



The Concept Of Ideal Womanhood Of Rabindranath Tagore And Munshi Premchand: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

Tagore and Premchand, the two great literary stalwarts, have portrayed women in their works mostly in their traditional roles, but keeping pace with the temper of the new age, they have also visualized them in strong and even rebellious roles. In their writings both reflect a tremendous sympathy and understanding towards the plight of women which was quite an unfamiliar trend for most work of that period. However, unlike radical feminists they do not vouch for complete liberation of woman rather consider male supervision as an integral part of the overall development of woman's personality. In the present paper an attempt will be made to compare both the writers on the basis of their views about ideal womanhood.

KEY WORDS: New woman, Traditional, Conservative, Social injustice, Patriarchy

Tagore and Premchand both in their writings have created women characters, who are courageous, bold and sagacious, capable of withstanding the heavy odds of life with grit and determination, vying with men in every sphere of life. They also extol women for their nobility, piety, obedience, love and devotion, but at the same time believe that their sphere of activity is more useful and safe within the home than in the outer space. Since it appears to be against the basic principle of feminism of equality and freedom, critics venture to regard the two writers even as anti-feminist. However, in view of the fact that both of them have taken up feminist cause prominently in their works, including various social evils afflicting women, it is not justified to visit them with such demeaning and negative appellation. Besides, both seem to be equally sympathetic towards women's predicament and plead for their rights, praising them vigorously for their patience, self-sacrifice and selfless service. Nevertheless, since they do not favour absolute freedom to women as envisaged by the radical feminists, and want them to thrive under the tutelage of their male counterparts, it would be more appropriate to call them as liberal or sober feminists, who have sincerely endeavoured to address various women's issues in their works, thereby giving sufficient hint to the emergence of a 'new woman' who is bold, intelligent and self-reliant, capable of facing the challenges of life.

Tagore adopts a progressive approach towards women, but warns them against deviating too much from the traditional ways in their eagerness to look modern. Thus, in his short story “The Conclusion’ Mrinmoyi comes out veil-less, “holding a naked baby to her chest with her unbound hair hanging free,” as against the general practice of pulling “their veils down to the tips of their noses, thus concealing their faces like curtains on a stage.” (Tagore, 1997: 269) But eventually she has to bow down before the tradition and has to return to her marital home and to settle down with her husband not as a modern woman but as a traditional and loving wife. It is believed that the character of Mrinmoyi is inspired by a ‘young, strong, straightforward and intelligent girl Tagore encounters during a journey, whose “half-boyish, half-girlish manner is singularly attractive- a novel blend of masculine nonchalance and feminine charm.” (Tagore, 1960: 38) Similarly, in *Ghare Baire* the heroine of the novel Bimala leads a happy married life with Nikhil, an educated and progressive *zamindar*, who wants to initiate his orthodox wife to the modern ways of life and therefore introduces her to English language and manners. Then probably as a matter of experiment he urges Bimala to move out and to know the outside world herself, saying, “I would have you come into the heart of the outer world and meet reality....If we meet and recognize each other, in the real world, then only will our love be true.” (Tagore, 1976: 18) Bimala complies with the wishes of her inquisitive husband and after some initial hesitation ventures out in search of self identity, where she is infatuated with a firebrand but hypocritical leader Sandip, a close friend of her husband. Sandip eventually deceives her, forces her to steal jewels from her own house and to pass it on to him, which Bimala obeys, but eventually she realizes her folly and comes back home disillusioned, deeply scarred and humiliated. Commenting on the outcome it is aptly remarked that Bimala “is restored to Nikhil and receives his blessing but she cannot get rid of the feeling that her disastrous journey into the world has left its permanent mark on her.” (Raj, 1983: 61) Obviously, by way of the above examples Tagore has endeavored to show that home alone is the safe place for a woman and to move into the outer world unescorted is fraught with unforeseen dangers for her. However, despite being a supporter of gender equality and women’s right to acquire knowledge at par with the man, Tagore feels strongly that a woman’s place as wife and mother within the home is more worthwhile and secure, as H. B. Mukherjee observes:

