Rabindranath Tagore’s contemporary India was under the British rule. The social conditions of those days were very complex. Especially the women’s position was adverse. Social reformers such as Raja Rama Mohan Rai, Eswara Chandra Vidya Sagar, and Kesava Chandra Sen, who were also contemporaries to Tagore, were trying to reform the society especially the women’s predicament.

Hinduism in those days, as Max Weber puts it was “A compound of magic, animism and superstition” when it comes to the women’s position. In the words of Bepin Chandra Pal ‘The birth of a girl was unwelcome, her marriage a burden and her widowhood inauspicious.’ Attempts to kill girl infants at birth were not unusual. Those who escaped this initial brutality were subjected to the violence of marriage at a tender age. Often the marriage was a device to escape social ignominy and marital life did not turn out to be a pleasant experience. An eighty-year-old Brahman in Bengal had as many as two hundred wives, the youngest being just eight years old. Several women hardly have a married life worth the name, since their husbands participated in nuptial ceremonies for a consideration and rarely set eyes on their wives after that. Yet when their husbands died they were expected to commit sati, which Raja Ram Mohan Rai described as ‘Murder according to every Shasrta.’ “If they succeeded in overcoming this social coercion, they were condemned, as widows, to life-long misery, neglect and humiliation… Women even went to
the extent of offering themselves to priests to satisfy their carnal pleasures.”

These social conditions have a direct bearing on Rabindranath Tagore and his portrayal of women characters reflects the then prevailing conditions in the society. We find such diverse characters jostling together in the story-world of Tagore as the Bangali village girls, Giribala Mrinmayi, Babus of Nayanjore, and the members of the low caste Rui family. Pramathanath Bishi says that no other Bengali writer has given us such a variety of characters as Tagore. It is true that he has depicted mostly the joys and sorrows of middle-class life and drawn a large number of characters from this section of society, being closer to it, but he is not indifferent to the masses. The people from the lowest caste have received his equal sympathy.

It is worth remembering that it was Tagore who for the first time gave honourable place to the humble and undistinguished fold in our literature. “Up to their time, the ordinary man and woman and more especially the poor and lowly, had not secured admission into our literature.” It was in Rabindranath Tagore’s stories that they were given their rightful place. Once when Tagore was criticized for his class leanings, his rejoinder was, “at one time, month after month, I wrote stories only of village life. I am sure that no such sequence of pictures about rural life had ever before appeared in Bengali literatures.”

Tagore, like Hardy, had an intuitive understanding of woman’s heart. In the galaxy of women he has created, a few deserve special mention. Bindya, the dark little amiable wife reminds us, ‘though the mortal rite of sati is ended, the spirit that led to it is not at all extinct.’ Tagore had a deep love for the
children and keen understanding of their mind. The secret of the case with which he could probe into child's world lay in his capacity to turn back to his childhood. His poems about children are among the best in the world of literature. His play, *The Post Office* does successfully what both Shakespeare and Kalidas failed to do. It brings on the stage a child who neither shows off nor is silly. Some of his great short stories too centre round the boys and girls of various ages. The charming little Mini, with her unceasing babble and irrepressible curiosity, has come to be a representative of the darling of every home the world over. Little Prabha assuming the role of the late mother, Uma secretly taking away her brother's pen and writing in huge letters on his essay what she desires and Ashu playing the game. According to William Cenkner "One recent study identifies 219 women in Tagore's short stories, novels, dramas and narrative poems."5

In the order of relationship, the women of Tagore's fiction are neither primarily romantic figures, mothers, divine mother, nor even objects of desire but social beings growing through human inter-relationships within ordinary Bengali family life. Tagore consistently repudiated the female stereotypes of either goddesses or sex objects. He attacks the social injustices of his day by portraying the oppressed women who become conscious of the social dimensions and resources of their own personalities. From his first short story, "Beggar Girl" (1877), to his final short story, "The Bad Name" (1941), woman undergoes change in personality within each particular plot and brings
transformation to Bengali society and social consciousness. Woman is the most creative transformative factor within social life.

