

# The Image of Woman as Motherhood in Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora*

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**Abstract**—This article evaluates the image of a traditional Indian motherhood in *Gora* written by Rabindranath Tagore. In *Gora*, Tagore portrays a divine mother and a goddess as well as the conception of the central character in relation to development of social, political, religious, and economical decisions of male. Yet, he insists that woman has the important roles in man's life and she should make the best identity for her own life in the family or in the larger society. However, This essay can be read as the ideology of a feminine ideal that compares nature of India motherland with mother of everyone in all aspects of life but it examines distinctions between Tagore and Wollstonecraft concerning women's role as mothers within the family because as a feminist she argues that the rights of women are demanded within the republic. In order to explore Rabindranath Tagore's treatment of motherhood, Virginia Woolf's perspective will be analyzed in respect to her feministic approach. So, disregarding how Tagore demonstrates the idea of words, Woolf realizes ideal of motherhood was essential in women's life and develops a female atmosphere in which women portray their status in the real world and fight against their patriarchal mother.

**Index Terms**—Rabindranath Tagore, Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, motherhood

## I. INTRODUCTION

In relation to discussion of feministic interpretation, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is recognized as a prominent thinker during the 19th Bengal. He is admired for depicting the various aspects of Indian values and cultures through a character in his novel. He is known as a significant and complex personality and also is seen as a great and complete man of new age. Tagore's novel *Gora* reveals the basic principle woman characterization. Through his novel, he was able to portray a new and different woman and also reveal countless social injustice, especially regarding women. A woman is completely different from the woman who is observed as the symbolic representation of Mother India through asserting her own personality upon her position as a woman in the social, moral, and spiritual fields and also emphasizing on her own rights as a woman. While Tagore views woman as a mother and wife at home, Mary Wollstonecraft holds a different and particular argument of motherhood discussing that woman must represent herself in a notion of feminine ideal in society rather than the icons of subjectivity or maternal duty.

### VIRGINIA WOOLF

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) was a significant figure for presenting feminist views in her first novel, *The Voyage Out*. This novel was essential to the development of her literary career, not her marital life. In this text, Virginia Woolf revealed her rejection of motherhood in which the woman is allowed to establish new opportunities for her own identity and challenge with false political, social, and literary structures about her gender identity. Woolf fought that motherhood as a role is not sufficient for woman whole life, in her writings she continued to seek for "everything -love, children, adventure, intimacy, work" (qtd. Saika Kanai, 2013, p.9). To Woolf, writing meant to return to identify herself, and to re-create it in her own form of writing. *The Voyage Out* encourages women to obtain freedom from repressions and limitations on them. *The Voyage Out* is not a representation of her desire for Victorian marital life, but it is a product of the complex stream of consciousness regarding her desire for her mother's role and her ambition as a writer. Woolf pursued this ideal of motherhood throughout her life. However, her marriage was not an avenue for motherhood; her husband did not allow her to have children because he was concerned about her health. Subsequently, Woolf's early writing career was marked by her anxiety about her failed motherhood as well as her ambivalent feelings towards her mother. In her earlier life with her parents, Woolf realized that the Victorian ideal of womanhood was essential in a woman's life. She observed that her mother was satisfied with maintaining her family and feeling the delight of life as a woman in this role. Julia was an ideal mother to Woolf and was a model of the Victoria ideal of womanhood, which required devotion to husband and children, Woolf's interaction with her mother made her see that supporting a husband and children was the perfect pleasure for a woman. Marriage and childbearing were essential events in a woman's life.

So, Woolf encourages women to take control of restricted position that is determined by the existence of men. Men seize the available opportunities to control the political, economic, social structures and conditions and they also treat women as inferior. Virginia Woolf emphasizes the notion of destiny and encourages women to jump over the barriers of oppression, reject their melancholy, and get equality or balance of family norms for themselves within the society.

