



## FEMINISM CONCERN IN CONTEXT OF THE WORKS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF AND RABINDRANATH TAGORE

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Communicated :01.08.21

Revision :06.08.2021 &  
20.08.2021

Published: 01.09.2021

Accepted :25.08.2021

### ABSTRACT:

Feminism is concerned with women's inferior status in society and with the prejudice women face as a result of their sex. All feminists advocate for reforms to the social, political, economic, or cultural order in order to mitigate and ultimately eliminate women's discrimination. Women's nature cannot be replaced. It is something that should be preserved and even cherished for the sake of both women and society. Women's achievements should be lauded. Throughout history, women have been subjected to physical, psychological, and economic abuse. They have not only contributed to the perpetuation of this system of male domination, but also deceived their children into it. However, they have rebelled and are emerging victorious and unstoppable. As we all know, each research project has a specific issue that motivates the researcher to do the study. Additionally, the current research study has a pertinent subject as a research challenge.

**Key words:** -Feminism, novels, Virginia woolf, Rabindranath Tagore etc.

### INTRODUCTION:

Feminism is a blanket word that refers to a variety of political, cultural, and economic movements. It seeks to increase women's rights and legal protection. As British novelist and critic Rebecca West observes, "I only know that other people refer to me as a feminist when I articulate emotions that distinguish me from a doormat or prostitute" (Marcus, 1989, p.219). Additionally, each writer develops his or her own unique meaning based on personal experience. For instance, according to Estelle Freedman, the focus is on the intellectual foundation: "feminism is a social movement that sought political equality for women and men, with the knowledge that gender inevitably interacts with other social hierarchies" (Freedman, 2004, p.24). Barbara Smith believes that, depending on her circumstances and political stance, "Feminism is a political philosophy and practise dedicated to the liberation of all women. Anything less is not feminism, but simply feminine egotism" (Smith, 1986, p.188). Smith

identifies as a feminist. Who was instrumental in establishing and maintaining Black Feminism in the United States, an organisation that emphasises the interconnectedness of racial, gender, heterosexist, and socioeconomic oppression in the lives of black women and other women of colour.

### II. VIRGINIA WOOLF

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) was a significant figure in feminist literature since her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, offered feminist viewpoints. This work was essential to the development of her writing career, not to the stability of her marriage. It is in this essay that Virginia Woolf expresses her disapproval of motherhood, which she believes allows a woman to explore new options for her own identity and to face erroneous political, social, and literary frameworks about her gender identity. "Everything - love, children, adventure, intimacy, work," Woolf emphasised in her writings, implying that motherhood as a

responsibility is inadequate to fulfil a woman's whole life (qtd. Saika Kanai, 2013, p.9). Literary, for Woolf, was a process of recovering her identity and re-creating it in her own writing style. The Voyage Out campaign advocates for women's freedom from oppression and limitations on their movements. In contrast to her longing for Victorian married life, The Voyage Out is the product of her complex stream of thinking about how she could combine her desire for the role of mother with her goal to become a writer. Woolf has dedicated her whole life to achieving her goal of being a mother. Her marriage, on the other hand, did not offer her with the chance to become a mother; her husband prevented her from becoming a mother out of concern for her health. Woolf's early writing career was characterised by her anxiety about a failed pregnancy and her confused feelings toward her mother, which continued into her adulthood. With her parents, Woolf saw early in childhood how important it was for women to adhere to the Victorian ideal of femininity in order to survive. She saw that her mother was happy with providing for her family and appreciating life as a woman in her position, which she found encouraging. Besides being Woolf's ideal mother, Julia served as a model for the Victorian ideal of womanhood, which required devotion to one's spouse and one's children. Because of her mother's influence on her, Woolf learned that sustaining a husband and children was the pinnacle of womanly happiness. Marriage and childbearing were considered to be essential aspects of a woman's life.

“A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction”.

Thus, Woolf urges women to seize control of a constrained position dictated by the presence of males. Men take chances to exert power over

political, economic, social, and political institutions and circumstances, while simultaneously seeing women as inferior. Virginia Woolf stresses fate and urges women to overcome oppression, reject their sadness, and achieve equality or balance of family standards within society.

#### **A. Virginia Woolf As the Key Figure of The Feminist Movement**

Virginia Woolf established herself as one of the earliest and most significant advocates and emblems of the Feminist Movement after the publication of her writings, particularly *A Room of One's Own* in 1922. Numerous individuals labelled her as a "feminist" in the "wrong" and "strict" meaning of the term. However, she was always careful to articulate her position on this point: She was not a believer in women being superior to men. She advocated for gender equality and believed that women should have the same rights as men since we are all human beings with rights.

