Women Empowerment as a Major Theme in the Selected Plays of
Rabindranath Tagore: A Critical Study

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Tagore: A Critical Study

Introduction:

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) was a prolific writer. He tried his hand successfully at almost all the major forms of a literature. Rabindranath Tagore wrote plays of every kind—tragic, symbolic, comic and farcical. He wrote in blank verse and rhymed couplets in his plays and prose. He wrote novels, poetry, reflective poetry, religious poetry, elegiac poetry and purely lyrical poetry. He wrote short stories too. Besides Rabindranath Tagore wrote countless essays, sermons, criticism and articles on politics and education, even on psychology and economics.

The present research work is undertaken to study women empowerment as a major theme in the plays of Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore, one of the greatest literary icons, seems to have explored every possible theme in his plays. Basically, he is poetic genius but it is found that he bore an unparalleled dramatic genius as well. He has made frequent use of myth, legend, symbols and different techniques in his plays. Rabindranath Tagore’s women characters are not less than their male counterparts. He has projected women characters in different capacities in his plays such as women as a mother, a wife, a beloved, a dancer, a sinner and life force. Tagore is a prolific dramatist who rendered some of his Bengali plays in to English. His English plays are richer than Bengali in plot and precision. His plays are various types: dance, verse, poetical, religious, political, mythical and lyrical.

Tagore’s women characters belong to different strata of the society. They are upper class, middle class women and lower class women. His female characters are more powerful than their male counterparts. He has shown the social ills of caste, unsocial ability, religious hypocrisy etc. He has borrowed stories from Mahabharata and Ramayana but he has used his own liberty to give glamour and twist to the original story in dramatization. The present research is the modest attempt to appreciate the dramaturgy of Rabindranath Tagore’s selected plays out of his vast dramatic corpus from the perspective of women empowerment.

Women Empowerment:

Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. It is often an attempt to develop confidence in the capacities of women. Empowerment is probably the totality of following capabilities:

1. Having decision-making power.
2. Having access to information and resources for taking proper decision.
3. Having a range of options from which you can make choices (not just yes/no, either/or.)
4. Ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making.
5. Having positive thinking on the ability to make change.
6. Ability to change other’s perceptions by democratic means.
7. Involving in the growth process and changes that is never ending and self-initiated.
8. Increasing one’s positive self image and overcoming stigma.

The present work is an attempt to study to women characters in the selected plays of Rabindranath Tagore from the perspective of women empowerment.

**Indian Drama In English : The Beginning**

Despite limitations Indian English dramatist dared to right plays ‘The Persecuted’ or ‘Dramatic Scene Illustrative of the Present State of Hindu Society in Calcutta’ in 1831. It is social play which presents the conflict between orthodoxy and new ideas which came from western education. It exposes the hypocrisy in Hindu Society. It is the earliest play on the east west encounter theme. It is an important theme in the entire range of Indian English literature. From technical point of view it is a crude presentation. Michael Madhusudan Dutt translated his plays ‘Rantnavali’ (1858) ‘Sermista’ (1859) and ‘It this called civilization?’ (1871), from Bengali into English. Ramkinoo Dutt wrote ‘ Manipura Tragedy’ in (1893).

Thus, Indian English drama made a humble beginning in nineteenth century. Indian English drama had no tradition.

**Tagore’s contribution as a Dramatist to the Indian writing in English:**

The dramatic art of Rabindranath Tagore is both simple and complex. It is simple in style and expression. It is complex in the variety of forms and in the depth of meaning. Tagore is lyrical poet. His dramas can be called lyrical dramas or dramatic lyrics. His works reflects his personalities. His works deal with the experience of his own inner and outer life. He writes on the mental states and moods of men, the progress of human thought and aspiration. We find dramatic talents of Rabindranath Tagore in his plays.
Rabindranath Tagore’s Plays:

Rabindranath Tagore’s dramas fall roughly into two classes. The earlier non-symbolic dramas such as ‘sacrifice’ and ‘The King and the Queen’. Later symbolic dramas such as ‘The Post office’, ‘The Cycle of Spring’, ‘Red Oleanders’. Some of non-symbolic plays are ‘Karna and Kunti’ or ‘ Kacha and Devyani’ are one seen plays. ‘Malini and the Sanyasi’ are slightly larger may be regarded from the technical point of view as plays of preparation or apprenticeship for major plays like ‘ Sacrifice ‘. They may also be considered as a sort of hyphen between his symbolic non-symbolic dramas. The dramatist has emphasized some particular aspects of character. His spiritual ideas are projected through his characters.

