

Tagore and Shakespeare: A Comparative Study of their Views of Daughters as Reflected in their Works

Mohit Ul Alam*

“Thou art an elm, my husband, I a vine.”
The Comedy of Errors, Act, Scene 2, line 165.

Abstract: In this study I want to show that the greatest Bengali writer and the greatest English writer had one concern in common as fathers—how to marry their daughters to suitable bridegrooms. This anxiety of the daughters’ fathers is counterpoised by the greed for dowry among the young men seeking a rich father-in-law. While my article will develop along this contrapuntal opposition—father’s anxiety versus dowry-hunter’s greed, I’ll also shed light on the biographical elements of both these writers as the depiction in their works of young women being married to wrong hands is so persistently identifiable with their own position as fathers in real life. I have tried to base my article first on a biographical premise, and then I have gone to focus on their treatment of the fictional daughters in their works, thus to prove a fact that writers do write about themes which keep them preoccupied in their lives.

But my paper by no means intends to present an exhaustive study on the topic, citing cases and examples from these two writers’ whole gamut of writings, rather my references will remain confined only to the pieces that I have read of these two authors, and again only the most prominent ones will be referred to.

While it is not easy to get to know about Shakespeare’s treatment of his two daughters—Susanna and Judith Shakespeare, because of lack of evidence, it is fairly understandable how deeply concerned Tagore was regarding his three daughters Madhurilata, Renuka and Mira respectively. So the technique I have followed in this paper is to give a brief description of each writer’s family life, and then to throw light on their works where daughters have been depicted as young and of marriageable age and often married to the wrong bridegrooms. In Tagore’s case, however, I will deal at length with a number of letters that Tagore had written to his youngest son-in-law, Dr. Nagen, husband of his youngest daughter, Mira. Then, I will refer to both Tagore’s and

* Professor Dr. Mohit Ul Alam, Head, Department of English and Humanities, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), Dhaka.

Shakespeare's works in order to show how the theme of daughters' marriage occupies substantial space in each of their works. Needless to say, while Tagore had this theme of the marriage of daughters elaborately treated in his novels and short stories, Shakespeare had done the same in his plays.

One basic difference here is that Shakespeare had created the daughter-characters of his plays by following certain stage conventions, like the cross-dressing device, the fair maid to be won after tackling the hazards by the hero-lover, the definition of women as 'shrew' and 'docile', etc., while Tagore's fictional daughters were not bound by any set conventions, and, moreover, the mode of fiction allowed him to interpose his authorial voice in the body of his stories and novels.

Tagore's children

Tagore and his wife, Mrinalini Devi (given name at the Tagore family; her original name was Bhavatarini Devi), had three daughters and two sons. The first child, daughter Madhurilata Devi (or Bela) (1886-1918) was married to Saratchandra at the age of fifteen. She died at the age of 31 without any children. The second child, son Rathindranath Tagore (Rathi) (1888-1961) was married to a widow, Sri Protima Devi, and they were also childless, but adopted a Gujrati girl, whom Tagore called Nandini, who became a source of great affection for Tagore in his later years. The third child or second daughter Renuka Devi (Rani) was born in 1891 and was married at the young age of 11 and died without any child in 1917. She was married to a physician, Dr. Satyandranath Bhattachariya, who also died five years later, in 1922. Tagore's third daughter was Srimati Mira Devi ((b. 1894, d. 1967) formal name: Atashilata) who was married to Dr. Nagendranath Gangopadhyay, and about this daughter Tagore was much concerned as she was finding it difficult to adjust herself to her husband. Tagore wrote many letters to Nagen, some of which are related to his anxiety about his youngest daughter's being ill-treated in her husband's house, and in our article we will refer to a number of letters by Tagore to show how his personal experience in this respect also germinated itself as a leitmotif in his fictional works. Mira and Nagen were finally divorced in the 1920's, and attempts were made to reconcile them, but Tagore discouraged the idea.¹ (*Rabindra Jiboni Vol. I*) The youngest child in the family, Tagore's second son, Samindranath Tagore (Sami) (1896-1907), died of cholera at the age of 11, while visiting a friend at Munger, Bihar.

¹ For Tagore's family details I've consulted the following books: *Rabindra Jiboni Vol. I* by Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay (Kolkata: Visvabharati Granthanbibhag, 1401), p. 15 and *Thakurbarir Andarmahal* by Chitra Dev (Kolkata: Ananda, 2010). Though Mukhopadhyay is silent about Mira's divorce, and the two essays from two issues of *Saradia Desh* from which I have used the information on Tagore's letters to Nagen do not mention the fact either, but Dev on page 133 writes that the divorce took place.

Shakespeare's children

Shakespeare had three legitimate children by his wife Anne Hathaway. The first daughter Susanna was born in 1583, and was married to a successful physician, Dr John Hall, by whom she had a daughter, called Elizabeth. Susanna died in 1649. She was illiterate as her two younger siblings were—the twins, sister Judith and brother Hamnetⁱⁱ (*The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare* 2001), who were born in 1585. None of them could read or writeⁱⁱⁱ (Greenblatt, *Will in the World*, 124), though about Hamnet it is supposed that since boys with a middle class background had to attend school in Shakespeare's time, Hamnet probably had some learning. But like Tagore's youngest son, Shami, Hamnet also died at the age of 11, contracting plague, which might have disconcerted Shakespeare about not having a male successor to his vast wealth. When Macbeth urges Lady Macbeth to "Bring forth men-children only" (1.7.72)^{iv} (*The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition* 1977), the personal note of unfulfilled desire cannot be missed here. Shakespeare and Anne were happy with their eldest daughter, especially about her marriage to Dr. Hall. But Shakespeare was never at peace with his second daughter, Judith, who married Thomas Quiney in February 1616, the son of Shakespeare's friend, Quiney. But just the following month it came to light that a woman who had died at childbirth was actually impregnated by Quiney, and he was to make a confession on the "'carnal copulation' in the parish church the next day, 26 March."^v (Honigmann, 7) By that time the Shakespeare family was immensely famous, and to avoid any