## II. DISCUSSION

The novel of *Gora* is important for its description of young female characters and the manner in which how their identities is form through their interactions with their families and society. Such characters as Sucharita and Anandamoyi are shown in relation to the discussion of feminism as they develop new identities and shape different ways of interaction with men and society. In fact, this study emphasizes on Mrs. Anandamoyi who is the protagonist in *Gora*. She considers Gora as a God gift to her although she is an Irish-British child and does not pay attention to the society's pressure. As a result, she ignores all violations and lives in loving her son. "The altar at which woman may be truly worshipped is her place as mother, the seat of the pure, right-minded lady of the house". (*Gora*, 1910, p.12) It could be said that in this novel much attention has been given to the ideology of motherhood as divine mother, the source of energy, power, fertility, love, self-effacing, and faithfulness thus in this paper all the aspects of woman identity and oppression in patriarchal structure will be revealed. In patriarchal structure, a woman depicts her identity as wife or mother and tolerates pressures in space of man's life. Rabindranath Tagore explains that every mother is not suppressed by male but some mothers perform their role as goddess or motherhood by the male. Tagore's aim was the emancipation of women through his novels, essays, poems and plays. The importance of this novel is to show the myth of motherhood in Indian culture wherein the most women expect to form the symbols of purity, grace, and love giving. So, Tagore creates ideal life within identity of female through her effort for development of personality, beliefs, emotions, and imaginations in which enables her to establish the depiction of womanhood in man's life. He believes that woman in social systems can play the central role by preserving the dignity of country and providing education, security, and also comforts with people. Then, she can have power to carry out ideas and plans for making a better world where she is able to realize the correct ways of promoting society based on freedom, love, and cooperation. In order to give hopefulness to women Wollstonecraft advocates political responsibilities and public roles to women and then focuses on duties demanded women in family. Wollstonecraft illustrates this aspect: "he clearly did not regard women as citizens" (Schwartz, 1985, p.41). According to her, the ideal feminine can separate her from the traditional notions instead of placing her in all public and domesticated roles. She believes that traditional society much discusses on the weakness of women's mind and body and ignores the power of women within family and society. It shows that the women have the ability to associate with duties on both mother and father within family, thus it makes women take part in right of citizenship and not limit themselves in duties of mother and wife. In the other hand, she suggests that the parents should participate and experience republic and membership of public before informing next group of republic and civic citizen. Wollstonecraft believes that if the women advocate the ideas of citizenship and motherhood for themselves in many social, political, and family roles; they can better care for their children and indicate acquiring acts such as education, free will, power, and peace to private and public areas. According to her, women would take part in social, political, and economical activities and even recognize duties of husband and father in these activities and also develop them in a better way by "allowing them to share the advantages of education and government with man." (qtd. Wendy Gunther, 1999, p.484) Then, she rejects the limitations of women life and elevates particular duties and public superiorities among them.

In *Gora*, Tagore depicts Anandamoyi as "face of motherland" who desires to develop her human beings without encountering with terrible attitude of religions, customs, and societies. However, the identification of motherhood emerges in Tagore's *Gora* when the icon of motherhood has the enormous importance in the cultural life of India. The image of real mother becomes a major part of Bengal or India. Anandamoyi is an angle that is in the house and lives with her family, "Let this face be the image of my motherland, let it direct me towards my duty, let it make me steadfast in performing it" (Tagore, 1910, p.190). This mother can embrace the responsibility of woman as a Goddess in patriarchal structure and this woman attempts to have a meaning or purpose in life, and thus it would create normal life. According to Tagore, a woman like a man is a creative being but woman's creative side is revealed at home when she serves her family as a mother and wife. For many women, a working career can give them a sense of superior, being, and a reality that the main image of mother is here. Anandamoyi finds her identity and can improve her fulfillment and happiness as wife and mother in society. So, Anandamoyi's belief reflects the Victorian women because of the idea of feminist and motherhood has been much different than our modern of society. While she often stayed at home during the years preceding the industrial revolution, factories made many of her duties around the home obsolete as manufactured products replaced goods produced in the home. It was a weak or uncertain existence and there was no place in polite society for a woman. Tagore sometimes uses descriptions of female characters to make a common view of women in society. He portrays them as natural limited domestic creatures that possess moral attitudes and have their own identity in society. In studying of domestic life, Virginia Woolf sees it as a need for human being's socialization especially for women. In Virginia Woolf's novels the married women are often women of society and domestic life in Virginia's mind is entirely social and there is no privacy and limitation for women. Consequently, it is impossible for the female to create her own identity freely and independently in an isolated room without any consideration of external

influence. From this aspect, the women in private space lose their revolutionary sense and even their knowledge. Thus, they should both face the masculine influence and also pursue a new feministic way until being able to get an opportunity to express their ability and intelligence into society. However, Woolf broke traditional stereotypes associated with women to free them from these limitations. Virginia Woolf demands a new space for women and strives to remove traditional notions of personal and political boundaries. Women had to find solace where they could get it, in religion or daydreaming, if they did not choose to let themselves be absorbed in domestic details. Thus, by challenging these ideals, her feminist ideas become very clear and she raises her own voice in order to gain equality, women's rights and their position in society.

