Chapter - 7

By Way of Summing up: Conclusions and Reflections

With this chapter, the present analytical study of Tagore’s short stories from a thematic and society’s self-perception view draws to a close. Having traversed through thirty-five stories, it remains to recapitulate briefly by way of summing up the main line of the argument developed in the previous chapters. However, it has to be stated at the outset that the present study has no claims to make either by way of new insights or startling discoveries. All that it has tried to do is to respond to Tagore’s stories as sensitively as possible and to understand his genius, achievements, and life-long literary impact, taking help from accessible relevant published or online critical commentary on his works.

The relation between literature and society is integral and eternal. But the role of History cannot be negated in the formation of a literary work. The reflexive value of literature is an important factor that helps to understand the historical significance of a literary work. The angle of vision, with which the artist undergoes, and his experiences also shape the content of his creative work. A man of genius is as much moulded by the age he lives in as he gives shape to his period and events in his works. It is important to give attention to the voices recorded by the previous writers because they provide a comprehensive perception of their age.

Roland Barthes, a French Literary Theorist and philosopher and critic (1915-1980) says that

Any text is an intertext
for the works of ‘previous and surrounding cultures’ are the constituents of a literary work. This expression does not remain mere imitative but becomes constructive as it transcends the depicted societal realities to project the future possibilities.

Tagore was a product of his social environment. As a poet, writer, a man of action and thinker, his art was conditioned by the situations of contemporary life in the society. He gave a shape to this conditioning with his reason, sensibility and psychical attitude. He articulated his responses and reactions in the creative expressions and produced an idea, image or action. He was the first Indian writer who made an honoured place of modern India on the literary map of the world by winning the prestigious Noble Prize for Literature in 1913 for his literary work, *Gitanjali*.

His international reputation largely lies for his poetry but his short stories too have brought him a considerable recognition as a world- famed Indian writer. He was a sort of path-finder or torch-bearer who brought in the varied themes, contents, forms, narrative techniques and style that opened up new possibilities for the other writers to follow them. In his fiction and short stories, he showed his forte that suited to his creative genius. The short story form, on account of its brevity and unity of effect, has served him as a powerful vehicle for conveying his insight into different facets of human experience. His multi-dimensional vision of life is discernible in the short stories in which, the significant moments of human life are depicted by telescoping man's relationship with man and with environment.

He lived in such a time when the forces of the Indian renaissance were asserting themselves in all directions. Those were of the days of binary opposition in the old traditions and the new principles, of rebellion against tradition and reaction against
modernity. His literary works are the culmination of ideas, the organic development of plot, the nicely executed characterization; all these make them as works of art. The quality of the stories depends upon his attitude of mind being progressive in his thinking as well as reactionary to the social conditions. Despite of his depiction of social injustices related to women, he presents the Indian women as self-reliant, fighting for their rights against subjugation. He shows his utmost desire for equality in society.

The thirty five stories covered in this study cover a wide spectrum of women of his contemporary period. In Tagore's hands, women are pure, complacent and meek characters who fall and fail under the heavy hand of tradition but they are very strong in their forbearance and sacrifice. Their sensibilities are thoroughly sensitizing as they strain under the triple weight of poverty, patriarchy and colonialism. The stories are sharp and satirical, and build unflinching crescendos of tragedy of womanly life. He exercises his stories on realism and naturalism both. The stories are not to be viewed only as a representation of events but as having been written with the intention to produce the aesthetic and emotional experiences. They exhibit the traditions, morals and spiritual values as well as an awareness of ‘self-expression’.

The research work has been divided into seven chapters. The first chapter is an introductory one that draws a short biographical sketch of Tagore’s life and focuses on Tagore as a social writer and a social thinker of the contemporary age, the effect of socio-political environment on his writings, change in his thinking with the changed social environment and his stories with new theoretical and critical explanations.

The second chapter discusses Tagore’s short stories as the reflections of his interest in women's emancipation and his desire to treat the women equal to men. These
stories represent female voices in the form of a progressive mix of twentieth century feminism with orthodox Indian mind set of nineteenth century. The chapter explores the different dimensions of ‘feminism’ as weaved in the structures of the stories and establishes the fact that the importance of these stories is because they represent the problems of common life arising out of the complexities of man-woman relationship and, present the possible solutions.

