



# Reclaiming Voice and Identity: A Study of Female Self-Assertion in Rabindranath Tagore's Mythical Plays

Rakesh Kumar <sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. Ravi Kumar Yadav <sup>2</sup>

1. Research Scholar, Kalinga University, Raipur, C.G., India

rakeshroshan992@gmail.com,

2. Assistant Professor, Kalinga University, Raipur, C.G., India

**Abstract:** This paper explores the assertion of the female self in the mythical plays of Rabindranath Tagore, focusing on how the dramatist reinterprets classical mythological figures to express feminist ideals and humanistic values. Tagore, a literary visionary and social reformer, subverts patriarchal traditions by reimagining female characters with depth, agency, and moral autonomy. Through close textual analysis of selected plays such as *Chitrangada*, *Karṇa-Kunti Saṁvād*, and *Gandhari's Prayer*, the study reveals how Tagore employs myth not to preserve convention, but to challenge the oppression of women and advocate for their empowerment. By presenting women as emotionally intelligent, spiritually aware, and intellectually articulate, Tagore's mythical dramas serve as a medium for voicing resistance, identity formation, and liberation within a traditionally male-dominated narrative structure.

**Keywords:** Rabindranath Tagore, Mythical Plays, Female Assertion, Feminism, Gender Roles, Identity, Indian Drama

----- X -----

## INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), Nobel laureate and literary giant of the Indian Renaissance, was not only a poet and thinker but also a progressive voice in advocating women's autonomy. His vast literary output includes poems, short stories, novels, essays, songs, and plays—many of which highlight social inequalities, particularly gender-based injustices.

Among his diverse dramatic works, Tagore's **mythical plays** stand out for their reinterpretation of epic characters and their nuanced portrayal of female figures. Drawing from Indian mythology, especially the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, Tagore reconstructs ancient narratives to reflect contemporary concerns of selfhood, freedom, and gender identity. While mythology traditionally portrays women in roles defined by patriarchy—as obedient daughters, devoted wives, or sacrificial mothers—Tagore offers alternative readings. His female characters often emerge as individuals who question authority, seek truth, and assert their personal desires and moral convictions.

This paper investigates how Tagore's mythical plays become a site for the assertion of female self, analyzing how characters like **Chitrangada**, **Kunti**, **Gandhari**, and **Sita** reclaim their voices and disrupt the boundaries set by convention.

## FEMINISM AND TAGORE

Rarely do uniquely suited people arise to understand the innate potential of civilisation. The aforementioned is undeniably true, as shown by a few events in India's extensive past. Unexpected and extremely remarkable persons had stepped up and poured new blood into the nation's veins via their extraordinary leadership abilities and spiritual insights during times of turmoil, uncertainty, ambiguity, tension, and deplorability.

The likes of the Buddha, Shankaracharya, Swami Vivekananda, and Swami Paramahansa have emerged at critical points in India's history, illuminating the path forward and ensuring the indigenous peoples' continued existence and culture. Because they showed people how to attain physical, emotional, and spiritual health, they unexpectedly became an inspiration to others. Improving their social skills was a deliberate choice they took to benefit the nation overall.

As the new century began, India once again encountered turbulent waters. The nation was ruled economically and politically. The decent individuals who lived here were unable to escape the cycle of poverty and lack of education. Many ways, they were at a disadvantage. They had deteriorated into lifeless shells of their former selves, as if they had lost faith in their own survival. A number of kind people thereafter attempted to console them, such Babasahib Ambedkar, Tanguturi Prakasam Panthulu, Raja Rammohan Ray, etc., but their efforts were ineffective since they only touched a tiny portion of the populace. There wasn't enough of the generated spirit. So, we are at a crossroads as a country.

At that same moment, two exceptional figures appeared to both frighten and comfort the populace. Both the Mahatma and the Gurudev were one and the same soul. The combined influence of these two titans gave India a chance to display her natural vigour once again. She made her spiritual dominance known in a very public way.

