions and decrees and expressed it in his writings. He also highlighted the sufferings of married women who are forced to live without their husbands’ love and care of the family and ostracized from the normal and natural steam of life. Harimohini and Anandamoyi of *Gora* are two such women who are the victim of social and familial ostracism. Binodini in *A Grain of Sand* is also forced to live a Spartan life after the death of her husband. For the first time, Tagore presents the controversial issue of marital rape in *Relationship*, where Kumudini has to undergo immense sufferings from the hands of Madhusudan. All these stories force readers and critics to trace the
root cause of many social and familial problems. He is not in the favour of the boundless freedom of men.

Through his writings, Tagore inspired many, but clearly declared that he would not follow the path of violence and bloodshed. His views about women and their participation in freedom movement were very clear. Women of contemporary Bengal were emerging as a symbol of post-reform, modern ladies imbibing the ideals of the Bengali Renaissance, still tied to the traditional world. They were perceived as inspiration to man, a guiding force, a restrain to his restless energy, but the participation of women in political independence was a doubly problematic issue not only in the Indian context, but also in the Western world. In fact, once the political independence is achieved, they are sent back to the kitchen. Tagore’s nationalism imbibes a sense of cosmopolitanism. His nationalism is not related only to the matters of geography, but also with the ideal of ‘Vasudhahav kutumbeam’/ ‘The Universal Home’. His works beautifully present the dichotomy of the East and the West. Though his primary experience with the West was through the English colonization of India and it also included many trips to foreign, but he rejected every kind of mechanism or rigidity in nationalism. Various dimensions of nationalism and role of women in freedom movement are discussed in Tagore’s novels. He had the courage to sketch powerful female characters different from his contemporaries, like Ela, Saudamini, Kalyani etc.

*Four Chapters* rejects the utilitarian quest of political leaders. Tagore was highly critical of political and commercial aggressiveness and surely never believed in the utilitarian spirit of the West. The women who neglect their duties towards their husbands, children and family and move out for the national freedom movement are not favoured by Tagore. He also does not approve young boys and girls who quit their studies to join the movement. In his life time, Tagore was criticized in the West and countries like Japan for denunciating nationalism. But today, the world needs to understand his views
on nationalism in a larger perspective. His nationalism doesn’t perceive the world broken up into fragments of narrow domestic walls; rather, his idea about the nation is based on rationality and reality. As a denizen of the world, he was concerned not only about Bengal or India, but about the whole world. Tagore moved ahead in the journey of life for building a new nation embellished with powerful intellectuals having capacity to choose between right and wrong. For this purpose, he established Shantinikaten as a centre of culture and intellect in pre-independence Bengal.

The novels of Tagore throw ample light on his radical thinking, liberated mind and inclusive spirit. He was the first writer who gave equal or perhaps more space to women in his writings. This liberal-minded writer had no objection in women performing on the stage, which was highly controversial issue in the contemporary society. Women of Tagore’s novels and short-stories come from this conservative, unhygienic and claustrophobic space to mark their way in the society. Religious dogmas regard women as second sex and inferior to men, but they are in no mood to accept the age long traditions and customs which ruin their life under the burden of society. In fact, they are more spontaneous than men. Tagore has created a series of women characters who have blossoming aspect of education, culture and maturity and are emotional and intelligent simultaneously. His women characters can boast of this dual combination rarely to be found in the 19th and 20th centuries of the colonial Bengali fiction. His new women can read, write, compose poems and discuss issues of politics and philosophy. They can give reasons, interrogate, reject and reconstruct their identities by struggling against stereotypes roles and mindless social practices.

If one talks about the most radical and courageous woman of Tagore’s fiction, no doubt, Binodini stands first in this category. She, by all means, is a ‘new woman’. As forerunner of a new genre in Indian fiction, she has received high acclaims from critics. Asha also enjoys the status of Tagore’s new woman.
in certain sense. Though, in the beginning of the novel, she is perceived as mere China doll, but with the passage of time, she gains maturity and becomes a strong woman. Lolita, the frank heroine of *Gora*, has the capacity to surpass all. Her anger, earthiness and temperament are matters of concern for the whole family because she does not hesitate in the least to express her views. Similar to Lolita, Sucharita is also an educated Bhramo girl with modern outlook, but her temperament is more balanced in comparison to Lolita’s. Like all heroines of Tagore, Kumudini of *Relationships* stands apart from the common Bengali women. Due to her strong will power and firm determination, she emerges as a winner or what we call Tagore’s ‘new woman’. In the declaration of love, Tagore’s heroines surpass his heroes. We witness this courage in the character of Binodini and Saudamini. Tagore projects a very bold picture of woman through the character of Mrinal in “Letter from a Wife”. Mrinal prefers to write her real name instead of the nomenclature of ‘Mejo Bou’ which is assertion of her individuality and independence separate from her husband. It can be marked as her second birth. New women are confident enough to plan their life, and Kalyani’s decision to participate in nationalist movement is a step ahead in the direction of self-expression through something which was more or less dominated by men. Her abjectness in exploring the transgression of women empowerment makes her stand apart from the common Bengali girls. Sohini of “The Laboratory” is also an unconventional woman. In fact, she is the boldest of Tagore’s heroines. The role of Sohini is quite subversive and deconstructs the popular stereotypical representation of good Bengali woman. Women of Tagore’s fiction believe in ‘ekla chalo’ philosophy. It is not that they are aloof from the contemporary stream of the society, but they are capable enough to manage their life even when nobody is there to help them. It is said that any piece of creation is the mirror of creator’s personality. 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 mould according to the changing stream of life.
Tagore has presented various images of women. The range of his canvass varies from creative forces to destructive forces. 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. 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.