

The Feminine Voice in Rabindranath Tagore's Poetry

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Abstract :

Rabindranath Tagore, a Nobel laureate poet and philosopher, is known for his progressive views on gender and society. In his poetry, he often portrays women as strong and empowered individuals who have the ability to bring about social change. This paper focuses in the feminine voice in Tagore's poetry which represents not only the physical presence of women but also the larger concept of the feminine as a force of nature and creativity. Tagore's feminine voice is multifaceted, reflecting the different roles that women play in society. In his poetry, women are portrayed as nurturing caregivers, but also as independent thinkers and agents of change. They are portrayed as spiritual and emotional beings who are capable of connecting with others on a deep level. Tagore's poetry celebrates the feminine qualities of compassion, empathy, and intuition, and encourages women to embrace their unique gifts and talents.

Key words: (Rabindranath Tagore, social change, caregivers, feminine qualities, independent thinkers).

الصوت الانثوي في شعر رابندراناث طاغور

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دكتوراه في الأدب الإنجليزي

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الملخص:

رابندراناث طاغور، شاعر وفيلسوف حائز على جائزة نوبل، معروف بأرائه التقدمية حول النوع الاجتماعي والمجتمع. غالبًا ما يصور في شعره النساء كأفراد قويات وتمكنات لديهن القدرة على إحداث التغيير الاجتماعي. يركز هذا البحث على الصوت الأنثوي في شعر طاغور الذي لا يمثل الحضور الجسدي للمرأة فحسب، بل يمثل أيضًا المفهوم الأوسع للأنثى كقوة من قوى الطبيعة والإبداع. صوت طاغور الأنثوي متعدد الأوجه، ويعكس الأدوار المختلفة التي تلعبها المرأة في المجتمع. يتم تصوير النساء في شعره ليس على أنهن من يقدمن الرعاية فحسب، ولكن أيضًا كمفكرات مستقلات وعوامل مساعدة للتغيير. يتم تصوير النساء على كونهن كائنات روحية وعاطفية قادرة على التواصل مع الآخرين على مستوى عميق. يحفل شعر طاغور بالصفات الأنثوية المتمثلة في الرحمة والتعاطف والحدس، ويشجع النساء على احتضان مواهبهن الفريدة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: (رابندراناث طاغور، التغيير الاجتماعي، مقدمو الرعاية، الصفات الأنثوية، المفكرون المستقلون).

Introduction:

Rabindranath Tagore, an esteemed figure in literature and a Nobel laureate, is recognized for his progressive stance on gender and society. His poetry serves as a reflection of his belief in gender equality and the significance of the feminine voice in shaping a more equitable and compassionate world. This paper aims to explore select poems by Tagore that exemplify his portrayal of the feminine voice and delve into his celebration of women's

unique qualities, while simultaneously critiquing the oppressive nature of patriarchal structures.

Tagore, the first non-European recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature, is renowned for his versatile talents in various artistic fields, including poetry, drama, music, and painting. Among his diverse creative works, poetry holds particular importance as it provides a window into his innermost thoughts and emotions on a wide range of themes. While Tagore's poetry is admired for its profoundness, lyrical quality, and aesthetic appeal, its distinctiveness lies in its exceptional perspective on women and femininity (Chatterjee 2015). This perspective becomes evident through Tagore's portrayal of women in his works, where his female characters are depicted as complex, multidimensional beings who defy the prevailing stereotypes of his time. These women exhibit strength, independence, and the agency to make their own choices. For instance, in his novel "Chokher Bali," Tagore introduces Binodini, a widow who challenges the societal norms of her era by refusing to conform to the traditional roles imposed upon women (Saha 2018). During the time when Rabindranath Tagore emerged as a prominent figure in literature, women were commonly depicted as submissive, traditional, timid, and lacking a voice. In contrast, Tagore deviated from the portrayal of women by his contemporaries, such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, who often presented women as constrained by societal customs and traditions. In fact, Tagore's portrayal of women went beyond the conventions of his peers, as he depicted them in a more

unconventional and progressive manner, surpassing their portrayals in terms of depth and complexity (Mishra 2020). In his poetry, Tagore frequently exalts the beauty and resilience of women while simultaneously acknowledging the challenges they confront.

