Is Women's Emancipation the Underlying Current of Tagore's English Plays?

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Abstract:

Hall (2007) opines, "One is not born a woman; one becomes one." To unmake 'the made' woman literature has to play a gargantuan role besides just mirroring the contemporary society. It has been possible from time immemorial by progressive writers. This study explored whether Tagore's plays told the sufferings of women, whether they had lead female characters who were role models for the future women. Rabindranath Tagore was a universally accepted humanitarian, is being examined here and proved that he was not just a universal poet, but also as a visionary sage who advocated gender equality along with his thoughts on humanity, universal love, work as worship, and rebirth for the entire world. The probe into Rabindranath Tagore's oeuvre made us wonder at his conception of feministic thoughts and marvel at his females playing feminist roles who were at the centre of the stage even when feminism was not at its pre-conceived stage.

Keywords: Chitrangada, feminism, gender equality, *Malini*, patriarchy

Introduction

India is not in good books in the world eyes since time immemorial. The world looks down upon India since in India women have been treated cruelly. India is notorious as far as gender issues are concerned. Sati system and dowry system are the big crater on the face of Mother India. The Manusmriti of Indian ancient script lays down the following restrictions for women:

"A female ought to be subordinate to her male parent as a child, to her spouse as a young lady, and to her own sons when her master dies; a woman should never ever be unfettered. >>>148

She ought not disassociate herself from her parents, partner, or brothers; forsaking family might render all (her own and her husband's) families despised.>>>149

She must constantly be cheery and astute in (her) household management.

Glorifying the husband as a deity: The spouse who married woman with sacred scriptures consistently gives satisfaction to his wife, in seasons and out of season, in this world then the next.>>> 5:153

Even if he is devoid of virtue, seeking gratification outside, or lacking in excellent characteristics, a devoted woman ought continuously to revere him as a god.>>>154"

The reformation by great leaders starting from Raja Ram Mohan Roy to Narendra Modi of the present world and renaissance brought forth by literary figures have brought forth oxygen cylinders to the women folk who were suffocating.

Despite the fact that the scenario of Virginia Woolf clamoring for her own room has taken a backseat to the scenario of everyone lounging in a virtual room, and due to the fact that the evolution of feminism has culminated in gender identification in the gaze of world critics, shots of violence against women and girls can even be seen in many regions of India, and conceivably in many parts of the world. Along with World literature and other regional language literature Anglo-Indian literature should also take giant strides to overcome Power/ Socio/ Economic inequality prevailing in this patriarchal society to deconstruct Hegemonic Masculinity besides being a mirror to this.

Maggie. M. (1994) quoting Einstein. lists the demands of liberal feminism. 1. Self-willed women by nature, 2. Women who could free themselves from the clutches of male dominance. In his short stories we have many great pieces of the great Scuptor Tagore. As Jayashree P.S (2021) cited Nirupama of *Profit and Loss* succumbs to death denying her father's money. She sends him back without allowing him to give the dowry, which was demanded by her in-laws. Even today we see in India 1000s of Deaths happening due to this evil practice. Nirupama fights against it and becomes a prey to it; But Nirupama's stand against dowry a hundred years before is applaudable. Parents should accept the newly awaken voice in support of marginalized gender: A Divorced daughter is better than a dead daughter." The protagonist of *Mahamaya* exemplifies the same kind of self-determination. She escapes from her husband's funeral pyre, which would have burned her alive in the name of Suttee, and proceeds to live with her lover. She abandons Rajeevlochanan once more when she discovers he isn't offering her the same amount of intimacy as previously due of the scar she has received.

Chakrabarty criticizes Tagore saying that he "did not maintain a uniformity in his feminist stance" Rabindranath, bowing to tradition, baulks at widow remarriage. In contrast Rabindranath's progressive outlook not only effects an inter-religion marital union but also projects the independent spirit of the women in Gora. Specially, Lalita is presented in the novel as a postcolonial feminist woman. Again in Chaturanga Damini's independent spirit flouts the society's age-old conventional norms though in Yogayog Rabindranath makes a sudden retreat and trails off on a traditional note on the gender

question. But Meenakshi Mukherjee asserts that "Yogayog is a powerful feminist text despite (or because of) the fact that it ends with a woman's defeat."

Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay, Pulinbehari Sen, Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay, Pranati Mukhopadhyay, and Swapan Majoomdar conducted extensive research on the bibliographical works on Tagore. However, with Tagore's English compositions, currently no specific remarkable endeavour has yet been undertaken other than Srutinath Chakraborty's Remorphing the Creations: English Plays by Tagore is a scientific quest which identified the origins of Tagore's English plays.