An Overview of Rabindranath Tagore’s Plays :

The following is a brief overview of Rabindranath Tagore’s Plays bringing out the major themes considered in them.

Chitra:

Chitra is based on the episode of the Indian epic ‘Mahabharata’, Chitra is a warrior girl fall in love with Arjuna, who is an ascetic. He rejects her on the basis of her plainness. She makes penance and gains a perfect beauty from Madna, the God of beauty. Now she is a woman of extra-ordinary beauty. She resolves to win Arjuna’s love using unfair wins. Arjuna forgetting his vow of celibacy surrenders to Chitra’s love.

Gandhari Prayer :

This play depicts the relations between a mother and her son. Gandhari was the great and large-hearted mother of Kaurava’s including the eldest of them namely Duryodhana. Gandhari and her husband Dhritrashtra know that their son Duryodhana is wrong. Father arrives at some sort of compromise, the mother does not compromise. Gandhari is a great woman having a clear vision of the doom to come. She speaks as the mother of sorrows.

Karna nd Kunti :

Here Tagore has depicted the relation between a mother and ill-fated son. Kunti is the mother of Pandavas and son here is ‘Karna’. She has caste him away on the water. Kunti too is the mother of sorrows because she suffers a lot. The mother and the son try to save whatever they can from general destruction, through it is too late. He expresses his feelings and dies.
Kacha and Devyani:

This play is only short dialogues, full of vitality. Young Kacha visits the earth from paradise with the mission of learning the secret of immortality from the sage who taught the Titans. When his task was accomplished, he returned to the paradise to teach his knowledge to the Gods. Devyani was the daughter of the sage. While engaged in study awakened love in her. She would be able to hold him, back from going to paradise. Kacha is certainly torn with a conflict between his claims of love and duty which he is able to overcome successfully. His mission for which he was sent by the Gods on Earth eventually come out triumphant. Devyani, regardless of the mission which has no meaning for her beside the claim of her own love desire that of Kacha to stay with her. She feels it strongly and expresses it eloquently although in so doing she only beats about the bush, as the delicacy possessed by women dictates her to keep her secret to herself and pride of a women in tails upon her to be at first wooed by her lover before she is led to woo him.

Somaka and Ritvik:

Somaka and Ritvik are not very significant from the dramatic point of view. It presents a picture of a hell which receives men who have followed the letter of religion rather than the spirit and who out of their pride sacrifice the emotion of love and glorify in human piety. In this help live only shades who have no soul, whose life is nearly empty. Who do not exult in the bliss of heaven and are not there to share of earth’s joy and sorrows. The air in this region is suffocation to the eyes and life is imparted into the torpor of this place by bringing life’s fire into by the recital of crime. The picture of hell so presented, contains excellent symbolic suggestiveness.

Chandalika:

The protagonist of the play is a chandal girl named Prakriti. She falls in love with Buddhist monk named Ananda. The bhikshu is under the vow of celibacy. Prakriti’s fellings are observed by her passion for Ananda. She compels her mother to exercise black magic. He comes to the door of Prakriti begging her love. By looking at the pathetic condition of Ananda. Prakiti requests her mother to undo the spell. As a result the mother has to lose her life when she is on the death bed. Ananda realizes and goes back. Here, we find conflict between desire of flesh and the aspiration of the soul.
**Natif Puja:**

This play deals with the conflict between temporal power of a king and the spiritual power of Lord Buddha. Srimati is a court dancer. She is murdered by the guard under the order of the King. In the course of the dance, she discards her ornaments one by one and stands pure and naked in a nuns wrap. She remains triumphant even in her death. Queen Lokesvari and even elder princess Ratnavali touch the feet of dead Srimati as a token of their conversion to Buddhism. It is the play depicting a rare act of religious martyrdom.