Tagore follows the footsteps of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894), the father of modern Bengali literature, who first introduced to the Bengali literary tradition a fresh perspective on woman and romantic love. Both aspects gradually develop throughout Tagore’s various literary periods. In his early period (1881-1897), his heroines submit to the injustices and hardships of rural village life and Tagore turns to mythological figures to show that woman need not be merely passive. Even so, the heroine of Tagore’s first novel, *Karuna*, was an illiterate. In his second period of writing (1893-1913), probably the most imaginative phase of his life, he portrays the urban and educated woman as a new force in Bengali society. A maiden heroine in “Bachelor’s club,” written in 1900, pleads for equal rights. Of some interest is the fact that the major heroines of Tagore’s novels are childless. Widows are especially important figures, and he uses them to express both the conflict within Bengali society and within woman herself. Binodini is a widow who struggles with her own passion and unfulfilled love; Damini is a widow who rejects social norms and marriages. In his mature period (1914-1941), Tagore’s fictional heroines become the vehicles for an explicit and radical critique of the caste system, untouchability and religious hypocrisy. Woman emerges as a catalytic figure in the dynamics of society, the nation, and even the world; Tagore finally images woman with a global consciousness.
What gives Tagore’s changing concept of woman coherence is the self-assertive and self-reliant character of his heroines. In a short story, “Laboratory,” written in 1940, a mother and daughter break all social conventions and values. The promiscuous daughter Nila never rises to her mother Sohini level of social consciousness, which violates all traditional values for the sake of science. His most powerful women are those who speak of the future and who forge a new personality for women. They are not heroines of the present.

Tagore’s women challenge. The female personality challenges Bengali society and, more particularly, challenges the male figures that grow only in relationship to the heroines. The Images are drawn with vivid realism. Tagore ultimately achieves in fiction a realistic image of what women could be and how they could transform male-dominated society. Woman is imaged as a human being in the process of full humanization, and man finds in this image the creative principle of his own growth. “The playmate of the night aspired to be the helpmate of the day,” characterizes the image of the woman in Tagore’s fiction. No female figure in Tagore’s fiction is the holistic woman: even the noblest woman is incomplete and in the process of development. The nature of the creative principle as imaged by Tagore is apparent: creativity seeks greater fullness because it is consistently unfinished.

The suffering of the Bengali wife is a recurrent theme in Rabindranath Tagore’s short stories, and it should not escape our notice that the women are much more alive, authentic and attractive than those of men. It seems that
Rabindranath Tagore gave a grudging attention to men, and that they are often stupid, insensitive and even ridiculous in his stories. But he went straight into the heart of the women, and discovered for us how much they suffered, how much they sacrificed, how little were they appreciated by the husbands or the family. A large number of his stories centre on the life of the middle classes, their complexities and pretensions, but it is the women – specially suffering women – who are at the centre of the canvas: mothers, wives, sisters and daughters. With a rare knowledge of human psychology he probes the nature of women – their spirit of sacrifice, their nobility, their genuine concern for the happiness of their home, their depth of perception of the finer aspects of life, their deep devotion to certain values.

The character of Kadambini embodies the spirit of sacrifice, nobility and genuine concern for the family and near and dear abundantly in the short story “The Living and the Dead.” She has no one in the world, but she wants to be someone. She stays in the house of zamindar Sharadashankar. Suddenly one day she is found dead. For the fear of the police, the zamindar hastily arranges for her funeral in spite of the darkness. Four Brahmin employees of the zamindar quickly carry the dead body to be burnt. While two of them, keep a watch in the darkness. The other two get back to collect firewood for funeral pyre. Mean while the “corpse” moves. Startled at the movement of corpse the two men run away. When they get back along with the other two for verification of the movement, they find the body missing. To save their skin they declared that the corpse is burnt.
From this point, the portrayal of Kadambini reaches its zenith. The character stays in a continuous and persistent dilemma, whether she is living or dead. Here Tagore tries to show to the world the ugly face of the society. The woman actually does not die. To quote the text “Kadambini had not died: for some reason, her life-function had been suspended- that was all.” When she regains her consciousness, she is not confident enough to get back to zamindar’s house. Her thinking about herself becomes a cause of humiliation for any civilized human being.