Tagore's female characters can be described as characters who, as a result of his unmatched realism, leave an indelible impression on the minds of readers. Tagore was incensed at the time by the patriarchal system that denied women's basic human rights. Gender is a fairly recent way of thinking about men and women. Gender studies show that patriarchy has an effects on people's lives of people who come under its net. It gives a person a degree of authority when he applies it on females. Connell (2005) created the term "hegemonic masculinity" to characterize male domination.

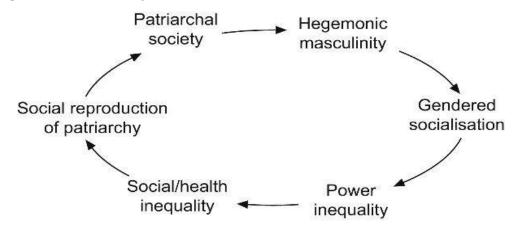


Figure 1. Representation of the perpetuation of R. W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity

As the above figure details R.W Connell's theory patriarchal Society gave birth to gender inequality in all spheres and the hegemonic masculinity has had its upper hand on women. This present research is in unique in its sense that it studies most of his English plays to explore how much Tagore contributed to the emancipation of women through his female characters in his plays to free them from the clutches of Hegemonic masculinity.

1.1 Research Objectives

This research paper aims at the following research objectives: To discuss women's roles in 13 of Tagore's plays

2. Literature Review

2.1 Understanding Gender

Gender studies, as well as feminist ideologies and behaviors, have long since influenced the construction of equality, with feminist perspectives stimulating sexual identity reflective

practices (Hester, 1990; Jahn et al., 2012). As a corollary, feminist theorists contribute a lot. De Beauvoir (2013), a French philosopher depicted womanhood as a gender in historically established existing taboos. They expose how sexist institutions' women, like others, were formed psychoanalytically. "The concept of gender is the most thriving notion in the world. It is used in a variety of ways to depict gender roles, gender disparities, and bias against women. Gender is inextricably linked to other social structures, including class, race, ethnic origin, generation, and disability" (Kumar, 2020, 2021 a; Kumar & Khalaf, 2021).

Jacquelynne S. et al (1990), examine how to discern across accuracy and perceptual bias in parents' gender role differential views of their daughter's abilities and interests, as well as the theoretical underpinnings for those outcomes. Then it presents the findings of a range of experiments that indicate that families skew their judgments of their own offspring in gender role chauvinistic tasks like basic arithmetic.

Kumar (2021 b) in his study on Mahesh Dattani's plays points out that Dattani has highlighted the notion of societal concerns such as gender inequality, pain, and despair, all of which are experienced equally by men and women. Gender discrimination, unfairness based primarily on gender, and all of these difficulties are related to the preference for male offspring in Indian households.

2.2 Emancipating 'New Woman'

The term 'The New Woman' was coined in late Victorian England and influenced and the formation of feminism as a movement. The term first debuted in Charles Reade's novel *A Woman Hater*, which paved the ground for the first time for the slow development of the concept of gender equality. "The kind of themes, topics, and treatment reminds the Victorian Era in British literature, where women started getting free recognition after rejection and criticism" (Kumar, 2020; p.25 as cited in Kumar & Khalaf, 2021). It makes a significant contribution to facilitating social transformation and challenging established social norms. The New Woman began to engage in the workforce, as well as artistic, theatrical, and literary organisations, and thus in society at large. However, in India, the movement developed out of a social reformation movement. The intelligentsia of the nineteenth century took it upon themselves to effect change. Sarojini Naidu, speaking at the 1906 Indian Social Conference, stated the following about India's social reformation movement:

"Therefore, I charge you, restore to your women their ancient rights, for, as I have said, it is we, and not you, who are the real nation builders, and without our active cooperation at all points of progress all your Congresses and Conferences are in vain. Educate your women and the nation will take care of itself, for it is as true today as it was yesterday and will be to the end of human life that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world". (Kumar, 1993; p50)

The importance of women's participation in society was also emphasised by her, particularly in the context of a country's growth and development:

"Other national questions come and go; they are result of the time changing spirit; but one question that never changed since the beginning of time itself, is the duty of womanhood, the influence of womanhood, the sanctity of womanhood, the influence of womanhood, the simple womanhood as the divinity of God upon earth, the

responsibility of womanhood in shaping the divinity into daily life". (Naidu, 2012; p 171)