ⁱⁱ Of the numerous books on Shakespeare's life, I've used the following five books from which I've collected information about Shakespeare's children. First one is *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, eds. Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001), Chapter I, "Shakespeare's Life" by Ernst Honigmann, pp. 1-12. About Hamnet's name, Honigmann notes in a bracket that "Hamnet being a variant form of Hamlet" (3). This is also supposed by Stephen Greenblatt, whose book, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare became Shakespeare* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company 2004), in my opinion is one of the most relishing books on Shakespeare's life and career. In Chapter 10: "Speaking with the Dead," Greenblatt notes that the death of Hamnet in 1596 still corroded Shakespeare's heart at the time of writing his play, *Hamlet* in 1600-01: "the act of writing his own son's name again and again—may well have reopened a deep wound, a wound that had never properly healed" (321). And about the confusion between Hamnet and Hamlet, Greenblatt writes that "in the loose orthography of the time, the names were virtually interchangeable" (321). The third one is *An Oxford Guide: Shakespeare*, eds. Stanley Wells and Lena Cowen Orlin (Indian edition, New York: Oxford University Press 2003); the fourth is Peter Thompson, *Shakespeare's Professional Career* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992, 1999), and the fifth one is Germaine Greer, *Shakespeare's Wife* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart 2008)

ⁱⁱⁱ Greenblatt, *Will in the World*, p. 124.

^{iv} All quotations from Shakespeare's works are to this edition: *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1977).

^v Honigmann in *Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, p. 7.

tarnishing of his image, he redrafted his will one day before that on 25 March 1616 and “inserted new clauses to protect his daughter against her feckless husband.” (Honigmann, 7) He bequeathed Judith only £150. (Honigmann 7), whereas gave everything to Susanna, including the New Place.^{vi} (Honigmann 11)

Were both Shakespeare and Tagore daughter-burdened fathers?

Was Tagore a daughter-burdened father? In a general sense, he was not. But he was anxious for the wellbeing of his youngest daughter, Mira Devi, who was married to Nagendranath Gangopadhyay, and with whom her relationship was not smooth. Mira’s case may be taken as an example of what many fathers also underwent in his time, which was to marry their daughters to suitable bridegrooms. Though because of unreliability of the facts about his life, it cannot be ascertained definitely how much this question of the daughters’ marriage bothered Shakespeare, the scant reference we made above to his disappointment with his younger daughter, Judith, maybe accepted as a valid inference if we consider here briefly how worried some of his father figures are in his works.

In one of his very early comedies, *The Taming of the Shrew* (1592), Baptista Minola is worried about the marriage of his two daughters, mainly about his elder daughter, Katherine, for whom he was not finding any man as she was reputed to be a shrew. When Petruccio from Verona arrives in Padua to marry wealthily, Baptista is almost melted seeing that his daughter had acquiesced in to marry Petruccio at the very first meeting, without knowing that she was actually tricked into receiving a forced kiss from Petruccio while he entered the room, so that he would think Kate had given her consent. In another play, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1594-96), Egeus, an aristocrat of Athens complains to the Duke against his own daughter, Hermia, who refuses to marry Demetrius, who is his choice, against Lysander, her choice. In fact, the father’s anxiety over the marriage of his daughter is a theme in plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *The Tempest*, etc.

In *Romeo and Juliet* family rivalry between the families of Montague and Capulet cannot allow the Capulet to approve of his daughter’s choice. *The Merchant of Venice* and *King Lear* do not show a straightway conflict between father and daughter as regards the latter’s marriage, but in the first play, Portia’s choice of a husband is restricted by her father’s imposition of the casket trial to determine her would-be bridegroom. Thus Portia’s free choice is being curtailed

^{vi}This little biographical information by Honigmann may be of interest to readers: “Shakespeare dies on 23 April 1616, his widow on 6 August 1623. Their daughters outlived them—Susanna till July 1649, Judith till February 1662. Judith’s three sons died without issue; Susanna’s only child, Elizabeth, was married twice, first to Thomas Nash, and after his death to John (later Sir John) Bernard. Elizabeth died childless: with her death in 1670 the descent from Shakespeare became extinct” p. 11.

by her father from the grave: "But this reasoning is not in the fashion to choose me a husband. O me, the word 'choose'! I may neither choose who I would nor refuse who I dislike; *so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father*" (1.2.18-22) (Italics mine). And in *King Lear* the conflict between Lear and Cordelia is about filial loyalty rather than over the choice of a husband. Still then Burgundy, who was first called by Lear to announce whether he would accept the 'fallen' Cordelia (Lear: "But now her price is fallen" (1.1.194)) without dowry, Burgundy declines. Then the offer goes to France who accepts her without dowry: (France: "She is herself a dowry" (1.1.239)) and a few lines after France says: "Fairest Cordelia, thou art most rich, being poor; / Most choice, forsaken; and most loved, despised / Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon" (1.1.248-50). In *Othello*, Brabantio, father of Desdemona, thinks like Lear that his daughter owes allegiance to him: "Come hither, gentle mistress. / Do you perceive in all this noble company / Where most you owe obedience?" (1.3.177-79). In *Hamlet* the father's displeasure over the only daughter's choice is most telling. A stern Polonius warns his daughter Ophelia about the class and cultural differences between him and her: "For Lord Hamlet, / Believe so much in him, that he is young, / And with a larger tether may he walk / Than may be given you" (1.4.123-26). In *The Tempest*, the father is anxious over the possibility of the pair exceeding the boundary of chastity before the marriage is solemnized: (Prospero to Ferdinand: "Then, as my gift and thine own acquisition / Worthily purchased, take my daughter. But / If thou break her virgin-knot before / All sanctimonious ceremonies may . . . be ministered" both Ferdinand and Miranda will find their wedding bed being filled with "weeds so loathly / That you shall hate it both" (4.1.13-17, and 21-22). Greenblatt has labeled Shakespeare as "a great poet of the family" (Greenblatt, 127).

Apart from this anxiety of the father which is common in both Shakespeare and Tagore^{vii}, the other point that both of them were aware of, and got the scope to translate into their works was the greed for dowry. We have already noted how Burgundy in *King Lear* abandons the idea of marrying Cordelia when she becomes dowry-less. But in Shakespeare's time, as in Tagore's time too, the demand for dowry was legal and socially acceptable. Marriage was looked upon as a passage to come across fortune for young men. Petruccio in *The Taming of the Shrew* declares that he has come to Padua to marry a rich man's daughter: "I come to wive it wealthily in Padua / If wealthily, then happily in Padua" (1.2.72-73). The second line is conditional meaning that if wealth is secured then happiness in conjugal life will also be ensured. Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* says to Bassanio, after he picks up the right casket, that it has not only made her

^{vii} Not that Tagore shows as much a father-daughter conflict as Shakespeare does, but it is implied as in the Bengal of Tagore's time, majority of the girls were married with the father's consent, not with their consent.

fulfill the obligation to her father, and made Bassanio the owner of her, but also made him the Lord of her mansion: "But now I was the lord / Of this fair mansion, master of my servants, / Queen o'er myself; and even now, but now, / This house, these servants, and this same myself / Are yours, my lord's" (3.2.167-171). Through marriage the paternal property travelled to the husband.