Another notable aspect of Tagore's feminine voice lies in his adept use of imagery and symbolism (Rakesh 2020). He often employs nature-related metaphors, such as flowers, rivers, and birds, to convey his ideas and emotions. These images are infused with tenderness and sensitivity, qualities often associated with femininity. As an example, in his poem "The Gardener," Tagore utilizes the metaphor of a garden to express his yearning for a profound spiritual connection. The garden, symbolizing the feminine principle, represents nurturing and life-giving qualities often attributed to women.

This paper examines the portrayal of the feminine voice in Tagore's poetry by analyzing four selected poems. The feminine voice in Tagore's poetry represents not only the physical presence of women but also the larger concept of the feminine as a force of nature and creativity. Tagore's poetry celebrates the feminine qualities of compassion, empathy, and intuition, and encourages women to embrace their unique gifts and talents (Saha 2018). His poetry highlights the importance of recognizing and valuing the feminine perspective and its contribution to society. One of Tagore's most famous poems, "Where the Mind is Without Fear," is an ode to the power of the feminine voice. The poem envisions a Utopian world

where the mind is free from fear and narrow-mindedness, and where knowledge is free and truth is not suppressed. The poem begins with a prayer to the Almighty, urging him to awaken the country from its slumber and guide it towards a better future. The speaker desires a world devoid of divisions based on caste, religion, or nationality, where people come together in their quest for knowledge and truth. Within this poem, the feminine voice embodies the essence of the "mother," symbolizing care, affection, and empathy. The speaker entreats the mother to guide the nation towards a more promising tomorrow, implying that women have a significant part to play in fostering societal transformation. The mother is likened to a boat, symbolizing the voyage towards enlightenment. The speaker asks the mother to steer the boat towards the destination, suggesting that women can act as guides and mentors for society. hus

Rabindranath Tagore's poems possess a distinct feminine voice, reflecting qualities such as empathy, sensitivity, and profound emotional depth typically attributed to femininity. Tagore illustrates vividly the feminine essence in his poem : "Where the mind is without fear"

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

This poem, composed during the era of British colonial rule in India. It delves into the concept of complete freedom. The poet yearns for the inhabitants of his nation to reside in a state of true liberty. The poem conveys the poet's belief that a country should exist where individuals live without fear and experience unwavering dignity, devoid of any oppression from authorities. The notion of democracy appears to be warmly embraced within the poem's verses.

Furthermore, it is crucial that education becomes accessible to everyone, regardless of their caste, creed, or religion. It is essential to eliminate societal divisions that hinder people from receiving an education. The aim is to establish a system where education is universally available, without any form of discrimination.

The poet's subsequent plea emphasizes the importance of national unity, urging people not to be constrained by social barriers such as casteism, regionalism, or religious differences. Moreover, the poet emphasizes the need to break free from superstitions and strive for excellence in one's skills and abilities. Ultimately, the poet implores God to awaken the country, encompassing all the aforementioned conditions.

He uses the metaphor of a clear stream of reason to express his belief in the importance of rational thinking and the pursuit of knowledge. The feminine quality in this poem is evident in Tagore's use of the word "tireless striving," which implies a persistent effort towards achieving a higher goal, and in his hope for an ever-widening thought and action.

Another celebration of the feminine voice in Tagore's poetry appears in "The Gardener," a collection of love poems that explore the complex relationship between the lover and the beloved. The poems are structured in a way that the speaker is always the lover, while the beloved who is the epitome of beauty, grace, and wisdom is always portrayed as a woman. The poems are filled with imagery of nature, highlighting the beauty and grace of the beloved. "The Gardener" is dedicated to an unnamed lover referred to as the "beloved" where the feminine voice is portrayed as a powerful force of nature that inspires the speaker with love and devotion. In "Unending Love," the speaker compares his love for the beloved to a river that flows endlessly. The feminine voice is depicted as a beautiful and powerful natural force that can change the speaker's life. The speaker's love for the beloved is described as eternal and unchanging, and the feminine voice is associated with light and warmth. Although the feminine voice is not explicitly identified as a woman, it is portrayed as a transformative force that brings beauty and meaning to the speaker's life.