In the field of pure knowledge, there is no distinction between men and women; distinction exists in the sphere of practical utility. Women should acquire pure knowledge for becoming a mature human being, and utilitarian knowledge for becoming true women...It is the nature of women to be a wife and a mother. (Mukherjee, 1962: 47)

Tagore, therefore, while hailing woman as the most beautiful and tender creation of God and believing in her inherent virtues, also expects her to remain indoors performing household chores, like bearing and rearing the children, managing the kitchen and to share the household responsibilities along with her husband, as enjoined upon her traditionally. He praises women saying, “It is women who make the home, which is no way less valuable or easier than running a business. The motivating force that shapes a home is a woman’s love (Tagore, 1961, X: 546) He believes that to be a wife and mother is ingrained in the very nature of the woman, which makes it incumbent on her to remain indoors to be able to attend her routine work inside the home, which among others include cooking, cleaning, washing and also taking care of her husband and children.

It is thus obvious that a good woman of Tagore’s imagination conforms to the qualities of the woman depicted in the Victorian poet Coventry Patmore’s poem, ‘The Angel in the House,’ which hails loyalty, love and devotion as the essential traits of a good wife, and requires her to be “passive, powerless, meek, charming, graceful, sympathetic, self-sacrificing, pious, and pure.” (Patmore, 2004, IX: I) How obsessed Tagore is by this concept is reflected in the character of Anandmoyi in *Gora*, the mother of the protagonist, who prefers to be confined only to home, though she is a woman “with a liberated outlook ready to break the shackles of dogma”. (Rani, 2012: 38) Similarly, Sarmila in ‘Two Sisters’, Ratan in ‘The Post Master’, Sohini and Pishi Ma in ‘Laboratory,’ etc. also assimilate in them the above ideals of womanhood. However, there are also examples to show that in case a woman dares compromise any of the above virtues in some way or the other she has to suffer from social interventions. Thus, in ‘The Conclusion’ Mrinmoyi after her marriage with Apurbo is trained by her own mother and the village women as well to become a proper wife, instructing to give up “playfulness and frolicking around, loud laughter, gossip with boys, and eating when hungry.” (Tagore, 1958: 275) Besides, as per the concept of ‘The Angel in the House,’ a woman is also supposed even to own the faults and follies of her husband and offer him her selfless love in both joy and grief. Tagore, in his story

'Punishment' presents perhaps the most befitting example to this effect, wherein at the behest of her husband Chidam, Chandara owns the guilt of killing her sister-in-law Radha, though she has been killed by her own husband Dukhiram. As Chandara loves her husband dearly she "is taken aback by her husband's cruel suggestion and is convinced that her husband had never given any value to her feelings" (Basu, 1985: 59) She, therefore, decides to end her life in protest against the humiliating proposal and goes to the gallows with stoic ease and keeps her mouth shut till the end. The above examples show that Tagore is essentially conservative in his outlook towards women, but at the same time it is also true that he has enough resilience to change his opinion according to the changes taking place around him. In fact, it is this flexibility that later leads him to come forward with the concept of the 'New Woman' who as we shall see is intelligent, independent and bold.

