Chapter-4

Tagore’s Short-Stories: A Voice of Social Consciousness against Prevalent Social Evils

The beauty of Tagore’s writing lies in its simplicity. In fact it is so simple that it is complex. His short stories …are a reflection of socio-political life in colonial Bengal, the complex realities of identity, class, caste, gender and colonialism.¹

There are strong reasons why one should take up Rabindranath Tagore’s literary creation for a closer analysis in the second decade of the third millennium, when our technology is progressing with scientific advancements. We have reached from the Stone Age to nuclear age. But even after so many advancements, man as a social human being with emotions and sentiments. If anyone wants to know about a person, one must have to analyze his/her emotional aspects also. Tagore’s works depict the contemporary age of the nineteenth and mid twentieth century. The historians assess the achievements of the past and of the great artists who presented the images of the concerned periods. Tagore was one of those artists of the past time who sought to delineate the real picture of society, giving its impression with his artistic literary genius.

Any Literary work that is without a passionate concern for the society is inconsequential writing if it fails to address itself to the real issues confronting the society. Tagore had a natural inclination to identify his literary works with the socio-political challenges of the society. His works cross the limits of time and space and
provide a remarkable insight into the trials and tribulations of society and expose the social issues or problems of his time that still have its existence in our country. His short stories strike at the inequities, discrimination and prejudices that were rampant in the society. Anyone can find the expressions of social life, sympathies and humanism in them that naturally exercise positive influence on readers’ mind and attitude. With the delineation of the realistic portrait of the society, his emotive and thought-provoking literary works create great influence on human mind and rouse the feelings of enthusiasm to proceed for a progressive change. Focusing his works on the issues of human beings, especially of women, he brings out into public view numerous social injustices that related especially to women.

Looking into the history, we find that Bengal in the twentieth century was marked with an enlightened cultural, social and intellectual movement. The Bengal renaissance began with Raja Ram Mohan Ray (1772-1833) and ended with Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). During this period because of intellectual awakening, the renaissance movement questioned the existing orthodoxies particularly related to women life-marriage-conflicts, Sati Pratha, the polygamy, dowry system, the caste system, age-gap in marriage-system and traditional psychological understanding of the people. The renaissance period in Bengal after the rebellion of 1857 developed with a magnificent treasure of Bengali literature. The socio-religious movement- the ‘Brahmo Samaj’ which was developed and headed by Raja Ram Mohan Roy came into existence in this period. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshub Chandra Sen, Ishwar Chand Vidya Sagar, Bakim Chander Chatterjee were the pioneers in bringing the Bengali renaissance. Bipin Chandra Pal and M.N.Roy also contributed in Bengal renaissance. Later writers like Sharat
Chandra Chatterjee introduced the social problems and conversational forms of Bengali literature into mainstream literature. So, almost every writer was concerned with the socio-political scenario of the then era and it got reflected in their literature. The era ushered in a great revolution in thoughts, ideas and humanity. It was marked with the spirit of conflicts between the old and the new. The writers of this age left the traditional themes of gods, goddesses, kings and queens and started to write on the humble walks of life-rural and urban people and sympathized with the common man’s life. Rabindranath Tagore’s family was not behind to others. They wrote much about social problems but were particularly interested in educational reforms. They contributed to Bengali renaissance with their vast literature.

As the research work is centered on Rabindranath Tagore's short stories, the essence of this chapter remains on the probing the short stories in context of the social issues. His stories are an amalgamation of tradition and modernity. The stories, written in pre-independence period are pre-occupied with socio-political ideologies. The era was characterized by the notion of freedom struggle, oppression by the colonizers and the feelings of resistance against existing prevailing circumstances. The writers tried to define protest and dissent in specific and at individual levels. In the writings of the age, there is no extensive reference to historical events, rather the writers wrote on social themes as there was a wave of social awareness of social upliftment, united action and participation in struggle for independence.

The period was marked within a frame work of binary opposition. At this time, social upheaval and reforms, old values and traditions were being questioned. Majority of people advocated the past traditional values while others protested these regarding them
as outdated. Women had no right and permission to get education. Child-marriage system was prevalent in the society, girls’ early death because of the early marriage and conceiving, and their becoming widow at a young age was a common sight. People were against the remarriage system. Women remained behind veils; widows were separated from all equal ways of living and were forced to lead the life in isolation only with the supply of the basic facilities of life. To think of the joyful future life was a kind of sin for them. They were expected to lead the life as having no right to enjoyment. If any woman protested against these social conditions, she had to bear a lot of sufferings imposed by socially fanatics. All these prevalent conditions took its shape in the literary works of the related period.

Tagore as a writer like the two great social reformers of Bengal--- Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidhya Sagar, was equally concerned with the plightful condition of the women who were exploited by patriarchy and colonialism. He exposed the conditions of women and argued for their liberation and emancipation through his writings and hinted at the differences and vices that affected the social structure. His true presentation had been with a purpose as to awaken the social conscience of the people against the problems that misled their minds.

In his short stories, he presents the sensitive and humanized side of life but with the purpose of emancipation and awakening. At the same time, his reflection on the existing binary opposition between old and new, tradition and modernity co-relating to human life and experiences also goes with his ideology. He wants to keep the modern approach of life along with the tradition but does not want to believe on the hypocritical practices. He wants to carry on the traditions that incorporated values and morals of life,
not superstitions. He understood the need for change from age-old out-dated customs. He passed through the conflicts between the orthodox and the progressive outlook—the former aspect looking backward and demanding to explore the past and the latter forward looking, based on external agencies to work. He tries to integrate and synthesize the binary oppositional situations of the past and present in the literary works and to draw what is best of them. He observes the traditional life around him and constantly meditates on the facts and ideas that construct the society. He re-examines the processes of the past, becomes the spokesman of the new age by building up a joined past and present culture, and preparing roads for the coming generation to march ahead. He is not only a photographer of contemporary social life but presents the social reality with a superb artistic talent.

His works represent a protest against maladies and wrongs of the society, including oppression of women, caste system and communal prejudices. The lives of the oppressed and powerless, poor and landless, deprived and hopeless that are exploited by the others especially the upper caste of the society constitutes the important themes of his works. While managing the family estate at Shelaidaha (1890), he became acutely aware of the plights of the poor people of rural Bengal which is prominently reflected in his entire ‘Galpo-Guchcho’ (a collection of short stories).

In nineteenth century, India was plagued by various social evils such as sati pratha, caste system and religious superstitions etc. He describes the life as it is actually lived around him and he has consciously tried to depict it in a realistic way in his literary works. His short stories are mainly the portrayal of women’s condition and then children
and men. He highlights their struggles and sufferings. Women’s condition as depicted in the short stories can be categorized into three broad periods---

1. (From 1881-1893): In the stories of this period, he presents the Indian women especially the Bengali women who are bound with traditions and are dependent on patriarchal system of society as having no existence of their own. He mainly depicts the rural life in this period. Some of the short stories of this period are –“Khata”, “Ginni”, “Denopaona”, “Dalia”, “Living or Dead?”, “The Supreme Night”, “The Skeleton”, “Victory”, “Subha”, “The Renunciation”, and “Mahamaya” etc.


3. (From 1914-1941): In this period, his stories are suffused with the spirit of social revolution with a search for the ‘Self’. Women’s individual revolt against the conservative and outdated ethical ideology in the Indian society and especially in joint family has been described in the short stories of this period. The specific stories of this period are –“The Devotee”, “Last Night”, “The Wife’s Letter”, “Aprichita”, “Patra O Patri”, “Tapasvini”, “Poila Number”, “Laboratory”, “Rabibar” and “The Story of a Mussalmani” etc.
The later stories reflect the birth of a new woman who challenges conventions and seeks to make decisions of her life and challenges the social evils like widowhood, untouchability, the rigid caste system and patriarchy. The readers can observe the impressions of fast changing conditions of India and the progressive change in Tagore’s views about women’s condition in stories of this period.

