

I. Tagore's Representation of Women

This research is a study on the short stories of the Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore in the light of Third World feminism thereby exploring the ambivalence of Tagore towards woman. It is an attempt to show the specific problems of Third World women which are vastly different from those of the First World women due to distinct socio-economic, political, as well as historical location. Altogether with this, this research shows how Tagore's ambivalence prevails in the representation of female characters in his short stories. On the one hand, Tagore shows female characters' complicity with patriarchal values. On the other hand, Tagore portrays female characters as inspiring heroines.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is one of the outstanding literary figures of all times. His contribution to Bengali literature is unique and unparalleled. He is a well-known poet, dramatist, actor, producer, musician, painter, reformer, philosopher, novelist, and short story writer. In this regard, he is a versatile thinker. His fecundity of writing was amazing. In sheer quantity of work few writers can equal him. His writings include more than one thousand poems and over two thousand songs in addition to a large number of short stories, novels, dramatic works and essays on religion, education, politics, and literature.

Tagore was also a pioneer in the field of education. He established Santiniketan School to educate the children. Though outside India Tagore upheld and interpreted the Indian philosophy of life, in his own country he was the severest critic of its social institutions and religious practices which encouraged superstition and inequality and tolerated injustice. Indian first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru highlighted Tagore's contribution in education in his book *Discovery of India* by saying:

His constructive work in the field of education quietly begun has already made Santiniketan one of the focal points of Indian culture. His influence over the mind of India, and especially of successive rising generations has been tremendous. Not Bengali only, the language in which he himself wrote, but all the modern languages of India have been molded partly his writing. (112)

This extract vividly shows the contribution of Tagore in education. Tagore inaugurated the new era of modern education in India by establishing Shantiniketan. Tagore not only uplifted Bengali literature but also contributed to mold the mind of whole India. In this way, he was considered a pillar of modern India.

Though Tagore was essentially a poet, he was much more than poet in the Western sense of the term. He was a poet in the Sanskrit sense of the word, kavi, a seer, an intermediary between the human and divine. Like the sun after which he was named (rabi in Bengali derived from Sanskrit ravi, means the sun). He sheds light and warmth and revitalized the mental and moral soil of his land, revealed unknown horizons of thoughts and spanned the arch that divides the East from the West.

Krishna Kripalini remarks about the Tagore's philosophy:

The basic and most robust characteristic of Tagore's philosophy of life was his emphasis on the development of human personality and his deep –set conviction that there is inherent contradiction between the claims of the so called opposites- the flesh and the spirit, the human and the divine, love of life and love of God, joy in beauty and pursuit of truth, social obligation and individual rights, respect for tradition and the freedom of experiment, love of one's people and faith in the unity of mankind. These seemingly opposites can and must be

reconciled, not by tentative compromises and timid vacillation but by building a true harmony out of the apparent discordance. (215)

This extract sheds light upon the Tagore's philosophy of life. He gives more emphasis on the development of human personality. And at the same time, he acknowledges the inherent contradiction between the physical and spiritual, love of humanity and divinity, art and life, social duty and personal freedom, the love of own culture and the desire to see unity in diversity. Tagore believes in reconciliation between these opposite ideas by building a true harmony in expense of tentative compromises and discordance.

Tagore was human and humane, a fully developed man who responded as keenly to the joy of life as he did to the cry of human distress. He was a lover of his people, a lover whose loyalty was pledged and strived for social justice, for the right of lowly to dignity, of poor to material being of the citizen to self-government, of the ignorant to knowledge, of the child to unfettered development of woman to equal status with man. Bhomkesh Chandra Chakravorty's remark, "Tagore has been usually regarded in the West as a mystic and romantic poet, but his writing encompasses much wider and greater than mystic-romanticism. Realism and international humanism are the fundamental characteristics of Tagorean literature" (321) further highlights the versatile nature of Tagore.

Though mainly a poet, Tagore also made his mark as writer of fiction- of novels and short stories. Among his written novel, mainly three appeared in approved English version in his own life time. They are: *Naukhadubi*, *Gora*, and *The Home and the World*.

Rabindranath Tagore wrote short stories at every stage of his life. His first story "Bhikarinni" (The Beggar Woman) was published in 1877 when he was sixteen,

and his last few stories-outlines rather than completed wholes were written a few months before his death in 1941.

Though Tagore has written a vast numbers of short stories, this researcher mainly deals with five stories: "The Living and the Dead," "Exercise Book", "The Gift of Sight", "Debit and Credit", and "Mahamaya". The researcher expects that these stories will be relevant to substantiate this thesis.

"The Living and the Dead" describes a peculiar situation in which a woman finds herself dead when she realizes that she is alive, and yet dead to the outside world. Kadambini was a widow staying with her brother-in-law Saradasankar in his house at Ranighat. She had no relatives left. Saradasankar's son was her favorite and she spent her days nursing him. One night she died suddenly. Her body was taken by four Brahmin servants to the burial place of Ranighat, near a pond. They brought the dead body to a hut and waited for the fire wood. Meanwhile the dead body made some movements and went out of the hut. The horrified servants fled away. Kadambini was not dead actually; for some reason her life-function had been suspended. She understood that she was a 'dead' woman.

Kadambini decided not to go to her brother's house and create problems there. Hence with the help of a passerby she went to her friend, Yogamaya's house at Nishindapur. Shripati was Yogamaya's husband. Kadambini stayed there for a month not discussing her' death' and escape, Yogamaya started to suspect Kadambini'sbehaviour, especially with her husband. He could not send a widow away. And now he decided to inform the news of Kadambini's stay there to her brother-in-law. He visited Saradasankar and came to know that Kadambini was dead and gone. He informed this to Yogamaya in that night which led to an argument between them. Kadambini overheard all these and came to their room and announced

that she was the 'dead' Kadambini. Yogamaya fell unconscious, taking her as a ghost. Kadambini left the house at once and came straight to her brother-in-law's house at Ranighat. She got into the room where the child was sleeping after a bout of fever. When the child asked for some water she gave it to him from a bronze vessel, and the servants who came to the room then were shocked to see the 'ghost'. Her brother-in-law and others rushed to the room. She told them that she was not dead but living. When at last she fails to convince the people around her that she is alive, she throws herself down into the well and by her death she proves that she was not dead.

In "Gift of Sight" we find a psychological study of the emotions of a blind woman. Kushum herself tells the story of her life. She is not born blind. Her eyesight gradually becomes weaker and weaker after she has given birth to a dead child. Her husband, a student of medicine gets a chance of testing his medical knowledge on his wife. The result is that her condition becomes worse and worse. When at last, he brings a competent doctor to examine her, it was already too late. Soon afterwards Kushum becomes totally blind.

Kushum's husband now realizes his stupidity and is repentant for his past neglect of his wife: "It was I who destroyed your eyes" (136). And then she tries to persuade him to marry again. But he spurns the idea of it and swears by almighty God.

The story writer has made a subtle delineation of the different stages of the mental separation between husband and wife till there is a complete estrangement between the two. The husband goes to a small town to practice as a doctor. He earns a lot of money and then he becomes selfish and hard hearted.

A new chapter begins in their married life when one day the husband's aunt introduces to him Himangini, her cousin's daughter. His first reaction of shyness and

hesitation is soon changed into a feeling of attraction. After a few span of time when the husband says to Kushum one night that he has to go away for two or three days, Kushum at once blurts out that he is a liar and that the truth is that he is going to get married.