Dowry as an acceptable social practice in Shakespeare's England and Tagore's Bengal

Honigmann supposes that Shakespeare got his business acumen from his parents, and that he was supported by them in his early career: "I think it quite possible that his parents helped him financially at the start of his career" (Honigmann, 7). John Shakespeare must have had an ambition like his son's fictionalized hero, Petruccio, who wants to marry wealthily. John married into the Arden family of Snitterfield, who were making name as a rich farmer's family. And Greenblatt obliquely hints at John's eye on the dowry that marriage with Mary promised. (58, 59)^{viii} His son, William Shakespeare himself may have married an illiterate woman^{ix} (Greenblatt, 124-25), eight years senior to him, but she was the daughter of a rich farmer, and her cottage that still exists today by the name of *Anne Hathaway's Cottage* provided Shakespeare with enough assurance as to allow him to leave his family behind in Stratford when he was making his career in London. So marriage was a strong social convention that guaranteed financial securities as well. Dowry, an accompanying financial component mostly offered by the bride's party, therefore, was an accepted form of exchange.

Tagore's time, like ours, was not free from this drive for fortune through marriage. Nagendranath, his youngest son-in-law, can be seen as some kind of Petruccio who came to Kolkata to marry wealthily. He was a young man from Barisal. He was as ambitious as he was meritorious. He wanted to go abroad for higher studies. But his family did not have the means to provide him for the trip. He was looking forward to marrying into a family which would support him to materialize his ambition. At that point Tagore was looking for a suitable boy for Mira. But he was not interested in any young man who would crave dowry from him by marrying his daughter. But all the proposals for Mira were coming from this fortune-hunting type of people. Tagore's friend, renowned scientist Jagadish Chandra Basu thought that Nagen was a good choice. Nagen was good-looking and a spirited young man. The marriage took place at Shantiniketan, on 6th June,

^{viii} Greenblatt writes in *Will in the World*, p. 58: "The Arden name was itself a significant piece of social capital," and on page 59: "Arden was a name for anyone with social ambition to conjure with, and a name was by no means all the riches that Mary's dowry held."

^{ix}Greenblatt, *Will in the World*, pp. 124-25. About Anne Hathaway's education, Greenblatt writes, "it is entirely possible that Shakespeare's wife never read a word he wrote, that anything he sent her from London had to be read by a neighbor, that anything she wished to tell him . . . had to be consigned to a messenger.

1907. Nagen was then seventeen years and seven months old, and Mira was thirteen years and a half. Before the marriage Nagen was entered into the Brahma Shamaj (Society) at the Adi (Old) Temple of Shantiniketan. As Nagen's family was poor, Tagore had to loan money to Nagen's father from time to time, and also bear the expenditures for the education of the siblings of Nagen.^x (*Desh 1398 Bangla Year*)

Tagore by that time had become interested in the development of villages. He had already sent his elder son, Rathindranath and his friend's son, Santoshchandra Majumder to the University of Illinois to study agriculture. His desire was to send Nagen also to America for the same purpose. Accordingly, Nagen left for the U. S. A. only three weeks after his marriage. Tagore, however, told his son-in-law in clear terms that he was sending him abroad with the expectation that he would come back and serve his country: "That you will go abroad to earn knowledge and status and thereby become rich, I don't think it will be your only goal, but whatever is 'humanity' that you will learn and thereby make your life successful, that's what I mean you to achieve."

And he further told him: "take this firm determination that whatever you'll earn in the foreign land you'll dedicate to your own country. Thus, you'll be able to perform your duty to your country. Always remember your country, the abject condition of your country. With courage and indefatigable energy overcome all kinds of temptations, and whatever is best in other countries, earn it and bring it for your country, and pour it onto the feet of the mother-goddess."

Needless to say, Nagen hardly had any patience for Tagore's dream. After returning from States with a bachelor degree in agriculture from the University of Illinois, Nagen got himself briefly engaged at the Shantiniketan rural development project, but soon finding it boring, he labeled this project as Tagore's 'khamkheyalipana' (eccentricity).^{xi} (*Desh 1404 Bangla Year*) Nagendranath started looking for job elsewhere, and during this time his father-in-law was bearing his expenses. The relationship between Tagore and Nagen turned sour, and perhaps this had something to do with the estrangement that developed between Mira Devi and her husband towards the year 1918.

Having gone through Tagore's letters written to Nagen published in *Desh 1398 Saradia Issue*, and the few extracts quoted by Chitra Dev in her book, *Thakurbarir Andar Mahal* (to roughly translate, Women in Tagore's House) one will sense that under the veil of his education and sophistication Nagen was a dowry-greedy loveless husband which kind proliferates in Bengal still now.

^x*Desh*, Sharadia Issue 1398, "Patraboli: Nagendranath Gongopadhay ke Sree Rabindranath Thakoor," pp. 17-18. All subsequent references to Tagore's letters are from this article and translated by me.)

^{xi} *Desh*, Sharadia Issue 1404, "Rabindranth, Nagendranath o Kolkata," p. 46. Translation mine.

Based on these letters where Tagore appears to be a daughter-burdened father, who was finding it difficult to adjust himself with his own son-in-law, we can view many of Tagore's short stories as having been impacted by this personal experience of his, particularly in those stories where he portrays the father-figures who look to be equally afflicted with the problem of having to marry their daughters to suitable boys, who were not dowry-hunters.