His earlier stories are the study of the images of the women. They probe into the reasons of making of those images but in those stories, he does not give voice to them. But in his later stories, he concentrates on the ‘self’ image of the protagonists and on the circumstances behind the construction of the ‘self’ and the issues related to them. He deals with the conflict and the feeling of awareness between tradition and modernity. With the unceasing and life-long efforts to understand the Indian social life, history and culture, he weaved his ideas and gave a shape to his thoughts, imagination and visionary outlook into the structure of the short stories.

Men and women under the same circumstances do not share the same status because of the gender-bias. In society, man and woman have unequal power relations while in actual, the man and woman are complementary to one-another. The binary opposition has been dealt in Tagore’s short stories as a conflict between goodness and cruelty, depth and shallowness.

In the story, “The Conclusion”, the theme is based on the development of love after marriage. Mrinmayi, the protagonist, is an unsophisticated girl who always behaved like a tom-boy. She gets married to Apurba. Even after marriage, she retains her strong adherence to her pre-adolescent self. Her efforts to restore the past days put impediments
in her life. Once she runs away from her in-law’s house and reaches to her parental home. But at that place also, she feels unhappy. She finds that her mindset is changing. Now, she does not like to play with her old playmates. She feels depressed. Then she returns to her in-law’s house. Transformation takes place in her existence. Now, she behaves like a married woman and cares for her husband. The story explores the tension in the inner realm of the girl where she finds herself tussling with the changing situation. The social norms ultimately succeed and undermine her individual efforts. The social behaviour trespasses into her individual space and influences her behaviour. As the title, is suggestive itself, it hints at her completion process and describes how a girl as an individual undergoes the transformation because of the social interventions, she emerges as a submissive wife, the one whom society appreciates and values and accommodates. The characterization of Mrinmayi is similar to the opinion expressed by Simone De Beauvoir in her groundbreaking feminist text, _The Second Sex_ (1949), who declares, “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman” Beauvoir declares that the inequality of the sexes is not nature’s design, but a result of the various social forces created by patriarchy. The girls had to bear restrictions after marriage, has been shown in this story, that after marriage,-

She(Mrinmayi) was warned that love of play, quickness of movement, loudness of laughter, companionship of boys and disregard of good manners in eating would not be tolerated in her husband’s house. They were completely successful in proving the terrible cramped constraint of married life.
Tagore represents strong reaction against the tyranny of custom and tradition. He wants to set free the human soul from the restraints of convention and lift it to a higher level.

The father frowns and raises his brows in case the married daughter dares return to her parental house having quarrelled or divorced her husband. A married woman is thus supposed to stay in house of her husband till her death.3

In “The Wife’s Letter”, the plot revolves around a married, woman, Mrinal, who belongs to an upper-caste patriarchal zamindar household. After her marriage, she is mocked for her rustic nature. However, her affinal family is highly aware of her sharp brains. As Mrinal goes on to describe the mundane nature of her daily lifestyle, a fragmentation in the story line is added by the appearance of Bindu. Bindu comes to stay with her sister as she has no one in the family to live with. Troubles start appearing here as well when Mrinal grows fond of Bindu and starts fighting for her with the rest of the family. Bindu is however soon married off to another household to a mentally-challenged man. Terrified of her husband and mother-in-law, Bindu runs away from her in-laws household within three days of the wedding and comes back to Mrinal. However, Bindu has to succumb to patriarchal norms and go back to her husband. Mrinal’s desperate attempt to rescue Bindu through her brother also fails, when her brother comes back with the news of Bindu’s suicide, she losing all faith in the institution of the family, leaves her husband and her family for Puri, a religious place, to find solace and the real meaning of life.
In these two stories—“The Conclusion” and “The Wife’s Letter”, Tagore deals with the female’s life differently. In the former story, the female protagonist submits to the married life while in the latter, she leaves the family-duties and frees herself from the ties of marriage to search the true purpose of life. Homi Bhabha, an important figure in contemporary post-colonial studies, reflects on Interrogating Identity that

the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre

given identity it is always the production of an image of

identity as and, the transformation of a subject in assuming that

image.⁴

This thought has been presented in the story, “The Wife’s Letter” in which Mrinal with whom, Tagore presents a psychological aspect of the women’s plight in the country, illustrates it by way of a letter as his mouthpiece. With utter clarity and simplicity in the use of words that remain evident in the narration, Tagore’s pathos pours out defiance into the whole narrative that ensues from a rebellious heart after suffering the troubles and restrictions of in-laws. Mrinal takes a bold step and decides to leave the home and go to some other place. The story presents the similarity to the thoughts of the feminist writer, Simone De Beauvoir who viewed that marriage subjugates and enslaves woman. The story shows that the marriage leads the central character’s life as has been described by De Beauvoir to

aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently

toward death without questioning its purpose.⁵

Women pay for their happiness at the cost of their freedom. De Beauvoir emphasized that such a sacrifice on the part of a woman is too high for anyone since
the kind of self-contentment and security that marriage offers woman drains her soul of its capacity for greatness:

She shuts behind her the doors of her new home. When she was a girl; the whole countryside was her homeland; the forests were hers.

Now she is confined to a restricted space.

Through Mrinal’s narration of her lifestyle, the readers come to know about customs that existed and hindered the progress of the society. When Mrinal is being seen for marriage, her parents are both sitting in anxiety waiting for the approval of the groom’s uncle. A woman’s beauty is a criterion which is primary for being valued for marriage deal. A woman who is beautiful will not have a dearth of men seeking her hand in marriage. This redundant thought on beauty still takes its place in the minds of the society and presently commercialization of beauty has made it possible for women to achieve the society’s standards of the beauty, so as to improve their marriage probability. When Mrinal’s husband asks her why she keeps roaming around the entire day, she replies that she rests during the afternoon and reads. Her husband then asks her the reason to read.

What will come out of your reading books? Will you get titles like Raichand and Premchand?

Mrinal painfully explains how she is bound by her beauty and no one gave any importance to her intelligence. Tagore beautifully expresses this thought through the concerns which Mrinal’s mother has for her daughter. Mrinal narrates that her mother always used to worry about her intelligence. She thought that it was a curse for her.
Women were viewed as *objects* which were to be owned and patronized by men. Women who were capable of thinking were thought dangerous and hence had to face resistance.

The person who has to follow restrictions, shouldn’t want to follow her brains, then she’d have to face resistance.⁸

The thought that women might actually possess the ability to rationalize and participate in activities other than household boundary was completely alien to the society at that point of time. Hence a woman having too much intelligence was not a boon but a curse. The radicalism in allowing the narrative to be taken over by Mrinal allows free access to the sensibility of the woman, an experiment that scathingly attacked in contemporary society. The short stories acknowledge the desire and the urgency to allow the contemporary women to find a space of their own.

Celebration of femininity by the practical culture is actually a subjugation of female autonomy. In order to destroy the supremacy of patriarchal culture, human beings should be identified as male and female based on their sex and not as men and women. ‘Woman’ connotes the quality of woman, attributed by the society to a female. She should be docile, obedient, patient and servile in her behaviour towards others. The moment a woman does something different from this conceived periphery; the society would call her either a bad woman or a lunatic. In Indian context, Mira Bai also adopted the path of her choice and left the palatial life and involved in bhakti but was defamed by society.