The end of the story provides an agreeable surprise when we find Hemangini married to Kushum's brother and there is repentance in the heart of Kushum's husband. He realizes the folly of his passion for Hemangini and sincerely feels happy that she has been married to Kushum's brother. A genuine and lasting reconciliation now takes place between Kushum and her husband.

“The Exercise Book” is one of the less known but influencing short story by Tagore. The protagonist of the story is Uma, which captivates the reader to be part of joys and sorrows, her innocence and justifiable aspirations.

This story explores the impact of a prejudiced patriarchal society on the life of a sensitive and intelligent girl with a creative bent of mind but devoid of opportunities. Narrated from the view point of the girl child, Uma, who was pushed into child marriage, denied education and self-expression. “The Exercise Book” highlights the emotions, thoughts, feelings and pains of a child caught in the shackles of social prejudices. “The Exercise Book” becomes a source of expression of the little girl's individual views and freedom of writing.

“Mahamaya” is a love story of Tagore. Rajib and Mahamaya were lovers. Mahamaya was a reserved and serious type of woman aged twenty-four. She was rich and lived with her serious brother Bhaminicharan Chattopadhaya. Her parents were dead. People feared Bhaminicharan for no reason.

Rajib was brought to that locality by Bura Sahib, the owner of a silk company. His father was a dependant of the Sahib. When he died the English man looked after

the child and when matured Rajib was appointed in the silk company. Rajib had been staying in a house near to Mahamaya's. Thus Rajib and Mahamaya had been playmates from early childhood. They were in love. One day Rajib proposed to her that they should elope and get married. But that was not acceptable to her. Rajib did not belong to noble family though he was a Brahmin. Hence Mahamaya's brother would not allow their marriage. She was not willing to dishonor and disobey her hard brother. Rajib told her one evening that he would be leaving the place the next day with the Sahib. Meanwhile Mahamaya's brother appeared there. He had overheard what they discussed and went silently back to the house. Mahamaya told Rajib that she would go to his house and he had to wait for her.

But that night she was brought by her brother to a hut for the dying, at the bank of the river. There she was married to an old dying man. She became a widow the next day. She decided to end her life by "Suttee." Rajib came to know about it and wanted to prevent 'suttee' with the help of the Sahib. But unfortunately the Sahib had gone to Shonapura, giving Rajib one-month's leave. Meanwhile there was terrible wind and rain. Rajib, very much dejected, decided to end his life, and so he started to go out. But it was raining outside. Suddenly someone knocked at his door. A woman appeared there drenched in rain, her head completely covered with a cloth. It was Mahamaya who escaped from the pyre, due to the tempest and rain. She told him that she had kept the promise of coming back to his house. She wanted to know whether he would accept her, who was only the old Mahamaya in spirit. She would stay with him only if he promised not to remove her purda or not to look at her face. If he was not willing, she would go back to the pyre. He replied that he would die if she left him. As requested by her they went to Shonapura and started living there.

Their life was not at all happy because of her purda. Days and nights passed, keeping them separate and away. One full moon night his feelings were aroused. She was sleeping. He went to her bed. He looked into her bare face, which was lit by the moon-light. He was horrified to see the burnt shocking face. His shriek roused her. She covered her head with the purda and stood up. He requested her, holding her feet, to pardon him. Without saying a word Mahamaya got out of the room. She never returned to his house.

In "Debit and Credit" Tagore tells the story of Nirupama, a victim of the cursed dowry system. Nirupama's marriage with the son of a grand Raybahadur was about to take place. Her father RamsundarMitra could only raise seven thousand rupees in place of the ten thousand rupees he had promised as dowry. Raybahadur objected to the marriage but the bridegroom insisted on marrying Nirupama, in her bridal dress. It was the beginning of Nirupama's tragic life. Her father was insulted whenever he came to visit her. Her husband was under the shadow of his father and mother, and she had to suffer endless tortures. Everyone in the house treated her as if she had no right in the household; and had entered it by deceit.

Nirupama's father decided to sell his house to pay off the balance of the dowry. But his sons objected it. Nirupama wanted to stay in her father's house for a few days to console him. With much indignity, shame and hurt, Ramsundar raised three thousand rupees and came to Ray bahadur. But Ray bahadur did not accept the money; instead he insulted him. Ramsundar was not allowed to see his daughter. Dejected, he returned to his house. Then he stopped visiting his daughter even when she insisted. At last, he vowed to bring Nirupama to his house for the 'puja'. He sold his house without his sons' knowledge and with the money he appeared before his daughter. Her father-in-law was not there. Ramsundar's eldest son who came to know

about the sale of the house burst into the room with his two small sons and started to complain. Hearing this Nirupama told his father strongly not to give any more money to her father-in-law. These things were noticed by the servants of the house and reported it to her mother-in-law.

Nirupama's life in her husband's house became a bed of nails for her. Her husband had gone off a few days after their wedding, to be a Deputy Magistrate in another part of the country. Nirupama now fell seriously ill. The news was not conveyed to her father. The doctor was called only when she was dying. Nirupama, the eldest daughter-in-law in the household thus died, and the funeral rites were performed with appropriate pomp. Those people who came to condole with the Raybahadur gave long descriptions of the magnificence of the funeral.

"The modern short story is Rabindranath Tagore's gift of Indian culture," observed Vishwanath S. Narvane in 1977. Scholars frequently praise Tagore's short stories for the deeply human quality of the characters and relationships. Mahindeor Kaur commented of Tagore, "With an infinite sympathy and rare psychological insight, he works out the emotional possibilities of different human relations" (223).

His short stories, written originally in Bengali and later translated into English, are world renowned and as competent as any other short story writers' work in the world. Tagore has been compared to such masters of the short story, as Tolstoy, Edgar Allan Poe, Anton Chekov, and Guy de Maupassant. Asit Bandhyopadya makes a comparative assessment of Tagore:

Tolstoy is didactic. Maupassant is erotic. Rabindranath Tagore combines the good qualities of both without their excesses. He delved deep into the psychology of man and riddle of existence in his short stories which are universal in their appeal... Rabindranath's success as

a master of short story writer was actually ensured by his essentially lyrical temperament since... there is close affinity between a short story and a lyric. (61-62)

Tagore's stories reveal the fact that he had great insight into women's heart.

ShrinivasaIyenger says about Tagore's women, "The women in his short stories, of course, are splendidly womanly, frail and fair, yet wise and strong; always or almost-more sinned against sinning. Tagore plumbs the depth of the womanly heart, and behind the seeming wiles and gestures, he sees reserves of devotion and sacrifice" (77).

Tagore brought out the pathos of women caused by various situations in the house. Women had to face several problems in their houses. NirmalkumanSidhantha succinctly said:

In a few stories we have seen the problems of the wife in joint family, the conflict of loyalties between what due to her husband and what she must do for her parents' family. But the conflict become more acute when her husband is perhaps a subordinate person, where she may see jealousy or ill will in all sides. Numerous new relationships grow up and she has to adjust herself to these without forgetting her old ties: the relation between the wife and her brother's younger (who is an object of affection while the elder brother has to be treated with respect); those between the husband's and wife's sisters, between the wives brothers, between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. If she is unfortunate she may have a co-wife; if she loses her husband she may become a little better than a maid servant tolerated by her 'in-laws'. If she has some responsibility to a brother, she may find it

difficult to reconcile that with what she owes to her husband's family.