Like Tagore, Premchand also extols woman in her traditional role and thinks that tolerance, patience, perseverance and self sacrifice are the essential virtues of a woman and also believes in the concept of 'The Angel in the House' more strictly than even Tagore, as he advocates vociferously that an ideal woman is one who sacrifices all her personal aspirations to keep her husband happy and is always ready to forgive him for his sins, described in the poem as she "Waits by, expecting his remorse, With pardon in her pitying eyes..." (Patmore, 2004, IX: I) Accordingly, in *Godan*, Mehta who is believed to serve as the mouthpiece of the writer himself, while contending with Malti on feminism and the feminist issues, says, "The woman is patient, calm, and tolerant like the earth... is the embodiment of whatever good is there on the earth." (Premchand, 2012: 213) Elaborating his viewpoint, he suggests that woman should not react against man even if it imperils her life, saying, "I expect her that even if I kill her, she does not think of countering it with violence. Should I love another woman before her eyes, she is not jealous. If I meet such a woman, I shall fall upon her feet and shall surrender before her." (213) He also believes that "marriage is a social contract, and neither man nor the woman should have any right to break it. Before the contract you are independent, but thereafter your hands are tied." (85) It clearly signifies that marriage to a woman symbolizes a perpetual bond of servitude, which she ought not to break. However, Malti who represents the feminist viewpoint finds the views of Mehta quite distressing, as she has strong misgivings against his stand on marriage and man-woman relationship. She also finds his attitude towards the modern woman rather negative, as once when she says not to leave her alone in the forest Mehta says sarcastically, "I know the traits of the modern women that they don't need the protection of men, but want to move forward along with them on equal footing." (109) Mehta while saying so probably implies that whatever parity women may demand, they cannot live without the protection of man. Besides, Mehta also demands high order of morality and justifies even the killing of the woman who intrudes between married couples. It scares Malti to the extent that she eventually decides to distance herself from him. (243) Curiously Mehta instead of Malti prefers a woman like Govindi, whom he even has once told that he wishes Malti "learnt the lesson of wifedom beneath your feet." (241) Obviously, he wants to marry a woman who is self-effacing, docile, patient and enduring like Govindi, who "even if faces indifference and humiliation, does not deviate from the path of virtue and sacrifices herself on the motherliness, for whom the sacrifice is the greatest duty and who deserves to be idolized and worshipped." (284) However, Malti, who even though loves Mehta ardently, is so scared by his conservative and even violent views on love, marriage and wife that she eventually abandons the very idea of marriage. Yet, she still can't afford to antagonize him and therefore decides to carry forward his mission of social work. Accordingly, she works among the rural-folk and gives free medical treatment to the poor and needy.

Besides, Malti also mixes up with the village women and educates them about sanitation, childcare and nourishment. This sudden change in her impresses Mehta hugely, who is all the more fascinated the way she attends Gobar's ailing son giving him a motherly treatment, so much so that "he feels like touching her feet. (Premchand, 2012: 489) He turns desperate in her love, neglects his normal work and lands himself in debt, while Malti keeps an equitable distance from Mehta, but helps him in various ways, clears his dues, takes care of his daily needs, maintains his accounts, etc. Mehta now becomes so impatient to get Malti as a wife that he begins to feel only a half of his self without her and, therefore, entreats her to forgive him for his conduct, saying "how much I have felt ashamed, how much I have grieved, you can't perhaps imagine." (Premchand, 2012: 491) However, Malti remains firm on her resolve not to marry and tells him calmly that she has finally decided to live as friends rather than husband and wife, adding that she too loves him and can make any sacrifice for him, but to realize the supreme goal of life she can not take a scholar and genius like him as a captive. She also says that the world assailed today by "injustice, terror and superstition, needs dutiful men like

you to spread the message of selflessness to keep it united”, Mehta hears Malti’s words reverently and falls upon her feet accepting her proposition and the two “get locked in an embrace tear pouring down their eyes.” (496) The episode of Malti and Mehta conspicuously reveals that Mehta by proxy Premchand himself with his traditional outlook does not approve of a socialite and educated woman like Malti as an ideal wife and finds her fit only for love making at the most. Obviously, while thinking so he seems to evaluate Malti on her face value ignorant of her intrinsic worth, but when he gets acquainted with her inner spirit of selfless service to the common people and self-effacing posture flaunted towards him, he turns desperate to marry her, but it is too late. Obviously, Premchand prefers Malti as a wife only when she adopts the traditional ways of service and sacrifice. However, from the rural spectrum in *Godan* he seems to prefer Dhania who unlike Malti is even though illiterate, rough and at times even foolhardy. Nonetheless, she serves her husband indulgently and enjoys his full confidence, so even if stricken by poverty, she leads a contented married life and seems to be fully aware of the fact that she derives all her strength from him that “gave her courage to battle life’s daily problems.” (Premchand, 2000: 10)