The impact of Mahatma Gandhiji was immediate and palpable. After hearing his crucial appeal, thousands upon thousands of people joined the liberation fight. Though his influence was less obvious at first glance, Rabindranath Tagore was undoubtedly on par with or perhaps more significant than Gandhiji. Rabindranath Tagore and Gandhi represent the classic opposition of the saint and the poet. In this context, it is important to note that Rabindranath

Tagore was more than just a poet; he was also a thinker and filmmaker. Only after reading his major works have literary critics come to appreciate his power. His importance was far greater than anybody had anticipated. It's about time that his international renown for *The Gitanjali* was remembered.

In 1913, a turning point for world freedom came when the Nobel Prize in Literature was bestowed to Rabindranath Tagore, an Indian. So, this caused a lot of people to become angry and argue over it. In an instant, the Western world adored the genius Rabindranath Tagore. An important turning point in history was his victory as the first Asian to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. A. Gnatyuk-Daniel Chuck points out that "...the publishing of Rabindranath Tagore's poem, in poet's own prose translation from Bengali, by Macmillan & Co. in March, 1913 turned out to be a great phenomenon in literary history." The anthology has been reprinted 131 times in the last year in London alone, all by the same publisher. Tribute books to Rabindranath Tagore written by T.R. Sharma,

## **RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S MODERNITY**

Some call Rabindranath Tagore a "nationalist poet" while others call him a "nationalist leader." Since Rabindranath Tagore had already rejected nationalism by the late 1800s, this raises historical and historiographical questions. Some of his closest acquaintances also dispute his ambivalence towards nationalism. Prasanta Mahalanobis states in a 1921 letter to Edward J. Thompson that Rabindranath Tagore never supported nationalism. Even at its peak, he disagreed with several aspects of the swadeshi movement.

Thus, it is said that the viewpoints of a few of Rabindranath Tagore's contemporaries provided a another picture, although one that lends credence to Mahalanobis' reading. An editorial that appeared in the *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, a daily newspaper in Calcutta, on August 19, 1925, gives readers a taste of the severe criticism that Rabindranath Tagore faced after publicly bashing the concept and practice of "non-cooperation." "Those who are anchored in the soil of this nation and aware of the reality would no doubt feel that the poet's fruitless labours are sad and sorrowful," the journal remarked of Rabindranath Tagore.

## **RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S MODERNITY**

Here are some specific examples that are brought up to emphasise how new and progressive Rabindranath Tagore's worldview is. He was an unafraid opponent of established social norms and religious dogmas that had no basis in fact yet were maintained over the years. Compared to other leaders of his day, his nonconformism was both more extreme and more constant. He made a complete and utter attack on the caste system. Therefore, he said, the caste system should be abolished entirely since all humans are created equal.

By providing intellectual reason for the emergence of castes, Rabindranath Tagore did nothing to soften his condemnation. The binary of "western materialism" vs "Indian spiritualism" was too simple, in his view. For him, science was "Europe's greatest gift to humanity," and he distanced himself from Indians who saw Western culture as a whole as immoral and shallow.

It is worth mentioning that Rabindranath Tagore, like many others, had a soft spot for India's ancient traditions. The profound familiarity and admiration for these enduringly valued components of Indian culture is the source of this devotion. His examination of Indian history demonstrates an exceptional grasp of the fundamentals of the field. Rabindranath Tagore sought to explain the two guiding principles—unity underlying diversity and continually in the midst of change—that have shaped India's destiny throughout the ages in an essay he wrote in 1912 titled "Bharatavarsha Itihasa Dhara" (The Stream of Indian History).