(287)

Tagore is an artist of rare lyrical powers, who understands the human soul. Tagore's stories are devotional, mystical, sublimated ecstasy. They are the thought of a seer, the perfect union of beauty and truth. Bhomkesh Chandra Chakravarty remarks: "His short stories bear the impress of his poetic genius. We find in them rich emotionalism which is the soul of the lyric. At the same time they give us a realistic picture of the poor and middle- class society in the villages and small town of Bengal. (115)

Tagore's stories do not focus on incidents rather they bring out the hopes and disappointments and frustrations, joys, and sorrows that are inherent in life. Each story reveals to us a particular aspect of the human heart. Consequently, we find unfettered imagination. As another critic Bandyopadhyay has been pointed out "Rabindranath Tagore's success as a master of short story writer was actually by his essential lyrical temperament since...there is close affinity between a short story and a lyric" (3).

Tagore's stories often set in rural Bengali village and are peopled by underprivileged sector of society. In the short story of Tagore one can find the influence of man, nature, and mysteries of the supernatural. Bandyopadhyay further says, "The picture of our rural urban lives, disintegration of the old joint families, family quarrels, conflict in love and affection, conflict between religious superstitions and humanistic values, and final triumph of humanism provides a pageant of the entire Bengal" (52). The domestic stories of Tagore are treated with unprecedented realistic approach. Similarly, Rajat Chand opines "Rabindranath Tagore was the first Bengali writer to elevate the short story to a serious art form. Tagore easily intermingled stark realism and poetic idealism in his short stories which reflected the

contemporary life in rural and urban Bengal. Many of the stories portray conflicts or tensions between the new and the old, cruelty and sensitivity, solitude and crowd, male and female” (101).

In this way, above-mentioned critics have presented criticisms of Tagore’s short stories, but the Third World feminist literary criticism of the short stories is quite sparse. This gap will be filled up by the research.

Third World feminism is a branch of feminism which deals with the unique experiences of the women in the so-called Third World countries. In other words, Third World feminism is such a branch of feminism which shows loopholes of Western feminism in its inability to address the history and heritage of Third World cultures thereby analyzing different types of suppression and marginalization of women in different scenario of global and local patriarchy. By challenging the essentialist and homogenous views of middle class white women, it brings fore the ideas of women from different classes, nations, politics, cultures, and races. It also studies the biases and prejudices of ethnocentric group of Western feminism. In this way, it tries to recognize the problems, suppression, and discrimination of Third World women which are hitherto unrecognized or misrepresented.

Different theorists from Third World countries like Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Sara Suleri, KetuKatrak, Uma Narayan, Kumari Jayabardane, Rajeshwori Sundra Rajan, Sarojini Shaool, Sushi Tharu and others have criticized Western feminism because of its ethnocentric orientation and neglect of unique experiences of women from Third World countries. They claimed that Anglo-American women’s issues are not appropriate in the distinct from the issues of the women from the Third World or non-Western society. For example, the African American women’s issues are much more distinct from the issues of the

Anglo American from the past to the very recent times. Anglo-American women are superior to non-Anglo-American in terms of many perspectives. Non-Anglo-American women have the experiences of many other forms of marginalization in terms of class, caste, gender, ethnicities, regions, colonization etc.

Although women from the Third World have been engaged in the feminist movement, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Sarojini Sahoo criticize Western feminism on the grounds that it is ethnocentric and does not take into account the unique experiences of women from Third World countries. According to Chandra Talpade Mohanty, women in the Third World feel that Western feminism bases its understanding of women on “internal racism, classism and homophobia” (49).

Third World women’s liberation is necessary, but we should understand the opinions, feelings, of women within political, social, economic, and sexual oppression. According to Kumari Jayabardana, Third World feminism not only deals with foreign ideology ‘imposed’ on ‘Third World’ countries, but it also focuses on women’s struggle for equal rights and against the subordination of women themselves. This issue is vital in Third World’s case.

Unlike Western feminism, the perspective of Third World Feminism can be reflected in the agendas and the desires and the principal struggles of Third World women which are centered on the most basic needs and basic rights. All the researchers or activists of Third World feminism in general argues that women should attain freedom not only from gender related inequalities, but also from those related to race, class, castes, cultures, regions, national asymmetries as these categories are mutually intertwined in the concrete and real lives of women. So, Third World woman critic and activist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in particular tends to reject the notion of single and uniform feminist movement, acknowledging heterogeneity that

derives from diverse sources of oppression. For them, feminism is more widely defined as a struggle against all forms of injustice so that women's rights could be secured in totality. The Western construct of feminism, fails as the notion promoted as women as an autonomous and sovereign cannot be applied in the Third World women in particular.

Uma Narayan in *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions and Third World Feminism* (1997) aims at the related notion of nation, identity, and tradition to show how Western and Third World culture and feminist genders. It directs a philosophical perspective on areas of ongoing interests such as nationalism, tradition, and Westernization in Third World context. According to her, since Western feminism cannot recognize and acknowledge the unique experiences of Third World cultural designations, it is invalid in such context. She argues, "Third World feminism is not a mindless mimicking of Western agendas" (13). She further sees:

Women in Western contexts might be unfamiliar with the violence against women connected to the contemporary functioning of the institutions of dowry and arranged marriages. They have no stranger to battery and violence prevalent within their own various forms of marriage and family arrangements. They are no stranger either to the sense of shame that accompanies admitting victimization, or to a multiplicity of material, social, and cultural structures that pose serious impediments to women seeking assistance or to their leaving abusive relationships. (13)

In such designations, it shows that Western feminism cannot address different and so called unique experiences of the Third World women. Their continual ignorance to address the cause of dowry murders, dowry related harassment, issues relating to

woman's poverty, work, health, and reproduction shows that they are unable to address the social cultural experiences of Third World societies.

To show Tagore's ambivalence towards females in his short stories, Third World feminism is the theoretical tool to analyze the text. But in doing so, it will not cross the frontier of the textual research. It is proved with the support of different writers and critics from the domain concerned. This researcher divides this thesis into three major divisions. First chapter gives overall introduction of this research. It sheds light upon the overall trends of Tagore's short stories and Tagore's representation of female characters in these stories. The second chapter analyzes how female characters are represented by considering the Tagore's ambivalence in the light of Third World women's experiences. And finally, the third chapter concludes the whole thesis and shows feminist concerns and Tagore's ambivalence towards females in his short stories.

II. Tagore's Ambivalence towards Women

This research is a study of the position of contemporary women represented in the short stories of Rabindranath Tagore. It is mainly concerned with ambivalent position of female characters in these representative short stories. To be more precise, it illuminates female characters' complicity with patriarchal values and norms and at the same time their denial to those patriarchal ideologies and assertion of self as inspiring heroines. In throwing light upon these above mentioned female characters' position, researcher will strive to prove these ideas clinging with Third World feminist issues which are pertinent to show Third world women's issues.

"The Living and the Dead" presents a young, childless widow, Kadambini, who is believed by others, and at first believes herself, to be dead, existing in the world only as a ghost. Kadambini, protagonist of this story, faces many tribulations for being a widow. The following initial lines from the story illustrate the pathetic condition of widow: "The widow living with the zamindar Sharadashankar's family, in the big house at Ranighat, had no blood relatives left. One by one they had died. In her husband's family too, there was no one she could call her own, having no husband or son" (1).

The story begins showing the physical alienation of Kadambini. After her husband has died and she does not have her own son, she is alienated from society. Prominent Third World feminist Ketu H. Katrak has attributed such kind of alienation to tradition. Katrak says "other traditionally legitimate female roles such as the proper behavior of widows and of single women lead to experiences of physical alienation from their bodies which in turn cause intense mental suffering" (192).

The pathetic condition of widow is also seen in the mind of Shripati who has given shelter to Kadambini in her difficult condition. The following lines from the

story reveal this: “He had said to himself, the people in her husband’s house must have treated this childless widow with great injustice and cruelty, so that she was forced to flee and take refuge with me. She has no father or mother –so how can I desert her?” (8).