One interesting similarity between Tagore in real life and his father characters in his fictions and the father characters of many Shakespearean plays is that the fathers alone look to be the guardians of their young daughters, whereas the mothers are either dead, absent or unmentioned. Mira Devi was only eight years old when her mother died. So she was brought up absolutely under her father's care. That is why it may be seen that in Tagore's stories there are two types of fathers: one group is those who are fathers of the bridegrooms and they are all dowry-hunters, and another group consists of the daughter-burdened fathers, like Tagore, who are all on the receiving end. Though Shakespeare's wife Anne outlived Shakespeare by seven years, in most of the plays where young girls of marriageable age are in focus none of them seem to have their mothers alive. In comedies, Katherine (*The Taming of the Shrew*), Hermia and Helena (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Portia (*The Merchant of Venice*), Rosalind (*As You Like It*) and Miranda (*The Tempest*) are motherless^{xii}, and in tragedies Ophelia (*Hamlet*), Lear's daughters, Desdemona (*Othello*) are also motherless.

There are many controversial explanations regarding Shakespeare's relationship with his wife, Anne Hathaway, and while Stephen Greenblatt is of the definite opinion that Shakespeare had all along suffered for having impulsively married an illiterate woman, older than him, Germaine Greer wrote a book-length treatise in defense of Anne in her book, *Shakespeare's Wife*. Whatever may have been the actual nature of relationship, the fact is that majority of Shakespeare's young heroines do have their fathers alive but not their mothers.

Unlike Shakespeare, Tagore had provided house teaching for all his three daughters. Mira learnt English from Lawrence Shahib, painting from Kartikchandra Nun, and Tagore himself inspired her to write letters in English, but Tagore was also anxious to marry his daughters young. (Chitra Dev, 131) Mira was then married to Nagen, and she suffered and so did her father, and the experience opened Tagore's eyes to one basic problem of the Bengali society—the maltreatment of women.

Tagore's fictions depicting dowry as a major social problem

The short stories, where the theme of the maltreatment of women is found, are: "Ghater Katha" (The Story of the Steps), "Dena Paona" (Exchanges),

^{xii} Among them even Portia is an orphan, though her father is mentioned.

“Taraprosnonner Kirti” (The Doings of Taraprosnonno), “Tyag” (Sacrifice), “Shubha,” “Mahamaya,” “Shompadok,” (The Editor), “Ashombhob Katha,” (The Absurd Talk), “Shasti,” (The Punishment), “Shamapti,” (The End), “Megh o Roudro,” (The Cloud and the Sunshine), “Praishchitto,” (The Penance), “Bicharok,” (The Judge), “Nishithe,” (At the Night), “Didi,” (The Elder Sister), “Manbhonjon,” (The Mollification), “Thakurda,” (The Grandfather), “Otithi,” (The Guest), “Putrojoggo,” (The Sacrifice of the Son), “Adhyapok” (The Professor), “Drishtidan” (Donating the Eyesight), “Uddhar,” (The Rescue), “Shubhodrishti” (The Blessed First Eye-Contact), “Joggosherer Golpo” (The Story of Joggoshsher), “Protibeshini,” (The Female Neighbour), “Noshtonir,” (The Broken Nest), “Malyadan,” (The Garlanding), “Hoimonti,” “Strir Potro,” (The Wife’s Letter), “Shesher Ratri,” (The Later Part of the Night), “Oporochita,” (The Unidentified), “Toposhshini,” (The Female Devout), “Patra o Patri” (The Marriageable Boy and Girl) and many other stories and novels.

Not that all stories mentioned above have the focus on the degradation of women. Some stories are of pure conjugal happiness, like “Taraprosnonner Kirti,” and some stories dealing with other subjects though still indirectly address the debasement issue, such as the story, “Shampadak.” Majority of the stories, of which “Hiomonti,” and “Strir Potro” are remarkable, however, have substantially dealt with the theme of debasement of women, and the reason for which is dowry.

Regarding the abusing of women, we find three streams of treatment by Tagore. In the first stream, we find those heroines, who are married in their childhood stage, and because of transference from their known environment into the unfamiliar houses of the in-laws, they undergo severe mental trauma. The stories depicting the second stream of theme are those where the brides are shown to be humiliated and tortured in the in-law houses in many ways. And in the third stream are included those stories where a sign of protest by the women against the degradation of women is registered. All three streams, however, are connected by another dominant theme, which is the practice of dowry, and because of which, the daughter-burdened fathers are shown to be suffering.

The Childhood Marriage

Of the first stream of stories which show daughters married at childhood age, and thereby start a painful journey into life, the first one is “Ghater Katha.” The heroine of this story, Kushum, was married a child. But her husband died abroad. Kushum returned to her father’s house. In the meantime a hermit set up his camp in their area. Kushum came to him every day for worshipping. She gradually felt attracted towards him. When she confessed it to the hermit he sternly said, “You

have to forget me.”^{xiii} The hermit then left the place, and Kushum drowned herself in the river Ganges, near the steps. This story, written in the unique form of the steps recounting the story, points out that because Kushum was a woman, therefore, society did not care for her needs. And the story also recognizes the fact that though Kushum became a widow, her passion for love did not die down with her becoming a widow.

Child marriage destroys the creativity of the young bride. Society does not recognize the fact that women can also think, imagine, draw, write, and sing and play music. Such mind frame enforces a kind of torture on the child wife’s imagination in the story, “Khata” or The Scrapbook. Uma, the child bride scribbles the alphabet everywhere—on the floor and on the wall--after she has learnt it. When she became a little more self-conscious, she started expressing her thoughts in a scrapbook. At this stage her marriage took place and she came to her in-law’s house. Her husband Pyarimohon himself is also a young writer. But he had a well-conceived idea about women that they were only to run the family affairs from the kitchen. So when he came to know that Uma kept a secret diary and he had not known what in the world was written there, he snatched the scrapbook from her. Tagore ends the story on a satirical note: “From that time onward Uma never got her scrapbook back. Pyarimohon also had a scrapbook in which he had preserved his essays on various topics full of subtle complications. But there was no friend of humanity to snatch that scrapbook from him and destroy it.” Man’s dominance spreads over to the creative-zone of the other gender.

In the story, “Shamapti,” when the young married girl Mrinmoyee started living with her mother-in-law then Tagore’s succinct comment is that “just within a single night, the whole world of Mrinmoyee got tied down to the inner house of Apurbo’s mother.”