Hori, in reciprocation keeps nothing secret from his wife and shares every bit of information with her and invariably seeks her consent in all the household affairs. Although at times Hori is embarrassed by her stubbornness, he always tries to keep her in good humour and even resorts to flattery to get his stand on a particular matter endorsed by her. She is quite a daring woman, who fights headlong against injustice perpetrated by zamindar, moneylender, Panchayat, Police, or anybody else of whatever consequence unmindful of its cost. The way she embarrasses the Police Inspector publicly virtually makes her a legend, and the people even “viewed her as the Goddess (Bhawani) incarnate.” (47) Nevertheless, she is a simpleminded person, who expresses her feelings in a straight manner and acts at whims, while Hori is a mature man who acts according to the situation. Thus, when she questions the wisdom of her husband going frequently in attendance of the zamindar, alleging, “...since they tilled zamindar’s lands, he could, of course, demand rent from them. But what was the need to fawn on him, to lick his boots”, to which Hori simply replies, “When we have to live like slaves, it makes sense to keep the master happy.” (9) Nonetheless, Dhania is a good housewife, which Hori praises openly, as she once tells Bhola as to how well she has managed the household taking care of his younger brothers who though have now turned hostile, though she has really suffered in the process “wearing their cast-off clothes, she attended to every need of her sisters-in-law. She saw to it that they ate, even if she had to go to sleep hungry. She got them silver ornaments even though she did not have even a thread around her own neck or wrist.” (19) Besides, Dhania is also quick to realize as to how difficult it is to manage the household amidst scarcity, as she regrets, “However much they scrimped and saved; however much they starved themselves and their children, it was practically impossible to pay the full rent demanded by the zamindar.” (9) Thus, Dhania enjoys a good rapport with her husband, who invariably consults her and avoids doing anything without seeking her consent first, though it’s the will of the husband that most often prevails. Precisely, Premchand holds the kind of relationship that exists between Dhania and Hori as ideal for it is based on the principle of reciprocity. Premchand has echoed the above principle of ideal womanhood also elsewhere in his narratives, as for instance Nirmala, even if not happy with her marriage, leads a disciplined life as per the traditional norms, and always surrenders to her husband’s wishes and never thinks of opening her mouth before him. She always treats her husband with utmost respect, obeys him, and avoids doing things that might annoy him, despite the fact that he doubts her integrity. Sudha, her friend, attributes it to the strength of her character, as she once tells her husband that Nirmala is “spending the days of her life with that decrepit old lawyer. I would long since have taken poison. But on surface you can hardly tell how miserable she is.... Women of good birth do not criticize their husbands—only sluts do that. Nirmala may grieve over her situation but never says one word about it.” (Premchand, 1988: 102) Similarly, Suman in *Sevasadan* who is one of the most ambitious and wistful women characters created by Premchand also lives as a dutiful housewife for at least the first two years of her married life, though like Nirmala, she is also not satisfied with her aged and widower husband. She follows pious ways, takes a dip in the holy river daily and recites lines from the *Ramayana* to the neighborhood woman that affords her the “satisfaction of being morally more elevated.” (Dalmia, 2006: 331) However, goaded by her latent urge to lead a luxurious life and command respect and recognition in the society, she turns rebellious and transgresses the traditional bond, where she faces the harsh realities of life, which leaves her ever gloomy and discontented. After leaving home she first becomes a prostitute, then joins widows’ home and lastly a charitable home for the prostitute’s daughters where she teaches them the domestic chores, cooking, sewing, cleaning, etc., but still does not get peace and contentment.

