

Rabindranath Tagore's Philosophy of Spiritual Humanism and the Problems of Women Presented in the Novel 'Nexus' (Yogayog, 1929)

Ritu Tandon

Ph.D. Research Scholar

Department of English and Foreign Languages

Guru Ghasidas University

Bilaspur (Chattisgarh), India

ruchitandon162@gmail.com

Abstract

Spiritual humanism means thinking about the progress of human beings in all fields - social, cultural, political or economical and advocates that science and philosophy, art and literature, or anything that human beings have achieved by logical thinking and idealistic thoughts must aim at the well-being of humanity. Its principal aim is to achieve human freedom, cheerful life with development and prosperity without any kind of discrimination among human beings. Rabindranath Tagore was a great poet, dramatist, novelist, short-story writer, musician, painter, educationist, social reformer, philosopher, spiritualist and a critic of life and literature. He wrote about the problems of women in most of his works – whether it is a poem, novel, play or a short- story. Rabindranath Tagore's novel 'Nexus'(Yogayog,1929) is an important story of a married woman Kumudini's struggle for freedom against the brutality of her cruel husband, Madhusudan. Here, Tagore's evolving attitude towards the role of a married woman, Kumudini and her rebellious thoughts towards the domination of her husband are clearly presented in this novel. Rabindranath Tagore believed that the solution for all the problems of society lies in spreading the message of non-violence, truth, peace,

love, and wisdom, which brings happiness among human beings. The present paper is an effort to investigate the major problems of married women of the nineteenth century Bengali society and the importance of Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy of spiritual humanism in the emancipation of women, which made Tagore a multitalented novelist, writer and personality.

Keywords: Husband, Woman, Relationship, Problems, Society.

Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore, a genius and creative writer was the first Indian to achieve Nobel Prize for Literature in November 1913, for his Gitanjali (songs—offerings), which is mainly a compilation of devotional lyrical poems. Set in the nineteenth century colonial Bengal, Rabindranath Tagore's writings, specially his novels depict the sufferings of women in the Indian society and show great compassion and understanding towards the predicament of women. His works portray social, political, cultural and religious circumstances of his period. He has presented a remarkable understanding of women's psyche and supported for the greater freedom and decision-making power for women in the family and society.

According to Rabindranath Tagore, true religion means the service of humanity, sympathy and affection for the helpless people. It is the greatest form of worship of God. He thought that humanity and spirituality do not belong to two dissimilar orders. They are like the two sides of the same coin. Through his long literary career, Tagore has investigated woman as —the most creative transformative element within social life. Tagore was extremely conscious of the condition of women in the nineteenth century Bengali society. His novels include vast range of problems. The issues of social discrimination, religion, human relationships, human intellect, society's false principles and contemporary political tensions have often found their way in his writings. Controversial problems such as remarriage of

Hindu widows, the need for female education, their liberation and domination caused through social discrimination have found important place in his writings. Thus his writings are important documents of communal changes in its relation to gender, nation, and politics.

Rabindranath protests against the breaking of life into distinct compartments with separate ideals. (The Philosophy of Rabindranth Tagore, p-251)

Gender discrimination is a big problem in almost entire country. Through his works, Tagore is seen to shatter the fake principles of his society and he wanted to liberate women from their oppressions. Woman is an important part of the society, she plays a fundamental role in the economic, social and political growth of India. Physical and psychological development of the women seems to be influenced by discriminatory outlooks of the society, which is revealed in all the spheres of women's life. Woman, the weaker sex was not allowed to come outside the area of house and take part in the management of external world.

To the woman belongs domestic life and everything which is personal and human.

She takes no real interest in the things themselves; her interest is for the sake of the son or the father or the husband. (The Philosophy of Rabindranth Tagore, p-256-257)

The main reasons behind were that, firstly, women were considered to be imperfect in intellectual as well as physical abilities. Secondly, in every relationship women are subordinates to men. In every relationship women represent the inferior part, whether in the relationship of husband-wife, son-daughter, brother-sister or father-daughter. The male counterpart, in every relationship, remains the superior and master. Rabindranth Tagore was fully aware of women's position in the society. Almost all his female characters are freedom lovers and strong-minded.