**Malini:**

In this play as in, ‘Sacrifice’ a new ethics come into conflict with an old an out moulded one. In this case beauty and revelation clash with fear and fanaticism, Malini is a princess with a strong Buddhist view. Brahmin regards her as heresy. The demand her banishment from the country. The Brahmin assembles in front of the royal palace. Malini appears before them. Most of the assemble Brahmin are fascinated by the beauty of holiness. They convert to the faith of Buddhism. These converted Brahmins now hail her as Goddess and mother. They further describe her as the divine soul of this world. Two persons stand apart. They are Kemankar and Supriya. Kemankar decides to leave the country to gain for in help to oppose Buddhiism. Supriya feels attracted towards Buddhism. She reports Kemankar's plan to the king. The king gets Kemankar arrested. He kills Supriya the king decides to Kemankar murdered. But Malini appeals to the king not to kill him. Why Malini pleads on behalf of Kemankar is not made clear.

**Sacrifice (Visarjan):**

The protagonist in this play is queen Gunvati. She is barren. She expects joy of motherhood. She sends flower and animals to the temple of Goddess Kali. They were sent to sacrifice to the terrible mother, Kali. The priest Raghupati assures the queen that her offering wood please Kali. The King Govinda personally visits the temple and sees a beggar girl Aparna whose goat has been sacrificed to Kali. She is feeling grief-striken by her loss the king is filled with remorse. He forbids all sacrifices involving blood shedding in the temple. All people think that banning sacrifices in temple will bring disasters. The priest appoints the man Jaising to kill the king secretly. However the Queen and Priest realized the folly and the criminality of blood sacrifice. New order begins in the kingdom. There would be much less folly and much less crime in the world. If people could keep the egotism under check. This is the message of the play.
Mukta – Dhara:

It is a symbolic play. Bibhuti, the royal engineer in the mountain kingdom of ‘UttarKut’ constructed a dam with the help of his steel machine. He stops flowing water of Mukta – Dhara. The people living in the land of Shivtarai below the mountains Kingdom of UttarKut are prevented from using the water of Mukta – Dhara from the irrigation of their field. Yuvraja Abhijit is on the side of the people. Yuvraja’s love for freedom and his innate humanity sympathises rebel against this inhuman dam. It even led to the starvation of the people of Shivtarai. At the end of Yuvraja breaks Bibhuti’s dam at the weak point and releases water of Mukta – Dhara. Abhijit loses his life in the act of breaking dam. It shows the triumph of the human spirit over the achievement of science and technology.

Ama and Vinak:

In ‘Ama and Vinayak’ a Hindu woman is introduced. She was abducted by a muslim and remains up to the last faithful to him. Who loved her intensely and became the father of her child. She is the heroine of the play who surrenders her boy to even muslim after she was proffered love by him. The play shows the author’s male catholic sympathies as he makes the Lady defend her love against the attack made on it by her parents, but this defense, although eloquent does not make the delineation of her character dramatically effective.

The Ascetic(Sanyasi):

Sanyasi’ is Tagore’s first important play. Tagore himself said that this play was an introduction to the whole of his literary works. This play deals with the conflict between truth and beauty, between reason and love, between rejection and acceptance. The protagonist turns ascetic, gives up the worldly activities and interests. He comes in contact with a girl, loves her and leaves her. Later he realizes her love and comes back meanwhile his beloved dies and he meets a child. He decides to break the staff of negation and lean on the tree of life. He has learnt the lesson of love and life. The message of the play is ‘ it is not which is the enemy of man but the wrong kind of egotism which degrades and enslaves the body, the mind and the soul of a man, far from enslaving the man can liberate and enlarge him’.
The King and The Queen ( Raja ‘O’ Rani ):

This play depicts a conflict between love and duty. Vikram, the king is the beginning spiritually and morally blind. He prefers sensual life. His wife Sumitra is not willing to lead the life has mistress and wife. She wants to perform the functions of a queen to promote the welfare of the people. She seeks the help of her brother Kumarsen, The King of Kashmir. Something suddenly strange happens Vikram suddenly awakens to his role as the King of his country. He dislikes the help extended by Kumarsen to his wife. He declares war against him. He defeats him. Later on the King Vikram repents. He wants to favour his brother in law by giving him “Ila in marriage bur invading. He was killed in the battle. Queen Sumitra brings a tray covered with cloth. There is head of Kumarsen. She falls and dies. She has been claimed by merciful death. It is Vikram’s egotism which has led to the catastrophic climax of the play is a total destruction of all hopes, plans and ambitions of Vikram.