Her first feeling was that the land of dead must be one of total darkness and desolation. There was nothing to see there, nothing to hear, nothing to do except sit and wait, forever awake. Then she suddenly felt a chilly, rainy wind through an open door, and heard the croaking of monsoon frogs; and all her memories of the monsoon, from childhood right through her short life, rose in her mind. She felt the touch of the world again. There was a flash of lighting: for an instant the tank, the banyan tree, the vast plain and a distant row of trees showed themselves before her eyes. She remembered how she had sometimes bathed in the tank on sacred occasions; how seeing dead bodies in the cremation-ground there had made her aware of the awesomeness of death.

Her immediate idea was that she should return home. But then she thought, ‘I’ m not alive – they won’t take me back. It
would be a curse on them. I am exiled from the land of the living – I am my own ghost." (R.T.S. – 33-34)

This state of desperate and despondent thinking has not struck Kadambini at once in that night. It has been the result of neglect and carelessness and under treatment of Kadambini by the society. She is staying in the house of zamindar and the zamindar is supposed to look after the safety, security and welfare of the people in his zamin. But he fails even to take sufficient care of the very inmates of his house.

Here Tagore exposes to the world that the feudal class does not take care of the lower class. Even the four Brahmin employees who are the only witness for the missing of Kadambini do not try to trace the truth. In fact, the Brahmin community is supposed to spread the truth and guide the society in right direction towards perfection. But they fail to do so. Perhaps this kind of situation prevailing in Tagore’s contemporary India made him pray to the lord to lead his country to the heaven.

Where Knowledge is free

Where words come out from the depth of truth

Where the mind led forward by thee into ever widening thoughts and action.⁶

The saying “woman is the foe of the woman” is declared by the male dominated society. The fact is that the male dominated society has created such a situation for women that they are forced to be permanent dependents on the
males. Even when it is necessary, to help the inmate friends women are forced to weigh their considerations in relation to their ‘family.’

Tagore illustrates this through the character of Yogmaya. At the first sight of her friend Kadambini, Yogmaya feels immense pleasure. The early pleasantries ensure safety and security for Kadambini:

The two friends were a little slow to recognize each other, but soon their eyes lit up as each saw a childhood resemblance in the other. ‘Well I never,’ said Yogmaya. ‘I never thought that I would see you again. But what brings you here? Did your in-laws kick you out?’

Kadambini was silent at first, then said, ‘Bhai, don’t ask me about my in-laws. Give me a corner in your house, as a servant. I’ll work for you.’ ‘What an idea!’ said Yogmaya. ‘How can you be a servant? You’re my friend; you’re like—’ and so on. Then Shripati came into the room. Kadambini gazed at him for a moment, and then slowly walked out, without covering her head or showing any other sign of modesty or respect. Afraid that Shripati would take offence at her friend’s behaviour, Yogmaya made apologies for her. But so little explanation was necessary—indeed, Shripati accepted her excuses so easily—that she felt uneasy. (R.T.S. - 35)

But soon Yogmaya feels insecure for the presence of Kadambini in her house. Shripati, husband of Yogmaya is a gentle man and has a soft corner for
Kadambini. This becomes flash point for Yogmaya’s irritant behaviour. Slowly but steadily she asks Kadambini to make a move out of her house. Here Tagore makes a moving presentation of Kadambini’s predicament.

‘Who am I to you?’ said Kadambini slowly. ‘Am I of this world? All of you here smile, weep, love, possess things; I merely look on. You are human beings; I am a shadow. I do not understand why God put me in your midst. You’re worried that I’ll damage your happiness – I in turn cannot understand what my relation is to you. But since the Almighty has kept no other place for the likes of me, I shall wander round you and haunt you even if you cut me off.’ (R.T.S. - 37)

Kadambini comes back to the zamindar’s house; there all are afraid of Kadambini, thinking that she is a ghost. Unable to bear the incessant doubt and humiliation she screams out, “I did not die, I did not die, I tell you! How can I make you understand – I did not die! Can’t you see: I am alive?” She seized the bell-mental bowl that had been dropped on the ground and dashed it against her brow: blood gushed out from the impact, ‘see here, I am alive’” (R.T.S. - 41). But unable to convince her living status, “she threw herself into the tank in the inner courtyard of the house.... Kadambini had proved, by dying, that she had not died.”