The Victorian Age was a time which may be regarded to be backward in this respect. Women were not allowed to voice their views in public and access to education was limited. Neither could they live openly as homosexuals, since this would be tantamount to treason against Victorian ideals' clean and decorous way of life. Victorian society was rife with biases, many of which were firmly ingrained, and which were largely a result of the era's strong religious convictions. Virginia Woolf wanted to depart from these ideals and advocate for women's fundamental rights. She was nearly entirely focused on women's intellectual lives. Virginia Woolf did not believe women superior to men. Indeed, she believed that both sexes belonged to distinct natures but should be treated equally. She advocated for the fusion of these two opposing natures, as well as for gender equality.

The following paragraph is an excerpt from Rachel Bowlby's 1988 book *Feminist Destinations*, which expresses a viewpoint on Virginia Woolf:

“Among feminist critics who praise her work, she is seen as exemplary both in the sense of being unusual – a one-of-a-kind heroine, a foremother, a figurehead – and as a model, in some way indicative or typical of what is referred to as "women's writing." Those who hate her work see it as not meeting the requirements for women's writing, but as conforming much too closely to patriarchal norms, literary or social, against which genuine women's writing should be opposed by definition”.

#### **B. Patriarchy in Woolf's *Jacob's Room***

The majority of female characters in *Jacob's Room* have minor roles. Their thought and emotion are shaped by the patriarchal society. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf makes reference to this male dominance. Woolf wants to convey this message in *Jacob's Room* "England is governed by patriarchal principles.

Woolf's approach in *Jacob's Room* is to "demonstrate the difference in worth and the trivialization of feminine by examining what is apparent and what is not in order to evaluate the sexes' difference" (17). According to Woolf's observation: "While men's values vary from women's values, it is men's values that triumph, since each is essential to the ordering of patriarchal society. Patriarchy has an impact on female personalities psychologically.

The narrator witnesses one of the female characters, Ellen Barfoot, being humiliated by males in *Jacob's Room*. Ellen is not allowed to attend some Aquarium performances. Ellen is seen as a prisoner in "her bath chair" by the narrator:

However, Ellen Barfoot never attended the Aquarium (despite the fact that she was

acquainted with Captain Boase, who had captured the shark), and when the guys with the posters came by, she regarded them with contempt... Ellen Barfoot was a prisoner in her bath-chair on the esplanade.

Mrs. Norman, another female character, is terrified as Jacob boards the train. She seems unable to stop him from smoking inside the train; all she does is complaining. She is alone with a "young man":

Mrs. Norman protested anxiously but feebly as the door flew wide and a strong-built young man rushed in. He did not seem to notice she was alone in a train compartment with a young guy. Men are seen as harmful by the narrator. Mrs. Norman takes the decision to protect herself based on her perception of Jacob's looks. Her attitude toward men reflects a psychological barrier that keeps her away from men:

Nonetheless, males are hazardous. She skimmed half a column of her newspaper and then sneaked over the brink, relying on the infallible test of appearance to determine her safety.

Mrs. Norman considers a suitable phrase to convey her message to "the young guy." She is reluctant to speak with him. She perceives him as being inattentive to her. Mrs. Norman's contact with Jacob is determined by Jacob's (the young man's) attentiveness.

Should she tell the young guy (who was, after all, the same age as her own son): If you want to smoke, don't bother me? No, he seemed completely oblivious to her presence.... She was adamantly opposed to interrupting him.

The narrator makes reference to women's works being neglected. Female literary works are relegated to the margins. Mrs. Flanders speculates on the prospect of reading women's unpublished writings. She alludes to male

readers' subjugation of women's unpublished works;

Mrs. Flanders understood just how Mrs. Jarvis felt; and how fascinating her letters about Mrs. Jarvis were, if they were read..... Because the blotting paper is torn and the nib is split and clotted.

Miss Julia Hedge, a female character in the book, also makes reference to the marginalization or neglect of female works. Mrs. Julia identifies herself a feminist. She is awaiting the publication of her book. She is perplexed as to why George Eliot and Emily Bronte's names are not included among the names of famous men around a dome. She is dissatisfied about female authors' marginalization:

Miss Julia Hedge, the feminist waited for her books. They did not come. She wetted her pen....." Oh damn', said Julia Hedge, why didn't they leave room for an Eliot or Bronte?

