

Portrayal of Valour of Woman Protagonist in Rabindranath Tagore's *Giribala*

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Abstract:

Rabindranath Tagore has contributed immensely in the development of Indian literature as a writer. His works are an emblem of salient features of Indian patriarchal society. He has also depicted status of women in Indian society in the context of male domination leading to sufferings and exploitation of women in 19th century. *Giribala* is one of the finest stories dealing with an ordinary woman demonstrating an extra-ordinary courage in order to protect her dignity and identity. The protagonist has challenged the traditional stereotypes of woman as a care taker, wife, slave, commodity and mother. As an innovative educator, Tagore often urges women to search for freedom, decision making power and establish their own rightful identity in the fabric of the society. There is self-awakening of feminine potentiality and desire for economic independence by the protagonist in the development of the story.

This research paper is an attempt to investigate valour of woman protagonist leading to New Identity.

Key words: Indian Society, Women, Patriarchy, Identity, Exploitation and Challenges.

Introduction:Traditionally, civilizations have always assigned different roles, codes of behaviour, morality, and even different feelings and thoughts to men and women based on the biological distinction of sex (between male and female) thereby leading to the construction of the social distinction of gender (between masculine and feminine). From the 'mystic' feminine with secrets to create life to the 'divine'; from Inthe witchy heretics to being the "second sex", the journey of women has been celebrated, shackled, marginalized, contested, debated, reassigned, negated and reinstated while the battle rages on. Despite all these, women have come out from the rooms of their own but the inception was not an easy one. And some men have been there by them and most against them in their journey towards liberty.

Women were expected to remain true to their husbands, whether the men deserved it or not. In this story, the husband himself was thebiggest oppressor of the wife. Men were always free to entertain themselves both inside and outside the home, as they wish to, but women were supposed to turn a blind face to all their doings, and keep playing the role of a virtuous and chaste wife. In the story “Giribala”, the eponymous character is a woman “overflowing with the exuberance of youth”, but disappointingly she remained unnoticed by her husband. She came as a child bride at her husband’s home, so they grew accustomed to each other’s presence.Gopinath did not notice Giribala’s beauty and youth. While Gopinath himself enjoyed going to the theatre, he never allowed his wife to accompany him because decent women of respectable families were not to be associated with theatre. It was a place for the fallen and uncouth.

Gopinath who is an epitome of Patriarchy, is an unseasoned prince, became a Zamindar, got control over his property after his father’s death. He lacks the maturity and agility to understand and value the Love that Giribala has for him. Giribala finds that the bond she shared with him, is fading and he is drifting away from her.His parasitic friends who were with him to enjoy the lavish lifestyle and extravagant recreational experiences like visiting to the theatre and partying and drinking. Most of the times, Giribala had to keep waiting for her husband.Sitting alone, she felt like a queen in her Queendom but no subjects.The loneliness of a thinking mind and a feeling heart that Giribala had, intensified her desire to see Labanga Latika whom Gopinath admired and has fallen for. Gopinath kept

neglecting Giribala for the sake of Labanga, so Giribala grew curious to see the woman whom her husband so very admired. She went to the theatre stealthily one day, and was awestruck to see the enchanting beauty of the world of art.

She showed courage to cross the boundaries of her home and took risk of visiting the theatre, shattering the stereotypical 'goodness' thrust upon her. When she witnessed the beauty and charm of the theatre and artistic world, she was instantly drawn towards it. "The life, the unnatural shine, the magic of Music and painted Canvas" of the theatre was in contrast to her "joyless home". She gravitated towards the Charm and the Freedom. It had everything that she had been wanting for a long time. This was the moment that intensified her loneliness more. Her expectation to get the love of Gopinath back, swelled to the brim. She started visiting the theatre every Saturday. She noticed every detail and the nuances of acting on stage. Giribala came back home, got dressed up and perfumed, has been waiting for Gopinath and finally he arrived. She tried to play Radha who was angry on her Krishna and wanted him to plead to her.

On the other hand, Gopinath had the plan to take money and jewellery and elope with Labanga. He demanded the keys, She denied. Giribala just wanted him to acknowledge his love for her and She would have handed everything to him. Gopinath turned furious and took the jewellery with force. Gopinath's parting kick to Giribala was the final blow to the relationship. Sitting there all alone, with bruises all over her body and soul, Giribala felt the Shame and Nothingness of Life. She wanted to die, however, realized that it would be meaningless. Nobody is going to bother. Thinking and analysing deeply through the night, she arrived at a decision. That Night was a turning point of her Life. She was determined not to give up. Next morning, she told that she is going to her father's house and left. She took a brave step, chose the Stage where she found Freedom. She honed her acting skills and establishes herself as an actress whom everyone loved, admired and appreciated. These were the times when going to theatre was prohibited for women. Thinking to join Theatre as an actress that too a "Respectable woman": Zamindar's daughter and Wife, was out of question.

Giribala broke the traditional stigma and emerged emancipated. She not only becomes an actor but also earns name, fame and Recognition. Through experimentation with Giribala's character, Tagore has suggested a solution to women's oppression. "Tagore conceives of this solution on the pay-you-back-in-your-own-coin formula, for Gopinath's

chief intoxication lies with theatrical performance". Women's identity especially during the twentieth century society was shadowed in respect to that with man. Men learned self-reliance and self-dependence while women were always instructed to learn to take care of others and to thwart themselves. Giribala breaks the age-old tradition of obliged wifehood. As a liberated woman, she becomes a pioneer to change the status of the wife in this social scenario.