Truth, beauty, kindness, love, freedom, and tranquilly are the essence of all things, and Rabindranath Tagore was aware of this. Some of the qualities of Indian tradition that he was aware of were an openness to new ideas and ways of doing things, a willingness to accept different routes that ultimately led to the same place, an awareness of the unity beneath diversity, and the capacity to find calm in the midst of chaos. Additionally, few people had the insight he did on the interplay between the creative, religious, and intellectual domains of Indian culture.

Some aspects of his family history upset him and even angered him. He expressed his displeasure and sorrow via words. India has a history of moral inertia due to its high-minded people's tendency to make excuses for clearly untenable practises and traditions, such as the belief that "contentment is the highest virtue" and the subsequent reluctance to seek out more efficient and comfortable ways of life.

Rabindranath Tagore was not daunted by the challenge. Among the many things he says to honour Ram Mohan Roy is, "There was a period when, all alone, Ram Mohan Ray took his position on the common demand of mankind and strove to reconcile India with the rest of the globe." Not even unwavering norms and practises could cloud his judgement. India's understanding of the world was broadened by Ram Mohan Roy. He saw that the march of time continues beyond the present, that it bears its triumphant banner into the future, and that all men must unite beneath that banner. These kind comments about Rabindranath Tagore's famous forerunner might be used to honour Tagore himself.

The topic of "tradition against modernity" has been the subject of much debate recently. In any case, these are the two options from which India must choose. The question of whether to adhere to current norms or to long-standing traditions is beyond the point. Rabindranath Tagore argued that a truly modern individual would not be one to reject tradition but rather to find new ways to express it via art, reasoning, and even the other way around.

Sincere admiration for India's traditional culture necessitates an attitude of openness and adaptation rather than resistance to change. Tradition, when used intelligently, may help one move forward without feeling uprooted or estranged from their past. The fact that it is automatically approved doesn't mean that it can't serve as a millstone for the country's neck. In several of his articles and letters, Rabindranath Tagore emphasises the truth in this way.

## **RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S HUMANISM**

Among the many prophets of humanism who emerged in the twentieth century, Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore stands out. The prolific mind of Rabindranath Tagore developed a treasure trove of ideologies and concepts. Being a product of the Indian Renaissance in the late 19th and early 20th centuries meant that he had easy access to and was able to acquire new ideas, attitudes, and practices.

Rabindranath Tagore's contributions as an intellectual, his understanding of his country's history, and his passion for national harmony are all topics worthy of discussion. Truthfully, he is well-known for his originality of thought and spiritual humanism. It's easy to miss this brilliant man's musical contributions and experimental art because of his dominance in the literary realm.

## **RABINDRANATH TAGORE, THE PAINTER”**

Truth be told, Rabindranath Tagore is a multifaceted individual who developed an interest in art in his twilight years. At first, all he did was draw rhythmic lines that took on a variety of forms. His inking techniques evolved over time, and he eventually started using his fingers and rags. Rabindranath Tagore received a diploma in identifying shapes that are regarded as indicative of ideas and thoughts. It was his imagination, not real life, that he painted from. Since he believes he's often asked to explain the significance of his artwork, he undoubtedly had an affinity for abstract forms of expression. Though his

photographs are popular, he has remained mute. He shouldn't try to explain it or intervene in what they're feeling.

However, Rabindranath Tagore's paintings gradually moved away from abstract emotions as his career progressed. One interpretation is that his paintings of legendary creatures, old birds, and reptiles represent a stage of development from the purely abstract to the more relatable human forms that suggest emotions and concepts.

In addition to penning several works on the topic of humanity's place in the natural world, Rabindranath Tagore established an experimental society known as Shantineketan to put his theories to the test.

Trees and meadows surround the region on all sides. In doing so, he established a standard for future human interactions with the natural world. "In his literary works he has declared he was born together with the trees and flowers," remarked Pabitra Sarkar, a former Vice-Chancellor of Rabindra Bharati University and an admirer of Rabindranath Tagore. His poems and prose showcased his profound admiration for the environment. One of his songs, Akash Bhora Surjya Tara Bishwa Bhara Pran, shows how much he values nature.