Tagore has written more than 53 plays. Tagore translated eleven of his Bengali dramas into English and wrote one in English itself. *Chitra (Chitrangada), Malini (I Malini), Red Oleanders (Raktakaravi), Sacrifice (Visarjana), Sanyasi or The Ascetic (Prakritir Pratisodh), The Autumn Festival (Sarodatsav), The Car of Time (Rather Rashi), The Crown (Mukut), The King and The Queen (Raja O Rani), The Trial (Lakshmir Pariksha), The Waterfall (Muktadhara), and The King and the Rebel, which was originally written by him in English. This study probes into ten of his plays translated by him in English and three other significant Bengali plays. Chitrangada (1936) and Chandalika (1938) are two of Tagore's most famous dance-dramas.*

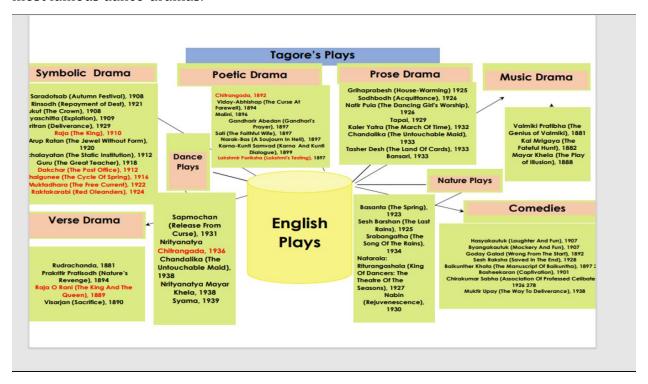


Fig.2 Tagore's Plays

Chitrangada is Tagore's succinct version of Sakuntala. Where she's the princess, warrior, who begets borrowed beauty and then renounces it. It's a tale of her salvation. Chitrangadha did not lose her spirit when Arjuna shunned her. She strives to attain what she lacked. Cupid bestows the boon on her. She demonstrates her mental power not only as a warrior, but also in her thoughts and deeds, in contrast to the meek and weak woman depictions of the time. In Dr Lal's words, "We can only imagine the aftermath that Chitrangada left, in an era when women were not even allowed to enact on stage. She promises Arjuna that if a son is born to her, "myself teach him to be a second Arjuna, and send him to you when the time comes, and then at last you will truly know me." A warrior to the core! But not only in historical character of the loveliest play, which was a lyrical feast, we find self-determination in Tagore's other women characters too.

Malini, the protagonist in Tagore's drama, resembles Buddha when she teaches and practices *Karuna*-kindness, and she resembles Christ when she asks the king to pardon even her antagonist after all of his heinous crimes are disclosed. She, like Ram, is willing for exile. Malini is the holy trinity of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. "The woman, as an enemy, is to be dreaded more than all others"- Despite the fact that Kemankar's statements condemn women, Tagore proclaims women's power. Tagore bids farewell to age-old timidity. Tagore besides being a staunch devotee of Krishna and had a strong affinity towards Buddhism creates Malini with Buddhist traits. A princess born in Royal Palace, never once looked out from her window had only heard that it was a sorrowing world, (49) Malini requests the king to banish her as "the world" needs her.

In *Tapati*, a reworked rendition of *The King and the Queen*, revolves on a king, Vikram the king is no longer anonymous—and his obsessive love for his queen, Sumitra, is at the cost of his royal duties. Sumitra moves away the leaving the palatial house as she deems it as her duty not to make him disregard his kingly duties because of his love for her. The same self - determination seen in the protagonist of *Mahamaya* is commendable. She escapes from the funeral pyre set for husband which would have burnt her alive in the name of *Suttee* and goes to live with her lover. Once again when she finds Rajeevlochanan isn't bestowing her the same amount of love as before just because of the scar she has incurred, she abandons him too. "I have realized what place women hold in a family, I am no longer in need of that". (Tagore 783, vol. vii) saying so, the intrepid woman of 'Strir Patra', Mrinal leaves her house.