The prevalent child marriage system increased the number of widows. The long age gap in husband and wife also increased the possibility of wife’s widowhood. In the
story “Once There Was a King”, when the king went away into the forest to practice austerity in order to get a son, he left behind his queen and a daughter, after twelve years when he returns, his conversation with the queen hints at the child marriage practice:

“What else?” the queen said with a sigh.

Do you not know that twelve years have passed by?” “But why did you not give her in marriage?” asked the king.

The story also hints at “unmatched marriage”. The king decided to marry his daughter to the person who is first seen on the next morning and he sees a Brahmin's son of about seven or eight years. The king said that he would marry his daughter to him. But the boy till after four or five years did not know what his relation to her was.

In the story, “The Devotee” there is a hint of child marriage as the protagonist tells about her:

At the age of fifteen I had my child. I was so young I did not know how to take care of him. I was fond of gossip, and liked to be with my village friends for hours together. I used to get quite cross with my boy when I was compelled to stay at home and nurse him.

The girls were married at an early age almost from seven to twelve years. The reference can be traced in the story, “The Conclusion”. When Apurba comes in Mrinmayi’s house to see her for marriage, the situation is –

The little victim-the intended bride-was scrubbed and painted, beribboned and bejewelled, and brought before Apurba. She sat in a corner of the room, veiled up to her chin, with her head nearly
touching her knees, and her middle-aged maidservant at her back to encourage her when in trouble.\textsuperscript{11}

Child marriage has been traditionally prevalent in India and is still existent day. In the past, child widows were condemned to a life of great agony, shaved heads, living in isolation, and being shunned by society. Although child marriage was outlawed in 1860 yet it is a common practice till today. The \textit{Child Marriage Restraint Act}, 1929 is the relevant legislation in the country.

Due to early marriage, the girls were not able to understand their duties in in-law’s home. So, there remained a gap between husband- wife relationships. This has been depicted in the story, “Mashi”

The story, “Mashi” is attacks on early marriage. Jotin feels-

Mani, the bride of this house, the little girl, became transformed into a world, her throne on the altar of the stars at the confluence of life and death.\textsuperscript{12}

The dialogue of Mashi (maternal aunt) and Jotin in the story, “Mashi” presents the thought of a woman who after being a woman is not willing to be a woman in next birth. When Jotin wished her to be born her as a daughter to him, he says:

Mashi, the love I have got from you will last through all my births. I have filled this life with it to carry it with me. In the next birth, I am sure you will be born as my daughter, and I shall tend you with all my love. ‘What are you saying, Jotin? Do you mean to say I shall be born again as a woman? Why can’t you pray that I should come to your arms as a son?’\textsuperscript{13}
Hints of early marriage in society can also be traced in the story, “The Supreme Night” -

At this time Surabala’s father and my father laid their heads together to unite us in marriage. I had come to Calcutta at the age of fifteen; Surabala was eight years old then. I was now eighteen, and in my father’s opinion I was almost past the age of marriage.¹⁴

Many of Tagore’s stories are concerned with marital relationships and the various forms of estrangement and conflicts between husband and wife. He desires an ideal relationship in husband and wife, putting emphasis on the value of love in the relationship. He emphasizes on the equality form in the family life as the need of it can be traced in the short story, “Mashi”, in which Jotin is lying on his death-bed while his wife has gone to her parental home to join in a ceremony of her small brother’s annaprashan ceremony (a ceremony that takes place when a child is first given rice). Jotin is talking to his mashi (maternal aunt) but he is missing to his wife again and again. The story is very heart-rending. It presents the internal and external conflicts of the male character. Love-hate relationship has been weaved in it. Along with the demerits of the early marriage, the story also attacks on widowhood. After facing reality of the relationship with Mani, he pours out all his love for his Mashi. He says:-

Mashi”, the love I have got from you will last through all my births. I have filled this life with it to carry it with me. In the next birth, I am sure you will be born as my daughter, and I shall tend you with all my love.¹⁵

Widowhood was a curse for woman. Widowhood meant losing the taste for the
enjoyments of life. Jotin was worried for his wife, Mani as what would be of her after his death, at that time Mashi says to him-

Of course I know you have lost your taste for the enjoyments of life, but Mani is so young that—” “No! You mustn’t say that. If you want to leave her your property, it is all right, but as for enjoyment—” “When harm if she does enjoy herself, Mashi?” “No, no, it will be impossible. Her throat will become parched, and it will be dust and ashes to her.”¹⁶

Jotin was silent for a moment. He could not decide if it was true or not, and if it was a matter of repentance or otherwise that the world would become distasteful to Mani for want of him. The star seemed to whisper in his heart.

Through the short stories, Tagore showed the ugliness and futility of certain outworn ideas, orthodoxies and customs. Tagore, in his short stories, shows the child marriage but inwardly he constituted an argument that the purpose of marriage is to build up a sound family and to produce healthy children. He reflects his innermost and earnest desire for the harmony of conjugal life. Due to early marriage, the wife gives birth to a child at an immature age with the consequent danger of both the mother and the child being physically weak.

In the story, “Mashi”, Mashi herself is a victim of the early marriage. She has resigned to her fate of being a woman. She tells Jotin –

---- I too was young when I lost the idol of my life, only to find him in my heart for ever was that any loss, do you think? Besides, is happiness absolutely necessary?” I can’t wish that I should
come and burden your home with the misfortune of a girl-child!\textsuperscript{17}

The dialogue of Mashi (maternal aunt) with Jotin in the story “Mashi” presents the thought of a woman who after being a woman is not willing to be a woman in next birth when Jotin wished her to be born her as a daughter to him. She answers:

Do you mean to say I shall be born again as a woman? Why can’t you pray that I should come to your arms as a son?\textsuperscript{18}

In the story, the one sided love was so over powering that love and death were the only two things that filled his little world. But the story is revelatory of women’s condition both as a girl and an old woman. Tagore, though, presents a gloomy picture of women's condition in the stories but from the part of society’s treatment. Inwardly, as a writer, he maintains a positive and bright attitude for women who are none the less to anyone. His short stories canvas his awareness for the emancipation of women in the Bengal. The particular image of woman envisioned by him got reflected in his writings in the later period of life and it seems that it increasingly gave calls for liberation of the individual. He has repeatedly sent forth summons through the might of his pen to free individuals from bondages and overcoming hurdles. The women, for the first time, saw themselves reflected through a public mirror.

In “Living or Dead”, Kadambini, a widow’s non-functioning of heart- beat for short time makes her future life difficult to live. Her family members and people around her think her as a ghost. She tries to find a place of shelter but the society’s rumours about her make her helpless. In the end, she dashes a brass pot on her head. Blood rushes from her forehead. She cries-’I am living’ but no one believes. Ultimately, she jumps into the well in their home. By dying; she gave proof that she was not dead. The story
manifests a profoundly restless spirit fired by the *passional force* that originates in the mind that sees and hears and is aware of a disharmonious life, of the hurt inflicted by coercive subjugation of society and complete obliteration of self due to widowhood, needed a new repertoire of life. Kadambini had no option but death so she became a victim of the inhumanity and cruelty towards women caused by the patriarchal system. Her widowhood became a curse for her and she was treated as ‘other’. Simone De Beauvoir also states the same thought in *The Second Sex*, XVI-

thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in himself but as relative to him. She is not regarded as an autonomous being-she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the absolute-she is the other.¹⁹

She writes----

A free and autonomous being like all creatures – (a woman) finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other.²⁰

In the story, “The River-Stairs”, “Kusum had become a widow, People said that her husband had worked in some far-off place, and that she had met him only once or twice. A letter brought her the news of his death.