Of this type, “Shasti” is a deeply psychological story. Husband Chidam on an impulse put on his own wife, Chandara, the blame of his elder brother’s killing of his own wife. The killing happened, he said, as a result of a quarrel between the two brothers’ wives. Though her love for her husband was deeply hurt at it, Chandara, out of loyalty to her husband, still absorbed the charge. She was convicted and was to be hanged at the scaffold. Here Tagore has portrayed the humiliation of women in a symbolic way. That Chidam could so easily put the blame on his wife was because Chandara was a woman. And the fact that Chandara had so easily taken the blame on herself is because, as Tagore suggests, she was so young that she could not grasp the consequences of her action. The

^{xiii} *Rabindranather Golpoguchcho*, ed. Abul Kashem Chowdhury, Dhaka: City Library, this is the volume I have used for all quotations from the short stories. All the translations in this essay of the passages from Tagore’s short stories and novels are mine.

tragic ignorance of the young bride is depicted by Tagore in this heart-rending description: "The day when a girl of tiny age of puffy face and of dark complexion came to the in-law's house abandoning her toy dolls at her father's house, on that blessed evening who could have imagined such turning of events of today!"

The description of Chandara's walk to the prison is no less touchy: "After being arrested, Chandara, a young restless and inquisitive village bride walked through her ever familiar village path, through the haat [local market], by the edge of the steps of certain ponds, in front of Majumder House, by the side of the Post Office and school house, and in front of the eyes of all the people known to her, bearing an indelible mark of scandal on her name, she left home forever."

There is also this matter of wife's fear of the husband. In "Kankal," the dead heroine reappears as a skeleton and describes in how much trepidation of her husband she had lived as a child wife: "When I was a human being and was small I used to fear one person like a devil. He was my husband. The way a baited fish feels I also used to feel like that. As if some strange animal hooked me up from my serene pool of birth—as if I had no way of escaping from him."

Tagore was most hurt by the child marriage because it took away the liberty of women. When the relationship between Nagen and Mira turned very sour, Tagore brought her to his house. Nagen was offended, and so Tagore tried to pacify him through a letter: "Not everybody is happy in life. That may not be. But if the freedom is not there, then nothing can be worse than this. Mira lives here in a corner of her own world. She doesn't want much. She gets a little bit of peace, and she knows how much I love her. It's impossible for me to act so monstrously as to send her to Kolkata against her wish." (Letter 71)

In another letter before it (Letter 68), he explained to Nagen why he could not take a social stand in respect of Mira as he is the father: "You've got to forgive me by knowing that my fatherly affection for her is natural and deep, and for that reason I can't discuss her joys and grief from a social perspective or a social ideology."

The above portion of the letter may make us think that Tagore was over-protective as a guardian. Or it may seem that his fame and status have instilled a kind of suppressed pride in Mira for which she could not love her husband, or it may be that Tagore's fame made Nagen inwardly jealous. But when all the letters are read in their bunch, it looks more plausible that the traditional dowry-hunting mentality was what Nagen's character was made of. In fact, what surfaces from the letters is Tagore's image of himself as a dowry-afflicted father. Here, it may be mentioned that even when the temporary separation between Mira and her husband was going on, Tagore yet tried to get a job for Nagen. Nagendranath wanted Tagore to use his influence in getting him a job at Hyderabad, Mysore, or Baroda universities. That Nagen got the position of Guruprasad Singh Professor

of Agriculture under the Khaira scholarship by having the requirements relaxed was possible because of the extra generosity shown by Tagore's friend the Vice Chancellor Sir Ashutosh Mukhopadhyay. (*Desh 1404:46*) Needless to say, Nagendranath squandered this opportunity, as most of the times he stayed out of the country, and took loans from the university under many pretexts which remained unpaid. The university, therefore, having renewed his tenure once, did not do so the second time.

Daughters debased in in-laws' houses for dowry

In the second group of stories, the role of the father of the bride is similar to the Tagore in real life. The first story of this group is "Dena-Paona," which is actually a vivid rendering of the cruelty dealt to the bride on the question of dowry. During the marriage of his daughter, Nirupama, Ramshunder Mitre was asked to pay ten thousand taka to the bridal family as dowry. After the marriage, however, Ramshunder failed to raise the money. In the meantime, Nirupama was being humiliated in the in-law's house. Though sympathetic to her, her husband, like Hoimonti's husband, could not gather the courage to oppose his parents. As a last resort, Ramshunder sold out his homestead without telling his sons and went to Nirupama's in-law's house to pay off the dowry. But sensing the motive as to why her father came to her in-law's house, Nirupama confronted him at the front gate, and told him that "if you pay the money, that will be a greater insult. Doesn't your daughter have any prestige? Am I only a bag of money that as long as there is money in the bag, my value is there for such time?" Needless to say, coming to know about Nirupama's turning back her father, her parents-in-law became absolutely furious and they started depriving her of the essentials which ultimately caused her death. Her death is "no different from the thousands of women that die in our country, or the way Hoimonti dies because of dowry.

On the theme of dowry, "Hoimonti," perhaps is the most tragic story by Tagore. Hoimonti's mother was dead, and she grew up under her father's care in a western province in the belt of Himalayas. When she was married in Kolkata, she was running seventeen. The father of the bridegroom wanted this marriage to happen despite the fact that the girl was over-aged because he was interested in the savings of the daughter's father who worked in a hill station and, supposedly, saved a lot of money. But news came secretly to Kolkata that the father of the daughter married her to his son on borrowed money. At this, the mental torture on Hoimonti increased. Though sympathetic to her, her husband could not go against the wishes of his parents. Like Nirupama, Hoimonti also dies, though her death remains unmentioned in the story.

Hoimonti's husband Apu himself is the narrator of the story. That is why the story becomes more tragic. Apu states that his father-in-law's character had the somberness of the Himalayas mixed with serene affection. At his marriage what

his father-in-law told him shows the deep anxiety of the father for a motherless daughter:

Baba [father, but here used as an affectionate term for a son-in-law], I know my daughter for seventeen years, and have known you for only these few days, and she's going to be in your hands now. The asset that I gave you, please try to appreciate its value. I've nothing more to say.