The widow, Kadambini, is as the title suggests, both living and the dead, or the perhaps neither living nor dead. She does not belong to the world of living, yet she is trapped there, as a lonely and inauspicious being. This horrific situation of widowhood is further substantiated by the words of prominent critic Nirmal Kumar Bose:

Widow is a marginal entity in society. It seems reasonable to view widowhood as a liminal phase in the life of a woman: a transitional period outside of normal existence which only ends at death. She was not allowed to wear an insignia of her active married state, that is her clothes and her jewelry, but wear rags. In some cases her hair was shorn. She was not permitted to partake in family meals, could only sleep on the ground and in all ways was kept separate from the active social world of the living. She was treated by the family and rest of the society as unclean and polluting. And her marginality was enforced by these pollution taboos. She was expected to devote the rest of her life to ascertain and worship of the gods, especially Shiva and her dead husband. (255-56)

This extract vividly shows the harrowing situation of widowhood. After being widow, she does not have her own self. She compels to live according to the so called rules and regulation of that society. The situation of widow is so harrowing which even

cannot compare with the condition of animal. The widow is considered unholy, polluted in the eyes of society.

Despite being alienated and misbehaved, Kadambini shows tremendous effort to assert her own existence in this world. Though society assumes her as a dead one, she claims that she is not dead one; she claims that she is not dead. The following extract from the story proves this:

Kadambini could bear no more. She screamed out, 'I did not die, I did not die, I tell you! How can I make you understand – I did not die! Can't you see; I am alive'. She seized the bell metal bowl that had been dropped on the ground and dashed it against her brows; blood gushed out from the impact. 'See here, I am alive!'(13)

The upper mentioned extract proves that Kadambini is not merely a puppet in patriarchal society but also she has possessed heroic qualities to assert her existence. The screaming of Kadambini can be taken as a revolt to that society which hesitates to acknowledge the living condition of kadambini. In other words, the screaming of kadambini can be taken as a slap to that society so that it can awake and recognize the widow as a human as every member of that society.

Similarly, "Mahamaya" presents the awful estranged life of a woman who becomes a widow the day after her wedding. The story opens with Mahamaya as a beautiful young unmarried woman. She is of a Kulin Brahmin family, the highest rank of Brahmans. She falls in love with a young boy of the village, Rajeev, who is a Brahman, but not a Kulin Brahman. When Mahamaya's brother, Bhavanicharan Chatterjee, finds out about their love he immediately arranged an alternative marriage for Mahamaya to a Kulin Brahman man to protect the rank of the family. The following extract from an essay: "Raja Rammohan Roy and the Status of Women in

Bengal in the Nineteenth Century” by S. N. Mukherjee reminds us the Kulinism and its effects in Bengal society:

What is important for us to recognize is the fact that the reputation of a family depended on the character of marriages made by its female members. A Kulin family could lose its rank by wrong marriages made by its female members whereas a non-Kulin girl could bring honor to her family by marrying into a good Kulin house. (258)

In such a way, rank of family plays crucial role eclipsing the role of individuality.

Though Mahamaya loves Rajeev, she becomes the scapegoat of patriarchal norms and values. Consequently, she is compelled to marry an old man from the Kulin family. Nirmal Kumar Boss further describes the ingrained Kulinism in this way:

In traditional society, marriage was not viewed as a union between two compatible individuals but as a social alliance between families. In Bengal, a bride became part of her husband’s family on marriage, bringing a substantial dowry with her. Marriages were arranged by the family elders with a view of maintaining or enhancing the power and prestige of family. Negotiations were carried out by the ghataki, the professional genealogist or go-between. Marriage ceremonies were the occasion for lavish expenditure, the magnificence of the affair being indicative of the status of the family. (256)

This extract vividly shows the prevalent Kulinism in contemporary high class Brahmin society. In such society marriage was not considered as the union between two independent individuals. Rather marriage was considered as the matter of prestige. The girl could bring prestige if she had married with the boy of high class.

Similarly, if she had married with the boy of lower class, she could not bring honor to her family.

Rajeev's family background is the only factor which hinders him to be the appropriate suitor of Mahamaya. Though Rajeev loves Mahamaya, he has not succeeded to marry her because of his poor family background. The following extract from the story clearly shows Rajeev's background:

Rajeev was a stranger to the village. He was brought along by the British manager of the local silk factory. His father was an employee of this English man. After the father's demise, the English man took responsibility of the young and brought him to this village when he was still a child. The boy's only family was his aunt. (17)

From this extract the researcher infers that though Rajeev is from Brahmin caste, he is not from a higher Kulin rank. In other words, Rajeev does not belong to any Kulin or aristocratic family lineage. That is the sole cause which hinders him to be the good suitor to marry Mahamaya.

Despite Mahamaya's unflinching love to Rajeev, Mahamaya cannot transcend the boundary of patriarchy to take her own decision to marry with Rajeev. In other words, Mahamaya is not as heroic as it needs to transcend the boundary of patriarchy. In this regard, Mahamaya seems submissive. The following extract from the story vividly shows the submission of Mahamaya before patriarchal values and norms:

That same night Bhavanicharan brought a red wedding sari and called up Mahamaya 'Go put this on.' She came back wearing it. He then said, 'come with me'...No one had ever even hinted at disobeying Bhavanicharan's orders, and so with Mahamaya. The two started walking towards the cemetery near the river. It was not far from the

house. An old Brahmin was lying there bidding for death. They came and stood by him. A priest was also waiting nearby the Bhavanicharan gestured at him. Immediately the priest made arrangements for the auspicious occasion and stood ready. Mahamaya knew instantly that she was going to be married to the dying man. She did not raise even the faintest of objection to it. In a dark house, dimly lighted by the fire from two nearby funeral pyres, the wedding ceremony was carried out with unintelligible religious incantations mixed with distressful cries of the dying. (155)

The above cited extract from the story vividly shows the power relationship between Mahamaya and his brother Bhavanicharan. Bhavanicharan has got absolute power from patriarchal society to decide the future of his sister Mahamaya. But Mahamaya seems just a puppet; she cannot take her own decision over whom to marry. In this way, patriarchal tradition has appeared as a shackle which fetters Mahamaya's right over her own body. The following extract from KetuKatrak's *The Politics of Female Body* sheds light the vicious condition of women under the guise of tradition:

Traditions inform and control women's life from birth to death. Traditions are used to control female sexuality, and to justify such domination. When women confront traditions, they often have to negotiate and work within the boundaries of patriarchal structures such as marriage. Stepping outside of tradition often results in severe reprisals of the female body. (241)

This extract proves that in the guise of traditions, women have sacrificed their own desire, subjectivity, willingness and decision. In this regard, Mahamaya has not had

rein over her own present and future. She is treated as an object but not as a free and independent human being.

