

Some Major Woman Characters in Rabindranath Tagore's Fiction

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Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore was one of the great poet, philosopher, and artist. He wrote many short stories, plays, dramas and novels. Tagore painted over 3,000 pictures and took a keen interest in science. In Tagore's writings, women are portrayed in varied ways. Most of the female characters in Tagore's work lived a traditional life; still they were not at all passive. Rather, they were outspoken having their own individual identity.

Keywords: Philosopher, artist, dramas, novels, passive, traditional, outspoken, identity

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was probably a renaissance in the Bengali literature. He tailored such beautiful pieces of novels and short stories that one would be absolutely mesmerized to imagine the great status of progressive and innovative thoughts that dwelt in his mind. He belonged to an aristocratic family that influenced him a lot. Tagore never had any formal education, but paced all over the world with his reading habits. His characters have a touch of simplicity and complexity blend together in a remarkable ratio. His close observation of human behavior is gets clearly reflected in all his tales. The emotions of a simple Bengali clerk, an orphaned girl, a housewife, the editor of a magazine is all different in their mentalities and it can be distinguished in all his great masterpieces. His unique style of depicting each character's persona and thought process is an interesting way of bringing the characters alive.

Tagore had always lived in a different era from his contemporaries and it was reflected through his writings. While his fellow people were still struggling to accept women as a part of their lives, Tagore already knew that women were eccentric in any society and that they were the creatures that held the world together and made it a better place to live in. Women in his tales have been independent, strong, determined, having an individuality of their own and a woman

who is not ready to accept the orthodox norms of the society. Tagore's woman is the 21st century lady, she needs no one for her existence, is complete in herself, yet she gladly accepts a man to be hers, because she loves him fiercely.

Here are some of Tagore's female characters who challenged the society they lived in;

Binodini; Binodini in "Chokher Bali" is a lady who has been widowed. Extremely educated and well versed in the ways of the world, she is aware of her sexuality and knows that with her widowhood she could no longer satisfy herself. She fell into a love triangle, rather came in between a married couple, Ashalata; a simpleton girl, and Mahendra; a well-educated man who got attracted to Binodini because both of them were similar somehow, and Binodini perfectly understood Mahendra, because there was an intellectual vacuum between Ashalata and Mahendra. Binodini like a serpent occupied that space with her intelligence and charm, and Mahendra, a man driven by lust and beauty fell into the vice like grip of the widow. Binodini's personality is extremely strong. She is aware of her own sexuality and she is not ashamed of it. She knows that passionate blasphemies are short lived. In the end, she departs from their lives, with a last letter that was addressed to Ashalata- she requested Ashalata to broaden the horizon of her daughter's education and teach her about the global ways of life. That would liberate her. Binodini's dynamism in character is strikingly unconventional.

Charulata; Charulata in the "Fouled Nest" is another woman who is docile, more simple, and yet full of complexities. She was married off to an elderly person, a journalist, who took her passions very lightly. Charu pursued her passions of music with the enthusiasm and zeal of her brother in law, Amol, and gradually fell in love with him. Amol's marriage with another girl and his departure from Charulata's house shattered Charulata and broke her marriage forever. Though Charulata's husband started off newly, Charulata chose to stay behind.

Mrinmoyee; Mrinmoyee in "Samapti" is a free spirited girl who does everything that is not accepted by the society for a woman to do. She is a tom-boy who climbs the trees, plays cricket with a group of boys and steal fruits from others garden. She refused to mould herself to femininity, even after marriage. One who had grown up as a free and independent woman couldn't stand the thought of tying her hair and wearing jewellery for the sake of society. She questions why it is the girl who has to make all adjustments and compromises post marriage and even ran away twice. Her spirit is too free to be confined within the domestic walls.

Mrinal ; Mrinal in "A Wife's Letter" is one of the strong characters as portrayed by Tagore. She used the power of a pen to fight against injustices and evil practices of the society. Despite her attempts, she is unable to save her sister-in-law's younger sister from setting herself on fire due to successive abusive marriages. Losing all faith in the institution of the family, she leaves her husband's home to find solace in 'tirtha' (pilgrimage). In a powerful letter to her husband, she

accuses the society of not taking a stand against the practice of disallowing a girl to return to her home after marriage, despite the nature of the marriage itself. She also indicts him of killing her talents and passions and only seeing her as a 'bahu' of the house.

Suman; Suman in "Tyaag" defies the caste system of the society. It is a story about the Indian caste system and its interference in true love. The story features a marriage between a Kayastha orphan girl Suman and a Brahmin boy through a trick played by the girl's uncle that hid her true caste. However, after getting married, the girl refuses to build a relationship based on a lie and reveals her true identity. After initial apprehensions about "polluting" his caste, the boy proclaims that his love for his wife is more important to him than his religious ties.

Bimala; Bimala of "Ghare Baire" lives under the shadow of her rich and elite husband Nikhil. She is a high spirited woman but has to remain subdued in the role of a traditional Indian housewife. With the arrival of her husband's friend Sandip, she finds a new hope of fulfilling her aspirations and eventually falls in love disregarding the norms of the society.

Labanya; Labanya in "Shesher Kobita" is portrayed as a strong-willed, highly educated, free-spirited woman who comes from a middle class family. She falls in love with Oxford-returned Amit. Through Labanya Tagore raises questions about the very institution of marriage as the ultimate goal of love.

A common feature in all these characters is the pride in their identity as a woman, instead of being defined as a wife, a mother or a daughter. Their rights and wrongs were not shaped by what the society expects of them. They did not leave behind their passions and hobbies after marriage and weren't afraid to look at sources of acceptance and love apart from their marriage. They challenged the concepts of dowry, femininity, chastity of widows and honor. These characters challenge the conventions of the world as we know it even today and it was only Tagore who could create them, a century ago.

Women of such persona dominated Tagore's poems, novels and short stories. The greatness in his narration is that he gave birth to modern women, who were driven by nothing else other than their inspirations and passions. These fiercely independent women must be the inspiration for all the young women who fear to pursue their dreams in dread of patriarchy. If Tagore's women could be liberal and had no barriers, so can we dream of an independent existence an individuality of our own, dominated by no one other than destiny.

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