Ratan in “The Post Master” has similarities and dissimilarities with Kadambini. The similarity is that she too has no one in the world to care for
her. She is not similar because she is young in age, tender in mind and yet is married. The Post Master was a fish out of water in the village, Ulapur.

The Post Master's salary was meagre. He had to cook for himself, and an orphaned village-girl did housework for him in return for a little food. Her name was Ratan, and she was about twelve or thirteen. It seemed unlikely that she would get married. (R.T.S. - 42)

The two characters are in need of support from each other. Mutual necessity creates conducive conditions for creeper-supporter relationship. Here the heroine of the short story appears to be tender and sensitive in mind. Day after day she grows more and more conscious of the growing intimacy between the two and Ratan develops an affectionate, emotional and indefinable feeling towards the Post Master. On the other hand the Post Master is not conscious of Ratan's transformation. But he is conscious of his family at Calcutta. "Occasionally, sitting on a low wooden office-stool in a corner of his large hut, the postmaster would speak of his family – his younger brother, mother and elder sister – all those for whom his heart ached, alone and exiled as he was" (R.T.S. - 43). He tries for transfer. When the same is rejected he decides to resign and reunite himself with his family. When the Post Master reveals the plan of his resignation to Ratan she is taken aback.

From this point the waves of emotions in the mind of Ratan raise high. She feels deserted and desolated. But Tagore strikes a balance in depicting the character of Ratan. The affirmative affiliation grown in the mind of Ratan has
made her ask a question, “Dada Baba will you take me home with you?” The reply was again a question, ‘How I do that?’ replies the Post Master. This reply keeps Ratan awake all through the night as it echo’s in her ears repeatedly.

Ratan’s human dignity increases when she refuses the recommendation of the postmaster to his successor about Ratan for her salary and shelter. But Ratan replies “No, no you mustn’t say anything to anyone - I don’t want to stay here” (R.T.S. - 46).

The day has come; the Post Master is relieved of his duties. As a token of paying back something to Ratan for her services to him, the Post Master offers money. But the decorum of the character of Ratan still increases when she refuses the money too. When the boat with the Post Master starts moving away from the village from Ratan,

The postmaster felt a huge anguish: the image of a simple young village-girl’s grief-stricken face seemed to speak a great inarticulate universal sorrow. He felt a sharp desire to go back: should he not fetch that orphaned girl, whom the world had abandoned? But the wind was filling the sails by then, the swollen river was flowing fiercely, the village had been left behind, the riverside burning-ground was in view. Detached by the current of the river, he reflected philosophically that in life there are many separations, many deaths. What point was there in going back? Who belonged to whom in the world?” (R.T.S. - 46-47)
But here in the village of Ulapur, Ratan remains optimistic; a flicker of hope is still flaming in her heart “Dadababu might return; and this was enough to tie her to the spot, prevent her from going far” (R.T.S. - 47).

One recent study identifies 219 women in Tagore’s short stories, novels, dramas and narrative poems. Significantly the study classifies them as heroines, because the male figures in this body of literature could neither merit the title “hero” nor is their maleness identified as a central motif. Woman is the more significant figure in Tagore’s fiction. Following general acceptance, we can say Tagore, as novelist is principally a social critic. His fiction primarily deals with woman as social being; what criticism he brought to Bengali social structure or social consciousness was in the context of the growth of woman as a social agent.

The institution of dowry has spoiled many lives of beautiful and young girls. Tagore could not remain indolent to such brutal happenings. He responded fiercely against the dowry institution in his short story “Profit and Loss.”

Nurupama in “Profit and Loss” reminds the reader of the statement of Thomas Hardy “Happiness is an occasional episode in general drama of pain.” Tagore makes a pictorial presentation of the wickedness of the society. The writer also raises the level of his heroines to confident, assertive and responsible women.