To his own son-in-law, Nagen, Tagore is almost writing in the same vein. He is trying to give Nagen an understanding of what kind of environment Mira grew up in while she was in her father's house, unmarried. By explaining Mira's nature, her range of understanding and her level of tolerance, Tagore wants Nagen to awaken to the natural generosity of Mira's character. The quoted lines above from Hoimonti's father Gourishankar, and the quoted passage below from Tagore's letter hardly differ in tone:

I earnestly pray that Mira become your suitable life-partner. I know she has no attraction for riches and opulence in family life. She only loves to dedicate whatever energy she has to doing good works. She doesn't know how to fend her own way—you lead her to the path of love of god for the good of the world, she will follow you with joy on untiring legs, this much I can tell you. (Letter 14)

Though Nagen could not understand Mira, in "Hoimonti," however, Apu tried to understand his wife. Hoimonti by that time became an object of torture and humiliation. Coming home one day Apu noticed that Hoimonti was sitting in bed looking out of the window to the west. There was something in her posture that made Apu realize that Hoimonti was not happy. Perceiving the "shape of her deep silent agony," Apu felt terrible remorse in his heart. He makes a sharp stinging remark on the traditional marriage the end result of which is to turn the women into inferior beings:

"I never had to abandon anything. Neither relatives, nor habit, nor anything. But Hoimo came to me by leaving everything behind. What she has left behind I've never given a thought to it. She is sleeping in the bed of humility our family has created for her, and I'm also sharing that with her. I shared her sorrow in that confined bed. That sorrow hadn't divided us. But this seventeen-year old mountain-resident girl had grown up with enormous freedom within and outside her. What pure truth and blessed light had made her character such straight, pure and stable! I had never felt closely with how much cruelty Hoimo had been torn away from her surroundings, because in that domain of freedom I had not had the same seat as her."

Through Apu Tagore has foregrounded a basic problem of our society. The social norm is that the daughter will leave her father's house in order to come to the in-

law's house. Her living cost and everything then shifts from her parents to the husband and the parents-in-law. That system becomes a major source of insecurity in the life of a girl. Until the day the economic independence of women is not recognized, the problem will have no satisfactory solution. In the western and developed societies women's economic independence is much more ensured, and, therefore, the marriage system is not like ours, whereas, our women, because of the system of having to go to in-laws' house, are automatically forced into a subjugated position. Hence is the paradox that the period the daughter grows up in her parents' house is being viewed as an uncomfortable and unrecognizable phase for her, though in reality, in the given social context, security-wise, that is the safest time of her life in general. That is, the daughter spends her time in family affection and adoration before her marriage, but that part of her is never valued as constitutive, and is rather ignored. So what prevails is that so long as the daughter is not married, she is not being assessed on any value which she gains only on her marriage. In a patriarchal society, the recognition of women is given in correspondence with the amount of dowry she brings to the in-law house. If the traditional marriage system is deconstructed, the rude economic fact that will come out is that a marriage means bringing somebody's daughter into the house and arrange for her life-long sustenance. So the convention of dowry has arisen from the necessity of trading off. The daughter is married to the husband who becomes her lifelong provider, and in return the bridegroom's family presses for dowry as a one-time payment for all providences for the girl. Though dowry is illegal now, it still has social acceptability and exists in every conceivable form, and from this perspective, our age is not very different from Tagore's or, far back in time and space, Shakespeare's.

In most marriages in upper class or upper-middle class society, dowry does not seem to create any problem, as both parties mutually decide upon the denominations of dowry and other emoluments due upon a marriage. But in the larger section of society, in the improvident section of people, where marriage is a financial trade-off, dowry is a thriving practice. Everyday there is news about wife getting killed for dowry. Dowry reduces women to killable objects.

The perception stated above was what Tagore tried a number of times to clarify to Nagen. The implication was that his daughter was degraded in his house. Letter number 68 may again be referred to for another passage, where Tagore's realization of the plight of women because of dowry is expressed in a defiant voice:

We expected Mira in the Jorashanko house from the beginning of the Sharadia. As you were sick you didn't want to send her before the day of performance, though I went to Bollygunj twice. Each time I came back finding you not available. The fact that men enjoy liberty over the smallest

thing in the world, which is denied to women, has been a constant source of affliction to me. The way society is oblivious to the mountainous differences between men and women has always bothered me—and the core theme of my short stories constitutes this tragedy. Under that grief-stricken mood I was talking to you, and perhaps I couldn't control myself. In mental affliction, we can't always make the right judgment. Perhaps to you I couldn't do justice. You've to forgive me by remembering that to Mira my affection is natural and deep, and for this reason I can't judge her on her sorrows and joy from a social perspective. And, who am I to judge her from above? Haven't I been born on a divine dictate as a man, and enjoyed all the privileges due to a man? So there must be a degree of artificiality in my having to be a judge on the rights of women. The English who are free, for them the freedom of the Indians may appear as an offense. So I can't pass judgment on Mira as I belong to a privileged group. Mira is my daughter, and you shouldn't grudge it that her sorrows distress me. When your own daughter will fall into the hands of her husband, then you'll understand my words.

In another letter (78) Tagore does not only express his grief over the aggrieved position of women but also puts forward the necessity to claim liberty for women ten times as much as they have. In this letter, Tagore wants to make Nagen understand something that is all important for the sovereignty of women, but that is being ignored by the traditional concept of women's liberty. And that is the particular liberty of the mind of the women, or her freedom of thought. In this respect, Tagore thinks women must be free from their husbands too:

It is only the creator who knows the innermost of an individual. I, you and everybody has certain thoughts which nobody but only God knows. If Mira doesn't want to disclose her very private thoughts, won't it be an act of injustice to try to force her to remove that screen? Doesn't every individual have right to her own secret thinking, and isn't it a humiliating act to disparage that right? Even within the relationship between husband and wife, there's a clear demarcating line between their rights. That sovereignty of rights can't be interfered with, if that happens then it will be abjection and humiliation of the highest kind. If you can imagine any offense by Mira, then try to forgive her by your own generosity, or if you can't, then don't—but first by unraveling her secret and traducing her and then forgiving her afterwards will not carry any value.

From the above two extracts we can understand that Mira's situation generated such a kind of pervasive remorse in Tagore about the abject condition of women that he felt he had to ventilate his feelings about degradation of women in his writings, particularly in short stories.

The daughter's voice of protest

In the third group of his short stories we come across the type of women who protest. We encounter the first protest woman in the story, "Mahamaya." Mahamaya is the heroine of this story. She is a Brahmin daughter, but she has fallen in love with a casteless man, called Rajib. They decided to escape secretly. Coming to know about it, Mahamaya's brother married her to a dying old man on that very night. And the old man died that night and Mahamaya in fulfillment of the ritual had to be ready to go to the suttee with her husband. But Mahamaya escaped from the funeral pyre half-burnt. She eloped with Rajib on condition that he would never request to see her face. But Rajib on one day was tempted to see her face, and Mahamaya on account of the breach of promise left him.