However, as for Tagore's approach towards women, it differs from stage to stage in the course of the evolution of his literary life, as per which in the early phase of his writing (1881-1897), his main concern is the social injustice against women, wherein he exhorts women not to be passive in any way. During the second phase (1893-1913), which is regarded as the most imaginative phase of his writings, he portrays the urban and educated woman, who fights for human rights, while in the third phase (1914-1941) he lays emphasis on higher education of women and speaks against the social evils, like purdah, untouchability, caste system, and religious pretense. (Kaur, 2013) Besides, from yet another angle Tagore's perception about woman at the early stage of his literary life is romantic, but later it becomes mature when in his thirties he as a manager of his family's estates becomes aware of the day-to-day life of the common people as well as the unfair social oppression of women. (Bishi, 1967: 9-10) In fact, it is there that he comes to realize that "A woman's identity is no longer limited to the role of a mother or a wife. We have arrived at the stage when women are demanding their right as human beings. They want to be counted universally in their identity as individuals." (Tagore, 1961, Vol. 13: 28) Besides, he also realizes that the dawn of a new age in the life of a woman is in the offing, about which he himself says:

I can feel that a new age has dawned in the world.... Women are coming forward to build the new civilization. The purdah over their faces has vanished, and along with it has gone the purdah that kept their mind away from exposure to the outer world. (380)

In view of this, in his narratives Tagore has created some very powerful women characters, like Anandamoyi, the mother figure in *Gora*, who is an enlightened woman and does not believe in sectarian considerations of caste and creed, and favours inter-racial and inter-religious marriages. She assumes the responsibility of Binoy's marriage with Lolita amidst the objection by the rigidly sectarian Brahmos, contending that marriage is a matter of hearts coming together and that "there is no caste in men's hearts." (Tagore, 2003: 183) Truly, the defence offered by her of the above marriage amply gives an indication of her enlightened mind, which is free from all the vestiges of communal bigotry and religious intolerance. She thus represents Tagore's broad vision of life with liberal and non-sectarian outlook and universal love, and echoes his ideal of freedom, where there remains no difference between man and man. Anandamoyi is a great critic of the traditional and orthodox practices, and she does not care for being proclaimed a rebel. She is applauded as the noblest character in the galaxy of Tagore's women, whom no other character can match "with the same culture, enlightened mind and advanced views on life and marriage. In his portrayal of Anandamoyi one may see Rabindranath's transition from nationalism to internationalism. (Shichang, 2007: 96) Similarly, Sucharita is another woman character of major consequence in *Gora*. She is the heroine of the novel and can really be regarded as the representative of the modern age. She is eager to serve the country and the people, who refuses to sit idle at home and in her keen observation, critical judgment and liberal outlook she is far ahead of other heroines of Tagore. She contributes immensely to the growth of Gora's personality and his self realization. In fact, it is because of her that Gora realizes the importance of women's role in the upliftment of the country. Sucharita defies her aunt and refuses to marry her brother-in-law and also opposes Haran Babu when he tries to thrust his Brahmo ideology upon her. Obviously, it is on account of this that Sucharita is described as "the precursor of Bimala (*The Home and the World*), Ela (*Four Chapters*) and Sarla (*The Garden*), who showed political awareness and interest in Freedom movement of the country." (Shichang, 2007: 238) Besides, she is also acclaimed as "an educated woman who heralded the age of modern women." (272)

However, Lolita in *Gora*, who is the second of the three daughters of Paresch Babu, the foster father of Sucharita, is temperamentally apart from Sucharita, who is introvert, patient and enduring, while Lolita is extrovert, impatient and touchy, "Sucharita was a hidden rebel whereas Lolita was an open rebel and Sucharita was no less revolutionary than Lolita. Sucharita combined in herself the best of tradition and modernity." (240) Lolita is a modern woman, who rebels against the tyranny and oppression of women in the society. However, in the beginning she appears reckless, but in her conversation with Anandamoyi in which she tells Anandamoyi that it is not "necessary for him (Binoy) to give up all that in order to establish mutual relations with another human being." (Tagore, 2003: 366) Binoy approves it saying: "If affection cannot put up with differences, then why do differences exist anywhere in the world?" (367) Thus, Lolita due to her courage, confidence, and energy emerges as prominent among Tagore's heroines, who "surpassed her predecessor, like Binodini, Hemnalini and Sucharita in her liberal outlook, sharp intelligence, keen insight and integrity. She

