“New Woman” in Rabindranath Tagore’s Short Stories: An Interrogation of “Laboratory”

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ABSTRACT This article investigates Rabindranath Tagore’s perspectives on women as seen through his short stories. While his poems primarily describe beauty, nature and his search for what is beyond mundane life, his short stories deal with the lives of ordinary people. Women’s struggles and sufferings are particularly highlighted. This article argues that while on one hand Tagore reveals the unequal social structure that oppresses women, on another, he creates courageous women who challenge tradition. His short story “Laboratory,” written a few months before his death, expresses his latest views on women and gives shape to the “new woman,” whom he perceives as arriving in India in the near future. In so doing, Tagore urges women to find an identity of their own, and realise that wifehood and motherhood are but fractions of their whole being.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Bharati Ray served as Professor of History at Calcutta University, India and as the University’s Pro-Vice Chancellor. She is currently the Vice President of Indian Council for Cultural Relations. A bilingual author, Ray has published several authored/edited books including From the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women, Early Feminists in Colonial India: Sarala Devi Chaudhurani and Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Women of India: Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods and Different Types of History. She has compiled and edited two volumes of articles published in the earliest women’s journal in Bengal, Bamabodhini Patrika (1863-1922).
Tagore's stories exemplify the fact that he had analysed the feelings of women. On Tagore's women, Srinivasa Iyengar has stated, "The women in his stories, of course, are splendidly womanly, frail and fair, yet wise and strong always – or almost always – more sinned against than sinning. Tagore plumbs the depths of the womanly heart, and behind these seeming wiles and helpless gestures he sees reserves of devotion and sacrifice." Short stories by Rabindranath Tagore – A collection of ten short stories written by Rabindranath Tagore Nobel laureate in Literature. Rabindranath Tagore was as a writer, a poet, and a painter. The stories are all set in the background of Bengal. Set in 30's Calcutta, Rabindranath Tagore's stories seem like a justified narration of life of people living back then. The simplicity of their intentions, complexity of emotions and purity of characters is something every story carries forward. If not inspired by true stories, fiction is at most believable platform here. Hemant Rajput rated it liked it · review of another edition. All stories of Rabindranath Tagore had that dangling ending. Rabindranath Tagore wrote over a hundred short stories, weaving together myths, fairy tales, and modern day fables. Writing at a time when the romantic narrative was in vogue, Tagore's short stories are pioneering writings which reflect his rural experiences, childhood memories, humanism, and religious philosophy, as well as his views on the historical and political realities of colonial Bengal. First published by Oxford University Press in association with Visva-Bharati, this classic collection is a valuable introduction to Tagore's short stories. About the Author. Sukanta Chaudhuri