A widow at eight years old, she had rubbed out the wife’s red mark from her forehead, stripped off her bangles, and come back to her old home by the Ganges.²¹

As the Ganges rapidly grows to fullness with the coming of the
rains, even so did Kusum day by day grow to the fullness of beauty and youth? But her dull-coloured robe, her pensive face and quiet manners drew a veil over her youth, and hid it from men’s eyes as in a mist. Ten years slipped away, and none seemed to have noticed that Kusum had grown up.\textsuperscript{22}

In this story, Tagore has shown the silent suffering of women under the patriarchal system. A young woman prefers to end her life because her husband becomes a priest after deserting her. The husband rigidly adheres to his own principles and neglects his wife. Tagore is at his best in describing the feelings of a sexually starved young widow as in the story—“The Skeleton” and “The River Stairs”. He makes men realize that sexuality in women also should be recognized as a basic instinct equal to that of men. The characters are to be studied against the background of sexual repression inflicted on them by social restrictions due to their widowhood. They are the victims of specific hegemonistic modes through which patriarchal power operates and castrates female individuality. Tagore asserted that sexual passion of a widow is not to be abhorred. He sublimes both their passions into spiritual level and satirizes the hollowness of religion in the name of which women alone are repressed.

Tagore differentiates between tradition and humanity. Any tradition that is not for the welfare of human beings is of no use. Rather it becomes as a restriction to one’s growth. He denounces the hollowness of such traditions that repress the human beings’ individuality and force them to live an isolated life. Women were treated inhumanly that is reflected in many of his stories.
The story, “The Skeleton” expresses the yearning of a young widow woman who becomes widow even in her childhood only at eight years. After that she returns to her parents’ home. As a widow, she is prohibited to have a link with the outer world. But she develops one sided love with a doctor, her brother’s friend. But this time also, she fails to get his love as he intended to marry another girl. On his marriage night, she mixes poison in the glass of his drink. She herself dies by eating poison with the feeling of being one with him in eternity. The story attacks on social conventions that curbed the desires of females.

My husband died two months after my marriage, and my friends and relations moaned pathetically on my behalf. My husband’s father, after scrutinizing my face with great care, said to my mother-in-law: “Do you not see, she has the evil eye?”

The widows had to live an isolated life is clear from the speech of the female protagonist in the story, “The Skeleton”-

‘I had no girl-companions,’ went on the voice. ‘My only brother had made up his mind not to marry. In the zenana I was alone’.

The practice of burning widows on the funeral pyre of their husbands was abolished in 1829. Rabindranath wrote the tragic story of Mahamaya in 1893 against the background of this horrible practice. The story, “Mahamaya” attacks on Sati pratha and Jamindari system both. It takes the readers back to the early nineteenth century when ‘Sati’, the burning of the widow on the funeral pyre of her husband, was commonly practised, when the evils of Kulinism were rampant. The story informs the readers of the
love of Rajib and Mahamaya against the social sanction and their meetings by stealth. Their passionate feelings were shattered by the elder brother of Mahamaya, a representative of orthodoxy. When she escapes from the immolation pyre, she turns to Rajib. She puts a condition that she will live with him but she will not remove her veil. But a time comes when this condition is violated and Rajib sees her burnt face, she does not hesitate to leave his house and goes out into the wide unknown world to tread her lonely path.

The story, *Punishment* depicts how males use woman for their selfishness as Chandora has to take the blame of killing her sister-in-law which actually she has not done. Tagore depicts the intense and dejected feelings of Chandora. When her husband was called to the court, she turned away and replied to the questions covering her face with her hands. Her answer to the judge’s question whether her husband did not love her was ironic. She replied that he loved her like crazy. In the jail, just before the hanging when the civil surgeon asked her whether she desires to see anyone, she answered that she would like to see her mother. The doctor then asked her whether he should call her husband since he wanted to meet her. Her reply was ‘Not him’, with an emphasis on the word ‘him’. This is her self-assertion and self-respect. Chandora is Tagore’s ‘new woman’ who resists patriarchal supremacy. Chandora suffers for the actions of superior considered males and accepts death ultimately. These stories prove to Kate Millett statement in her study of *Sexual Politics* that status is a “political component” and in that “a pervasive assent to the prejudice of male superiority guarantees superior status in the male, inferior in the female”.

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Whereas temperament is the attribute natural (not only psychologically but also emotionally and culturally) in male and female polarizing each other sharply. And all positive attributes go in favour of male and all negative ones are politically made as part of female nature. Millett further writes:

…temperament, involves the formation of human personality along stereotyped lines of sex category (‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’), based on the needs and values of the dominant group and dictated by what its members cherish in themselves and find convenient in subordinates: aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy in the male; passivity, ignorance, docility, ‘virtue,’ and ineffectuality in the female.\(^{25}\)

The female characters in the stories of the earlier period of Tagore, leaving a few exceptions, quietly submit to the oppressions and injustices and they are treated as an object, as having no feelings in their heart and having no place in the society as has been reflected in the stories—Punishment and “Castaway”. In the story, Punishment, Chandora, doesn’t think of other way of punishing her husband who had falsely accused the murder of his elder brother’s wife to her, than courting her own death-sentence. Ramlochan, the chief of the village who visits the at the murder scene suggests that Chidam should blame on his brother-Dukhiram’ head which was an actual fact. But Chidam said that “if he loses his wife, he can get another but where will he get another brother?” These thoughts reflect that woman was considered only as an Object.

This treatment is also found in the story “Castaway” that reveals the views of people for a woman, as having no importance-
Kiran was a universal favourite with her family and neighbours, so that, when she fell seriously ill, they were all anxious. The village wiseacres thought it shameless for her husband to make so much fuss about a mere wife and even to suggest a change of air, and asked if Sharat supposed that no woman had ever been ill before, or whether he had found out that the folk of the place to which he meant to take her were immortal. Did he imagine that the writ of Fate did not run there? But Sharat and his mother turned a deaf ear to them, thinking that the little life of their darling was of greater importance than the united wisdom of a village”.26

In his later stories like “The Riddle Solved”, he deals with the theme of polygamy but with a moral teaching. It was considered fashionable to have concubines and to entertain dancing girls. Krishna Gopal Sarkar, the Zamindar of Jhinkrakotha was reputed to be a pious and charitable man and in accordance with the injunctions of the Hindu religion, he went to Varanasi to spend his last days. But the story reveals that even such a person had a son by his Moslem concubine. He turned his considerable wealth over to his son, Bipin Bihari, and spent the days of his life in prayer and voluntary simplicity. His son was a harsh landlord. He was educated and was a British in his ways. Some people had paid no rent to Bipin’s estate. They were Brahmins whom his father had supported with free rent. Bipin, however, thinks he needs that income and dislikes the likes of the Brahmins. These folks complain to Krishna Gopal, begging him to convince his son to follow old ways. Krishna refused to intervene saying that time had changed and he had to
let his son rule. However, Asimuddin was a Moslem who had the deal with Krishna, continues to fight Bipin and his new ways. He even attacks Bipin and is on trial. Krishna returns back to explain his gift so that his son will know why he so favored to Asimuddin. Bipin is finally convinced that he was also his brother and the Moslem is freed and given his land. Michael Foucault, a French philosopher speaks of three types of struggles between the subject and object:

Either against forms of domination (ethnic, social, and religious);
against forms of exploitation which separate individuals from what they produce; or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggles against subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission.27

The characterization of Sasikala in the story, “The Elder Sister” matches with this thought. In the story, Sasikala dares to protest against the intrigues of her husband to cheat her child-brother. She is always ill-treated for being caring to her small brother who has no one to live with him. Her sister is like a mother to him. She also loves him dearly, she cannot allow anyone to occupy his property, not even to her husband who tries to deceive her and snatch the property rights. She faces hard struggle but she does not resign to the circumstance. She takes the help of the magistrate for future care of the child. But after it, she dies. It is said that she died of Cholera. In this way, she was always regarded and treated as the other by her husband. The readers discover how woman “is the most creative transformative factor within social life. Her personality alters with each plot and this leads to a transformation in the social consciousness.
Sasikala is delineated as a wise and strong woman, ready to fight and even defy the social norms to protect what she upholds right and true. She even stands against her husband to save her small brother’s right of property.