He found in the women of his country an enormous strength- their courage against all problems, their power of endurance under the most terrible conditions and dominations.

Rabindranath Tagore has shown a significant understanding of female consciousness and

gave sufficient independence to women and their lives in his novels, short- stories and plays. Women from different social groups, social understanding and outlooks are presented in his works. Through his novels and stories, he had presented the old traditions which enhanced the sufferings of women. He had contributed in the progress of women and their freedom from domination of the society.

Spiritual humanism

Rabindranath Tagore, though born in an aristocratic family, believed in freedom and equality of human beings and criticized the Indian tradition of complexity and separation and imagined a country free of all discriminations of gender, caste, creed, community and nationality. Rabindranath Tagore's Philosophies are very important for the emancipation of women. He had been struggled and taught entire life to individuals about non-violence, love, peace, freedom, equality etc. now which is strongly needed to human beings. People are suffering in daily life; they have lots of predicaments; they fight every day and destroy each other; girls and women are exploited , ill-treated, raped and killed by men; social and lawful justice is prejudiced; castes and category wise illegitimate activities has been growing. These kinds of violent and cruel activities are dangerous for the humanity. In this condition, Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy of Spiritual Humanism will absolutely bring peace among human beings.

Spiritual humanism considers people as equivalent and does not believe in caste, race and gender discrimination and gives importance to joyful and healthy living. True religion is that which makes a man to rise above his society, country and religious group and it cannot be judged by rituals, customs and superstitions. It accepts the equality and self-respect of all the people instead of their differences in thoughts. Tagore's philosophy of Spiritual Humanism gives justice and equality to all the human beings. Spirituality can be attained by

helping the helpless people and by loving human beings. Thus, Spiritual humanism is important for the development and progress of our country.

The problems of women presented in the novel 'Nexus' (Yogayog, 1929)

Tagore has presented the problems of women in a conjugal relationship in this novel 'Nexus'(yogayog)– in the portrayal of a society whose traditions involve and direct a woman to tolerate the brutality done by her cruel husband in the form of marital rape. The story revolves around the opposition and conflict between two families- the Chatterjees, Kumudini's family, who are not very wealthy and the Ghosals- Madhusudan's family, who are the aristocrats. Kumudini has been overprotected as a child and her miserable world is ruled by the domestic rules. Her brother Bipradas brings her to the city, where she learns the art of playing chess, photography and pistol shooting. She becomes brilliant in Sanskrit grammar. Kumudini's study of Kalidas results in spiritual contemplations in which she imagines that her husband should appear as pure and pleasant in the divine contentment. For Kumudini, spiritual love is the true love and the gratification of physical desires or sexuality by violence and marital rape by her husband Madhusudan is the terrible love.

Man and woman are not copies of each other but mutual supplements. Sentiment, feeling, and emotion predominate in woman, while thought, reflection, and composure characterize man. The joys of passivity and surrender are the woman's, while those of activity and energizing are the man's. The woman is made for marriage, while man is made for business. If the man idles away at home, he is said to be unemployed; if the woman does not marry, she is unemployed. (The Philosophy of Rabindranth Tagore, p-257-258)

The man and the woman must be treated equally in a marriage. Madhusudan, on the other hand, has a very old outlook towards women and believes in their complete

suppression. From the beginning of their marriage, Kumudini is allotted the restricted position of a dependent slave in Madhusudan's house. This contradiction that succeeded in restricting a woman to a position of a slave on the one hand and treating her as a toy or an object of sensual desires by her husband on the other is complicated to understand. She is intertwined in a conflict between her representation of her husband as a virtuous individual and her later identification of him as a violent, unpleasant and frustrating man. She even goes to the extent of considering her incapability to surrender herself to her husband's carnal desires because her husband's physical violence and marital rape was impossible to tolerate by her.