Nandini, the protagonist of *Red Oleanders (Raktakaravi)*, is the feminine "Shakti" principle, both in terms of her humanity as well as with her strength. She is the embodiment of the womankind's potential and the reservoir of its wisdom. Prakriti is one of the elements of the Spiritual Energy. Tagore's memory will live on through her. For Indian women, faith and vision emerge through. Tagore I've always regarded the Indian woman's duty as one of integration. The play is based on a paradigm of ecofeminism. Ecofeminism, according to Mary.M (1997) is a feminist movement that believes there is a link between environmental exploitation and degradation and women's subordination and oppression. Men have power over both natural environment and women, precisely as he has over all other species. However, according Tagore, nature and women should be allowed to breathe freely and bloom. The city was ruled by a selfish ruler, nature was destroyed, and men were trapped in gold mines.

Nandini, the brave female figure brought from her village by the merciless King, carries with her songs of liberty and a glint of joy to reinvigorate the miners who work tirelessly in the mundane life. Kishore brings Nandini her favorite flowers on a regular basis, and the professor, who used to bury himself in "a mound of yellow pages," trace in her "the unbridled light." Everyone is startled by the light she transfers and that could pierece "through the split walls." Nandini's radiant beauty mirrors Bishu's free temperament. Even the robotic society's workers, the miners and their masters, were captivated by her ebullience in many ways. Nandini strived to liberate them, but she ought to make sacrifices in the process. Nandini, who wears red oleander blossoms, signifies mental and spiritual liberation. She is also so humanitarian that she sympathizes with the king and is willing to give him "some little joy," which drives others to be wary of her. She is alluded to be a spy, a witch, and a person with a toxic personality, despite the fact that she is the pinnacle of benevolence. The monarch who has brought her there and intends to

possess her, murders her lover, but Nandini saw to that the mine-labourers are released before she dies. Nandini is portrayed as a lightning bolt with the tremendous thunderstorm as she herself asserts that she has brought the thunder, and she will hit the gilded bastion.

The king is made to realize the blunders he has committed.

Through Nandini's persona, Tagore, a devotee of Goddess Kali, emancipates women. Tagore's attempt to attract women from the culinary realm to the court yard requires no further evidence. Nandini, possesses distinct characteristics of a unique human. She is a genuine lady who understands that riches and authority are fantasies and that the true essence of existence is love."

Sudarshan, the female lead in *The King and the Dark Chamber* attains genuine beauty as she accelerates from innocence to acceptance via experience. She realizes that inner beauty is all that matters. She craves to have a sight of the king, who warns her against it. She gets horrified at his sight and goes after Suvarna, the king's manqué. Her sufferings lead her to be the Return of the Native. The story is an analogy to one's spiritual attainment, which Tagore depicts through his Sudarshan.

Guruji further revolutionized drama stage when he came up with the play *The Dancing Girl's Worship Natir Puja*, in which female students of Shantiniketan performed gracefully on stage." It's again revolutionary when he made the female students act when he filmed it. Natirpuja is a tale of metamorphosis. An ordinary court dancer evolves as a staunch Buddhist devotee, who exercises her right to religious freedom daring King Ajata Satru's ban on the practice of Buddhism. When Buddhist monks don't revolt against the king, Pujarini, the court dancer protests against the king's command. Though she gets killed, Tagore's venture to voice the marginalized in his film venture in 1931 is commendable.

Tagore's Magnum Opus in Drama sphere, *Mukta Dhara*, condemns men for misusing modern innovative technologies in destroying Nature by retelling the story of a king who dares slavery, injustice to devotees, and indifference to the death of workers dying in his vain attempt to build a dam across Muktadhara, a waterfall, Even in this the sole cry of Amba, whose son has been taken as a slave by the king to build the dam, which stands as a blockade and as huge demon between God and the devotees resounds in our ears even after the play gets over. Though a minor character, through Amba Tagore showcases the slavery and the agony. He makes her foretell that the same king who took her son would be an obstacle for their prayers to reach God.

Sanyasi was Tagore's very significant play. It explores the tensions that exist between truth and beauty, rational and emotional, finite and infinite, denial and approval. In this drama, the protagonist is a Sanyasi who gets atonement after experiencing a great deal of agony in life. As a result, this sends an epistemological message to the readers. Sanyasi, the Ascetic, the play that explores the direct correlation between the finite and infinite tells the story of an ascetic who detached himself from the materialistic discrete world in order to enter the spiritual immeasurable realm. Sanyasi, who thinks he's better than other men since he's withdrawn himself from the world's trivialities and materialism. He declares victory over all materialists. Sanyasi's inner strife is completely addressed when his passion for a small girl teaches him that he won't find the infinite by shunning the finite.