was far ahead of her age.” (Shichang, 2007: 242-243) Similarly, there is Baradasundari, who being a hardcore Brahmo looks with doubt at everything Hindu and “has a sour taste for idol worship, traditional clothes, religious names and everything that is non-Brahmo.” (Rani, 2012: 40) In fact, through Barada Tagore depicts the hypocrisy of the modern educated class, which he believes denounces everything traditional in a bid to look modern. Thus, the women characters as portrayed by Tagore in *Gora* signify that he “delicately balances the growth of womanhood by providing opposing examples, almost like binary opposites - and churning out a victor from them.” (40) Tagore seems to favour both Anandamoyi and Sucharita as the joint victors, as he believes that in her youth Anandamoyi and Sucharita, sans her Western education might have been similar. Thus, he “seemed to point out that a new type of womanhood had emerged as a result of Western education and changes in the socio-economic set-up.” (Shichang, 2007: 240)

Binodini in *Chokher Bali* also represents the new emerging class of emancipated women of the early twentieth century, who although comes from a rural background “is the ‘emergent’ kind of new female subjectivity whom western education, with its kind of Midas touch, has transformed into a woman with a mind and ‘heart’ of her own.” (Roy, 2012) Widowed at a young age even before the consummation of marriage she is a beautiful, educated and accomplished woman. However, her insatiate desire of love and sexuality haunts her all through her life and turns her rebellious that leads her to seek fulfillment of her cravings through illegitimate means, interfering in the lives of Mahendra, Asha and Bihari. She refuses to obey the dictates of the society a widow has to follow and wants to realize her share of recognition and happiness from the society. However, she needs to be protected at every stage of her life, which shows that despite all her competence a woman cannot survive alone in the wilderness of the world reeling under the masculine hegemony. On the contrary, Bimala in *The Home and the World* presents the case of a woman who leads a contented married life for nine years, during which “Her way of life and behavior was similar to the traditional class of women like Kamala (The Wreck), Asha (Binodini), Sharmila (Two Sisters) and Niraja (The Garden).” (Shichang, 2007: 105) Bimala is illiterate, who also has a dark complexion like her mother, but she compensates it by following the model of her mother from whom she “had learned that beauty was not a woman’s only asset, but service and devotion to her husband were as important, if not more...” (105) However, her husband Nikhil is a modern-minded landlord, who engages a Christian lady to teach English, and modern ways of life to his wife, which inspires her to move out to “blossom fully in the knowledge of herself in the wide world outside...” (Raj, 1983: 57) Nikhil notes the inclination of his wife curiously that she longs for experiencing the realities of the outer world herself and therefore tells her, “I would have you come into the heart of the outer world and meet reality...If we meet and recognize each other, in the real world, then only will our love be true. (Tagore, 1976: 18) As expected Bimala first declines, but later agrees and moves out, where she gets attracted towards Sandip, a friend of her husband, who is a fiery speaker and a swadeshi activist. Bimala is so hugely impressed by Sandip’s personality that she is transformed into a rebellious lot as she confides, “I was no longer the lady of the Rajah’s house, but the sole representative of Bengal’s womanhood....I said within myself that ... we women are not only the deities of the household fire, but the flame of the soul itself.” (Tagore, 1976: 28-29) However, soon she has to pay the price for her over-enthusiasm, as Sandip cheats her of her jewellery, which leads her to realize her folly and to return home humiliated, thereby proving that home alone is a safe place for women. Thus, the conduct of Bimala represents both the traditional and liberated classes of women, but it projects the former as a better alternative for them.