### III. TAGORE'S FEMINISM IN GORA

Rabindranath played a pivotal role in the emancipation of Bengali women. Initially, he used his letters, short tales, and essays to highlight the suffering of women and to advocate for their autonomy. He was able to create fresh and vibrant female characters via his books. He then became an inventive pioneer in coeducation and women empowerment via his admission of girls to his Santiniketan school.

Around 1907, when nationalist opposition to British imperialism was competing for the allegiance of young Indians with the allure of Western modernity, Tagore composed his magnum opus, Gora. This was a period of political turmoil in India, but this book did not address any political movement; rather, it depicted the efforts made to comprehend the modern perspective on life brought about by Western education and the realization of a

logical attitude. In this regard, Sharad Srivastava writes:

The woman is freed when she analyses and thinks on her place as a woman within the larger scheme of things, which encompasses social, moral, and spiritual dimensions. (17-18)

A free woman is diametrically opposed to a woman who considers achieving equality with males, expressing her own individuality, and stressing her own womanhood rights.

Gora is set in Kolkata in the second half of the nineteenth century and follows a generation that grew up in the aftermath of the Indian Railways rebellion. The rising tide of nationalism and separatist has an effect on the activity's trajectory. As part of a larger examination of India's cultural, political, and religious identity, the novel depicts clashes between a fiercely orthodox Hindu nationalism and the liberal Bengali Socialist Movement within Hinduism, the Brahma Samaj, rather than between British colonialism and Indian resistance, as European readers are accustomed to seeing in Indian literature. While these were British attempts to reform Hinduism, the Brahma Samaj was an eclectic and syncretistic movement that incorporated a number of positive western tendencies such as opposition to Sati Pratha, the Parada System, child marriage, and the caste system, as well as support for widow remarriage and women's education. Despite his love to his nation, the renowned Indian poet, philosopher, and thinker R. N. Tagore argued for the importance of global religion and culture, which he believed to be true Hinduism. As Upendranath Bhattacharya points out in Rabindranath's Short Story and New, Rabindranath's Short Story and Novel created and expanded the field of dialectical disputes between old Hinduism and the novel Brahma religion. The 'relationship' between orthodox

conservative society and reform-minded progressivist Brahmo society deteriorated over time as a consequence of mutual hostility and caustic confrontations. (323)

For more than half a century in India, the writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Asia's first Nobel laureate, have been a popular subject of study. His literary works have been exposed to intense examination throughout the years. Despite his popularity as an Indo-Anglian poet, prophet, philosopher, novelist, and essayist, his work has received little critical attention, despite his fame as an Indo-Anglian poet, prophet, philosopher, novelist, and writer. Throughout this lecture, I want to examine the idea of femininity as it appears in Rabindranath Tagore's landmark book *Gora*. Every culture and civilization has portrayed the female person as a fertility symbol, a Goddess symbolizing the Motherland, or even as a class of individuals who thrive in the kitchen and at home. In each of these instances, the woman is seen as a crucial component of one of the two philosophical systems under discussion. Binoybhusan is a highly educated Bengali young man who has established a reputation for himself in socio-religious discussions regarding education and national objectives, as well as in disputes concerning topics considered suitable for women to address, such as women's relationships inside and beyond their gender. Binoy, as he is subsequently known as, is seen gazing out his window, his countenance serene. Meanwhile, he overhears a baul singer performing a traditional song: "The odd bird flies in and out of the cage, if only I could capture it." When we consider Tagore's female characters, the free young lady with a strong intellect who is equally at comfortable within and outside of 'home,' as well as Anandamoyi, or the protagonist's 'mother,' come to mind as figures

that linger in our minds. Despite its early twentieth-century publication, the book is widely considered as a watershed moment in the history of Indian literature, and many efforts have been made to analyse each step Tagore makes in this work. *Gora* is to be seen through the eyes of Gourmohan, an Irish orphan adopted by a Brahmin family after the 1857 mutiny. A second reading of the book is as a storey of victory over racial and caste stereotypes. Another view is that the storey is about an intergenerational effort to reconcile the educated class in Indian culture with the pressures of Westernization. *Gora* has many levels of significance in Bengali literature as a result of its emphasis on the cultural roots of Bengal and Bengalis, as well as the debasement of society as a result of the assault of western thought brought about by British rule. Rabindranath may have called this 500-page book *Gora* after the story's major character, Gourmohan, who is also known as *Gora* by his friends, *gora* ('white-skinned') after the central character's skin tone, or *Gora*, which translates as "essence and core of a problem." By using these three distinct perspectives, one may make challenging and intriguing comparisons between the narrative's many components. However, the fundamental problems of liberty, women's education, and liberation, as well as the desire for these things, would remain constant throughout history.