Hence, we see that this step has given her the Freedom that she yearned for. The freedom of making a decision and creating a Unique Identity and place for herself in the world. She gracefully achieves the goal and also shatters to pieces the male ego (in the form of Gopinath who took her for granted and thought her to be his personal property) Rabindranath Tagore has presented his women characters as valiant, undaunted, strong-willed, determined and conscious of their identity. The protagonists of Tagore's stories defied the common patriarchal norm of their time, to remain suppressed and passive and championed the cause of women emancipation from the clutches of patriarchal domination. They raise their voice in a strong manner against the biased patriarchal society and through their zeal, courage, grit and determination ultimately come out victorious.

He wanted to provide women with their rightful place in this world. Tagore respected the natural disposition of men and women, and desired that the world also smoothly operated by ensuring harmony between the two. He desired it to be so that there remained no violation of each other's space and rights. His ideas of harmony and balance depend upon this mutual understanding of each other's potentials and their due respect. He did not hesitate to accept that women are delicate by constitution, but, their delicacy did not always imply their weakness.

In Giribala, her physical description in detail emphasizes the delicate beautiful physical structure of women. At the same time, Rabindranath Tagore ensures that this is not just the description of the physical beauty. He makes Giribala use her beauty as an asset to enter into the new world of art where she was welcomed as an artist. It was a universally accepted truth in the society that women are born to serve men and their entire life must be nothing but an exemplary journey of restraint, endurance and sacrifice- that again conjoined with never ending affection and devotion. They had no right to complain, no reason to be unhappy, sick or sorrowful. In such an atmosphere of high, hollow ideals of women conduct, very few had the courage to expose the affectation which lay beneath these airy-fairy morals. Tagore tried

to reveal it seriously that women were not just abstract virtues but flesh and blood just like their male counterparts, therefore they were also able to feel. Social practices and ideologies affected women. Tagore has tried to point out many evils which prevail in the society even to this date. Such evils also prevail in the most crucial part of women's lives. Tagore's portrayal of Giribala's character is to kindle the awakening of womanpower in the minds of women folk. In this regard her maid Sudha played a very significant role for the awakening of self in Giribala and also in providing her the courage and self-belief to revolt against her husband's male oppressive psyche which was evident, right from the beginning of their relationship.

A deeper bond, a friendship and takes the story moves ahead. The contrast in their personalities is also highlighted. Tagore suggests for regaining individuality, freedom from the patriarchal setup of the family system, and the need for women empowerment, through these women characters. Tagore's creation of such emancipated women characters several decades before the Feminist ideologies evolved proves the fact that Rabindranath Tagore was a harbinger of Feminism far ahead of his time. Woman protagonists in these short stories are unfazed by the male domination or the patriarchal societal norms and finally show through their progressive thoughts, courage, and determination they protect their rights and in the process are emancipated. There are certain qualities that are highlighted in the Women protagonists as is by Giribala too.

She is an ordinary woman in ordinary situation: Giribala is married into a rich Zamindar family, has nothing much to do (the household chores) and had no children. The husband Gopinath, who was a loving and caring one in the early days, has slowly drifted away from her. His father's death has given him access to unlimited power which he started showing off. The man "with no brains and character" as described by the author turns out to be the epitome of a patriarch in the worst of his form: Ignoring his wife, spending time and money only on his parasitic friends and paramour. Giribala brimming with the wine of youth and exceptional beauty like an obedient and committed wife has been left waiting for him almost always. There was a possibility of her giving up; however, she showed her mettle.

Giribala shows Extra-ordinary Valour by taking charge of her Life:

She started doing things that she liked. Theatre and acting was one where she found the freedom and joy and she did not hesitate to pursue it. Every Saturday when she started visiting the theatre, it wasn't just for entertainment, but an act thought out and charted after much introspection. We see that a woman in an ordinary circumstance, who is a thinking and

feeling being, who deserved happiness, love and respect. When did not receive it from her so-called husband, creates an opportunity and paves a new path. At the outset readers may consider it to be revenge story of a wife, however, that would be hardly the true message of the great author. This story definitely has a much deeper meaning and message. One can't deny the courage and the risk-taking capacity which Giribala showed, when she chose to be an actress. She is supposed to be a "Decent woman" for whom even visiting the theatre as a viewer is strictly prohibited.

She visited there and slowly starts observing the mistakes made by other actors. She works hard to hone her skills, chooses to grab the opportunity when Labanga Latika elopes with Gopinath. When on stage, she exhibits her acting prowess and earns admiration, applauses and support of the audience. This certainly was not because she was lucky, but she had worked really hard and is committed towards her goal of creating an individual Identity in the fabric of the Patriarchal society. Never ever do we see that she has compromised on her values. She evolves to be the "New Woman" which Rabindranath Tagore wants every woman to be. By breaking the Stereotype of a "Good woman," The protagonist surely becomes a great woman, an ideal that each one of us can aspire to be even in the 21st century. Thirdly, we do see that her anger, disappointment and humiliation of life has given her a new direction and strength in Life. Giribala rather than falling into abyss has risen above the situation and created a Life through her own willpower and Determination. It paved a path towards Creativity rather than destruction. This is what every woman of 21st century can learn from this story narrated by Rabindranath Tagore.

Conclusion: Tagore has developed his Womenprotagonists in a much fuller perspective. Tagore's women-centric short stories represented the New Woman as a significantly transformed identity in a more assertive way. The women in the stories, came forward and acted, instead of staying passive towards the changes that took place in their lives. One can say that through Giribala the "New Woman" is born in the patriarchal India of 20th Century. Rabindranath Tagore successfully created a role model 'A Woman who is liberated physically, emotionally, spiritually and financially, A bravewoman with sharp intellect, determination and values, who takes the reign of Life in her hands and drives it in the right direction.

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