Though Mahamaya has undergone many injustices under the patriarchal system, she endeavors to assert her subjectivity. If we examine closely the character of Mahamaya, we find the heroic characteristics. For example, her manipulation over love affair can be taken as heroic act. The following extract from the story vividly shows the awesome personality of Mahamaya which indicates the leading role of Mahamaya in their affair:

Rajeev always saw Mahamaya with a little awe; her somber glance made him even more nervous. He had thought of saying a few words that would be lucid and intelligible, but he had to forego that wish hastily. Being unable to avoid giving a reason for their meeting, he sputtered, 'Let's escape from this place and get married secretly.' This no doubt conveyed what Rajeev had in mind, but the preamble he had so carefully planned for it remained unsaid. His words therefore came across as dry, bare, and even strange. He himself felt embarrassed by them; there was not even the possibility of repairing the words by some tweaking and padding. After summoning Mahamaya at high noon to this run-down temple by the riverside, all that silly man could manage to say was, 'Come, let's get married.' (154)

Rajeev's seeing Mahamaya with awe, somber glance of Mahamaya, Rajeev's hesitation to speak straightforwardly are some of the evidences in this extract which prove superiority of Mahamaya in the affair. In the similar manner, Mahamaya's acceptance of Rajeev's love in the presence of her brother Bhabanichara, "Rajeev I

will become your wife one day. You wait for me” (157) further buttresses the rebellious nature of Mahamaya.

“Exercise Book”, a story penned by Tagore, explores the agony of female character Uma in her reading and writing by patriarchal contemporary society. The aspiration of Uma in reading and writing is badly throttled by contemporary patriarchal society. This story vividly shows how Third World women were lagged in education in nineteenth and early twentieth century. At the same time, this story throws light upon the early marriage system, an evil practice prevalent in contemporary Third World society, and how it affects the overall lives of contemporary women.

Uma, a seven years old girl, has undergone many tribulations in pursuing reading and writing only for being woman. Though she has strong hankering for reading and writing, she cannot get opportunities for it. Mainly her own family, a unit of patriarchal society, has appeared as the main hindrance for her. Though Uma’s elder brother Govindalal and her husband Pyarimohan are educated, they appear to suppress Uma more than others. The following extract from the text proves the Govindalal’s attitude towards Uma’s writing:

In the quite of the afternoon, Uma took her brother’s pen and ink and wrote on the essay in bold letters:

So well –behaved is young Gopal

Whatever you give he eats it all.

I don’t believe she meant this to be a dig at the readers of Govindalal’s essay, but he was beside himself with rage. First he smacked Uma; then he took away her pencil stub, her ink smeared blunted pen and all her carefully accumulated writing implements. The little girl, quite

unable to understand the reason for such disgrace, sat in a corner and cried her heart out. (68)

These lines vividly show how Govindalal appears as the main hurdle in the endeavor of Uma. Though named after the warrior goddess of Hindu mythology (Durga), Uma fails to imbibe the deity's strength. She has no power to challenge his brother. In this sense, she seems just a puppet before patriarchal force.

The early marriage of Uma further complicates the situation. In her early age eight years old- Uma is compelled to marry with Pyarimohan under the duress of her parents sacrificing her individuality. This is one of the glaring examples of early marriage which the Third World women had undergone during the contemporary period of Tagore. But their sisters in Europe and America were spared from such kind of tradition at the same time. Elizabeth Leigh Stutchbury, a prominent critic, succinctly remarks the reality of that time:

It was necessary for a girl to be married before puberty, especially among the Brahman castes and in many kulin families the age of marriage was so pushed down that the girl was barely more than a baby. In some cases the husband would be many years older, so widows of ten to fifteen were not uncommon. (84)

Just mentioned in this upper mentioned extract, Uma compels to marry before puberty. The researcher can easily infer that there is long gap between the age of Uma and her Husband. This further complicates the life of Uma eclipsing her individual enhancement.

Uma is one of the representatives of that contemporary time who compels to bear the evil practice of early marriage. In that context she effaces her individuality

and surrenders in front of patriarchal values and norms. Nirmal Kumar Bose further elaborates the pathetic consequence of girls in that contemporary time:

Once the orthodox Hindu girl is married, she comes under the control of her husband and senior members, both male and female of his joint family. Suffice to say that more rigorous the control- she is substantially confined to the household and excluded from all productive activities other than the bearing the children. (257)

Uma also has undergone similar experiences in early marriage. She was under the control of his brother Gobindalal before marriage and that control was handed over Pyarimohan, the husband of Uma, after the marriage. In this way, Uma has become the scapegoat of patriarchal values and norms in the expense of her individuality. Thus early marriage has proved the main obstacle in the way of her advancement.

If we look from another side of the character of Uma, we find the rebelliousness and assertiveness in her character as well. This aspect shows the dawn of modernity heralding the new era of individuality and freedom of women. Her whimsical scribbling on the walls, the new almanac, her father's daily account-book, or even on her brother's thesis amply hint at her unconscious self-assertions.

Uma's exercise-book has become an embodiment of her extended self where she finds her individuality and freedom. The moment she realizes her entrapped situation and begins to sense pathos involved in her incarceration she seeks refuge in her exercise-book, the only space allotted to her. When Uma's husband Pyarimaohan encroaches upon Uma's private space and dismantles her brain child, exercise-book, she asserts her individuality by refusing to give exercise –book, “that girl held the exercise-book to her breast and looked at her husband, entreating him with her gaze. When she saw the Pyarimohan was about to force it from her, she hurled it down,

covered her face with her hands, and fell to the floor” (73). These lines proved that though Uma’s self-assertion does not yield any fruitful success to change the contemporary social scripting, Uma has appeared as the seed of protest and rebellion giving birth to individual scripting.

“Debit and Credit” is a story which revolves around the theme of Third World women’s predicament under the guise of marriage and dowry. To be more specific, this story deals with hardship and tribulation of Nirupama, a major character of this story, for being a woman. This harrowing story also sheds light upon the social reality of contemporary period of nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The story progresses with the anxiety of Ramsundar Mitra, the father of Nirupama, for not being able to find a suitable groom to marry with Nirupama. At last, he becomes success to catch a son of a reputed Rai Bahadur but it triggers and complicates anxiety further by demanding huge amount of rupees and gift items from the side of Rai bahadur. In spite of the demand of the huge amount of rupees and gift from the side of Rai Bahadur, Ramsundar Mitra does not want to slip off this groom so he confirms to marry with the son of a reputed Rai Bahadur.

This initial event of the story shows how the individual freedom of Nirupama in regarding the choice of life partner is throttled by society. Nirupama has become the mere spectator of event which determines the whole future of Nirupama. By dubbing such a bad situation as a ‘tradition’, patriarchal society tries to legitimize this injustice. It is pertinent to cite the Ketu H. Ketak’s argument incorporated in her book *The Politics of Female Body*:

Most Third World cultures, rather than sexuality as such, displace this category onto a variety of other forms of control over women’s bodies. Tradition such as dowry, polygamy, that in fact control the uses of the

female body are mystified as social custom with the weight of ancient at times, scriptural authority. And social custom is regarded as distinct from anything to do with sexuality although that is often its major arena of control in terms of regulating marriage arrangements, child bearing, socialization of daughters and sons. (47)

As explained in this citation, the female body of Nirupama is mystified in the name of tradition, custom, and dos and don'ts of society. She has no control over her own body regarding marriage arrangement. In fact it must be the exclusive private affair of Nirupama because it directly affects her rather than any other members. The desires, wishes, individual will, self-decision have become the myths in front of so-called a historicized stagnant traditions and custom of the society.

Dowry system is an ill practice in the name of tradition especially in the Third World countries such as in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh etc. Though it was limited as optional and voluntary in upper class of society in ancient time (*Women in India and Nepal*), it continues to be practiced under another guise- that of the exchange or giving of 'gifts'. Especially women and whole society is badly affected by such evil practice. Nirupama and her parents especially the father are the glaring victim of such practice. The following lines from the text vividly show the horrific situation of dowry:

Ten thousand rupees and gift items were wantonly demanded as dowry by the groom's family. Even, Ramsundar without weighting the pros and cons readily agreed to the demand...It proved to be an uphill task- Ramsundar found himself Rs 6,000 to 7,000 short even after selling and pawning a part of his own property...At an extremely high rate of

interest a man agreed to lend the rest of amount, but didn't turn up at the right moment. Chaos and tumult followed. (160)

These lines vividly shows how the dowry system, an evil practice in the name of gift, has transformed a holy practice of matrimonial ceremony into mere greedy deal eclipsing the humanitarian and holy value. The burden of this evil practice has directly fallen upon lower middle class people and they have compelled to lend money in extremely high rate of interest.