Rabindranath Tagore gives his female characters respectful faces and he believes that love and respect are two important elements for a woman in her family since her useful role as a mother leads to the equality between all of men and women. At Tagore's time, there was such respect for women in India: "Christianity made the wife equal to man. But Hinduism instead of doing so went further. It made her the goddess of man, the object of his worship. All the gods are pleased when the woman is worshipped." (Basu, 2005, p.25) Rabindranath Tagore believes that the role of woman in India is so glorious and holy as she advocates all her life for her husband and children. He thinks that right of woman should be given according to the principle of equality and goddess when a man treats her wife respectfully. In other hand, Craft discusses the principle of 'logic', 'equality', and 'development' and establishes her idea about how woman should take place as a "human nature" (Halldenius, 2007, p.77) toward social structures. If logic dominates in social and political issues, so humanity can progress in social positions and mode of living. Then, she is demanded to change the modes of unjust or even disrespect and develops the nature of humanity and moral outcomes among man and woman. Accordingly, in Wollstonecraft's view, woman's rights and moral principles or even respect should be legalized in a way that alters social, political, and domestic positions of a woman.

Rabindranath Tagore represents the state of two women in various situations in which they have different contributions on their emancipation and their state of being in the society and family. Tagore attempts to describe a developing condition of women's rights and the empowerment of them towards the social issues of his contemporary society in *Gora*. In *Gora*, Tagore focuses on the character of Sucharita, the liberated young woman who has courage and strength in trying situations and plays the key role within her own wishes to break down restrictions of her society. In this novel, Sucharita endeavors to attract the opposite personality; she has no hesitation to adopt a more open-minded life style for herself and during the novel to divulge her agitation for keeping her thinking. So, she has an individual and independent mind that attempts to create a modern and normal life for own identity. Tagore believes that Sucharita feels to have a strong mind of her own and it is important for her to create her own role with a liberated outlook inside and outside of 'home'. She finds her role in society as men have the same position in society in this way that she and male characters of society will have the same functions, values, attitudes and as a result they will receive the same rewards and desired purpose. Tagore is able to differentiate between Anandamoyi is as the face of a traditional Indian woman and Sucharita is as a young woman who try to rebuild a normal life and wants to participate in the society that enriches and enhances her growth. Sucharita is the heroine who is an educated person with her own point of view in life. She imparts this educated class to fulfill needs of herself or even her country and also to prepare herself for the service of the country. In the words of Tagore:

When we find that our learning is not in tune with the way we live, that it does not depict ... the social milieu we are rooted in, that it does not reflect our relation with our parents, friends, brothers and sisters ... it becomes obvious to us how impotent it is to fulfill all the needs of our life. (qtd. Kalyan Sen Gupta, 2005, p.32)

Tagore talks about the form of education and gives the new thought to educational methods in India and also begins to realize the problems of education and transfers educational system to rural life. Tagore puts his perspective on education and reveals education as the most necessary element in opening the channel of communication between the East and the West and also the development of a country. According to him "The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence." (Das, 2014, p.3) So education provides a sense of harmony and identity in a one's life and develops the individual personality in any field. In the other hand, he wants the woman to have a universal personality like himself in which she overcomes the feeling of colonial power so that she can live and contact with the worldwide developments. Tagore believes that freedom and creativity make life meaningful and some women should remove the limitations of their lives and join to freedom, humanism, and unity and then develop their creativity in categories of technology and sciences. Hence, he feels that lack of education prevents the progress of a nation and also creates a lot of problems such as getting money, financial gains, and so on. However, education develops our beliefs and imaginations, creativities and enables us to improve our conditions and natural and spiritual needs. Then, Wellstoncraft asserts that woman can empower herself through education, profession, and political participations. He adds that the woman would expand her experience in different affairs until she achieve to power in household. "Contending for the rights of woman, my main argument is built on the simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all" (Wollstonecraft, 1989a, p.66). Therefore, it is better for a woman to participate in society, take her education and abilities seriously, put them to use and ultimately she has to compete with men. She emphasizes that the woman would show her interest in government and would use her mental capacity in education in which performing of these abilities by woman undermine the correct way and stability in home. So, "It is not empire,