Tagore shares the sad plight and social injustices suffered by women in Hindu society but as a prophet and a social reformer, he maintains a positive outlook for women as is revealed in his stories. In the mature period (1914-1941), the women in Tagore’s fiction, rely on education and assert them. Tagore was never influenced by patriarchal views. That is why he depicted his heroines as powerful and self-reliant. Tagore reveals the spirituality of the female characters. He presents them as having practice sense and self-determination. He presents the view of the progress of women in society and wants to make them free from the bondage of patriarchal system. He seems to believe in the concept of making woman free and allowing them to act according to their decisions and having equal rights and opportunities to men in society and to let them live as an independent human being. Their survival in patriarchal society is possible only after self realization of their worth and their capacity to take decision against the societal bonds.

If we take a look on the constitutional provisions, we come to know that in spite of the legal provisions, our country is ridden with age-old traditions. Still it is very difficult to make people to follow those rules. *Dowry prohibition Act*, 1961, *Widow Remarriage Act*, 1856, *Women Voting Right*, 1921, *Child Marriage Restraint*, 1929 were constituted. Despite the fact that women were granted these rights such as *Widow remarriage Act*1856, *Sati prevention Act*, 1987 (Sati Regulation,1829, Sati was first banned under Bengal) and the system of purdah was protested, yet the crux of all these acts was not visible to the Indian society at that point of time.
Tagore exposes the hollowness of the reforms and reform movements that were carried out in the nineteenth and mid twentieth century. Western-educated Indian men felt that there was a necessity to change the structure of the Indian society and especially culture, as a response to the British who had labeled Indian culture as ‘brutish’ and ‘barbaric’. The cry for women’s rights and privileges and their fight for equal treatment, equal opportunities, sexual equality and separate laws against the torture of women, which has been the hallmark of Western feminism, becomes one of the underlying tenets of feminist agenda. To quote, De Beauvoir,

It is the masculine code, it is the society developed by the males and in their interest that has established the woman’s situation in a form that is at present a source of torment for both the sexes.28

The story, *Manbhanjan* (Giribala) describes the hollowness of marriage system with extra marital relationship. Giribala’s decision to develop her ‘self” can be understood is in accordance to D.H.Lawrence’s expression-

Passional force that originates in a mind that sees and hears and is aware of a disharmonious life, of the hurt inflicted by coercive subjugation and complete obliteration of the self, needed a new change, the conventional being woefully inadequate. And through the act of performance, new hybrid identities (Past and Present) are negotiated. Through this act, a new ‘hybrid’ culture identity comes in process of formation and transformation.29

The story, ‘Aprichita’ is very close to Homi Bhabha theory that is in his *The
The new subjectivities are born, and fixed borders are ‘crossed’ imaginatively and from “in between” marginal status, the people go “beyond” the binary fixities of natives and “carve” new routes instead of lamenting over the last roots.30

Through Kalyani’s character, Tagore emphasizes the necessity of education for women. Her decision to remain a lifelong spinster is one way of solving the dowry menace. The story also hints at celibacy—a decision to remain single, this thought is prevalent in modern times when young people either do not want to take the responsibility of family life or they are much concerned for their economic career, but Tagore was so advance and far-sighted in his thinking that he gave a place to this thought in this story through Kalyani.

In the short story, “The Laboratory” (1940), a mother, Sohini, and her daughter, Nila, flout conventions and values. The promiscuous daughter never achieves her mother’s level of social consciousness which leads her to violate traditional values for science. In this respect, Tagore writes, “I have done it deliberately….the episode of bodily affairs is secondary. Nila will pass quite easily in society, but Sohini will be difficult to accept”. He delineates Sohini as a representative of ideal womanhood who withers all the superstitious inhibitions, which tie up the Indian women. This embodiment of Sohini is the little step towards tapping the rational mindset among women. Tagore might have thought that by making a widow to ridicule such hypocrisies would make a powerful impact on the other widows. Sohini reveals herself as a devoted wife, but not as exemplified in the Hindu scriptures. Tagore destabilizes the traditional purity and virtue,
assigned to a wife. Here, Sohini’s devotion towards her husband lies in her prime duty to fulfill his aim and not merely in doing ceremony.

Tagore believes in the solemnity of marriage, based on harmony and not on biased sacrifice and possession. Tagore provides such strength to the female protagonists in “The Woman Unknown”, “The Laboratory” and “The Wife’s Letter” that “their reaction to circumstances, their refusal to remain passive objects and their little rebellions against the established order are thought-provoking and paved the way to lessen the social problems and to progress”.

Miller, a psychoanalyst observes that

> When one is an object, not a subject, all of one’s own psychical and sexual impulses and interests are presumed not to exist independently.\(^{31}\)

Many problems arise due to frustration that is a psychic phenomenon. It has been reflected in the story, “The Supreme Night” that is about a school master’s love for his old playmate, who has now been married to a rich lawyer earlier he had an opportunity to marry her but he refused. Now when all ambitions are frustrated, he has a desire for her. Now there is much difference in their relationship after her marriage.

Another psychic phenomena—depression and attempt of suicide have been discussed in the stories, “Living or Dead” and “The Skeleton”, in which the widows die in absence of hope of life. In both these stories, the widows suffer because of the strict patriarchal system as they are treated as ‘others’ not only in society but even in their families and have to commit suicide out of depression The modern approach to literature
rediscover the past and reasserts the past values to break the conflict between modernity and tradition.

In Indian society, the gender-bias results in neurotic reaction that results from a compulsion to repress one’s feelings and desires because they are not in consonance with the accepted norms of society. Women are mercilessly denied opportunities for free expression of their real feelings in the tradition-bound Indian society. In this respect, they remain at great disadvantage when they are compared to men. The physiological study of this factor finds its place in many of his stories mainly in “The Skeleton” “The River Stairs”, “The Devotee”, “The Postmaster”, “The Home Coming”, “My Lord, The Baby” and “Living or Dead”.

Conflict in love and affection is a common theme of Tagore’s stories. The story, “The Postmaster” tells of individual (the small orphan girl-Ratan) who takes care of postmaster like her elder brother but when he leaves the place after resigning from job. It becomes difficult for her to live without him. With the thought and fear of society, he leaves her behind all alone. She becomes the victim of the harshness of life yet hope lingers and makes her continue to life and dream of his return back. To quote, in the last paragraph of the short story:

She was wandering about the post office in a flood of tears. It may be that she had still a lurking hope in some corner of her heart that her Dada would return, and that is why she could not tear herself away.32

Tagore’s stories exemplify the fact that he had analyzed the feelings of women and rational attitude of man as is reflected by the postmaster in the story—“The
Postmaster” and Kantichandra in the story, “The Auspicious Vision”. The pathos and the irony that he systematically uses sensitize the readers.