The third chapter focuses on Tagore’s short stories through the characters’ impulses, thought-processing and behavioural actions. It touches upon the significant area- ‘psycho-analysis’ in his short stories. His stories have been discussed with the association of psychoanalysts’ theories as Freudian theories- id, ego, super ego, libido, dream etc. Other psychological and behavioural inferences as isolation, displacement, Lesbian Feminism Ideology, modern conflict theory, the object-relation theory, jealousy, greed, Hamartia etc. have been explored in the mould of the stories.

The fourth chapter attempts to prove that Tagore’s short stories play its part as a reflector and a corrector of the society and provide an insight into its aspect of substantial contribution in lessening the prevalent social evils. Focusing his stories on the issues of human beings, especially of women, he brings into public view numerous social injustices related especially to women and presents his literary works as a social document.

The fifth chapter discusses the fact that any work that is written by the writer with the best efforts to be totally impersonal, but the work always carries the writer’s thinking, ideology and impression that cannot be escaped. This chapter makes subtle speculations of the influence of Indian philosophy on Tagore’s ideas though he never claimed to have
built any philosophical system. It also examines his emphasis on humanism, ideal of spiritual harmony, interpersonal human unity, affinity with nature and self-completeness through artistic creativity that is fabricated in his short stories. As an educator, he had a definite social aim to make the society to achieve the high human values through education.

The sixth chapter concentrates on the methods of presenting the narratives. It explores the variety of themes handled, and the different techniques used by Rabindranath Tagore in his short stories. The chapter also discusses his style of writing as rewind, flashback, situational opening, dialogue-based story, letter-method, poetic expressions, use of songs indicating his poetic interest, story within story, use of nature in filling the gap of the story, use of symbols, conversational style, humorous style in between narration of a pathetic tale, use of a homodiegetic character, creation of hagiographic characters, heterodiegetic-narrator, adopting the low pitch of language while describing the sad theme, high pitch in language at the time of aggression and excitement.

The seventh chapter concludes that Tagore’s stories have a wide contemporary relevance. In a world where disparities exist among nations, conflicts arise between individual and society, environmental exploitation persists leading to insecurity, terror, international terrorism, degradation of spiritual ideology, Tagore stands as a spokesperson for the compassionate humanism and the deliverance of a message of wisdom. His romantic and philosophical ideas are meant to restore order and peace in the society by returning men back to nature and creating a world that is devoid of demarcations and where unity exists amongst diversity. His call for universal humanity
undercuts religious, social and cultural barriers by standing against colonialism, discrimination and dehumanization.

Tagore’s short stories are marked with the deep human qualities of the characters and relationships. He treats the familial and social problems and creates examples of womanhood which remain immortal in the minds of the readers. The research work investigates the male-female relationships, reveals gender-biases and presents the real picture of society as a protest against patriarchal system in Tagore's stories. It is a general thinking that woman is woman and is expected to behave as a woman in all corners of the world. Their condition is same though the degree of the standard of living is different. So, the woman becomes the victim of a male-dominated society one or the other way and it is her life which goes through a painful journey. As the society is made up of man and woman relationship, so both should be given space on equal planes. However since long, the society has been walking with the ideology of men. The sprouts of ‘feminism’ can be traced as he presents the women struggling to be treated as equal human beings. In the stories he reflects his wish for the progress of women and to build up a society of equals. Generally, Women is viewed as men’s other rather than as an independent human being with her own rights. She has remained under subjugation of the power-relations between men and women that prevailed in patriarchy. Tagore never was consented to the patriarchal ideology.

Tagore seems to support the idea that our existence on earth transcends the laws established by man and the society and therefore, a life led in a natural environment devoid of all forms of social- evils and restrictions would eventually help man in manifesting his true nature and thereby lead to the creation of a society that does not
encourage domination at any level. Nature keeps the things in balance. Anything in excess is not desirable for the betterment of the society. Everything is interrelated and that is why for better environment and culture, women must be treated as equal human beings.

Throughout these stories, Tagore's main interest in human beings and he deals with the changing colors and shapes of human life. He presents the human beings with the emotional aspect in different human relations. His stories portray the life of characters with different themes. His close affinity with men and his interest in manners and their lives enabled him to understand the innate significance of humanity in the physical world and he presents it in the excellent characterization of his short stories. All the human emotions-love, grief, anger, fear, terror and disgust have been depicted in the stories. Imbied with emotions and high quality of expression, his universal themes transcend to the regional and cultural boundaries and become the themes of humankind.