but equality they should contend for” (Wollstonecraft, 1989a, p.173). Moreover, woman would get equality and balance of freedom and rights for themselves in social and political life and also take control of restricted conditions that are determined by power predominant of men.

In fact, Rabindranath Tagore brings the nature of motherland as a symbol with an idea of the nation in the cultural life of India. Anandamoyi was a divine mother in the house that she was responsible for sewing, knitting and so on, she also was supposed to take care of someone and her work is only in house who obeys her husband; the gentleman made sure that the home was a place of comfort for the husband and children and they were free from all the burdens of outside work. So, Anandamoyi as a mother appoints ‘human being’ in positive paths and even creates self-sacrifice against her family because all her thought and activity remain in the shadow of tradition of India. Finally, Tagore emphasizes that India would fix power and force in harmony with the rest of world and the whole people of a nation create political and social freedom for themselves. He believes that a nation should be in harmony with universal humanity, dignity, equality, and freedom which are the tendency in human mind to build and promote superiority among country. He states that,

A woman’s identity is no longer limited to the role of a mother or a wife. We have arrived at a stage when women are demanding their right as human beings. They want to be counted unreservedly in their identity as individuals. (Rachanabali, 1961, p.79)

Rabindranath Tagore is a social reformer whose idea was derived from some of his experiences. He writes about his feeling for value of humanity and efforts to give India the spiritual and natural needs that are in harmony with the large nation. He believes that woman as a human being can create a substitute model of personality, whether male or female because God created her as part of society. In order to reach this equality, woman should establish a well-balanced relation with others that provide a sense of one’s identity as a total man. Then, Tagore brings freedom in Indian nation with the true religion and creed doctrines which are necessary in growth of social and intellectual factors in a socio-political entity. In the other hand, he gives brands of self-confidence and self-respectful to woman in society and attempts to bring place of woman in the social formation. Tagore seeks modern resources for improvement of woman in terms of physical, intellectual and economic conditions and his aim was independence of India and to eradicate the alien powers and even the imposed injustice. In Tagore's opinion, woman couldn't be poor but could be educated and she should gain freedom of mind and action, and also should resist against social pressures or stresses of a man because it is possible that this equality stay between man and woman in a society. Woman, like any other man, should have legal property rights and should consider for herself some property and defend herself rights against other people so that she is treated equally in society. Finally, woman can create new means of bettering herself and her environment. Virginia Woolf suggests that women like men should seek to achieve equality in moral, social, economic and political fields. In her call, she offers women to believe in themselves and maintain integrity of their values. Woolf wants women to exclude all masculine values of hierarchy, dominance and power from society. As a result, Woolf believes that this true identity allows women the power of thinking and standing up for their rightful place in society. Virginia Woolf makes image of identity more clear and hopeful for releasing the barrier of domination and allowing freedom to emerge in the course of social and political power for women.

### III. CONCLUSION

As a whole, Rabindranath Tagore’s novel can be viewed as the best example of motherhood; Tagore was able to promote an unusual or irregular ideology of mother character in a Hindu community. *Gora* is a novel that depicts the effects of a noble hearted woman who did not want to encounter an intellectual world which was resonated with the ideas of liberalism, freedom, and so on, but Tagore desired to enhance and enrich our growth as 'human beings'. He shows the conflict between roles of women in the house as wives and personal aspiration and that the women would not expect to complete their roles as woman but would expect to protect their wishes as the expression of personal aspiration. Undoubtedly, both the female characters, Anandamoyi and Sucharita, have liberal outlook in their thinking. Thus, Tagore has persistently advocated equal rights for women as that it only would enhance and enrich our growth. Moreover, women must be allowed to have the opportunity to improve their thoughts, feelings, emotions and senses and liberate themselves from constraints of society and marriage.

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