

Bold, Resilient and Fearless: Representation of Women in Anurag Basu's *Stories by Rabindranath Tagore*

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/gijash.20250313>

ABSTRACT

Indian history is replete with stories of women who have been victimised and face the consequences and complications of social evils like child marriage, dowry, widowhood and domestic hostility. They are now defiantly resisting the compulsive and conservative social and familial societal norms by refusing to follow them. Within this paradigm, the present paper attempts to bring out the injustice against women and their attempts at withstanding the impositions of the unreasonable societal norms laid down by the contemporary society of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Rabindranath Tagore, the legendary novelist and the face of Bengali Literature is known for his contributions to Indian literature. Some of his famous works highlight the lives of everyday Bengali people, the rich and poor, the domestic roles of a woman, familial controversies, the societal problems of rural areas of Bengal and much more. A few of his short stories have been well-depicted by ace director Anurag Basu in his Epic On web series entitled *Stories by Rabindranath Tagore*, which presents to the audience strong, confident and ambitious Bengali women of the 1920s. By highlighting the lives of the central characters Binodini, Charulata, Giribala, Kalyani and Mrinal, the paper explores the journey of Bengal women, who defiantly

resisted the subjugation, stereotypes and social norms of society. The select women-centric stories of Tagore highlight the intricacies of gender inequality where women aggressively defy the norms to break the old-age stereotypes.

Keywords: *Women, Bengal, Indian Society, Social norms, Gender-inequality*

INTRODUCTION

Motion pictures, Television and Web Series, help the audience escape from the world's harsh realities and dig into the world of imagination to refresh their minds. Watching movies is comforting, entertaining and enriching. Some find watching a horror movie enjoyable, while others may find comfort in watching a rom-com movie. Through compelling narratives, intricate plotlines, cinematography and special effects, they have the ability to evoke strong emotions in viewers. Whether they are based on real-life stories or fiction, they can make the audience laugh, cry, empathize and get excited. Almost always, the audience gets deeply immersed in them as they provide new perspectives to look at life and new ways of thinking and feeling. Discrimination, poverty, violence against women, homelessness, economic and political issues, and many more social dilemmas presented through motion pictures touch the hearts and minds of the audience. A movie portraying poverty helps people

understand the atrocities of living homeless and miserable without food. The representation of gender biases and stereotypical mindsets through the portrayal of characters serves to challenge and break down the stereotypical mindset of society. Since the director directly communicates with the audience, what he chooses to project can inspire, enlighten and sometimes even infuriate the viewers.

We live in a world where the audience prefers watching movies, short documentaries, and web series online due to the convenience of watching them at one's own pace. Many platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Zee 5, Hotstar, and Sony Liv are famous and significantly impact our society, especially the youth. These platforms offer a vast canvas, and present-day directors choose challenging themes such as racism, LGBTQ rights, mental health etc., to create their content. Several directors have created fascinating series based on women's lives and their varied experiences. Many web series, such as *Four More Shot Please (2019)*, *Leila (2019)*, *Aarya (2020)*, *Human (2020)* and many more have explored the nuanced portrayal of female characters facing struggles in their day-to-day life. These series also depict women as strong and independent, dismantling the stereotypes that the world of movies has perpetuated for years. Within this paradigm of web series portraying powerful women characters, Anurag Basu, in his Epic On web series, *Stories by Rabindranath Tagore*, captures strong female characters who break the patriarchal stereotypes and emerge as progressive, empowering and resilient women. Anurag Basu, the famous Indian director, actor, producer, and screenwriter, began his career in 2002 and is known for his versatility and has made popular movies with numerous themes. Some of his popular works that have been acclaimed are *Life in a Metro (2007)*, *Kites (2010)*, *Barfi (2012)*, *Jagga Jasoos (2017)*, *Ludo (2020)* and many more.