Tagore showcases the content of a short story through its title. Profit and Loss involves business – a different kind of business. The business involves
human beings as goods. Nirupama is the only daughter of Ramsundar Mitra. Nirupama means unequaled and unmatched. By giving that name to his daughter Ramsundar Mitra makes it clear that his love for his daughter is unmatched and unequaled. As long as Nirupama stays with her parents she is pleasant and comfortable.

The occasional episode of happiness in Nirupama’s life comes to an end with her marriage to a groom belonging to zamindari family. Tagore in a way assumes the role of a social reformer by touching the social evils in the society. The manner he presents the social evils in the short story is heart moving. The deep love of Ramsundar Mitra for his daughter makes him search for a grand alliance. In the process he finds the son of Raybahadur, a noble family for his daughter. Beyond his capacity Ramsundar Mitra agrees to pay a dowry of Rs.10,000/- in addition to many other valuable gifts. Tagore vividly presents the draconian clutches of the social evil the dowry system. “Even after pawning, selling, and using every method he could, he still owed 6,000 to 7,000 rupees; and the day of the wedding was drawing near” (R.T.S. - 48).

The first victim of the dowry system is the father of a girl child. The next victim is the girl herself. Paradoxically the next victim becomes the direct sufferer of the social evil, undergoing trials and tribulations everyday at the hands of her in-laws. The ultimate outcome is the death of the girl.

When Ramsundar Mitra is unable to pay the total amount Ray Bahadur refuses to celebrate the marriage. Ramsundar Mitra literary prays to the zamindar. Tagore becomes prophetic here. The western educated son of the
zamindar raises his voice and says, "This, haggling and bartering means nothing to me. I came here to marry, and marry I shall" (R.T.S. - 49). Tagore foretells the voice of the society too:

'You see, sir, how young men behave these days.' said his father to everyone he turned to. 'It's because they have no training in morality or the Shastras.' said some of the oldest there. The Raybahadur sat despondent at seeing the poisonous fruits of modern education in his own son. (R.T.S. - 49)

From now onwards Nirupama becomes the focal point of the story. She is ill treated in her in-law's house. Her husband is away from home as a magistrate. Her mother-in-law leads the attack against her every day. Her father-in-law is a mute spectator of the persecution. The servants act as the aids of the mistress of the house. Nirupama's transformation begins from the day one onwards. Her father frequently visits her house. But he too is ill-treated. When Ramsundar Mitra requests Ray Bahadur to send his daughter along with him, the permission is denied. The irony is that Nirupama is the daughter of Ramsundar Mitra; he has every moral right and responsibility towards his daughter. But the society makes these rights and responsibilities irrelevant the moment the girl is married. The parents of the girl act at the mercy of the in-laws. Perhaps Tagore wants to demolish the crooked structure of mental bastions. If the crooked structure of mental bastions is to be demolished many 'samidhas' are to be burnt in the penance of this demolition.
On his every visit Ramsundar Mitra is demanded the ‘owing dowry’ by the Raybahadur family. Ultimately Ramsundar Mitra gets ready to pay the dowry by selling his house and comes to Nirupama’s house with money. By this time in the continuing transformation Nirupama grows stronger in mind and advises her father against paying the money at the cost of the lives of the father’s family. This conversation is carried to her mother-in-law. From the next day onwards the persecution takes more serious turn and the result is Nirupama dies of hunger and ill-health.

She now fell seriously ill. But this was not wholly her mother-in-law’s fault. She herself had neglected her health dreadfully. On chilly autumn nights she lay with her head near the open door, and she wore no extra clothes during the winter. She ate irregularly. The servants would sometimes forget to bring her any food: she would not then say anything to remind them. She was forming a fixed belief that she was herself a servant in the household, dependent on the favours of her master and mistress. Finally Nirupama died of hunger and torture. (R.T.S. - 53)

Finally she dies.