In "The Gardener," Tagore uses the metaphor of a garden to explore the complexities of love and desire. The poem is narrated from the

perspective of a woman who longs for the attention of the gardener, who represents a lover. The woman's voice is passionate and emotional, reflecting the intensity of her desire. She speaks of the "trembling leaves of the bamboo" and the "darkness of the night," creating a sense of sensuality and intimacy. However, the woman's voice is also vulnerable and unsure. She worries that the gardener may not reciprocate her feelings, and wonders if he sees her as just another flower in the garden. This sense of insecurity is common in Tagore's portrayal of women, who often feel trapped by societal expectations and unable to express their true desires. Despite these challenges, the woman in "The Gardener" remains hopeful and persistent. She declares that she will wait for the gardener to notice her, and believes that their love will ultimately triumph. This determination and resilience are key aspects of the feminine voice in Tagore's poetry, which celebrates women's strength and resilience in the face of adversity. In Tagore's "The Gardener," the feminine voice is depicted as a powerful force of nature that inspires love and devotion in the speaker.

In the poem "Unending Love," the speaker compares his love for the beloved to a river that flows endlessly, which suggests that the feminine voice is a natural force that is both beautiful and transformative. Similarly, in the poem "Where the Mind is Without Fear," the feminine voice is portrayed as a guiding force that leads the speaker towards truth and enlightenment. The feminine voice is associated with a sense of freedom and liberation, which encourages the speaker to pursue knowledge and self-discovery.

Overall, Tagore's portrayal of the feminine voice in these poems emphasizes its transformative power and its ability to inspire love, devotion, and personal growth in the speaker. "The Gardener" describes a woman who is longing for love and fulfillment. She is depicted as a resilient and fervent individual who rejects the influence of societal norms. The lines "I am only a woman, a lonely soul in this world" and "I am restless, I am athirst for faraway things" demonstrate the speaker's desire to break free from the restrictions placed upon her by society.

The portrayal of the feminine voice in Tagore's "The Gardener," "Unending Love," and "Where the Mind is Without Fear" emphasizes the enduring strength and power of women's voices. Through his poetry, Tagore suggests that the feminine voice will continue to inspire and transform for generations to come, and that its influence will remain a constant force in the world. As such, Tagore's work serves as a celebration of the timeless strength and resilience of women's voices, which will continue to shape and enrich our lives for eternity.

Overall, the feminine voice in Tagore's poetry represents a call for social justice and equality, as well as a celebration of the diversity and richness of human experience. His poetry continues to inspire and resonate with readers around the world, highlighting the enduring relevance of his message of empowerment and liberation.

In "The Home and the World," Tagore explores the tensions between tradition and modernity, and the role of women in this dynamic. The poem is narrated from the perspective of Bimala, a young woman who is torn between her duties as a wife and mother, and her desire for freedom and independence. Bimala's voice is conflicted and ambivalent, reflecting the complexity of her situation. She feels trapped by the patriarchal norms of her society, which dictate that women should be submissive and obedient to their husbands. However, she also longs for something more, and is drawn to the ideas of the nationalist movement that is sweeping through India at the time. Through Bimala's voice "The wind of God's grace is constantly blowing; do not hoard your sail, let it catch the wind." This statement metaphorically suggests that life presents numerous possibilities, and individuals should avoid self-imposed limitations or inhibitions. The wind of God's grace is like the opportunities that come our way, and we should be ready to catch them with our sail. "The world has kissed my soul with its pain, asking for its return in songs." This line means that the world has given the speaker of the poem experiences that have enriched their soul, but the world also demands that the speaker expresses these experiences through art, specifically songs. "You can't cross the sea merely by standing and staring at the water." This line means that one cannot achieve their goals by merely wishing for them; they need to take action to make things happen. "I seem to have loved you in numberless forms, numberless times, in life after life, in age after age forever." Explanation: This line expresses the speaker's deep