The present paper delves into the web series *Stories by Rabindranath Tagore*, which was released in 2015. The compilation included 26 episodes that primarily highlighted the social injustice against women in colonial Bengal. The paper attempts to showcase how the strong women of Tagore's stories fight against old-age stereotypes and emerge as strong and independent characters. The series, *Stories by Rabindranath Tagore* adapts Rabindranath Tagore's stories to understand the people, culture and heritage of Bengal. Rabindranath Tagore, the renowned Bengali poet, writer, playwright and composer, is known for shaping Bengali literature, music and theatre. Even today, he is remembered for his poems, short stories, plays and essays that often explored love, spirituality, nature and humanism. Many filmmakers have adapted Tagore's novels and short stories and created beautiful movies based on them. These adaptations are often literary or theatrical works which began almost immediately after the development of films. Prominent filmmaker Satyajit Ray also made many of Tagore's novels, short stories, and dance dramas into movies. His adaptations include *Charulata (1964)*, based on Tagore's novella *Nastanirh* and *Ghare Baire (1984)*, based on Tagore's novel of the same name and many more. Anurag Basu's adaptation of Tagore's short stories depicts the life of women of Bengal. In an interview, Basu states, "I wanted to depict Tagore stories, but never got the chance. I thought that I will never get a chance to fulfill my dream until the channel came with this offer. I visualized and depicted these stories through the show" (Maheshwri). Rabindranath Tagore's stories such as *Choker Bali*, *Charulata*, *Kabuliwala*, *Detective*, *Punishment*, *Waaris*, *Two Sisters*, *Mrinal ki Chitti*, *Tyaag*, *Aparichita*, *Kankal* and many more have been adapted by Anurag Basu.

Various scholars have delved into different stories of Rabindranath Tagore and have analysed the stories and the depiction of women in their research. Gitanjali Roy

in *Progressive Female by Tagore: A Psycho-Philosophical Analysis* articulates Tagore's female protagonists using Gadamer's hermeneutic method, i.e., focuses on the textual analysis of women. Another research article titled, *Cinematic Version of Tagore's short stories by Anurag Basu* by Tanvi Nundy discusses Tagore's best collection *Golpoguchcho*, a collection of 95 stories studied from adaptation into web series.

Researchers have also done much work to understand Tagore's female protagonists, and a few have attempted to analyse his short stories as well. However, hardly any work is done on the visual representation of women reflecting the patriarchal men versus strong women fighting against oppression and subjugation. Therefore, by elaborating on the select episodes of the series, the paper attempts to raise issues of violence, patriarchy and infidelity faced by women in marriage. The paper shall further depict how women stand up against social injustice by refusing to follow the social norms of society by delving into *Mrinal Ki Chitti*, *Aparichita* and *Maanbhanjan*.

Theoretical Background

The paper approaches the select stories of Rabindranath Tagore, adapted by Anurag Basu, by applying a qualitative method inclusive of visual analysis to construct its arguments by applying Simone De Beauvoir's theoretical framework to analyse the issues women face in marriage. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir discusses marriage and claims that marriage changes a woman's destiny. She states that it limits her ability to function independently as she begins to depend on her husband for almost all her decisions. She says that men do not experience the same pressure because they may work and live independently. Marriage presents an uneven opportunity for women and is the only route for a girl to become monetarily secure and integrated into society. Instead of having their own interests or lives outside the home, wives should serve their husbands and care for the

home and children. Beauvoir argues that most men view their wives more as possessions than as the love of their lives. Given that marriage is an oppressive and unequal institution, love and marriage typically do not go together for either gender. Women are considered as property who are given in marriage, and Beauvoir writes, "...it is men's society that allows each of its members to accomplish himself as husband and father; woman, integrated as slave or vassal into the family group dominated by fathers and brothers, has always been given in marriage to males by other males" (503).

Married women have constantly been subordinated, suppressed and oppressed in a patriarchal society. Therefore, marriage and power structure cannot be separated as marriage includes sexual division of labour and unequal distribution of power. Raewyn Connell, a sociologist in *Gender and Power*, explains three aspects of society, i.e., labour, power and cathexis. Raewyn describes labour as the sexual division of labour in the workplace and at home. In his definition of power, he asserts that social interactions like authority, aggression, and ideology play a part in how power is used in the state, the military, and the household.

John Stuart Mill, one of the most influential philosophers in *The Laws Governing Marriage*, explains how the power differences between men and women are manifested in marital law. He describes that women are considered bonded slaves and men as their masters. Men tend to treat their wives worse than they would treat other people. They would exercise complete control over them. Men mistreat their wives because they know that the law also views them as property, having no rights of their own. He adds that even if women are officially the owners, they cannot independently acquire or dispose of wealth or property. Their husbands own the things they receive as an inheritance from their blood relations.

The paper aims to implement the above theories in the selected episodes by Anurag

Basu to understand how women are exploited physically, socially and emotionally in marriage but still emerge as strong characters.