The King of the Dark Chamber’ (Raja):

In the play Tagore deals with man in relation to God. It depicts the secret dealing of God with human heart. The king of this play is invisible, even the queen Sudarshana has not seen him. In fact nobody has seen him. Surangama a maid of honour believes in his reality though she too has not seen him. The king in this play symbolizes God who is everywhere and is everything. Still the God is invisible. The play is about the human soul’s adventures in its attempt to know God.

Red Oleanders:

The play has king but no queen. There are some other characters such as the Governor, the Assistant Governor, the Deputy Governor, the Doctor, the Professor, the Headman and Wrestler. The soul of the play is a girl named Nandini’ she is most beautiful. All are highly fascinated by her beauty even king too. The idea from the play emerges that this world is a prison with its governors, deputies and assistants. People always try to storm the prison even the king tries to come out of his self made prison and pull down the flag which is the symbol of his kingship and tyranny. There is a mysterious character named ‘Ranjan’. He is dead but holds in his hand the bunch of red oleanders sent to [oleanders is a kind of shrub which bears yellow flower’s] him by Nandini fights till the victory is won. The play ends with Bishus song of autumn and fruitfulness.
**The Cycle of Spring (Phalguni):**

The play depicts the passing away of winter and the advent of spring. The spring in the play is not depicted as coming naturally and spontaneously. In this play the winter seems to be most unwillingly to depart and the spring here shown as striving to be born. There is war between going winter and coming spring. Winter becomes a deem memory. The play ends with a choral song celebrating the festival of spring.

**The Post Office:**

The post office is about a child named ‘Amal’ with a sick body. The king visits the sick chamber of the little boy and all is well again the post office too deals with the soul’s adventures with the divine. The adventures leave the soul as well as the body. The divine spirit comes to the human heart and there would now being the burst of a new spring of vitality and happiness.

**Research Methodology:**

The method of library research would be followed for the present study internet resources would also be utilized.

**Scope of the Study:**

The study has been undertaken with respect to the most popular plays of Rabindranath Tagore that have shown the feminine psychology at its Zenith. The plays taken for the study are as follows:

1. Chitra
2. Natir Puja
3. Chandalika
4. Malini
5. Sacrifice
6. The King and The Queen
7. Gandhari’s Prayer
8. Amma and Vinayak
9. Karna and Kuni
10. Red Olienders
Objectives of the Study:

- To concentrate on the women characters in Tagore’s selected plays from the perspective of women empowerment.
- To undertake a unified study of Tagore’s selected plays with special attention to the role of women characters.
- To unfold the reader the many shades of woman’s personality as reflected in Rabindranath Tagore’s plays.
- To attempt analytical study of women characters in Tagore’s selected plays.
- To study different role of women in Tagore’s plays and its significance.
- To attempt a close study of women characters from Tagore’s selected plays so as to evaluated women and her role in modern context.
- To critically asses Tagore’s contribution in the presentation of women character.

The above mentioned objectives of the studies will be adhered to most scrupulously in the presentation, interpretation and analysis of women characters in Tagore’s plays.

Hypothesis:

The present research work aims at the critical analysis of the woman characters in Tagore’s selected plays under the shade light of women empowerment. He has always uplifted female characters from their male counter parts. He has portrayed female characters in a more dominant manner. In his major plays it can be observed that women characters appear in all possible situations in his plays. His portrayal of queen characters in unique in its manner. Some are happy with their status some of them have turned the mother of sorrow. The second category of women characters portrayed by Tagore is that of the princess. Some of his princess strong willed princess. Chitra is a warrior. The third category of women character is that of common women such as Shrimati and Prakriti.