## **RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHTS**

Rabindranath Tagore's fundamental philosophical ideas revolve on a few basic concepts: ultimate truth, the universe or nature, the soul, death and immortality, and freedom. In addition to his philosophical ideas, it is important to emphasise the predominance of humanism in his theistic beliefs. To paraphrase Rabindranath Tagore, "God" is the concept of the ideal being in the human imagination. Given the world's imperfections, it's only natural to strive for an ideal of perfection inside one's own head. According to his words in Sadhana, the very fact that man has any concept of God at all is a miracle beyond compare. For him, what is seen is the actualization of perfection. "To know him in this life is to be real; to miss out on knowing him now is to miss out on the ultimate solace that is death"

Tagore, Rabindranath, believes in the presence of a world-mind that can comprehend and understand everything in the universe. When discussing "The Nature of Reality," Albert Einstein said, "If nobody is in this home yet the table stays where it is." Yes, it stays beyond the mind, but not the global mind," states Rabindranath Tagore. What I see on the table is accessible to minds like mine. So, like Berkeley, Rabindranath Tagore thinks the world's objects exist only in the collective consciousness. Ancient religious texts indicate that tribal peoples also believed in a God endowed with unlimited might.

The closeness of the community, according to Rabindranath Tagore, is the root cause of the people's profound faith in God. He contends that individuals look to the community for the beauty and truth that is uniquely theirs. Similar to how listening to music brings people together, this enormous social communion allows man to feel the awe of unity. The experience of such unity is the means by which man learns about God. Not in its infinite breadth, but in the ad vitam, the marvel of unity, does infinity really shine. (495). Another proof that God exists, therefore, is the fact that people stick together. But such definitive proof doesn't bother Rabindranath Tagore since he feels God's presence within himself. In support of his assertion that God exists, he offers the following arguments.

As a result, Rabindranath Tagore asserts, "the essential goal of man is to exist." The very fact that humans exist is proof that the universe exists. The human and the cosmos are joined in an eternally expressing symphony. It is because of this innate need to express oneself that a guy may be considered an artist by definition. He must go beyond the realm of the living. He longs for the opportunity to articulate it, convey it, and impart it onto others. Humans are responsible for learning about the environments in which they live. He has to improvise or invent a new system if he is to continue developing his creative self. He values a certain worldview, and he wants to fill in the gaps with his imagination. His goal is to use technology to remake the world in his image. Man cannot delve into the harmony between his own existence and that of the cosmos as a whole without using science, technology, and art as spiritual probing tools. Man is like a torn apart lover, aware of the beauty of harmony but unable to experience it.

The illness is existential rather than psychological. It's not the kind of illness that makes you feel unwell. Yet man suffers for having given birth to art; this suffering is creative in nature. Tagore attributes Viraha, the feeling of alienation or separation, to the creative awareness.

Yet Rabindranath Tagore's man is both unique and universal. This explanation is extremely illuminating. It unlocks the secret to comprehending the man's rootedness in truth and beauty, not only in his nationalism or internationalism. This unclouded appreciation of goodness and grace represents a new era in India's cultural development. People discovered, after a long wait and with fresh vigour, in his language a startling presence of man, transparency of truth, and ecstatic beauty.

### **SPIRITUAL AND MORAL VALUES IN RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S PROSE"**

This connection is a domain in which Rabindranath Tagore believes he rules. Character is the core of oneself from which awareness radiates out into the world. Rabindranath Tagore's central argument is that an individual's sense of self is grounded on a principle of transcendental unity. As a result, by his understanding, affection, and endeavour, man is able to reach out into infinity.