The irony of dowry system is that the educated and well-to-do families demand more dowry as a form of rupees and gifts than uneducated and poor people. In this story too, Rai Bahadur demands more dowry though he is from aristocratic and rich family. In the similar way, the groom being an educated person, he should have to condemn such practice. At the beginning of ceremony he thunders at his father, "I have nothing to do with buying or selling. I have come to marry, and I shall return with a bride" (155). But he cannot convince his family to abandon such bad practice. In this regard, not playing the active role to root out such evil practice, he seems complicit with such practice which in itself is a support for such evil practice. The following line from the Ketu Katrak's *Politics of Female Body* further buttresses this argument:

As with social class, so also with education: the more educated a man is, the greater the dowry he expects (regarded as repayment for his educational expenses). Such a man does not have, as one might expect, a higher consciousness that would encourage his challenging sexist codes in society ironically can strengthen them. (211)

The burden of such practice directly falls upon newly married bride if the promise is not fulfilled by the side of bride's parents. Nirupama, the newly married bride in the

home of Rai Bahadur, is the direct victim of this dowry system. She undergoes physical and mental violence and torture since the beginning of her married life. The perpetrator of such violence and torture is no others than another female: mother-in-law. The following extract from the story vividly shows the pathetic consequence of Nirupama caused by the inability of her parents to fulfill the promise:

Nirupama, meanwhile, was being exposed to stinging accusations and rebuked at every step. Nobody enquired after how Niru fared, what she ate or wore and if, by chance, a kind hearted neighbor chipped in to point some flaw, the mother-in-law said, “She deserves no more attention than she get.” It was perfectly apparent that the girl 17 would surely have been taken care of had her father fulfilled the promise. The pervasive feeling was that the girl had entered the household hoodwinking everybody. (161)

As expressed in these lines mother-in-law of Nirupama seems the perpetrator. In this sense, the mother-in-law as a female herself exploits another female Nirupama forgetting her own horrific past. Katrack’s argument, “The complicity of women in their own oppression is striking and tragic. Mother-in-law in patriarchy, who attains “male privilege” with age and as mother of sons, often participate in these horrific acts (211-12) further throws light upon such heart rending condition of women.

Nirupama is one of the representative characters of contemporary period of nineteenth and early twentieth century who undergoes many tribulations for the sake of existing patriarchal values and norms, traditions, and cultures. Dowry system as the product of patriarchal structure of Third world countries debilitates the condition of individual woman like Nirupama. Nirupama as the victim of such dowry system alienates her own body, mind, and soul for the sake of such ill practice. In this regard,

she is compelled to exile from her own body and community. The following lines from the story make it clear how Nirupama is exiled from her body, soul, and community:

Her father-in-law's dwelling turned intolerable for Niru. Within a short period after their marriage her husband had been relocated to an alien land as Deputy Magistrate. And lest she imbibed ignoble thoughts through evil company, Niru was prohibited from meeting her near and dear ones... Sometimes after Niru had a serious illness for which her mother-in-law could hardly be blamed! She used to neglect the girl's needs to such an extent that even in the extreme chill of the month of Kartik Niru had nothing to wrap herself with. She never took her meals in times and the maids often forget to fetch her meals; but she kept mum, never complaining. She was confined in an alien place, totally at the mercy of the master and mistress, the pageboys and the maidservants. (164)

These lines show the extreme painful condition of Nirupama as a consequence of not fulfilling the promised dowry in the form of rupees and gift. Nirupama is compelled to endure such inhuman behavior which cannot be accepted by any civilized society in any pretext. At the same time, these lines show how Nirupama is alienated not only from family but also from her own body. It would be pertinent to bring some lines from the Ketu H. Katrak to shed light upon such kind of cruelties prevalent in Third World society:

Hindu tradition exalts suffering, even death for a husband's welfare, such values are so ingrained in female socialization that, internalized, and they render women alien to their own bodies. In such exilic

conditions, women take on physical abstinence and self- flagellation as violent acts on their own bodies; which they hardly own; they watch the violence as outsiders to their own skin and bone, such alienation also creates physical and mental space for bodily cruelties imposed on women, often in their most fatal form, in dowry related murders, even when women face threat to their very lives from cruel and greedy in laws (who prepare to kill wife so as to get a new bride and a new dowry). They cannot escape. (210-11)

As expressed in these lines, Nirupama is not only physically, mentally, and socially alienated, she compels to die due to her in-law's treatment and behavior towards her. This death of Nirupama paves the way for Nirupama's cruel and greedy in-laws to get a new daughter-in-law with lucrative dowry. The last line of story, "The dowry this time would be nothing less than Rs 20,000 and no stone would be left unturned to realize it as promptly as possible", (160) proves the greedy and criminal mind of in-laws.

Though Nirupama is the victim of patriarchal values and norms and its by-products, Tagore is not hesitant to attribute heroic qualities to Nirupama. Tagore, being the intellectual and social reformer of that time, implicitly imbibes such heroic qualities to Nirupama. She is not only dependent, submissive, passive and mute spectator but she also possesses the heroic qualities such as self-respect, self-assertion and responsibilities towards her parents. The following lines from the story highlight the heroic aspect of Nirupama:

Niru could make out everything. She declared, Father, if you give my father-in-law a single farthing, you won't ever see your daughter again"...Ramsundar cut her short. "Oh, dear Maa, don't talk like that.

They would go on insulting you and me as long as I don't pay the sum I had promised I would"...Niru replied sternly, "Do you think I have no self-respect? Am I nothing more than a satchel of wealth? Please don't humiliate me by paying the amount. Besides, my husband has never asked for the money." (163)

"The Gift of Sight", the last story taken for this research penned by Tagore, is a story which deals with a psychological study of the emotions of a blind woman Kushum under the patriarchal society and in its various guises such as religion, tradition, custom, motherhood, wifehood etc. At the same time, it vividly shows how a woman successfully copes with the complexities of life despite life's vicissitudes and ups and downs.

Kusum, the protagonist of this story, is an example of typical Third World woman who undergoes many trials and tribulations for being woman. As other women of that contemporary time, Kusum also was married at earlier age, "I was not yet eight when I was married" (132). As a consequence of her early marriage, she compels to bear many physical, mental, and psychological problems. The following lines from the story show the hardships of Kusum due to early marriage:

My baptism of fire began in childhood. Before I was fourteen years old I gave birth to a dead baby, and I myself came close to death. But if a person is fated to suffer sorrow, she is not allowed to die too soon. A lamp that is meant to burn long has to have enough oil: it mustn't go out until night is over. I survived my illness, true, but whether through physical weakness, or mental distress, or for whatever reason, my eyes were affected. (132)

This very incident-Kusum's eyesight weakness – is the main drive of this story; the plot of this story entangles and develops around this incident. There is perennial conflict between Kusum's brother and her husband, Abinash, regarding the problem of Kusum's eyesight's weakness.

