

Marginalized Women in Rabindranath Tagore's Selected Short Story

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Abstract

Indian English Literature is an endeavor of showcasing the rare gems of Indian Writing in English. Throughout history, women have always struggled to gain equality, respect, and the same rights as men. Feminism is a philosophy in which women and their contributions are valued. Feminism can also be described as a movement or revolution that includes women and men who wish the world to be without boundaries. Rabindranath Tagore comprehends the plight of Indian women of his days. In his short story, the women characters struggle for their identity and human dignity. In "The Skeleton" he brings out women as a poison bride causing her husband's death and then turning into a skeletal widow.

KEYWORDS: plight, struggle, revolution, equality and dignity.

Introduction

The image of women in Indian Writing in English is based on the traditional ancient literature of India and it showed women as a devoted wife or a duty-bound mother. Tagore has a significant role in the liberation of women. He explored the plight of women and expressed their agony through his short stories. He is responsible for the regional Bengali short stories gaining a universal status. Tagore is a favourite among researchers of literature worldwide. Women are devoted to the portrayal of the image of subjugated and marginalized women. It is a fact that woman is victimized and subjugated by the male community everywhere. She has been the subordinate sex and has to conform to male standards. They are never regarded as autonomous beings. The other important aspect is the oppression and suffering of a fellow woman. Woman ill-treats and exploits women instead of showing love, respect and understanding for their own sex. The universal psychological truth, that the woman is the enemy of the woman. It shows how one woman subjugates the other woman than the subjugation of women by men. The ruling ideology that favours men prompts women to fall prey to the designs of men. As a result of their exploitation and subjugation, to assert their identity, women turn rebellious. Silence is a symbol of oppression, a characteristic of the subaltern condition, while speech signifies self-expression and liberation. There is a transformation on their part. Now they are aware of their rights and hence revolt against the traditional norms and fight for equality in the male-dominated Indian society.

Analysis of marginalised Woman character

In "The Skeleton" (1892), the protagonist is a child widow who had died many years earlier. Her body had been donated to Campbell Medical School, the skeleton used to teach the lesson for student. One night young student was sleeping in a room next to

where the skeleton was kept and he heard something outside the room. It was the spirit of the person from whom the skeleton had come. It started narrating its story to young student throughout the night. Before the last thirty-five years, the skeleton had its physical existence. She got married when she was very young and she was treated in a cruel manner by her husband.

She said that:

“ My husband, I felt like a fish caught on a hook. That is, a completely unknown animal had hauled me upon a hook, snatched me out of the cool, deep, protective waters of my home with no chance of escape”(Dominic,2009,p-57)

After two months of her marriage, her husband died and she became a widow. People marginalized her from the society. After looking at many signs, her father-in-law decided to call her as a “poison bride” and her parents-in-law also thought that they expelled the ominous widow from their house and she came back to her father’s house, too young to understand what had happened to her. She had one elder brother and he had a friend named Sashisekhar. He completed his medical course and he joined as a family doctor in his friend’s house. She was attracted to him when she got chance to meet the doctor. She loved him and dwelt in imagination when she was alone in the garden. She questioned herself for growing sad day by day.

“And when in the evening I sat like an empress at the foot of my flowering tree, all the world’s young men sat my feet in Shashisekhar’s image. Are you listening? What are you thinking? ‘I’m thinking’, I said with a sigh, ‘that I should have liked to have been born as Shashisekhar.’”(Radice, 1991,p-88)

One day she had fever and the doctor was called to see her pulse and the doctor said that he might felt her pulse. After recover from fever, she used to dress up secretly in colorful saris with bracelets on her arms, imagining men admiring and caressing her. The doctor’s practice increased and opened a small on the ground floor of her house. She used to enjoy visiting him for carefree talk about medicines and about how to use poisons to help the sick people from dying.

Then one day she heard that the doctor was getting married. On the evening of his wedding, the girl slipped some poison from his office into one of his drinks; soon thereafter, as flutes played, he left for the bride’s house. She then dressed herself in a silk wedding sari, put a large streak of red vermilion on her forehead and adorned herself with all of jewels on her chest. She consumed poison herself and lay down on her bed. She hoped that when people came to find her they would see her with a smile on her lips as a married woman.

“My hope was that when people came and found me, that slight smile would still be intoxicatingly present on my red lips. My hope was that when I slowly entered my bridal-chamber of Eternal Night, I would take that smile with me. But where was the bridal-chamber? Where was my bridal attire? Woken by a clattering sound within me, I found

three boys learning anatomy from me. In a breast that had throbbed with joy and sorrow, where the petals of youth had daily unfolded one by one, a teacher was pointing out with his cane which bone was which. And the final smile into which I had formed my lips had gone without trace”.(Radice,1991,p-91)

The story ends here, when the morning arrives and the spirit of the skeleton or widow silently leaves the young man to himself. In beginning of the story, the girl is a real bride who is perceived to have caused her husband’s death by her nature as a poison bride, and later she is dressed as a bride who indeed does administer poison to a departing groom. At the end of each sequence, after causing her groom’s death, she becomes a skeleton. Initially, it is her existence as a widow that is skeletal: she is a beautiful woman full of dreams and throbbing life, but she is forced to live without love, fulfilment, and the capacity to unite with others.

Nirmalkumar Sidhanta commented on this story thus:

“...its supernaturalism is extremely thin. It is a tale of unrequited passion and sordid crime revealed through a dream. It is suggested that the genesis of the dream of the apparition telling the story is a skeleton used by students, but the reader is not taken into psychological analysis of the genesis of the dream. The apparition is not significant nor is its presence made visible to the reader.(Dominic,2009,p-58).

Conclusion

Rabindranath Tagore explored women issues through his writing in society. He thought that his short story is to be the mirror in which men would see themselves and would change, for it is necessary to bring about a change in the way men looked at themselves in order to change the lives of women. He described that the widow had literally become a hollow skeleton that possesses no signs of life or emotion.

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