In the story, “The Auspicious Vision”, after the death of his wife, Kantichandra engaged to the hunting of beasts and birds. One morning, when he was sitting in his boat he saw a beautiful girl who put the two ducks into the water and watched them anxiously. He was fascinated. As he gazed, the maiden was in terror and she hurriedly took the ducks in her bosom and left the river bank. Looking around Kanti saw that one of his companions was pointing with his gun at the ducks. He at once went up to him and checked him. But his curiosity drove him to the thickest where he had seen the girl disappearing. Moving from there he reached in the yard of a well-to-do householder. The girl was sitting there he had seen that morning. There came a call of “Sudha!” from the house. She took up her ducks and ran within. In the house, Kanti found a middle-aged Brahmin, the father of Sudha, Nabin Banerjee. He saluted him. The elderman welcomed him with hospitality. After he had eaten and drunk, the Brahmin asked his introduction. Kanti gave his own name, his father’s name, and the address of his home and then said in the usual way: ‘If I could be any service, sir, I shall deem myself fortunate’. Nabin Banerjee replied that he required no service but he had only one care at that time. He wanted to marry her daughter, Sudha. But he had not been able to find a worthy bridegroom. On next day, Kanti proposed to Brahmin to marry his daughter. The Brahmin suggested him to first see and speak to Sudha. Kanti answered that he would see her after marriage, pretending as if not seen her earlier. But when after the marriage ceremony, he took off the bride’s veil; he was startled as the girl was not the same. At first, he felt angry with his father-in-law who had shown him one girl, and married him
to another. But on calm reflection, he remembered that he had not shown him any
daughter at all—that it was his own fault. He thought it best not to show his folly at that
time. He maintained his calmness. The bride, seated by his side, gave a suppressed
scream. A girl with a hare rushed hastily, brushed across her feet. Close upon it followed
the girl, he had seen before. She caught the hare into her arms, and began to caress it.
Soon Kanti learned that girl was deaf and dumb. It was by chance that she rose the other
day when the name of Sudha was called.

With a sigh of intense relief, as of escape from calamity, he looked
once more into the face of his bride. Then came the true auspicious
vision. The light from his heart and from the smokeless lamps fell
on her gracious face; and he saw it in its true radiance, knowing
that Nabin’s blessing would find fulfilment.33

It was not alone that the society was affected and suffered with social evils, but
efforts were also going on to abolish them. As Bangla Mahila Vidyalaya (Bengali Women’s College) was established in 1876 in Kolkatta by the liberal section of the Brahmo Samaj that was the first women Liberal Arts College in India. It was successor of Hindu Mahila Vidyalaya (a School of Hindu Women) established in 1873 by Annette Akroyd. Bangla Mahila Vidyalaya was merged with Bethune College on 1st April, 1878. The short run of Bangla Mahila Vidyalaya not only became a foundation of women's higher education in India but it also fostered the principles and objectives of the Brahmo Samaj.

Woman’s emancipation was a major issue of the renaissance period. The conservatives and progressives agreed on one view that female education was necessary
and women education should be given equal to men. Tagore showed his concern for the education of girls as he wrote the story, *The Exercise Book* (Khata) with the purpose of awareness in girls and shows the protest which the girls of that era had to suffer. Tagore efficiently scripted the short comings of patriarchal system and championed the cause of women education. This story attacks on the hold up of social norms in curbing the aspirations of the woman. Uma’s exercise-book, however, faces a cruel predicament. The husband becomes representative of the cruel distortion in the story. The moment she realizes that she is in an entrapped situation she seeks refuge in her khata—the reading book, only space allotted to her. Thus, she finds her own tears in Durga’s tearful complaint to her mother in the agamani song. “With the same soreness of heart, Uma’s eyes filled with tears.” This process of rediscovering herself, completely lost in the literary convention in her husband’s realm, remains incomplete. He husband, Pyarimohan interferes in Uma’s private space. Tagore writes—

    The girl held the exercise-book to her breast and looked at her husband, entreating him with her gaze ... She hurled the book down, covered her face with her hands, and fell to the floor.34

Her self-assertion fails to bear the blows of social discourage. It leaves Uma to accept repression with all her indifference. But the narrator’s final comment:

    Pyarimohan also had an exercise-book full of various subtly barbed essays, but no one was philanthropic enough to snatch his book away and destroy it.35

The comment hints at Tagore’s ruthless irony at his depiction of how the female self is curtailed by forceful interventions of patriarchy. Through writing, Uma gives the
representations of her individual selfhood but her husband wants to obstruct her every source of self-expression. Though she fails in her self-assertion and has no alternate only to bear the repression silently. But through her character, Tagore expresses his protest against such stifling attitude towards women. Uma is not an individual suffering the torture but presents the situation of women in general. The story also indicates the superstition prevailed in the contemporary society. For a Hindu wife, to use paper and pen was considered as her becoming widow soon. Pyarimohan’s objection becomes reminiscent of vehement oppositions to female education voiced by eminent newspapers like Samachar Chandrika, Sambad Prabhakar at the instigation of orthodoxy and fundamentalism. Through Uma’s character, Tagore shows the restrictions in getting education of girls but through Kalyani’s character in the story, the “The Woman Unknown”, he provides the feeling of awareness and a need of education of girls for their social progress as she determines to devote her life to girls’ education.

Tagore’s literature is associated with the society. The more the literature and the society are interlinked, the more solid foundations are possible to be laid for a sustained growth and a corrected social order. Indian society has passed through many changing phases and seen many conflicts and problems during the course of time. In Tagore’s stories, next to women, the characters that linger longest in the minds of the readers are those of children and the adolescent. Tagore was interested in educating children but he was against the prevailing cramming system of education that made the schools a boring place for them. He wanted to provide education to children in a healthy atmosphere. He presents this thought in the story, “The Parrot’s Training”, that has a symbolic theme. It opens with
Once upon a time there was a bird. It was ignorant. It sang all right, but never recited scriptures. It hopped pretty frequently, but lacked manners. Said the Raja to him: ‘ignorance is costly in the long run. For fools consume as much food as their betters, and yet give nothing in return.’ He called his nephews to his presence and told them that the bird must have a sound schooling.36

The parrot is first introduced as “illiterate” and of ‘no use’ to the society. It fell on the nephew of the king to ‘educate’ the bird. The first reason for the parrot’s illiteracy was found to be its “nest of twigs and straws” that was not capable for much education. So a golden cage was prepared for it. The People from afar came to appreciate it—“education or not, the bird got a great cage! What a lucky bird!” The cage was properly maintained and polished. Scribes and manuscripts were put into it to educate the bird. Those who were employed for the maintenance of the cage, grew rich because they got fat salary for the education of the parrot. The king came to see preparation. He felt satisfied to see the process of education. As the cage was maintained and polished regularly, people applauded the “progress”. Scribes were called for and heaps of manuscripts copied for the bird’s education. This “overflow of learning” impressed many. The king realized that there was no dearth of arrangements. The cage had no food or water. Reams of pages from hundreds of text books were thrust to the beak of the bird with tips of pens and quills. The bird not only could not sing but it could not even cry out. The bird started to die, but due to its “wild nature”, it often looked at the sun and snapped its wings. The policeman called this act as show of indiscipline of the bird. Finally, the
bird died and the news reached to the king. The king called his nephew and questioned him about it. He replied that it was dead.

So, the story reveals Tagore's sympathy, caring attitude, his deep and pure love for children. The children depicted in his stories are very handsome and innocent. They win the hearts of the readers with their childish-activities. The conflict of their innocence with the evil or cunningness of this world brings out the pathos of these stories and penetrates the readers' heart with sympathy for them but their conditions arouse the human sentiments in the physical world. These children are very often attracted by Nature, led by nature and spend most of the time in its communion. The way they respond to nature reminds the readers the children in Blake’s and Wordsworth’s poems. As they are weak, and innocent, the readers find them curbed by the cruel grown-ups. This has been reflected in the stories-- “Subha”, “The Conclusion”, “Once There Was a King” “The home coming” and “Ginni” etc.