His short stories probe the philosophical and allegorical themes. Universal love, tolerance and sacrifice are the symbols of the parts of Indian philosophy that are reflected in the stories. He trusted in the highest thought of Hindu philosophy that Brahman-the blissful entity-resides in every heart that is manifested in his faith in Humanism that becomes the core of his literary creation. His humanism is centered on man but asserts the need of a harmony between man and man, man and nature and man and the universal spirit.

The locus of interest is the characterization of the stories. Tagore’s characters mainly are females and their growth of awareness leads them to self-actualization. They
have been presented through different contexts focusing on interrelation of ‘self’ and ‘society’. To quote Krishna Kripalani –

Tagore’s genius was of a different order. He achieved success not by a forced adaptation of foreign models or by ministering to popular sentiments, but by his own uniquely creative response to the impulse of the age. He made no herculean effort to pour Indian contents into western moulds, but let himself browse freely and without compulsion or inhibition on whatever suited his genius on the classical, medieval and folk tradition of his own land and on whatever foreign pasture came his way, with the result that the reflective grandeur of the Upanishads, the chaste sensuousness of Kalidasa, the lyrical abundance of Vaishnav devotion, and the rustic virility of the folk idiom are some well blended with western influences in his poems and songs, his stories and dramas, that generation of academic pundits will continue to wrangle over his specific debt to each or any of them.²

Tagore was an early environmentalist who adored the natural scenes. He established a kinship with human life and nature. Tagore’s concept of ‘romanticism’ points out a significant role of nature in human lives. He records the acknowledgement of a close connection of man with nature. He finds a similar responding function of nature with human sentiments. In his literary works, the readers find that he enjoys not only the calm and serene beauty of nature but also enjoys the beauty of nature in fury. Through this, he presents his philosophy of life that life is not easy but it is has to face many
hardships. Life gets perfected not only by greetings of joys but suffering and sorrows also. He believed that nature gives a lesson not to discriminate the human beings on the basis of rich and poor, high or low. It widens the human minds and suggests adopting a liberal attitude.

The research work not only examines the short stories on the basis of form and structure but it also explores various fields of literary criticism in them. His stories become ground to the new critical theories. The stories reflect that the writer maintains the coordination of relationship between tradition of social realism and of the postmodernist tradition of experimentation. The fragmented interior monologues (a post modernist technique) by the protagonists are an evidence of the modernist trend on the process of representation and storytelling which constitute a very significant part in the structure of the some stories. He maintains the postmodernist trait-intertextuality i.e. the displacement of origins to other texts as in the story, “The Hungry Stones”. No text makes sense without other texts. Every text is what Roland Barthes calls a new tissue of past citations.  

Postmodern endings-“open-ending conclusions” as what happened next? as in the story-Subha” which is a story of a dumb girl, Subha whose parents get her married without disclosing the bridegroom of her defect of dumbness. The story presents a very pathetic situation as after delivering their dumb girl into another’s hands in marriage, her parents return home. But in less than ten days, everyone in the in laws-house comes to know of her dumbness and soon her husband brings a second wife who can speak. The story closes at this point but at the climax, the readers have to imagine that she would have been ill-treated on account of her husband’s anger at the fraud practice on him by
her parents. In the same way, at the end of the story, “Mahamaya”, no one knows what happened of Mahamaya after leaving Rajib’s house.

As a deconstructionist analysis, the stories have been sought to understand how meaning is generated and contested from the construction. It provides a space of more than one meaning drawn by the readers and covers a wide range of comprehension of the structure of the stories.

Class struggle which is a Marxian concept based on the consciousness of human-beings’ liberty and individuality. It becomes the theme of some of his short stories. In them, the readers find that the characters not only protest against the injustice of the feudal lords but also struggle for their freedom and individuality. Tagore’s stories are reflections of his thinking for the women’s assertion for their individual existence.

The narrative skill of Tagore in his stories is remarkable, which reaches a high level. In case of his short stories, coaching psychology offered by Carl Rogers (a researcher and clinician), can be applied which refers to a focus on enhancing individual potential. It describes that the meaning is drawn as the reader handles the text itself. Postmodernists emphasize that human being’s emotions and feelings provide the writers significant representation and direction for creating a piece of literature. They also stress that to derive the different concepts of a literary text, the writer's presence is ignored.