Kumudini's love and devotion for her husband present her kind-heartedness; because there is no love in their conjugal relationship. As she becomes rebellious with the cruel recollections of her marital life, she realizes how her husband forced her physically and mentally immediately after marriage for satisfying his sexual desires. It is not surprising that the birth of her child is the consequence of marital rape done by her husband, Madhusudan. Kumudini's individuality is rooted in her silent rebellion rather than a physical one; the medium of this rebellion is, perhaps, objections in various moments of sufferings. Rebellion is in her mind and it goes to the extent of devastating all her spiritual beliefs of devotion for her husband. So, Kumudini has proved herself a matured woman, as she has developed to maturity from the position of a simple housewife.

Her faithfulness to her husband is an evidence of her love and devotion for her husband Madhusudan, but what are more problematic are his unlimited expectations of sexual desires from his wife, Kumudini, which she cannot fulfil. Previously, she always imagined the presence of God in her husband's personality. She demanded pure love from him. This is similar to Mira Bai's devotion for Lord Krishna. But Mira was a silent sufferer, who protested, through her songs, against the unfairness and discrimination done by the

society, whereas Kumudini employs various forms of oppositions against the injustice and brutality done by her husband, in spite of being a simple housewife. This shows her intellectual strength and self-determination.

In this novel 'Nexus' through Kumudini- Madhusudan marital relationship we feel that hatred, difference in outlooks, communication gap, dominating way of life, injustice, unfaithfulness, brutality and violence are harmful for matrimonial relationships. Perfect human relationships are based on love, sympathy, understanding, impartiality, justice, faithfulness, and an uncomplicated belief in humanity. True Relationships are true 'yogayog' or contacts from heart to heart. It involves a real attempt for evaluating the thoughts and desires of every human being with equal significance. A woman can have understanding, logical power if she is allowed to grow in a healthy environment filled with love, care and sympathy. With her experience of married life Kumudini has transformed from a simple woman to an emancipated woman.

Rabindranath Tagore, has primarily used Bipradas as a representative, to present his own attitudes on the problems of Kumudini. The meaninglessness of Madhusudan and Kumudini's marriage and their inappropriateness lies neither in their age-dissimilarity, nor in the disparity in their public position but in Kumudini's failure to satisfy Madhusudan's carnal desires. A woman is anticipated to surrender either deliberately, or by domination, to her husband for satisfying his physical desires. She is exploited by her husband in the form of marital rape. The sacred devotion of a faithful wife to her husband did not seem satisfactory to strengthen a conjugal relationship. A woman was estimated to gratify the physical desires of her husband or else she would have to permit his relationship with other woman.

Women are generally helpless in the family and a widow generally becomes a victim of male desires. A deep emotional disparity and family division occurs as a result of sexual dissatisfaction of a married man or even a young widow. In Kumudini's family, a beautiful

widow named Shyamasundari throughout the illicit relationship satisfies Madhusudan's physical needs.

In the beginning she thought she had acquired the right to boss over the domestic staff, but now she was made to realize at every step that they were unwilling to accept her as the mistress. (Classic Rabindranath Tagore, Nexus, p-941)

Her character is deplorable as she becomes unacceptable in Madhusudan's family. Their illegal extra-marital relationship was temporary, as Shyamasundari was incapable to imagine a primary position in Madhusudan's home. Kumudini's hatred towards her husband is also revealed in this novel when Madhusudan repeatedly used to mock at Kumudini's family by feeling proud for his wealth. His inborn bad manners, the coarseness of his speech and the impoliteness of his body and mind made Kumudini feel hatred for him.

This novel reflects the problems of female protagonist Kumudini, her loveless life, her feelings of opposition against marital rape by her husband, Madhusudan, and her plan with her life as she was incapable to adjust herself with her husband. Her suppressed frustrations and rebellion as a submissive partner, is clearly presented in this novel. Kumudini is emotional, rational and freedom lover. All these qualities of her character made her inequitable with her deceitful, unfaithful, and hypocrite husband Madhusudan. As a freedom lover she could not adjust with the patriarchal society in which she is living. She wanted to share her divine love with her husband, but by physical violence of her husband Madhusudan, she becomes pregnant.