The Raybahadur zamindar family performs the funeral rites of Nirupama in a grand manner. The expenses of the rites might have crossed the amount that was due to the Raybahadur family by Nirupama’s family. Tagore ends the story on a profit and loss note. “Mean while a letter from the Deputy Magistrate arrived: ‘I have made all necessary arrangements here, so please
send my wife to me quickly.' The Raybahadur wife replied, ‘Dear son, we have secured another girl for you, so please take leave soon and come home.’ This time the dowry was 20,000 rupees, cash down (R.T.S. - 53).

Thus, the women of Tagore are the representatives of the whole Diasporas of Indian woman of medieval period up to twentieth century. “The birth of a girl child is unwelcome, her marriage a burden and her widowhood inauspicious. Attempts to kill girl infants at birth were not unusual.” Here special mention should be made about the socio-cultural conditions that have produced such women like Kadambini and Mahamaya, Anne Beasant of Ireland, born in the nineteenth century and Gurjada Apparao’s Buchamma of India are the products of their respective socio-cultural conditions. Hence, here it is relevant to study the socio-cultural conditions that moulded the lives of the women in Tagore’s short stories.

Rabindranath Tagore’s birth and brought up have made him look at the Indian society and understand it closely. The multifaceted genius has viewed society from different angles and responded in a fitting manner through his writings. His lifetime has coincided with the important happenings in the Indian history as well as the world history.

In India, the traditional monarchy was under transition. The country was under alien rule. The age old systems and traditions were under transition due to either the intervention of the British or the reformist orientation of the western educated Indians or the need for integrating all the Indians into one force to fight against the British.
At the international level during his lifetime, Russian Revolution took place, two world wars were fought. The world war divided the world into two blocks. The great Indian National Movement in non-violent method of which Tagore himself was part and parcel took place. Having been witness to all these phenomenal events, Tagore had a very deep and wide understanding of the society, its structure and its impact on human beings.

An organic and holistic conception of human development provides the context in which Tagore articulates the feminine principle. Throughout Tagore's creative work, the feminine images a principle of vitality and integration, this seeks wholeness but, in fact, achieves it in an incomplete manner. The human person experiences himself/herself as ultimately unfinished. "As Tagore moves from fiction to poetry or from poetry to painting, the feminine principle is expressed in radically diverse images both the order of relationship and the order of imagination."\(^7\)

Tagore may have constructed a fine plot for his short story. But his aim was to show how the evil institution of dowry is spoiling the beautiful lives of many a young girl. The personal life of Nirupama and many such girls is clean before they get married; their life is full of happiness and entertainment. But the moment they get married the demon of dowry enters their lives. It is heinous, that women are killed for money. Those women are embodiment of sacrifice and without them the creation cannot be continued. But the society by establishing the evil institution of dowry is calculating the profit and loss with
the lives of women. Thus, Nirupama stands as a victim of social conditioning of dowry system.

Kusum, another innocent and beautiful girl child is conditioned for adverse and tedious journey for the rest of her life by child marriage customs of the society. In “The River Stairs” a story of haunting beauty, the very river-stair seems to quiver with emotion as it tells the tale of Kusum, a sweet little girl, it’s never failing playmate. When her shadow fell on the water “I felt a longing to hold it fast in my stones,” says the Ghat, “such rare loveliness it had. And when her anklets clinked the weeds and ferns were delighted. As for the river there was a peculiar understanding between her heart and its tide.” She loved the water like her another self. One morning the Ghat missed the familiar touch of her feet and gathered from the talks of her friends that she was made a child-bride and led away to her father-in-law’s house. There was no Ganges there. Everything was strange there – the people, the houses, the very reed before the house.

A year after, the stair is startled by the touch of the familiar feet, but the feet are without anklets. Kusum has become a widow at the age of eight. She no more finds her old playmates, for they were brides as well now. But when she sat on the steps of the Ghat it seemed to her that the river ripples held up girlish hands and called out to her ‘kushi.’ The time rolls on. The child grows into fullness of youth and beauty, but all remains veiled in the gloom of widowhood. Then a Sanyasi comes to the Shiva’s temple nearby with a radiant face, he stirs her being with love and becomes the object of her dreams day and
night. Through him Kusum was to discern what life and death means. She goes 
everyday to touch his feet. But after some time, when he comes to know the 
secret of her heart, firmly pressing the stone surface with his right foot, he bids 
her to forget him.