In *Sacrifice* Aparna is the sufferer. It is a tale of her sufferings. She loses her goat and her love, Jaisingh. The vicious Raghupati has to sacrifice his son and the Queen

Gunavati sacrifices her beliefs at the self-sacrifice of JaiSingh. The Queen is also one of the characters who evolve in the process of the plot.

The English translation of the Bengali **Dakghar, The Post Office** was initially published in 1914 by W. B. Yeats' Cuala Press. It was presented in Dublin in 1913 with Patrick Pearse's play An Ri, and in Calcutta in 1918 before Gandhi and prominent leaders of the Indian National Congress. The weak and meek Amal the story revolves around dies a pre matured death before Sudha brings him the flowers. A comparison is drawn between the weak Amal and Sudha, the flower selling girl. As he fantasizes reading tales and learns, the flower girl learns via her experiences with the world. This is the type of education Tagore dreamt of. Again a girl's held high in comparison to the pathetic dreamy Amal.

Tagore penned comedies too. The pioneer venture in this genre is Goday Galad in 1892 followed by Lakshir Pariksha, written in 1897 after a span of 5 years. Hasya Kautuk which was written after 10 years in 1907 is also a comedy. All these are translated into English by Rabindranath himself later. In Tagore's Comedy: Chirakumar Sabhamay, three pairs of lovers, Srish-Nripabala, Bipin-Nirabala, and Purno-Nirmala, are driven to fall in love in a mutual way, and, as is customary in romantic comedies, love culminates with wedding bells ringing. It turns out to be a general fusion endeavor in which Tagore aspires to widen the definition of romantic comedy by incorporating satirical and farcical features. Raymond Williams (1977) highlights culture is an ever-changing one. And at the time when Tagore wrote this play the ever growing cultural norms are for the side of women too. That's why Shasibala tells Purabala that she's going to be a member of the welfare society as men as other women. To make it humorous Tagore makes her add that that's why she shifted from saree to men's robes. The series of questions to Chandrababu: Why am I not chosen to work? Is it only because I was born your niece and not your nephew that I am unable to participate in your society's development initiatives? So, why have you spent so much time educating and training me? How can you throw a stumbling hurdle in my path after your lessons have awakened my intellect and heart? Hasn't anyone ever seen a female saint? The transition from Kitchen to Drawing Room, from Use and Throw Product to Dynamic personality is portrayed.

In *Chandalika*, which is based on a legend frmo Buddhism Chandalika, from the marginalized society, when taught of equality, feels elated and purified and falls in love with the Monk and becomes a burden on him. Prakriti who refuses to offer to the thirsty monk, being ashamed of her caste later feels 'this is my new birth, in satisfying his thirst I feel baptized.' She tastes the freedom and in her ecstasy she forgets herself and medicates the monk to woo her, not to leave her. It is amusing to observe how a girl called Prakriti, which means "Nature," may become entangled in a web of class, caste, and sex differences. Only in the last episode does she comprehend her remorse for subjecting someone to pain without his will. When she finds him standing in front of her in an almost pitiful state, she apologizes and surrenders in shame, falling at his knees seeking his pardon. Prakriti comes to a realization during a fight of magical mantras and mystical force. The whole story revolves around the female protagonist's evolution. It's a feminine story indeed!

Not only in these plays but also in his other writings we see him writing for the cause of women. *Gandhari's Prayer* and *Karna and Kunti* are the portrayals of the deep bond between two pairs of mother and son from the epic, Vyasa's Mahabharata. Kunti admires Karna's bravery ignoring the fact that she faltered in her purpose. She now enters a monologue in which she proclaims her admiration for Dharma's austere righteousness.

She describes how a tiny, vulnerable baby who had been orphaned by her obtained hero's superpowers and returned to hurl weapons against his siblings. What a dreadful fate! It's quite natural much importance is given to women characters and speak of their greatness, sacrifice, selfless love. Both the Mahabharath's powerful pitiable characters who were the

subjects of the Hegemonic patriotic norms have had a tough time are given opportunities to speak of their inner selves. Thus through his writings Tagore empowered women, they progressed, freed themselves from the clutches of slavery and ignorance. His role models paved the way for women to gain confidence and evolve into what they are today.