Probable Date of Completion:

This research project is proposed to be completed within the time limit as stipulated by the university.
Significance of the Present Study:

Rabindranath Tagore, leading dramatist of Indian Writing in English, sole reformer and visionary person tried to uplift the status of women in his plays. He treated female characters on equal ground with their male counterparts. The women were deprived of opportunities for centuries together. They were considered to be the secondary sex. They had no right to share the duties that were exclusively reserved for males. By reading Tagore’s plays, it is felt that he tried to give voice to the throats which were pressed for centuries together. He tried to give justice to the females by creating dominant females characters in his plays. This is an attempt to bring fresh insight into the understanding of the thematic and structural aspects of Tagore’s plays from the perspectives of women empowerment. It is felt that Tagore’s women characters are role models of women empowerment for modern women.

Plan of the thesis:

This research project could be directed under the following sub-heads.

Chapter I : Introduction

Chapter II : Chitra and Amma and Vinayak

Chapter III : Natir Puja and Malini

Chapter IV: Malini and Chandalika

Chapter V: Gandhari’s Prayer and Karna and Kunti

Chapter VI : Sacrifice and The King and The Queen

Chapter VII : Conclusion

Conclusion:

It seems that Tagore’s plays exhibit the characters of women in the outstanding way. It is also noted that Tagore’s sensitiveness in portraying the women with such an exquisite delicacy in simply unique. It unfolds many strands of the feminine psychology. Apart from this many social problems seems to have resolved through his dramas such as unbeatable agony of the
unnatural caste system and the bad custom of sacrificing animals for nourishing once superstitious beliefs. Thus the research work undertaken would remain a good example for the propagation of women empowerment through Tagore’s plays.

Bibliography

Primary Resources:

The Following plays by Rabindranath Tagore would be the primary sources.

1. Tagore, Rabindranath. *Chitra*
2. ------------------------- *Natir Puja*
3. ------------------------- *Chandalika*
4. ------------------------- *Malini*
5. ------------------------- *Sacrifice*
6. ------------------------- *The King and The Queen*
7. ------------------------- *Gandhari’s Prayer*
8. ------------------------- *Amma and Vinayak*
9. ------------------------- *Karna and Kunti*
10. ------------------------ *Red Olienders*

Secondary Sources:


The Tagore women, some of them trailblazers and some who conformed without question, redefined the role of women in society. Chakravarti introduces the intellectually daring Tagore women through her imagination. Employee empowerment is a critical tool that can be utilized to create a better environment while amplifying the support of employees. “People are the most important asset. Empowerment empowerment as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities and in their society, by acting on issues they define as important, increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender, or economic strength of individuals and communities. The Works of Rabindranath Tagore consist of poems, novels, short stories, dramas, and essays that Bengali poet and Brahmo philosopher Rabindranath Tagore created over his lifetime. This ebook presents a collection of all major works of Tagore. A dynamic table of contents allows you to jump directly to the work selected. Tagore’s literary reputation is disproportionately influenced very much by regard for his poetry; however, he also wrote novels, essays, short stories, travelogues, dramas, and thousands of songs. Tagore had early success as a writer in his native Bengal. With his translations of some of his poems he became rapidly known in the West. In fact, his fame attained a luminous height, taking him across continents on lecture tours and tours of friendship. ‘Stories by Rabindranath Tagore’ is a television series based on the novels and short stories of the Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore. All of the women created by Tagore have one thing in common – their rejection of the subordinate status of women in Bengali society. When I first told my dad about a TV series that depicted the stories of the epic Robi Thakur, his reaction was nothing short of skeptical, which may have been the reaction of many familiar with Tagore’s works. I began watching the show and a few episodes later I see my dad and brother sitting behind me, immersed into the show. ‘Stories by Rabindranath Tagore’ is a television series based on the novels and short stories of the Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore. To say that Rabindranath Tagore was a prolific dramatist would be an understatement. In his sixty-year career as a playwright, he wrote more than fifty works in the dramatic mode. He tried his hand at so many different styles that a classification of his dramatic output is essential. The literary influences of Tagore offer important insights into his plays. Above all writers, Tagore perhaps revered the classical Sanskrit master Klidsa the most; his early drama contains much proof of the impact of Klidsa’s heroic themes, nature imagery, and lyric language.