In the same way, in his short stories also Tagore has portrayed women in both the forms, conformist as well as rebellious. However, an analysis of his short stories of the nineties shows that he was never impressed by the patriarchal norms, which subjugate woman in the society. As for instance, in ‘Punishment’ he depicts the family of a poor labourer, which denies women their basic human rights, even though they are morally far superior to their selfish and spineless husbands. The story portrays Chandara, the wife of a laborer, who protests against the woman’s oppression under patriarchy in a unique way. Accordingly at the behest of her husband Chidam she owns the guilt of killing her sister-in-law, who is really killed by Dukhiram, the husband of the deceased and the elder brother of Chidam. However, she has no courage to disobey her husband, though she expresses her ire against him by refusing to meet him before going to the gallows but agrees to meet her mother. In fact, when the doctor informs her that her husband too wants to see her, she tells him emphatically “Not him, with an emphasis on the word ‘him’.” (Dominic, 2010) Thus, the story ends on an ironical note which reads, “Some time in the dawn of youth a very young dark complexioned lively girl, setting aside her

dolls left her parents place to live with her in-laws. But who could imagine that auspicious marriage night, of what would happen today". (Basu, 1985: 60) Commenting on the story, Garcia also remarks, "women are silenced both figuratively and literally...are portrayed as cheap, replaceable objects... to display a society that is far from civilized" (Garcia, 2015) Desai in her 'Introduction' admires Chandara's 'unflinching determination,' 'pride and fury,' and long sufferings as "wife of Hindu tradition," (Desai, 1991: 11) Dominic also appreciates "Chandara's rejection of the husband she still loved, the pride that prevented her from backing down and a shy reluctance to show her true marital feelings in public." (Dominic, 2010) Similarly in many other stories like 'Atonement,' 'Elder Sister,' 'The Renunciation,' etc., Tagore depicts the miserable condition of the woman in middle class society and also criticizes anti-woman senseless religious rituals as also the ill effects of caste system. In 'The Renunciation' he encourages the inter-caste marriage between Hemanta and Kusum, a girl from the lower caste. Besides, Tagore in his stories also highlights the efforts of social reformers, intellectuals and other progressive sections of the society to address various social issues, which prominently include the women's question suggesting comprehensively the ways and means for women's emancipation.

Besides, in some of his short stories Tagore has created women, who despite being bold and courageous, still fall victims to the patriarchal inhibitions. Thus, Uma in 'The Exercise Book' is an intelligent girl and wants to continue her education, but the society denies it and she is married at an early age. However, in her marital home she continues to read something and to note down quotations from it in her exercise book. As from Barnaparichaya she reproduced the lines, which is rhetoric, mocking at woman's dependence on male, it reads: "So well-behaved is young Gopal/ whatever you give he eats it all." (Tagore, 1994: 140) She also writes a line in her 'exercise- book' about Joshi, the maid-servant, as the most marginalized figure of the household. However, her in-laws and husband, Pyarimohan do not like it and always try to suppress her writings and expressions. Her husband even distorts her exercise book (Khata) that leads her to break into tears and to make entry to that effect in the Khata itself in her own space allotted therein. (144) Thus, despite all humiliations and sarcastic comments from them Uma continues to maintain it and her 'khata' becomes an embodiment of freedom of expression. However, Mrinmoyi in 'The Conclusion' is more liberated, who with her tomboyish demeanor, has "the image of a restless urchin - one who can create ripples in an otherwise unperturbed life of her locality." (Tagore, 1991: 81) She also reflects the same trait when despite all his education and experience she ridicules Apurba Krishna, who asks for her hand in marriage. At this occasion beholding Apurba fall on the muddy river-bank, she burst into a "melodious peel of high-pitched laughter." (81) Mrinmoyi maintains this bold and brazen posture even after her marriage, and tries to recreate her childhood days, braving innumerable obstacles. She always remains busy in fighting against the post-marriage limitations imposed on her, but eventually she also has to surrender before the orthodoxy and has to return to her husband as a traditional woman somewhat apologetic. Describing the sudden change in Mrinmoyi characteristically the story tells that she begins to feel as if she has attained maturity, but "was unaware when the Creator's sword severed her childhood from her youth. She looked around her, astonished and bruised, and saw herself anew." (97) Thus, Mrinmoyi from a free bird turns into a docile wife, one that society appreciates and values, which implies a sort of self-confinement and the loss of freedom. On the other hand, Mrinal in 'Strir Patra', and Sohini in 'The Laboratory', are different, in so far as even though both are oppressed by the masculine authority, they never surrender before it. The difference, however, is whereas Mrinal prefers to leave home in disgust, Sohini fights against it successfully. Obviously, it is due to this that Tagore regards the latter as really a 'New Woman' and probably his ideal woman.