As a story, "Mahamaya" is a very disturbing piece. It is on the theme of suttee. The caste system in Hinduism is at the root of Mahamaya's tragedy, or more specifically, she has to face this problem because she is a woman. Tagore implies that though she has come out of the grip of the suttee, she cannot free herself from its aftereffect.

Of a different taste is the story, "Didi." Shashi and Joy Gopal had a very happy conjugal life. But to her rich parents was born a son after many years. They gave its charge to Shashi before their death. Shashi instantly understood that her husband could not take to her brother Nilmoni, easily. He was actually deprived of his in-laws' property because of the birth of Nilmoni. So Joy Gopal conspired to grab his in-law's property. Nilmoni's very life was threatened. Finding no other way to save him, Shashi handed her brother over to the Shahib magistrate. Still Shashi could not prevent the ultimate from happening. She died of diarrhea one night, and she was cremated on the same night. But readers can imagine the cause of Shashi's death. In the society of Bengal, wives frequently get killed in the houses of in-laws, but these deaths are passed on as suicide or natural death.

In the story, "Maanbhanjan," Giribala is a pretty wife. But she is not happy because her husband Gopinath is flirting with an actress called Lobongo. Though Gopinath is rich, his money was quickly vanishing for his extravagant lifestyle. Then one day Gopinath came straight from the theatre to ask her for some money. Giribala said, she would give the money only if he promised not to go out anymore that night. But why would Gopinath listen? But Giribala would not give him the key either. Then took place a classical scene of the conjugal life of Bengal—the torturing of the wife by the husband. Let us note, how Tagore describes it:

Being frustrated, Gopinath in rage shouted, "Give me the key, otherwise it wouldn't be good for you." Giribala kept silent. Then Gopi pressed her down and snatched off the bracelets from her hands, the chain from her neck and the ring from her finger and went out not before he dealt a kick at her.

Then Giribala went back to her parents' house, determined to take revenge. She came secretly to Kolkata and joined the theatre and became a reputed actress. That is, Giribala was taking the revenge on her husband by beating him in his own ground. By that time Gopinath and his mistress Labanga became the unwanted couple in the theatre. Though the story shows Giribala's moral victory over her husband, Tagore, however, makes us feel that she could achieve her goal only by leaving her husband.

The tit-for-tat story, "Aporochita," has a satirical presentation of the dowry system. At the very marriage ceremony, the maternal uncle of the bridegroom wants to weigh the dowry gold by engaging a goldsmith. The father of the bride, Shombhunath Sen makes no mistake in his turn by not falling short on courtesy by feasting the bridal party well but then bidding them farewell by refusing to marry his daughter to them. The action of the father of the bride is just a strong protest against the dowry system.

The story, "Strir Patra," is possibly Tagore's signature story against the dowry system and female degradation. The story is written in the form of a letter. The wife, Mrinal, has written that letter to her husband. It is not only that Mrinal is protesting against the humiliation she has undergone in her in-law's house, but she is also protesting on behalf of a girl called Bindu (the name in Bengali meaning 'a dot' is suggestive of women's nonentity in society).

First comes the reference to Mrinal's childhood marriage: "The day your distant maternal uncle and your friend Nirod came to our house with the proposal my age was only twelve."

Mrinal is a pretty girl, but of a remote village. She was intended to be taken as the bride in order to compensate for the lack of beauty of the wife of the elder brother of her husband. Mrinal, however, was not only pretty, she was intelligent, and she wrote poetry in secret, a fact which remained unknown to her husband for fifteen years.

Mrinal writes about the inner quarters of the house, where the women mostly had to spend time:

Do you remember the comment made by the English physician who came to examine me? He was shocked to see the condition of the room in which I was supposed to give birth to the child and admonished you all. There is a little garden in the front yard of your house. There is no dearth of furniture and tokens of beautification in the house are not lacking. But the inner compartments were just the opposite, like the other side of a woolen work, where there is no sign of embarrassment for having no attempt at decoration, and no beauty prevails there, nor any sense of aesthetics. There the light shines dimly, the wind just merely steals into it, the dirt in the yard doesn't move, and the wall and the floor bear the scandalous sign of negligence.

After this incident in Mrinal's in-law house there came to take shelter Bindu, the sister of the wife of the elder brother. The elder brother's wife was loyal to her husband, so realizing that her husband was not sympathetic to the sister-in-law, she stopped showing any natural affection to her; rather she made her live in a much worse condition than how the housemaids lived. When such was the situation, Mrinal gave her shelter in her own room. But Bindu had contracted smallpox, and then she was married to an insane person, from whom she escaped on the third day. Under stiff opposition of the in-law family, Mrinal provided shelter to Bindu. But people from Bindu's in-law family came with the threat that they would report to the police. Mrinal adamantly said, "Ok, report to the police." Mrinal argued that "the cow which has escaped the butcher and took shelter with me, to return it to the butcher again in fear of police—that is never going to happen." In the meantime, realizing that she was the centre of all the fuss Bindu left for the in-law house on her own. Then the wife of the elder brother said, "She's ill-fated, what's the use pining. Whether he's a goat or a mad husband doesn't matter, a husband is a husband." Then Mrinal's stingy comment on the male-dominated society is worth quoting:

You were thinking of the act of the wife who carried her own leprosy-afflicted husband to the door of the prostitute as a noble example of devout wife. And you men had no qualms of the heart to spread such a cowardly story of the lowest kind, and on the basis of that argument the fact that Bindu was born as a human being didn't matter to you, but rather what mattered was her behavior, and you became angry with her instead of bowing down to her. My heart cracked for Bindu, but my shame for you was endless.