In the story, “Subha”, Subha, a dumb girl is detached from her companion-nature. She is married with person who after marriage, knowing of her dumbness, marries again. In the story-“The Conclusion”, Mrinmayi, a playmate to nature, submits to married life. The story--“Once There Was a King” expresses the innocent life of a boy who is married to a princess but he does not understand his relationship with her. In the story, “The Home Coming”, a naughty boy is sent to his maternal uncle to study in Calcutta but he dies there because of home sickness and mistreatment of his aunt. The story, Ginni is a thought-provoking story that hints at the torture inflicted on children by society. In it, Ashu, a boy becomes victim of an insensitive teacher, Shibnath who has a bad habit of changing the students name in a funny way, that is frustrating and hurtful to the
concerned student but entertaining to his fellow mates. Ashu because of his shy nature is called ‘Ginni’ (literal meaning- daughter-in-law or house-wife). It becomes humiliating for docile Ashu. The story highlights the problem of misbehave with small children that makes its deep impression on their minds.

*Denopaona* (Debits & Credits) is the story of Nirupama who died at a small age in the hateful practice of dowry. It attacks on the evil of dowry system. In it, the bride is given sufferings and humiliation for not bringing a full amount of dowry. But her funeral rites are performed with great pomp and show. The husband receives news about proposal for new marriage, with more dowry, now this time cash also. “Aprichita” story also proceeds with the theme of dowry.

Tagore explicates his feminist consciousness and does not treat widows as a curse in the society. He creates a space, even for a degraded woman to look beyond the ordinary households. Tagore allows them not only to participate in the freedom struggle but paves a way towards scientific temperament to aspire beyond the ordinary restrictions as has been shown in the story, “The Laboratory”.

Tagore a true reformist believed that the gender inequality prevalent in the society can be eradicated only when the women are able to confront their fears and insecurities, and thus they can be able to create new and strong identities of their own. As the Feminist Betty Friedan has observed in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) that the impulse for freedom must come from each individual woman who must find her own answers and her own experiences and strategies for liberation. As a true feminist, Tagore is very much concerned about the denial of the basic amenities for the lives of women. In making a female to voice against the degraded status of women and patriarchal oppression, he
makes clear call to all the womenfolk to realize their status of subordination and to fight for their rights.

He brings in all the pathos of women who suffer in the high caste system. During his days, though born into the higher caste, the status of women was no better when compared to the lower caste women. Suffering was even worse when the basic requirements were not allowed to them. The men’s room was well furnished whereas the inner quarters of women were devoid of ventilation, with stained floors and walls. As women of lowest self-esteem, they were unable to raise their voice against this inhuman treatment dealt with them. The short story, "The Renunciation" is based on the issue of discrimination in society that has its roots in traditional social connections. In ancient India, the human beings were divided as Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. In the Indian ancient book Manu Smriti, it is written –“Chandals and untouchables should live outside the village, they should use earthen pots instead of utensils, should have dogs and donkeys as their property and should put on the clothes taken off from the dead bodies.” Tagore’s view on the discrimination in society based on the caste is revealed in the short story where he uses Hemanta as his mouthpiece to express his revolt against such social issue. More important, his unmistakable humanism stands out in presenting Hemanta’s compassion to his wife along with the triumph of love over social inequality and human idiosyncrasies. Evidently shown in this story is Tagore’s ability to enter into the human hearts both of his characters and his readers. He attacks on casteism but with full of feelings of devotion in marital life. Hemanta becomes the representative of the progressive section of the intelligentsia, who ceaselessly struggle against feudal backwardness and colonial oppression. Harihar, Hemanta’s father, is a man belonging to
the older generation and is a supporter of the customs of feudal patriarchal society. He has been the head of his community and many have been tortured by him. Peari Sankar had been one of his victims and he decides to take revenge on Harihar. Accordingly, he uses the custom of prohibition of inter-caste marriage and encourages Hemanta to marry Kusum, a girl of lower caste. The caste of Kusum was cleverly concealed by Peari Sankar. Unaware of Peari Sankar’s plans, Hemanta falls in love with Kusum and marries her. Even though, Kusum has estimated the plans of Peari Sankar but she does not disclose her true caste because of the fear that she will lose the love of Hemanta for this reason. After his marriage, when he comes to know of her wife’s caste, he calls Peari Sankar and annoys at him: “Hemanta, flaring up like a big fire, said in a trembling voice:

You have defiled our caste. You have brought destruction upon us. And you will have to pay for it.” He could say no more; he felt choked.37

Peari Sankar, then, spreads the news of Hemanta’s marriage with a low caste girl. When Harihar knows this, he orders his son to send Kusum out of the house. The order of the head of the family is considered undeniable in patriarchal Hindu family. It is a difficult situation for Hemanta to leave his wife with who he dreams to live a happy life. If he refuses to obey his father, he will become an outcast; he will lose his father’s blessing and consequently the inheritance; and that he will have to face a difficult and hard struggle with society where cruel and unjust customs exist. Unlike other weak intellectuals, Hemanta chooses the difficult path. His words at the end of the story, ‘I don’t care for caste,’ give a message of revival in new generation of India, his decision echoes a voice of protest against feudal system and colonial oppression. Hemanta’s
announcement was very daring as he challenged the age-old caste system, which had become an instrument of feudal oppression. Tagore’s revolting attitude against the caste-system has been shown through Hemanta. He knew that his firm decision would be fatal for him. He would be outlawed from his society. He would lose his father’s property. Having no property of his own, Hemanta would have to work hard to meet his family expense. He could foresee all these dangers; yet he is not willing to send out the girl who loves him deeply. The story, “Cloud and Sun”, as the title is suggestive of rise and fall in the circumstances of life in which Giribala, a small girl takes lessons from Shashibushan Life went on with the passing of time, he sees her as a widow, clothed in white garments, without a single ornament on her person, pale and broken in health- with her eyes full of sweet sympathy; and tears coming down her cheeks. Everything changes with the passage of time. The happy life, small joys, the circumscribed peace that exist as in a land of desire and shadowy imagination, everything alters like shadow and sun. But the story, as well as the description of changes of time gives reflection of a soft heart of a woman and her forbearance power who agrees to patriarchal norms without hesitation and accepts every situation as being fated for her. In the story-

that secluded life in a village corner, that circumscribed peace, those small joys, the face of that little girl-everything seemed to exist in a land of desire and shadowy imagination-in a heaven outside time and space and beyond his grasp. Giribala standing and silently waiting. As soon as he looked up, Giribala, clad all in white in widow’s garb, without a single
ornament on her person, came and knelt before him, and took the
dust on his feet.  

The story also brought politics of the time in a clear and straightforward manner. It reflects the miserable treatment of the alien administration, the tortures and other injustices done by the owners or their managers to the people, lack of justice in the verdict of the judges, oppressions on the poor and lower class people inflicted on by the servants of the British in the colonial rule. The protagonist of the story, Sashi Bhushan, restrained and unexpressive by nature, while protesting against such abuses and wrongs, turned into a political character contending against all these. His somewhat slow and leisurely life became meaningless by political blows and resultant shocks. The story depicts the misrule of the British, the unholy relationship between the rulers and their employees, the administrator and rent collector of the zamindars, the undue pride of the English judge, the enmity of the native employees of the British to our countrymen, the weaknesses of the tortured people and so on. This story is a concrete proof to show how the content of this story and such others, are responsible directly or indirectly for the growth of political consciousness in the minds of the middle class. Tagore was gradually growing impatient about the unjust and shocking behaviour of the English rulers. But Rabindranath was more distressed at the callousness of the Indian who did not know how to protest against such oppressions. What appeared to Tagore more ridiculous was the conduct of some men who silently enjoyed these when others were humiliated. Rabindranath wanted to change in the inhuman social practice of untouchability cast different and dowry etc. therefore, the stories mentioned above, produce an awakening and protest against the inhuman and unequal behaviour. He tries to fight against social,
political and religious injustices and exposes the hypocrisy prevalent in the society at various levels. These stories prove that Rabindranath was much affected by the dehumanized society, failure of legal system and oppression on low caste people.