As Rabindranath Tagore writes in *The Religion of Man*, "the knights-errant of the cult of arson are abroad, setting fire to our time-honored altars of worship, proclaiming that the images enshrined on them, even if beautiful, are made of mud." Tagore is aware of the challenges and arguments of the modern era. They claim it has become clear that human idealism is a mirage, that the dirt under the surface is real. From this vantage point, it's possible to conclude that the whole cosmos is one big hoax, and that all the billions of spinning electric particles that pass for "you" and "me" are to blame for spreading incorrect information. It's not that Rabindranath Tagore blindly sails off into mystical obscurity out of unthinking longing for the past.

As we have seen, Rabindranath Tagore often remarked after World War I that he was disillusioned with Western civilisation and its inability to live up to its greatest aspirations, as embodied in Christianity. For Rabindranath Tagore, the best answer is to use "the inborn standard of the actual," which states that "the rose must be more pleasing than its component gases" and that the whole is in "perfect harmony" with its parts.

Tagore places more value on 'wholeness' than on analytical prowess. A mystical grouping of the human being's disorderly and disillusioning resources, restraining and stressing in right places, producing a

distinctive worth to our individuality in all its entirety, has changed the animal in the savage into higher phases in the civilised man.

To maintain alive our confidence in the actuality of the ultimate perfection is the role of civilisation; this is Rabindranath Tagore's response to the nihilism of modernity. Rabindranath Tagore rejects the 'realism' of contemporary writing because, in his view, it only captures a small fraction of the whole breadth of human experience and reality. When they are at their greatest, literature and the arts assert the whole of the human being, fortifying the very basis of civilisation. His works, such as his analysis of the rose, often explore how

It takes guts to state that the Infinite's choice to become a man and descend to Earth was pointless, and Rabindranath Tagore had the guts to express it. By being present in the finite, the infinite creates a spiritual connection between people, the environment, and the Almighty, and when one attains this degree of self-awareness, they realise that the universe is an actual creation of the infinite.

## **RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S VIEWS ON EDUCATION"**

Education from Rabindranath Tagore's perspective is a spiritual practise. Education, in his opinion, should lead to personal growth. Rabindranath Tagore defines self-realization as the experience of recognising one's essential unity with all other living beings. This is the pinnacle of human achievement. It's an endeavour impossible to complete without formal schooling. When it comes to philosophy and schooling, as well as the intersection of thinking and living, Rabindranath Tagore sees no contradictions. Like many modern Indian thinkers, he thinks that everyone has the capacity to be divine and can develop that ability.

"The essential objective of education is not just to enrich ourselves through the depth of information, but also to develop the link of love and friendship between man and man," says Rabindranath Tagore, elaborating on the goals of schooling. Because of this integralist view of ultimate reality, we can see that Rabindranath Tagore's approach to education was humanistic. That man can live in harmony with nature and God is central to his worldview. All three of these things are equally true. Just like in nature, the human body, mind, and spirit are all interconnected and equally vital. Rabindranath Tagore, like Aurobindo, is an advocate of a well-rounded education that includes the development of one's body, mind, and spirit.

## **PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENTS**

Education of the body, in the truest sense, does not reside in play and experience, but rather in methodically devoting the body to some meaningful job, as argued by Rabindranath Tagore. To emphasise the importance of physical education, he writes, "even if they learnt nothing they would have had ample time for play climbing trees, diving into ponds, plucking and tearing flowers, perpetrating thousand and one mischief's on mother nature, they would have obtained the nourishment of the body, happiness of mind, and the satisfaction of the natural impulse of childhood."

Because learning involves discovery, it's not enough to have a head full of facts and figures. He emphasised the need of improvising in many areas, including, for instance, stretching limited financial resources to their full potential. There was no other purpose to schooling but to learn to love, and the environment in which that love was taught was crucial. If Rabindranath Tagore's idea of having classes outside in the woods were

implemented, even partially, it would save the needless cost of constructing and furnishing classrooms and schools.