Abraham Maslow’s term, Openness to experience is also in accordance to Tagore’s stories that is the exact perception of one’s experience in the world along with the feelings and emotions being ready to accept the reality. This term helps the readers to become close readers of the literary texts.
In the story, “The Parrot’s Training”, irony plays a significant role in constructing it as postmodern story. Tagore has immersed in the language, the texts and the material culture of the past to produce the remarkable fiction.

Tagore’s literary works forged on the contemporary set up also focus on the study of hidden psychological motivations, not only on the sequence of events. In handling the theme, he is aware of the variations in taste and the singularity of literary technique and his emphasis on analysis brings out the clarity of insight.

In India, the twentieth century was marked with the writings of the eminent writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Rabindranath Tagore. With the publication of *The Lost child and other stories* (1934) of Mulk Raj Anand in the mid-thirties of the twentieth century an era of short story in its proper form began. He gave voice to poor people’s day to day life, their complexities and conflicts. His stories became the medium to strike at the decayed and inhuman social customs of the feudal society, powerful patriarchy, child marriage, and cruelty in education. R.K.Narayan’s *Swami and His friends*” (1935) became a landmark in creating an imaginative setting of Malgudi - a village, and his insight into child psychology. Raja Rao captured mostly social and political scenes in his short stories. His well-known works are- *The Cow of the Barricades and other stories* (1947) and *Police man and the Rose* (1978). The remarkable feature of Raja Rao’s stories is use of myth.

But Rabindranath Tagore had an inner urge to write his fictional works especially on women and he captures the women’s condition and psyche very minutely, and this quality of him remains unexcelled. The oppression of the female is felt through a male's heart and, reflected in male's actions and reactions. The importance of the stories lies in
the resistance of women to patriarchal oppression through male’s perspective. Tagore was ahead of his time in his support for women’s rights and abolition of oppressive acts against women. He lived in a society where many either opposed his views or were not ready to accept change. He, being a proponent for women’s education, enlightenment and an equal status in society, with his sharp feminine perception of life successfully, gave shape to his experience into creative expressions.

The research work tries to pave a way of presenting the root issues such as social concern, culture depiction, and modern contexts of the ‘self’. A minute reading of his stories brings to light the various aspects of themes-feminine sensibility, pathos, social evils, an urgent need of progressive and broad outlook and humanism primarily but with a social motive. The stories are written with a purpose as to arouse a personal response in the mind of the readers. His short stories play its part as a reflector and a corrector of the society and provide an insight into its aspect of substantial contribution in lessening the prevalent social evils.

He firmly roots the Indian ethos and colour in the characterization and treatment of the stories as he was delighting to depict the people of Bengal through his stories but with the objective of targeting social evils like dowry, child-marriage, hard condition of widows, woman and wife in domestic field with his sharp satirical tone. He does not believe in the dictum of ‘art for art’s sake’ rather he viewed the stories as a medium to propagate values and tried to exercise a potent influence on the society endorsing the social purpose with a highly constructive outlook and using vast experience of the world. Through his fictional works, Tagore wanted to shape public opinion, personal beliefs and the society’s self-perception. He wanted these stories to be the mirror in which men
would see themselves and work to change the lives of women. He investigates deep in to the lives of Indian women and portrays them as significant figures in human life.

In his earlier period stories, he depicted women’s pathetic condition but in the later period stories, he gave voice to the women characters to protest against discrimination to find space and individuality and to express their notions on love, relationship between man and woman, marital understanding and decision making power. Tagore, as a socialist and humanist, raised many social and humanistic issues that needed a prompt change in society.

As an educator, he acts as a social reformer who advocates harmony with all that exists to be achieved through education. He is in favour of play and domestic activities as part of education during infancy, and activity in the community as a part of the educational process during childhood. He includes subsequent education as of activity-oriented education. He believes in joy and festivities, and an awareness of the child’s dignity as a component part of the educational environment. His views were linked with the development of mind and spirit and his profound understanding of India’s traditional educational experience and philosophy. In his view, the higher aim of education is the same as that of a person’s life, that is, to achieve fulfillment and completeness. In his view, education was not intellectual development alone. It should also develop a student’s aesthetic nature and creativity. The quest for knowledge and the idea of physical activity in an agreeable environment were integral parts of the educational process.