“I leave here to-night and you must forget me, promise me that.”9 She promises and he goes. Last of all, we see her standing looking at the river Ganges, her only friend. “if it were not to take her in its laps now in her trouble?” ......The Ghat ends the tale... “My playmate who had played so long on my stony knees, slipped away I could not tell where.”10

In this story, Tagore reveals the heart of Kusum by slight interrogative touches which often uses to give reality to the spiritual portraits of his women. He leaves so much unsaid about Kusum’s suffering for the reader’s imagination. Indeed, Tagore is one of the few tale-tellers who can interpret women by intuitive art. So tenderly he makes us feel the pangs of Kusum’s heart that she becomes a fellow-sufferer in life. Her last act of devotion and self-sacrifice stamps the picture of a woman in love. Not a word he says about child marriage, but with what subtle touches he brings home to us its horrors! In such tales Tagore shows, as he does in his songs, his belief in the essential kinship between nature and man. The scenes of the Ghat and its neighbourhood grow intimate and real in his telling.

Tagore depicts the character of Mahamaya as if it were created to continue to undergo the hard suffering of Kusum. Like Kusum, Mahamaya also
becomes the victim of early marriage and 'sati' system, which Raja Ram Mohan Roy described as "a murder according to every Sastra."

The short story "Mahamaya" is not so much in its setting as in its conclusion. Taking us back to the time when the custom of sati, the burning of the widow on the funeral pyre of her husband, and the evils of kulinism prevailed in India. It tells us of the love between Rajib and Mahamaya, his childhood playmate. They deeply love each other, but their love has no social sanction, for Mahamaya is a Kulin's daughter while Rajib belongs to a low-caste. One day Rajib persuades her to come to a ruined temple by the river-side and tells, "Let us run away from this place and marry." When Mahamaya was just about to leave with a deep sigh, there comes her elder brother, her only guardian, and casts stern look at her. Mahamaya tells Rajib in unruffled voice "Yes, I will go to your house, Rajib, do wait for me," and silently follows her brother to home.

That very night she is married to an old dying man by her brother, the upholder of orthodoxy. The following day she, a widow, is to die on the funeral pyre of her husband. However, rain and storm come to her rescue. Escaping death, she goes to Rajib with a veil on her disfigured face. Her union with Rajib is subject to one condition, i.e. he will never lift the veil from her face. When he violates that, she leaves him without a word. "The silent anger of that unforgiving farewell left a long scar on Rajib's earthly life." With a few deft strokes, Tagore brings before us the proud, silent Mahamaya with her naturally grave looks and firm decisions. The end is in keeping with her dignity and
strong dislike for vacillation. The satire on the social evils which shatters love and destroy beauty, thus, is bitter and the pathos of the pangs of youth is deep. Maximum of life has been compressed in minimum of space. The beginning is as striking as the end. The description of the temple where they meet is very intimate. It takes us to a ruined temple on the bank of a river in Bengal.

Evil customs breed evil practices and evil practices lead to corrupt practices. This fact is substantiated in “Lapse of Judgment.” In this short story, it is presented that the by-product of evil custom is evil practice. Here Tagore shows how a callous greedy village doctor had a tender and soft corner and a heart filled with love for his only daughter Shashi. Ever since her mother’s death he resisted the temptations to remarry and was busy amassing wealth in alliance with a police-inspector, to see her happily married.

The social evils such as dowry, against woman threaten the doctor to secure a safe life for his daughter. The doctor chooses the way of amassing wealth for his daughter’s bright and secure future and he succeeds in his attempt. But unfortunately on the day of marriage his daughter Shashi dies. The doctor undergoes a shock. Now his eyes are opened. His life is screened before his eyes and he witnesses whatever he had done for his daughter’s sake. All his efforts have gone in vain. Here after the doctor treats every child as his own and every helpless father as his fellow traveller in life. Here also Tagore has a strong message to the world. The message is that, all the activities are controlled by the supreme force and human beings must behave within their limits.
References


2. Ibid.


9. Ibid., p.53.

10. Ibid., p.56.