A sign of revolt against the suspicious husband is noticeable in Gauri of the story entitled “The Saved”. The story is about husband-wife relationship, their marital dispute, husband’s suspicion on wife, her becoming widow and then Sati. In the story, Paresh was terribly jealous of everything his wife (Gauri) did and of everyone she saw. She goes often to a new holy monk in the area and her husband is extremely jealous of him and he locks her up. In her innocence and dedication to religion, she begs the holy Guru to intervene for her. However, the guru falls in love with her and writes a secret letter with a promise to help her that he will help. Paresh finds the letter and commits suicide. The woman understands the guru’s betrayal with her and she also commits suicide next to her husband. Other’s take this as a statement of her love for her husband. In the story, she sacrifices her life by becoming Sati, in spite of her husband’s suspicious nature. She proves her loyalty for her husband. The story also attacks on the superstitious gurus who preach of holy deeds but are caught in mean desires and thus, lower their status of being gurus. The end of the story shows Tagore’s great respect for women’s high moral-life.

When Gauri after becoming widow

Caught sight from the window of her Guru stealing like a thief to the side of the pool, she lowered her eyes as at a lightning flash.

And in that flash she saw clearly what a fall his had been. The Guru called: ‘Gouri’ ‘I am coming,’ she replied.

When Paresh’s friends heard of his death and came to assist in the
last rites, they found the dead body of Gouri lying beside that of her husband. She had poisoned herself. All were lost in admiration of the wifely loyalty she had shown in her sati, a loyalty rare indeed in these degenerate days.40

To fight for the dignity and true emancipation of woman is the most difficult task especially because it involves values and attitudes that are deep rooted not only in the minds of men but in the consciousness of women also.

The hints of dowry system are found in the speech of the female protagonist in the story, “The Skeleton”, when she loved the doctor but she learnt that the doctor was going to marry someone else. Her speech is with the student-

I gradually learnt that the bride was an heiress, who would bring the doctor a large sum of money”.41

The story, ‘Subha’ attacks on polygamy system. In the story, Subha was a child of nature. As she was dumb, she could not find peace in human society. She always felt at ease with nature. But her parents married her without disclosing to her husband of her dumbness. The story attacks on the human selfishness and thinking woman only as an object to find pleasure and as having no feelings and existence of her own.

In the final passage of the story, Tagore hints at polygamy system---

In less than ten days everyone knew that the bride was dumb! At least, if any one did not, it was not her fault, for she deceived no one. Her eyes told them everything, though no one understood her. She looked on every hand; she found no speech: she missed the faces, familiar from birth, of those who had understood a dumb
girl’s language. In her silent heart there sounded an endless, voiceless weeping, which only the Searcher of Hearts could hear. Using both eyes and ears this time her lord made another careful examination, and married a second wife who could speak”.42

Tagore has an idea of widow remarriage but other character shows his delusion.

Nobin began to argue with me. ‘Permanent widowhood,’ said he, ‘has in it a sense of immense purity and peace; a calm beauty like that of the silent places of the dead shimmering in the wan light of the eleventh moon. Would not the mere possibility of remarriage destroy its divine beauty?’43

For his views of widow remarriage, Tagore, from the character Nobin, presents the society’s views about widowhood that becomes his spokesmen and says:-

It is all very well for you to idealize widowhood from your safe distance, but you should remember that within widowhood there is a sensitive human heart, throbbing with pain and desire.44

Purdah System was also in vogue. They used to go about in the stifling darkness of closed palanquins. Women in their households had to obey the strict orders of in-laws as has been reflected in the story, “The Conclusion” in which Mrinmayi’s mother-in-law is also not well disposed to her. She is not as indulgent to her pranks as her mother or her husband Apurba. She refuses to allow Mrinmoyi to go to her father who works in a remote village at a steamer station. Apurba, however, takes her to her father without the
knowledge and permission of his mother. In *Haimanti*, we find the mother-in-law taunting her daughter-in-law and refusing to allow her to accompany her father even when she was seriously ill.

The caste system in India has fragmented and segmented the Indian society. It is still a bane for Indian social life. Tagore repeatedly emphasized on the development of “creative mind” of the individual and believed that all men are the children of God. He was against the caste system. For Tagore, the caste system and its associate practice—untouchability were the darkest blot on Indian society that still exists in society after so many years of independence. It had prevented the development of a feeling of unified and homogeneous ‘idea of India’ as an organic whole. It was indeed one of the major causes of the misery, humiliation and defeat which India had suffered at various times. Tagore, in his short stories, has subtly attacked on the societal issues, as patronage in the corridors of power and influences as is evident in story, “The Supreme Night”---

I saw that my father always treated these court officers with the greatest respect. I knew from my childhood that they had to be propitiated with gifts of fish, vegetables and even money.... For gaining material success, people have more genuine faith in them than in the god.45

The story,“Vision” hints at the difference of thoughts of male and female. The female thought is-

A wife is a burden enough to a man, in all conscience, and to add to it the burden of this blindness was to make his life unbearable. I vowed that I would suffer alone, and never wrap
my husband round in the folds of my all pervading darkness.\textsuperscript{46}

And this thought is much similar to Simone de Beauvoir who had done a lot of research on women and her thesis was found in the \textit{The Second Sex}----

One of the important obstacles to a woman’s freedom is not her biology or the political or legal constraints placed upon her, or even her economic situation; rather it is the whole process by which femininity is manufactured in the society.\textsuperscript{47}

Tagore exercised a potent influence on society through his writings. He presents a true picture of Indian social scene, especially of Bengal. His literary writings have a social phenomenon. He writes with an outlook that is constructive and purposeful. He presents an awareness that was sprouting up in society along with conflicts between the old and the new generation, with the feelings of rebellion against tradition, and the reaction against modernity. The aim of his writings is to build up a reformed society, away from evils. So in a way, his attitude is expositional, persuasive and straightforward. His prose works prove him as a conscious artist with subjects of familial-social issues and incessantly trying to achieve the object. He adopts the tone of persuasion ranging from personal to the widespread area and the personal desire to social necessity. He focuses on the existential concerns of resistance and reconciliation in human relationships. An era has begun when the patriarchal culture should cease to exist for the all-round development of women. It becomes explicit that the human experience is a prominent feature in exposing the social reality. Tagore explores the social reality for upward social mobility as he was aware of the social, political, psychological, religious, moral and environmental realities of the contemporary India. In the stories, he traces the female
protagonist’s progress to independence and identity and the evolution of feminist awareness. The change in Tagore’s outlook in the direction of radicalism continued up to his end.

The feminist awareness and psychological study of women from a man-Rabindranath Tagore, is amazing. Tagore’s thoughts can be summarized in the later day feminist writer, Manju Kapoor who voices the need of women’s enlightenment in the present time while describing through her protagonist, Astha in the novel, *The Married Woman*---

A woman should be aware, self-control, strong will, self-reliant and rational, having faith in the inner strength of womanhood. A meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense.48

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