The last part of the story may be considered as the manifesto of women's emancipation. Mrinal has decided that she would go to pilgrimage, and Bindu will accompany her. But news came that Bindu burnt herself to death in her in-law's house. Would Mrinal follow the same path? She writes to her husband:

But I'll never go back to your house at 27 Makhan Baral Lane. I've seen Bindu. What actually is the status of women in their in-laws' houses, I've come to know about it. I don't need to know more. I've also seen that though she was a woman God hadn't deserted her. Whatever maybe your power of strength over her, it has a limit. But her fate is stronger than her unfortunate mortal life. That you would trample her down according to your wish, your legs aren't that long. Death is greater than any measure you take. She's become greater in her death—where she is not considered as only the daughter of a Bengali family, nor the sister of a cousin brother, nor the cheated wife of a stranger insane husband, but there she is infinite. When through the broken heart of this girl that tune of death resonated in me, on the bank of my river of life, that day as if the arrow of truth had

struck me for the first time. I asked God, why is it that whatever is the most trivial in the world should be the hardest to overcome. The tiniest bubble of joy ever afforded amidst this walled-in prison on this lane why should that be so dangerously attractive to ignore. Whatever maybe the intensity of your [God's] call filled with the elixir of six seasons, why can't I even for a moment cross this little threshold of this inner room of the house. In your wide world free with such life of mine, why should I have to die moment by moment behind this trifling cover made with the pretence of brick and wood? How trivial is my day-to-day life, how trivial are the well-fastened rules, the rigid habits, the practiced words, the conventional forms of offense--and at the end all these trappings will win, and defeated will be that created world of joy of yours?

Needless to say, that 'created world of joy' didn't die, as Mrinal came out of the Makhan Baral Lane and found freedom in the universe. She says: "That will save me, and I'm saved."

Mrinal's freedom didn't come in a social way though; it rather came in a spiritual way. That is, when Mrinal thought that Bindu was released from the curse of subjugation of women through her death, it may be spiritually satisfying, but it cannot be considered as an effective protest against social mal-practices victimizing women. Mrinal cannot be considered as having taken as straightforward a step as Ibsen's Nora has, but she is equally defiant for she has fought for Bindu's rights, left her husband's house, and above all her spiritual defiance was bolted by her realization of the abject condition of women in their in-laws' houses.

Mrinal has occupied a middle space in Tagore's female protest characters. On the one hand she does not face the tragic end that is meted out to Hoimonti, and on the other, she does not take as direct an action as Giribala does in the story, "Manbhanjan," neither does she act as defiantly as Bibha in the story, "Robibar" (Sunday). Bibha, like Hoimonti, has grown up in the liberal environment of her father's house, but fortunately she does not have to enter a restrictive contract of marriage and thus avoids tragedy. Mrinal is again not like Charulata, the heroine of the remarkable story, "Noshtonir" (The Broken Nest), nor like Bimala, of the novel, *Ghare Bairey* (Home and Abroad), the two women seemingly most liberated of all Tagore's heroines. They are liberated psychologically, because though not under financial constraints, nor under the bindings of dowry, they both can afford to have the freedom of choice to venture for relationship with other men outside their marriage orbit. The torture they undergo is quite psychological, and there is no apparent correspondence between their state of mind and their financial situation. But again, from another angle, Mrinal is more of a defiant character than either Charulata or Bimala. She became a protest figure by experiencing the humiliation of women from a close range (Bindu), and

in reaction she has come out of the house. From this perspective, Mrinal is Tagore's most socially defiant female character. In that sense, neither Charulata nor Bimala has abandoned their husband or homesteads in the end.

We have seen that Tagore in his short stories has depicted the cultures of higher-middleclass, middle-middleclass and the lower-middleclass families, but he sets most of the stories in the environment of the in-law families in order to explore the real position of women in society. Tagore has sometimes explored the culture of the in-law family through the eyes of the child-bride, and through this process he has addressed the social issues of child marriage, dowry system, and the humiliation of women.

And as we said earlier the marriage of his youngest daughter, Mira Devi, to Dr. Nagen, and the anxieties that were created in Tagore's mind by his character and attitudes, and the financial pressure that Nagen and his family put on him—all these factors of his personal life had left a strong impact on Tagore's philosophy, and then also on his creativity. By referring to his personal life and to a number of short stories we have tried to establish the fact that his youngest daughter's unhappy marriage opened his eyes towards a major issue of the Bengali society—dowry and the depravation of women—which is still ravaging our society.

Shakespeare anticipating Tagore in reflecting upon the social view of women as dependent beings

Though Shakespeare, anticipating Tagore, was equally conscious about women's subjugated position in society, his projection of the problem had to abide by the dramatic conventions of the time. In his early plays, where he was following the pastoral tradition, he saw love as a chaste pursuit leading to marriage in order to fulfill the Erasmian dictum of 'multiply and increase', that is begetting children. In *Romeo and Juliet* (1594-96) the traditional pastoral ideas 'love at first sight' and 'dying for love' are projected, while in the comedy, *The Comedy of Errors* (1592) Adriana says that men are like elm trees and women are vine creepers: "Thou art an elm, my husband, I a vine" (2.2.165), a recognition of the gender specifications which had to be dispelled by Mary Wollstonecraft toward the end of the eighteenth century by challenging this idea. But if that weakened position of women as recognized by Shakespeare was to conform to Tagore's depiction of the degradation of women, the play that most fits with this framework is *The Taming of the Shrew* (1592), which ends in a scene where the husband's dominant position is recognized by the wife herself. Petruccio, whom we mentioned earlier as having intended to marry wealthily, has finally succeeded in taming his 'shrew' wife Katherina, and when there was a wager put on whose wife would prove to be the most obedient, it was Petruccio's wife, Katherina, who comes first to the call of the husband. Not only that, Katherina

then delivers a speech advising other wives that they should not quarrel with their husbands, but rather should look after their comfort. The husband, she says, “commits his body / To painful labour both by sea and land,” (5.1.161-2) and in return, the wife should “place your hands below your husband’s foot” (5.1.189).

Almost a kind of submission that Mrinal’s sister-in-law, the elder sister demanded of Bindu, while she said: “Whether he’s a goat or a mad husband doesn’t matter, a husband is a husband.”

But Katherina’s Griselda-like obeisance to the husband has been negated by Shakespeare’s more mature heroines, like Rosalind in *As You Like It*, which is a comedy, and Cordelia in *King Lear*, which is a tragedy. Through Rosalind’s realistic approach to love Shakespeare comes out of the pastoral web and through Cordelia, ironically, he shows the tragic consequences that might take place in a patriarchal world when a woman takes up a defiant role.

Both Shakespeare and Tagore had worked in dominantly patriarchal societies, but both were keen to show that women’s bondage in marriage, just materialized by the motive of dowry in complete absence of love, leads to disastrous consequences.

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A Tagore painting