Tagore's desire for freedom gives him courage to be a creative as he believed that if people leave their animal nature, they will become more humanistic and united. So, the
freedom, humanism and unity broaden their minds and develop their creativity. This aspect gives a meaning to their life, and education is an effort to make life meaningful.

In the colonial system of education that existed at that time, the whole focus of education was on employment, to the complete neglect of the higher aims of life. He emphasized on getting the scientific knowledge, use of technology and agricultural sciences, as well as training in village crafts. He wanted the teachers to help young children to grow on their own as a gardener helps the young plants to grow. He wanted to provide such education that could change Indian people-to remain away from meaningless rituals. His interest in scientific study is reflected in the stories-“The Skeleton” and “The Laboratory”. Without it, India could not progress.

Tagore felt that it was necessary to make the new generation understand the national cultural heritage and to know its significance. Education should also bring children face to face with the cultures of other countries and persuade them to learn from them. Tagore was in favour of using the national language to provide education. He wanted that Indian universities should facilitate to educate the people even living in the country side. He presents his views on imparting the education in the story,“The Parrots Training” in an allegorical manner. He was very much concerned with the child and women’s education. He wanted men and women to be offered similar theoretical courses with separate practical courses for women, since their roles in life differed from those of men. His views to educate the women are present in the stories-Khata and “The Woman Unknown”. Tagore considered teachers to be very important in any scheme of education. He wanted teachers to stimulate the constructive doubts of the students and to prepare then with courage, enterprise thought and action. He wanted his students to think in terms
of the whole of mankind. He wanted them to become universal men and women and to overcome feelings of narrow nationalism in order that the world could live and grow in peace and fellowship. His contribution in educational field cannot be forgotten. The educational centres- ‘Santiniketan’ and ‘Visva Bharati’, established by Tagore, form the core of his ideal of education. Remembering Tagore’s contribution in educational and literary areas, Rajagopalan (2013) holds that

Rabindranath Tagore filled the whole of our horizon with his personality during his life-time and continues to do so even after his passing away.4

He goes on saying that “Judged by any standard whatsoever, Tagore’s many-sided achievements must compact recognition”. Tagore’s handling of theme is as he begins it as a simple narration of character’s life, then develops the theme with an issue on conflict and after it ends it by exploring the possibilities of transition in the existing situations. He picked up the common people as his subject-matter. His writing may be called as ‘social documents’ of immense value. The stories establish that he tried to change the old outdated ideology of the contemporary people and opened the gates of freedom in the form of individual existence for women in society.

In his book, Raga Mala, Ravi Shankar, the great musician, argues that had Rabindranath Tagore been born in the west he would now be (as) revered as Shakespeare and Gothe.5

The Raumanian poet, Alexandra Phillippide, places Tagore alongside of Goethe and other great literary figures whose work

While bearing the stamp of a national character, also had the
features of universality, including human features that are essential in all ages and places.⁶

The research comes out with the conclusion that Tagore deals with powerful emotions and radical ideas for existing social setup. He worked through his stories to change the stale, outdated state of social institutions and beliefs. They doubtlessly prove that Tagore has furnished in them the real pictures of the society of Bengal. The stories are relevant in present times as they present the contemporary situations of the nineteenth and twentieth century of Indian society but those situations still exist in the current scene of the Indian society. A transition is required in the old beliefs, hypocrisies, denial of true feelings, disharmony in society, sectarianism and the secondary status of women- an overall transformation within an individual and the society in general.

As the chief motif of literature is to reflect on the personal, societal or cultural biases, Tagore as a committed writer furnishes this conception with honesty. With a feminist approach, he lays bare the patriarchal practices in the stories and provides a wider space to explore it further. Virginia woolf, the feminist writer, writes:

> fiction is like a spider’s web; this web is not spun in mid air but is attached to life at four corners.⁷

i.e. literature does not arise in vacuum but in society. Thus, the research work is as a personal tribute to Tagore’s creative genius. It concludes that his representations act as filters through which one can interpret the traces of the past and form the notion of the socio-cultural constructs of the milieu. It recapitulates the selection of the unique themes of his stories, ever-retaining characterization in the memories of the readers and his remarkable use of methods of narration. Through his short stories, he has given his
message to mankind to be humane which he considered as the foremost condition to nurture the feelings of brotherhood and universality.

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