As a student of medical science, Abinash, the husband of Kusum himself insists to treat her eyes. But Kusum's brother doubting the expertise of Abinash, urges him to treat her eyes with experienced doctor. This is the main issue of conflict between two male guardians of Kusum. Kusum is sandwiched between the power struggle of her husband and brother. The following lines from the story vividly show how the power is exercised upon a woman in patriarchal structure:

‘When king fights,’ I said to myself, ‘ordinary folk had best keep out of the way. My husband is quarrelling with Dada, but I'm the one who will pay for it.’ I also felt that his friends no longer had a right to intervene. My sorrow and happiness, health and sickness were all in the hands of my husband. (133)

This extract vividly shows how the power is exercised upon Kusum, a typical representative of Third World women. The women must remain under the tutelage of their fathers and brothers before marriage. But this tutelage shifts from fathers and brothers to husbands after the marriage of the women. In this way, women's lives in Third World are situated in the hand of fathers and brothers or in husbands in expense of their own individuality.

As the plot of this story unfolds, Kusum has further appeared as submissive and complicit with patriarchal ideology. Instead of taking her own decision over her body (the treatment of eye-sight), she merely depends upon her husband. It is the glaring example of submissiveness in the name of tradition, even ignoring the advice

of her brother. The following lines from the story shed light upon the submissiveness of Kusum.

As if out of grudge towards my brother, my husband now treated my eyes with redoubled vigor. He changed medicines from one day to the next. I wore blinkers over my eyes, or spectacles; I put drops into them, or smeared them with powder; I even put up with the foul-smelling fish-oil he gave me to swallow and which made me want to vomit. My husband would ask me how I was feeling and I would say, 'much better.' I even tried to persuade myself that my tears were a good sign; when the streaming stopped I decided I was on the road to recovery. But before long the pain was unendurable. My vision was blurred, and I was writhing with headache. I could see that even my husband was downcast. He was finding it difficult to think of a pretext for calling a doctor after so long. (134)

As social scripting of that contemporary period, Kusum, a representative of third world women, merely depends upon traditional-assigned role of wife. She has no power over her own body. Even ignoring the suggestion of her brother, Kusum blindly follows the direction of her husband. The consequence is the loss of eyesight-in jeopardy the very precious life. She is never resentful of her husband's callousness even after she is blind. It is pertinent to lend the lines of Manushi Saroj Vasaria to substantiate such condition:

The ideals, ethics, and morality heaped on women since time immemorial are suffocating and killing. The adjectives used to praise us have become oppressive. Calling us loving, they have locked us in the close room of culture... They have handcuffed us with modesty

and chained our feet by loyalty, so that far from running, we have not been able even to walk...Now we must refuge to be Sitas. By becoming a Sita and submitting to the fire ordeal, woman loses her identity. This fire ordeal is imposed on women today in every city, every home... we can be fearless since we have no models. (244)

As mentioned in this citation, Third World woman, Kusum is not immune from such so-called ideals, ethics, and morality. Moreover, she helps to strengthen such principles by taking the references from myths, traditions, and religions. In this regard, Kusum has sacrificed her own desires, feelings, and wills.

When Abinash, the husband of Kusum, realizes his mistakes regarding his ill-treatment of Kusum's eyes, Kusum does not become ready to acknowledge this fact effacing her own self. The following lines from the story prove this:

I could tell from his voice that he was close to tears. I pressed his right hand with both my hands and said, 'Don't worry; you took what belonged to you. Suppose my eyes had been destroyed by some other doctor's treatment- what comfort would have been in that? If it was inevitable no one could save my eyes were taken by you. When he had insufficient flowers for a puja Rama tore out his own eyes and offered them to God. I too have given my eyes to a god – I have given to you my light of the full moon, my morning sunshine, my blue of the sky, my green of the earth. Describe to me anything you see that pleases you. I shall receive from you the grace of your gift of sight.' (136)

The opinion of Kusum expressed in upper mentioned extract illuminates the social scripting of that contemporary time in which Third World woman like Kusum believes her own body as the part of husband in expense of her own individuality.

Such kind of social scripting is buttressed by the myths, religions, and customs as expressed in upper mentioned extract.

The complicity of Kusum with such status quo is further exposed in following extract when she meets friend from her old village:

A short time after I became blind I remember a friend from my old village came to me and said, 'Aren't you angry, Kumu? If I were in your shoes I wouldn't be able to stand the sight of your husband.' I replied, 'The sight of him has been stopped, true, and I'm cross with my useless eyes for that; but why should I blame my husband?'

Labanya was angry with him for not having called a doctor in time, and make me angry too. I explained to her that if we live in this world, our wisdom and follies cause us whether we like it or not various kinds of pleasure and pain; but if we keep a firm faith within, we can have peace even amidst trouble otherwise we spend our life in anger and rivalry and conflict. (141)

This extract proves that though modern idea about individualism and personal freedom has also peeped in that contemporary period, the general women like Kusum hesitates to enlighten by such idea. Moreover, she is complicit with social scripting of that contemporary time. She has given focus to collectiveness in expense of her individuality. These lines also show that Kusum is not ready to acknowledge the stupidity of her husband rather she takes the refuge of fate and her own wisdom and follies. Though she seems faintly influenced by this modern idea, she has no courage to raise question upon her husband's stupidity.

A new chapter begins in their married life when one day his aunt introduces to him Hemangini, her cousin's daughter. Then she also asks the permission of Kusum

for this prospect of new marriage of Abinash with Hemangini. The rhetoric of persuasion employed by Kusum's aunt-in-law to convince Kusum about the prospect of second marriage of Abinash is important to know the Third World women's socio-cultural position of that contemporary time:

And I say to you, Bauma, the more wives her husband takes, the prouder a Kulin girl should be of him. Our Abinash could marry instead of carrying on as a doctor, and he wouldn't have to worry about earning. When sick people fall into a doctor's hands they die, and once they're dead they don't pay him fees anymore; but Kulin's wives are fated not to die, and the longer they live the more the husband profits.'

(145)

These upper mentioned lines vividly throw light upon ingrained Kulinism prevalent in that contemporary period of time and how the women of Third world were affected by such practice. In the place of individual's choice and independent decision of concerned individuals, the marriages were considered as a prestige and the matters of economy. This extract further sheds lights upon how women of Third world were affected by polygamy in the name of prestige of Kulin family.

As the plot of this story progresses, the relationship between Kusum and Hemangini further throws light upon the condition of Third World women. Hemangini laughs at odd behavior of Kusum at the first sight of but instantly becomes serious knowing the reality of Kusum's blindness. Both of them further nurture their relationship with the passage of time. The following dialogue between Kusum and Hemangini is pertinent to shed light upon the Third World women's sexuality:

As we made our way to the ghat behind the house, Hemangini asked,
'Why haven't you got any children?'

I smiled and said, 'How should I know why not? God hasn't given me any.'

'I dare say you had some kind of sin in you,' said Hemangini. 'That too is only known to God,' I replied.

The girl said conclusively, 'Look at Auntie, though. She has such crookedness in her, no children can possibly form in her womb.'

I had no understanding myself of the mysteries of sin and virtue, suffering and happiness, punishment, and reward-so I couldn't explain them to the girl. All I could do was sigh and inwardly say to God, 'You know!' (147-48)

This extract shows how the identity of woman is determined by motherhood in Third World. The sole identity of women is based on her motherhood only within the boundary of patriarchal framework.