The concept of sati was disembodied; what is known in English as 'impersonal'. The man Madhusudan may be flawed but the idea called husband is eternal and emotionless. Kumudini dedicated herself to that shadowy being. (Classic Rabindranath Tagore, Nexus, p-826)

As a result of marital rape, she feels lonely and separated from her husband. She could not accept the selfishness and brutality of her husband in everyday life. Her incapability to adjust with her husband and her helplessness to lead the normal way of life made her eccentric. Violent activities of her husband made her sad, as an outcome she alienates herself to her own world which consists of inner and outer isolation. Loneliness leads to tediousness. Thus, Kumudini strongly feels that marriage is a mockery and all the human relationships are false in the absence of love.

Unfortunately, she feels very unhappy even in the company of her husband. Therefore, she ignores the customs and principles of society. In Kumudini's views, life without love is meaningless. Her husband does not understand her problems due to the communication gap between them. He is quite unsympathetic towards her problems. Madhusudan's extra-marital affair with his brother's widow created separation in his married life, which separated Kumudini from her husband.

Kumudini's suppressed frustrations and her rebellion as a submissive wife, is obviously reflected in this novel 'Nexus' (Yogayog). Kumudini is hyper-sensitive, rational, freedom lover, and devoted to her husband. The violent behaviour of her husband created disturbance in their marital life. Then, she decided to leave her husband's house and goes to her brother's house. Her brother Bipradas consoles her by giving suggestion that self-adjustment is the solution for self-alienation. After the discovery of her pregnancy, she returns to her husband's house. She simply compromises with her destiny due to her motherhood. But, she had decided to live a life free from the bondages of marital rape, exploitation and violence.

Even Kumudini's brother Bipradas does not accept Kumudini's requests for liberation from her marriage because Kumudini is carrying Madhusudan's child and so he has regained his right of possession of his wife. We are left to introspect about the pathetic condition that

has happened in the destiny of Kumudini, in Tagore's novel 'Nexus' (Yogayog). At the end of the novel, Tagore sends Kumudini back to Madhusudan's house after her pregnancy is discovered. Tagore himself extremely believed in the education and liberation of the woman yet he had chosen to leave the question of the problems of women, in the Hindu society of Bengal, unanswered, as it is really a controversial problem.

Conclusion

Our society is full of inappropriateness. Rabindranath Tagore's purpose is to bring into light, the condition of women of the nineteenth century Bengali society. Rabindranath Tagore has presented the social problems of marital rape of a married woman Kumudini, her emotional conditions, loneliness and separation from her husband, Madhusudan, and her disappointments with her married life as she was unable to adjust herself with her husband. Her suppressed frustrations, and struggle for freedom from bondage and domination of the society is clearly depicted in this novel 'Nexus'. This novel makes the readers to understand the problems of married women, who are dominated by their husbands.

It proves that Rabindranath Tagore was a great lover of humanity. He was a philosopher and social reformer. His philosophies of Spiritual humanism are dedicated to the freedom and progress of humanity. He had imagined a beautiful human society and struggled entire life for it. Indian society can't neglect his teachings and philosophies of 'Spiritual humanism'. Similarly, he had successfully opposed to false religion; superstitious principles, exploitation of women, evils of the society, etc. He was a messenger of non-violence, peace, truth, love, friendship, freedom, brotherhood, self-respect and social justice among the people of our country. Hence, his teachings are an encouragement for progress of all human beings. It is important for the development of Indian society.

References

- Tagore, Rabindranath. *Classic Rabindranath Tagore*, New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., 2011.
- Tagore, Rabindranath. *Creative Unity*. New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2002.
- Tagore, Rabindranath. *Personality*. New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2002.
- Tagore, Rabindranath. *My Reminiscences*. New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2017.
- Tagore, Rabindranath. *Sadhana: the realization of life*. New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2002.
- Tagore, Rabindranath. *The Religion of Man*. New Delhi: Indus, 1993.
- Dutta, Krishna. *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myraid – Minded Man*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd, 1995.
- Radhakrishnan, Sarvapalli. *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, London: Macmillan, 1919.
- Bhattacharya, Sabyasachi. *Rabindranath Tagore: An Interpretation*, New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., 2011.
- Iyengar, K.R. Srinivasa. *Indian Writing in English*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 2009.
- Chatterjee, Indira. *A Thematic study of Tagore's novels*. Gurgaon: Shubhi Publications, 2007.