		Protagoni	Antagoni	2nd Heroin	Independe	Decision
	Name of the Play	st	st	e	nt	Making
1	The Red Oleanders					
2	Malini					
3	Chitrangadha					
4	Sacrifice					
	The Dancing Girl's					
5	Worship					
	The King and the					
6	Dark Chamber					
	The King and the					
7	Queen					
8	Kunti and Karna					
	Chirakumar					
9	Sabhamay					
1						
0	Chandalika					

Figure 3. Women's Roles in the Plays

Out of the 13 plays studied other than Post Master, Sanyasi, the Ascetic and The Waterfall, the other ten are women-centred one. As the above figure expounds in eight out of ten of them have female protagonists. They are cleverer, smarter and wiser than the men. Portio, Bassanio's counterpart, discusses the attribute of Mercy, which brings satisfaction to both the giver and the receiver, and then protects her husband's companion from Shylock, who preys on Antonio, is an example of intelligentsia prevalent in Shakespeare's female characters. The same capabilities can be seen in many of Tagore's female protagonists.

3. Discussion

"I would have you come into the heart of the outer world and meet reality. Merely going on with your household duties, living all your life in the world of household conventions and the drudgery of household tasks ..." Niklesh's words to Ghare Baire's heroine, Bimala. "It's in my short story 'Strir Patra' that I supported the women's cause for the first time", to quote Tagore himself. (Sarkar 35 qtd.in Dasgupta 189) In Tagore's writings, women find an avenue to breathe liberation via reading and writing literature.

Feminism involves first, a protracted period of emulation of the dominating made of the dominant tradition, as well as absorption of its artistic practices and social obligations. Second, there is a phase of antagonism to these norms and ideals, as well as campaigning for underdog rights and values, besides a quest for individual freedom. Ultimately, there is a stage of consciousness, a delving within liberated from certain burden. Tagore created all these life-spans to his heroines. Aparna in Sacrifice, Chitra in Chitrangatha, Nandini and Sudha in the Post Office are vehicles for his progressive ideas, which he used to transform the patriarchal era. If at all, the women of today breathe the air of freedom, (at least some of them, though not all of them) the credit goes to the visionaries like Tagore, undoubtedly.

Sri Aurobindo's Mahasweta Devi's Mother of 1084 and Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar's and Girish Karnad's works portray crime, walking with its giant steps in Indian society and stamping the innocent marginalized women. But Rabindranath Tagore's Chitrangada, Chandalika and Natir Puja show how in ancient period too women continued their battle against all sorts of discriminations. These writers' contributions are all landmarks on the path to renaissance in the minds of countless millions, as well as for the contribution of real nurturing of mankind. Feel the suffering as a living thing, but feel for the pain of others as a human, as Leo Tolstoy states.

Rabindranath Tagore was born into a culture that valued tradition. Nonetheless, as a result of his parenting, he developed a liberal feminist worldview in himself. Not quite a 'Feminist' in the literal definition of the phrase, what he did was give many of his protagonists a commanding voice in his plays. The female is the focus of the family system. Protagonists frequently rebelled against masculinity. Women for ages constrained to a narrowness of sphere due to the male dominance but since they are endowed with Shakthi, as Homo Sapiens, they could emerge successfully against all bigger animals. In the same way, Tagore believed women also will usurp the higher rank than men. (Das 676).

4. Conclusion

To conclude, the paper humbly attempted to show that the women of Tagore household helped him construct and shape the women characters of his literature. The 'new woman' in his literature are almost the reflections of the women of Tagore household and transcends them. Furthermore, the characters depicted by him inspired the society to initiate a discourse of reformation. The characters created by Tagore not only creates the 'new woman' but also, many a time, moves beyond his era. This is probably the reason why Tagore is relevant in every walk of life, even today.

Liberal Feminism promotes men and women to get significant exposure to women's equality rights in order to reconstruct society. Women should be able to determine or control their own future. According to this view, Tagore's ladies are strong willed. Tagore's plays exhibit a strong confidence in the feminine ideals and an ongoing basis for the flow of the force of positivity in gender equality along with his optimism about life, the innate world's beauty, and humanity's enshrined link with the divine all lend to the ubiquitous sense of harmony and indomitable mood of positivity in his plays. As Tagore opined Woman's all-pervasive influence will one day bring humanity back to man's barren world. Woman will one day prove that the humble in soul, with the magic of love can be the master of Universe as even the physically meek man compared to the gargantuan animals could win over all other species. Who else would be cited an advocate of feminist writer

even at its embryonic stage. As Ruskin comments on Shakespeare's heroines we can boldly assert that Tagore created "no heroes only heroines" in the plays studied here.

5. Recommendations

Future studies go in depth into Tagore's untranslated Bengali plays. There can be comparative studies with the plays of Tagore with that of later playwrights' plays.

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