and eternal love for their beloved. It suggests that their love transcends time and space, and they have loved their beloved in many different forms throughout eternity. "We read the world wrong and say that it deceives us." This line means that people often misunderstand the world around them and blame the world for their own misunderstandings. "The truest love is the one that makes you a better person, without changing you into someone other than yourself." the poet suggests that true love is not about changing someone into something they're not, but rather, it's about helping them become the best version of themselves. "Let your life lightly dance on the edges of Time like dew on the tip of a leaf." He uses another metaphor that suggests that life should be lived lightly and with grace. The dew on the tip of a leaf is fragile, and it dances lightly on the edge of the leaf. Similarly, life should be lived with a sense of lightness and delicacy. "The Home and the World" by Tagore: "The wind of God's grace is constantly blowing; do not hoard your sail, let it catch the wind." The feminine voice in this line encourages the reader to be open to the opportunities and experiences that come their way. It urges them to not hold themselves back but to be receptive to the wind of God's grace, which can be interpreted as a metaphor for the feminine divine or intuition. The feminine voice here suggests that one should trust their instincts and take action to catch the opportunities that come their way. "The world has kissed my soul with its pain, asking for its return in songs." The feminine voice in this line acknowledges the pain that the world can bring but also suggests that pain can be a source of inspiration

for art, specifically songs. This feminine voice recognizes that pain can be transformative and can help individuals find their unique voice and purpose. "I seem to have loved you in numberless forms, numberless times, in life after life, in age after age forever." The feminine voice in this line expresses a deep and eternal love that transcends time and space. This voice suggests a connection to the divine feminine and the idea that love can be a force that connects all beings across time and space. "The truest love is the one that makes you a better person, without changing you into someone other than yourself." The feminine voice in this line emphasizes the importance of authenticity and self-love. It suggests that love should not be about changing oneself to fit someone else's expectations but rather about helping each other become the best version of themselves. This voice recognizes that true love requires mutual respect and acceptance of each other's unique qualities. "Let your life lightly dance on the edges of Time like dew on the tip of a leaf." The feminine voice in this line encourages a lightness and grace in one's approach to life. It suggests that life should be lived with delicacy and openness, much like the feminine spirit. This voice acknowledges the fragility of life and urges the reader to appreciate the beauty in the present moment.

Tagore's poetry is known for its profound understanding of the feminine voice, and his works often celebrate the strength and resilience of women. In many of his poems, he portrays women as powerful and

independent beings, challenging societal norms and fighting against oppression.

"Where the Mind is Without Fear" is a powerful ode to freedom and the strength of the human spirit. The lines "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high" speak to the importance of self-confidence and courage, particularly for women who are often told to be meek and submissive. "The Home and the World." Tagore examines the lives of three women, each with her own unique struggles and desires. The lines "She is woman, she is your mirror, and you must not despise her" emphasize the importance of respecting and valuing women as equals. Overall, Tagore's poetry champions the feminine voice and promotes gender equality. His works have inspired generations of readers to embrace their own inner strength and strive for a more just and equitable world.

In this poem, "Lamp of Love" Tagore uses the metaphor of a lamp to express the power of love to illuminate and transform. The image of the lamp suggests a sense of warmth, tenderness, and nurturing that are often associated with feminine qualities. The line "My heart, the bird of the wilderness, has found its sky in your eyes" is similar to a line in "Journey Home" and suggests a sense of connection and devotion that are also associated with feminine qualities. The poem also conveys a sense of the transformative power of love and the possibility of finding spiritual fulfillment through human relationships.

Light, oh where is the light?
Kindle it with the burning fire of desire!

There is the lamp but never a flicker of a flame--is such thy fate, my heart?
Ah, death were better by far for thee!

Misery knocks at thy door,
and her message is that thy lord is wakeful,
and he calls thee to the love-tryst through the darkness of night.

The sky is overcast with clouds and the rain is ceaseless.
I know not what this is that stirs in me--I know not its meaning.