## CONCLUSION

Rabindranath Tagore's mythical plays present a transformative vision of female identity that transcends conventional frameworks of myth and tradition. By reimagining mythological women as self-aware, articulate, and morally empowered individuals, Tagore provides a literary platform for female assertion that remains relevant in today's discourses on gender and equality. His plays are not mere adaptations of epics; they are interventions—each character's voice becomes a testimony to the right to self-definition. Through dramatic monologues, moral dilemmas, and courageous choices, the women in Tagore's mythical plays assert not just their presence but their power. In a time when Indian society was still grappling with the question of women's rights and social roles, Tagore envisioned and enacted a world in which the female self was not marginal, but central. His works continue to inspire feminist readings and encourage re-examinations of traditional narratives with progressive intent.

---

## References

1. Agrwal, B. R. 2004, 'Insight into Feminine Mind: a Study of Tagore's Dramatic World'. In Neeru Tondon. *Perspectives and Challenges in Indian English Drama*, New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers
2. Joseph, Thomas 2013, *Humanism in the Selected Poems of Rabindranath Tagore and G.Sankara Kurup-A Critical Comparison*, *Language in India*, vol.13 May 2013 p. 284.
3. Kaiser Haq 2010, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, *Asiatic*, vol. 4 no 1 June 2010 p.37
4. Kriplani K.R., Included in *Three Plays* trans. Marjorie Sykes. Madras. OUP
5. Kundu R. 2004, *Buddha in Tagore's Imagination: Studies on Rabindranath Tagore* ed . Mohit K.Ray, Delhi, Atlantic Publishers
6. Madhumati, Roy 2010, *Scripting Woman in Three Short Stories of Rabindranath Tagore*, *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*. ISSN No.0975-2935 vol. No.2 Nov. 2010
7. Mehta P.P. 1968, *Indo-Anglian Fiction*, Assessment, Barailly, PBD
8. Nagraj, Holeyannvar 2012, *Myth and Puranas: Decolonisation of Indian English Drama*. *The Criterion: An International Journal in English* ISSN 0976-8165 Mar. 2012 .vol.2 No.4, 2012 , p.449
9. P. Satyanarayana, et al 2013, *Rabindranath Tagore as a Novelist*, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, ISSN No.(online)2319-7722 (print)2319-7714
10. Pathan M.D. 2011, *Feminism Reflected in Rabindranath Tagore's Plays*, *Chitra, Chandalika & Natir Puja. International Referred Research Journal*, ISSN 0975- 3486, vol.1 Issue 17 Feb. 2011
11. Pathan M.D. 2012, *A Study of the Interpretation of Myth in Rabindranath Tagore's plays*, *Universal Research Journal*, ISSN 2229-4406 VOL.1 Issue 4 Mar 2012- Aug. 2012

12. Prasad H.,2004, Studies on Rabindranath Tagore ,vol 1 ed. . Mohit K.Ray, New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers
13. Quayyum M.A.,2005, Paradisiacal Imagination : Tagore's Visvovod Or Vision of Non-National New-Universalism, Quodlibet,The Australian Journal of trans- national Writing.vol.1 Feb.2005
14. Rai Anita 2012, Critical Analysis of Short Stories of Rabindranath Tagore, International Journal of Arts& Education Research, ISSN 2278-9677.vol.1 Issue 3 Article No.15/269-279 Oct 2012
15. Sharma T.R. 1998, Perspective on Rabindranath Tagore,Ghaziabad, Vimal Prakashan.
16. Sharma, Ram 2010, A History of Indian English Drama, Sunoasis Writers Network, Posted on 24 Jan 2010.
17. Sutapa, Chaudhary 2010, Signifying the Self: Intersections of Class, Caste and Gender in Tagore's Dance Drama Chandalika (1938) Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities ISSN 0975-2935
18. Yadav Shalini, 2012, Rediscovering Symbolism in Rabindranath Tagore's The Post Office, Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal ISSN 2278- 9529 vol.1 Issue 1 Jan 2012