Tagore imbues feminism with his own meaning; he shows his feminists how to discover themselves in the face of society without causing harm to others. Anandamoyi and Sucharita are unlikely to create great catastrophes since they lack the excessive ego that is often the mistake of larger-than-life epic figures. Tagore refrains from transforming his female characters into supernatural creatures. It's reasonable that Sucharita's first animosity against *Gora* is

comprehensible. Gora is not concerned with moral purification; rather, Tagore is concerned with character development and takes the majority of his characters on a life journey during which they find their own particular humanity. Accelerated feminism simply irritated the people of the period in India. Gora was published by Tagore in 1924, but it was serialized earlier. The tale was written during Tagore's lifetime. Lolita's failure serves as Tagore's tool for convincing Indian feminists that a sudden outcry for freedom and the dissolution of woman from Hindu society would yield very little - much less than Baradasundari received from her Brahma feminist ideology, which permitted her to wear revealing clothing and converse with men in broad daylight. Even this "little" liberty would have meant a great deal to the women of that era, but it was not something for which a cultural and social revolution was required.

#### CONCLUSION :

The novel chronicles the journey of a young man Gora from the narrowness of the institutionalized religion in which he believed to disillusionment and enlightenment as a "human being," a journey that was undoubtedly aided by the fact that he had a socialist Indian surrogate mother in Anandamoyi who was far ahead of its time and society in recognizing the spirit of humanism inherent in As we progress through the novel, we realize that she is a noble-hearted woman who is not interested in debating which path is the best, but in enhancing and enriching our growth as 'human beings,' without which religion, societies, traditions, and ideologies - with all of their progressive or reactionary ideas - can devolve into a horrible bondage. Without a question, both female characters have a liberal perspective on life.

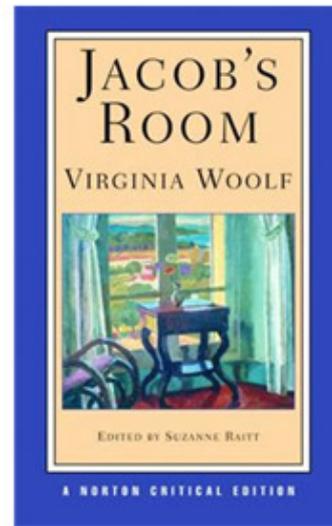
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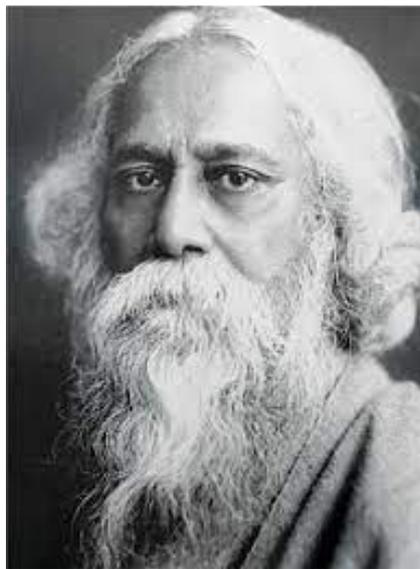
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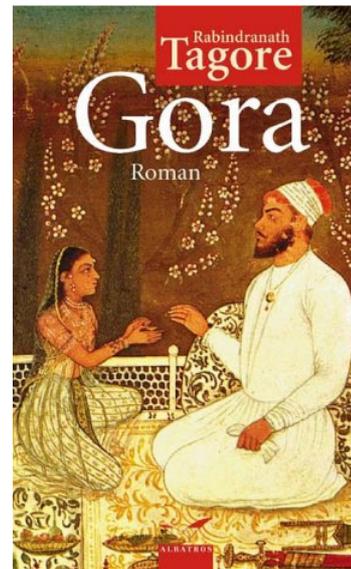
*Figure 1: Virginia Woolf  
(Source: Time Magazine)*



*Figure 2: Jacob's Room Novel by  
Virginia Woolf*



*Figure 3: RabindraNath Tagore*



*Figure 4: Gora novel by RabindraNath Tagore*