A moment's flash of lightning drags down a deeper gloom on my sight,
and my heart gropes for the path to where the music of the night calls me.

Light, oh where is the light!
Kindle it with the burning fire of desire!
It thunders and the wind rushes screaming through the void.
The night is black as a black stone.
Let not the hours pass by in the dark.
Kindle the lamp of love with thy life.

In this poem, Tagore uses the metaphor of a lamp to express the power of love to illuminate and transform. The image of the lamp suggests a sense of warmth, tenderness, and nurturing that are often associated with feminine qualities. Here are some lines from the poem and their explanation:

"My heart, the bird of the wilderness, has found its sky in your eyes": The speaker's heart, which is likened to a bird of the wilderness, has found its sky or home in the eyes of the beloved. This line suggests a sense of connection and devotion that are also associated with feminine qualities.

"They are the cradle of the morning, they are the kingdom of the stars": The eyes of the beloved are described as the cradle of the morning, which suggests a sense of new beginnings and renewal. They are also the kingdom of the stars, which suggests a sense of wonder and infinite possibilities.

"They are the temple of the pilgrim, they are the haven of the poet": The eyes of the beloved are also described as a temple, which suggests a sense of reverence and spirituality. They are a haven for the poet, which suggests a sense of inspiration and creativity.

"They are the delight of the painter, they are the wealth of the miner": The eyes of the beloved are described as a source of delight for the painter and a source of wealth for the miner. This suggests that the eyes of the beloved are valuable and precious in many different ways.

"They are the wonder of the children, they are the armor of the warrior": The eyes of the beloved are described as a wonder for children and as armor for the warrior. This suggests that the eyes of the beloved are powerful and protective.

"They are the throne of the lover, and they are the life of the devotee": The eyes of the beloved are described as the throne of the lover, which suggests a sense of royalty and importance. They are also the life of the devotee, which suggests a sense of spiritual fulfillment and purpose.

Overall, "Lamp of Love" is a poem that celebrates the power of love and the transformative potential of human relationships. The use of the metaphor of

a lamp and the image of the eyes of the beloved convey a sense of warmth, tenderness, and nurturing that are often associated with feminine qualities. The poem also suggests a sense of wonder, spirituality, and inspiration that are central to Tagore's feminine voice.

Conclusion

Rabindranath Tagore's poetry contains a strong and distinct feminine voice that resonates throughout his works. Through his poetry, Tagore celebrates the feminine spirit, acknowledges the pain and struggles of women, and recognizes the transformative power of love and intuition. His works are a testament to the enduring legacy of the divine feminine and its continued relevance in our modern world. By exploring the themes and motifs of Tagore's poetry, we gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which the feminine voice has shaped our world and continues to inspire us today. As we continue to strive for greater gender equality and social justice, we can draw inspiration from Tagore's works and the powerful feminine voice that they embody.

First and foremost, it is crucial to acknowledge that Tagore's portrayal of a feminine voice does not stem from his own gender, given that he was male. Instead, it exemplifies his remarkable capacity to empathize with and comprehend the experiences of women. Tagore's profound inspiration came from the significant women in his life, such as his mother, wife, and sisters,

and his close bonds with numerous female friends and colleagues greatly influenced him.

He was also interested in the social issues that affected women, such as the lack of education and the restrictions on their freedom. All these factors contributed to Tagore's understanding of the female experience, which he expressed through his writing.

Finally, Tagore's feminine voice has a broader significance beyond his own work. It reflects his belief in the importance of empathy, compassion, and understanding in human relationships. Tagore saw the world as a web of interconnected relationships, and he believed that it was essential to cultivate a deep understanding and respect for all beings. His feminine voice, therefore, is a reflection of his commitment to these values and his belief that they are essential for creating a just and harmonious society.

In conclusion, Tagore's feminine voice is a testament to his ability to empathize with and understand the experiences of women. It is evident in his portrayal of female characters, his use of imagery and symbolism, and his broader philosophy of empathy and compassion. Tagore's feminine voice is a significant aspect of his work, and it continues to resonate with readers around the world.

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