According to Hemangini, both of them – Kusum and her aunt-in-law- are sinful because they do not have children. Kusum also seems complicit with Hemangini's view and compels to accept unproven sin evoking the god. The researcher further cites the lines from the Ketu H. Katrak:

In many traditional societies, a woman's sole purpose is to bear children; motherhood is her sole and only identity. As a mother, her outsidersness to patriarchal power is slightly ameliorated especially if she bears son who will preserve male authority. In most traditional societies infertility is considered a woman's worst fate because her entire identity relies on bearing a child. If she cannot, she has no self at all, and often seen as not worthy of living. She is considered a failure by her culture, and worse, since this failure is internalized, she believes

it herself. It is as if she is doubly exiled from her body- once as a woman, an outsider to patriarchal power, and next as an infertile woman who cannot fulfill her biological destiny. (244-45)

This citation proves how the women in Third World are exiled both from patriarchal social structure as well as from their own body because of their infertility. In the story too, Kusum and her aunt-in-law are considered failure, unfortunate, or even a curse in the eye of Hemangini- a representative of patriarchal society.

Though Kusum seems submissive, emotional, superstitious, and as the victim of patriarchal society, examining closely, the researcher also finds heroic qualities which are attributed to her by Tagore. By narrating the story from the point of view of Kusum, Tagore tries to highlight the position of Kusum as the heroine. In this regard, other characters' presence in the story seems just to unfold Kusum's personality.

Although Kusum is under the tutelage of her brother and husband, she endeavors to assert her own individuality when the relation between her husband and brother becomes strained over the matter of medical treatment of her eyes. She has taken the initiative to mend this relation. In this regard, Kusum seems creative and constructive who does not hesitate to take any means to reconcile her husband and her brother. The following extract from the story substantiates this:

What lies women have to tell! I couldn't upset my brother, and I couldn't damage my husband's self-esteem either. A mother has to beguile her child; a wife has to keep her husband happy- women have to stoop to so many deceptions! But the result of my ploy was that before I finally became blind I was able to see reconciliation between my husband and brother. My brother supposed that the damage was done by the treatment he arranged secretly; my husband felt that it

would have been better to have listened to my brother's advice from the beginning. (135)

These lines vividly show Kusum is not merely the puppet under the patriarchal system but she is creative as well as imaginative. Kusum's leading role in maintaining the good relationship between her husband and brother even sacrificing her own self uplifts her as heroine.

Though Kusum is physically blind, she has acute power of perception and capacity to distinguish good and bad. In this regard, the researcher assumes she has philosophic mind and idea. The following lines from the story shed lights upon her unflinching belief in the philosophy of happiness in place of greedy materialism:

Life was happy for a while. My husband became a quite a respected doctor. His income became respectable too. But money is not a good thing. It stunts the mind. When the mind is in control, it creates its own pleasure; but when wealth takes up the pursuit of pleasure, there is nothing for the mind to do. Where formerly the mind's pleasure reigned, possessions now stake their claim. Instead of happiness, we acquire nothing but things. (141-42)

This extract clearly shows the penetration of deeper philosophical ideas in the mind of Kusum. She has the acute mind and perception to distinguish truth and falsity regarding happiness and causes of sadness, materialism and spiritualism. Therefore, such kind of Kusum's philosophical mind uplifts her personality.

Kusum's unflinching belief in justice, the addressing of Kusum as a goddess by her husband, relentless faith in truth, her capacity in keeping intra-personal and inter-personal relationship, her endeavor to save her husband from second marriage, and lasting reconciliation of her husband with her are some of the characteristics of Kusum which help her to uplift as a heroine in this story.

III. Tagore's Divided Loyalty towards Women

This research is a study about the representation of Third World female characters represented in Tagore's short stories who undergo distinct problems than their sisters in Western society due to distinct socioeconomic, political as well as historical location through the lens of Third World feminism. Moreover, it shows the ambivalence of Tagore towards female. On the one hand, female characters have appeared as submissive, mysterious, emotional, and dependent. On the other hand, Tagore portrays female characters as inspiring heroines. Though they are shown as the victim of patriarchal society, their courage against all odds, their power of struggle under the worst conditions and oppression, their self-sacrifice and gentle nature make them inspiring heroines.

Each stories studied in this research deals with distinct socio-economic and political issues which were/are prevalent in Third World, though some of them are slightly interrelated. Among them, "The Living and the Dead" is a story which deals with the problem of widowhood. Kadambini, the protagonist of this story, is the victim of cursed widowhood prevalent in Third World society. She compels to live as a dead when she is alive as the title suggests. The researcher observes that as the story progresses, Kadambini seems not only submissive but also assertive when she refutes the argument of so-called relatives and claims herself as alive.

Similarly, "Mahamaya" sheds light upon Kulinism, another Third World women's issue prevalent in Third World society. Mahamaya, the main character of this story, is a sole character who compels to bear the repercussions of ingrained Kulinism sacrificing her own individuality, free will and independent judgement. In spite of Mahamaya's love affair with Rajeev, she compels to marry with an old man for the sake of the so-called reputation of her family. Though she seems meek,

obedient, and submissive, the researcher also finds heroic qualities in the character of Mahamaya too. Mahamaya's manipulation over their love affair, sombre glance of Mahamaya, Mahamaya's acceptance of Rajeev's proposal before the presence of Bhavanicharan are some of the characteristics which contribute to the heroic qualities of Mahamaya.

“Exercise-Book”, a highly debated story penned by Tagore, shows how the aspiration of Uma in reading and writing badly throttled by contemporary society. This story also shows how Third World women were lagged in education in nineteenth and early twentieth century when their sisters in Western society were fighting for their rights. This story also sheds light upon the prevalent early marriage system and its repercussion in the enhancement of contemporary Third World women. Though Uma seems submissive and meek, the researcher also finds rebelliousness in her character. Her whimsical scribbling on the walls, the new almanac, her father's daily account or even in her brother's thesis amply hints at her unconscious self-assertion.

Another typical Third World issue- dowry and dowry related violence- has risen in “Debit and Credit”. This story mainly concerns about the hardship and tribulation of Nirupama under the guise of marriage and its repercussion: dowry system. When Ramsundar, father of Nirupama can't fulfill the promised dowry in the forms of rupees because of his poverty, Nirupama undergoes extreme physical and mental violence and torture. She has also exposed to stinging accusations and rebuked at every step. As the extreme form of violence, Nirupama compels to die due to her in laws' treatment and behavior towards her. Although she seems devoid of agency throughout the story, she is also imbibed heroic qualities too. She is not only mere spectator but also possesses heroic qualities such as self-respect, self-assertion and

responsibilities towards her parents. Some incidents just like her warning to her father not to give money, her claim for self-respect in place of satchel of wealth, faith in husband rather than in laws can be taken as the manifestation of heroic qualities.

In the similar way, the researcher also finds typical Third World women's issues in another story "The Gift of Sight". This story dramatizes many Third World issues just like Kusum's predicament under the various guises such as religion, tradition, custom, motherhood, wifehood, and sexuality. Being a tradition and religious bounded woman, Kusum has sandwiched between the power struggle of her husband and brother. In the similar way, she is not immune from so called ideals, ethics, and morality. As a consequence, she believes her body as a part of husband sacrificing her individuality. At the same time, the researcher also finds some of the heroic qualities in Kusum. Her unflinching belief in justice, the addressing of Kusum as goddess by her husband, relentless faith in truth, her endeavor to save her husband from second marriage, her capacity to keep intra personal and inter-personal relationship can be taken as some heroic qualities.

To sum up, the researcher finds Tagore's ambivalence towards female in contemporary Third World society. Being the intellectual and social reformer of that contemporary time, he tries to highlight their heroic qualities. At the same time, being the representative of that patriarchal society, he is not immune from ideological mind-set of patriarchy. As a result, the female characters in his stories seem submissive, loyal, traditional and the victims of patriarchal society.

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