Likewise, in many of his short stories Premchand too depicts women, who like Suman (*Sevasadan*) and Malti (*Godan*) also show the spirit of rebelliousness as per the temper of the age. However, most of them have eventually to bow down before the tradition, as the writer willfully links modernity with promiscuity. As for instance, in 'Miss Padma', the protagonist of the story is a lawyer, who disregards the institution of marriage and equates it with slavery. She enters into a live-in relationship with Prasad who she loves. The relation, however, does not last long as Prasad, who is an extravagant, ultimately leaves her. (Premchand, 1984, II, 94-104) Similarly, the marriage of Padma with Vinod in 'Do Sakhiyan' also staggers, as dissatisfied with her wastrel husband Padma flirts with another man pushing Vinod on the verge of committing suicide, but they eventually patch up as Padma on the advice of a friend Kusum wins her husband back by her self sacrifice, spiritual love and complete dedication. In the same story Padma's friend Chanda is a traditional girl, whose

marriage party goes back leaving her behind under the pretext of inadequate dowry even after solemnizing the marriage. Nonetheless, she still considers her husband as her lord and is, therefore, able to persuade him to accept her as his wife. (IV: 210-277) Similarly, in 'Prenuptial', Prabha also believes in traditionalism, but her husband Pashupati is devoted to western culture, who flirts with other women but they reject him one by one, leaving him totally dejected, which forces him to return home. Incidentally, he reaches home where his daughter who is about to get married brings out a reunion between her parents, and her mother being a loyal, sacrificial, and devoted wife forgives her guilty husband. (Rai, 1978: 170-183) Vageshwari in 'Unmad' is also a traditional woman, who along with her routine work also manages the household, sparing her writer husband Manhar to work peacefully. Manhar in due course emerges as a successful writer and is sent to England on a government scholarship, but there he marries Jenny, who flirts with men who matter to get promotions for Manhar. However, things change after Manhar, now a celebrity returns to India, as Jenny refuses to settle as a traditional Indian wife. Dejected Manhar then goes back to Vageshwari, who forgives him and restores him to his old position, but when Jenny comes to know about it she tries to shoot Vageshwari down, Manhar snatches her weapon and kills his own self. (Premchand, 1984, II, 116- 136) Premchand in 'Shanti' reiterates most effectively the importance of traditional culture, wherein the woman protagonist is a traditional housewife, while her lawyer husband is a votary of the western culture. The trouble begins when the wife at the behest of her husband adopts the western ways, but by her changed demeanor she antagonizes her husband and family. Realizing his mistake, the husband eventually requests his wife to return to the old fold, saying, "I want to again see you as a woman who is shy, walks with her head down, offers prayers, reads Ramayan, does household work, spins charkha, is scared of god and is completely devoted to her husband." The wife, who too has by now become aware of the worthlessness of the western culture, readily agrees. (Premchand, 1984, VII: 80-96) Thus, Premchand blames the western culture, for "the break-up of the Indian joint family system by spoiling the Indian woman...whom he would very much prefer to remain the traditional 'Goddess of Sacrifice and Service'." (Orr, 1957: 33)

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