DISCUSSION

Women in Marriage

Marriage is a social contract between two people who are bound together to provide a vital source of happiness, comfort, solace and love. It is often said that marriages are made in heaven and celebrated on earth. However, the concept of marriage, which has significantly evolved over time, differs for both sexes. At times, marriage is a locus of exploitation, loneliness and profound inequality for women. In *The Second Sex*, Simone De Beauvoir writes, "Marriage is the reference by which the single woman is defined, whether she is frustrated by, disgusted at, or even indifferent to this institution" (502). This institution has changed significantly from arranged marriages to love marriages due to changing societal values, norms and expectations.

During colonial times and even today, marriages in India have been the responsibility of the older members of the family. The custom of arranging marriages was based on various parameters, including the continuation of family lines, the consolidation of wealth and many more. Girls were married at an early age to ensure the preservation of young women's purity and were legally bound to obey and follow their husbands. From childhood, girls were taught household chores like cooking, sweeping, dusting, washing clothes and all the essential household chores. During the colonial era, educating a woman would be harmful for the family and would bring disastrous effects as it was believed that a woman's sole purpose was to take care of the house and not indulge in anything beyond it. "It was a popular belief that educating a girl was bound to undermine her feminine qualities which would ultimately bring disgrace to the family" (Pant). However, there did exist some families who

believed in prioritising their daughter's education over marriage.

Mrinal- A Bold and Progressive Woman

In *Stories by Rabindranath Tagore*, Anurag Basu depicts the institution of marriage and reveals the reality of the relationship between a man and a woman in a patriarchal society. In the story, Basu brings forth the society's deeply rooted traditional customs, long-standing beliefs and practices. The story, *Mrinal ki Chitti*, adapted from Tagore's short story "Streer Potro", revolves around a young woman, Mrinal who was married at an early age. Set in Kolkata and Puri, the story begins with Mrinal writing a letter to her husband from Puri, revealing it might be the last one. She begins her letter by saying, "Aap sabse dur ake lag rha hai ki jaise main uss dur shitij mein doobta hue suraj ke samaan ek bindu hu. Aaj lag rha hai ki main anant hu, puri hu. Sirf aapke ghar ki choti Bahu nahi hu, Main, Main hu" (After getting estranged from you all, I feel as if I am just like the small spot similar to the setting sun in the horizon. Today I feel that I am vast. I am complete. I am not just the youngest daughter-in-law of your house. I am me) (*Mrinal ki Chitti* 05:29). In the letter, she describes her journey in Kolkata with her husband, mother-in-law, sister-in-law and Bindu. Mrinal reveals that everyone in her family believed that marrying into a wealthy and well-settled family was her luck, but she felt otherwise.

Mrinal, an educated housewife, was the youngest daughter-in-law who was chosen by her mother-in-law solely on her good looks highlighting the typical requirements of a deeply rooted patriarchal society and its superficial approach to marriage. Later, she questions her husband, "Mujhe to aaj tak samajh mein nahi aya ki aapke ghar mein sundarta ki paribhasha kya hai?" (I still don't understand how beauty is defined in your house?) (*Mrinal ki Chitti* 15:02). Mrinal was fond of writing poetry but was constantly chided by her husband for wasting her time on such things. He wanted Mrinal to take responsibility for all the

domestic tasks, including cooking and managing the household, while he would take care of all the work outside the house. Raewyn Connell, a sociologist in *Gender and Power*, explains three aspects of society i.e., labour, power and cathexis. Raewyn defines labour as the sexual division of labour within the home and the labour market. In the story, Mrinal's husband having a typically patriarchal mindset, clings to the traditional gender roles and societal expectations as he firmly believes that a woman should be confined to doing household work only. Therefore, when Mrinal looked at the account file and corrected the calculations, her husband was irritated and told her to focus on her household chores. He says, "*Mrinal ye ghar ke mardo ka kaam hai. Tum vo kaam kiya karo na jo ghar ki aurto ka hai*" (Mrinal, this is the work of the men of this house. Do what is expected from the women of the house) (*Mrinal ki Chitti* 08:47). His reaction highlights his ideology built on the social norms and expectations of a woman. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir writes, "Marriage has always been presented in radically different ways for men and for women. The two sexes are necessary for each other, but this necessity has never fostered reciprocity; women have never constituted a caste establishing exchanges and contracts on an equal footing with men" (502-503). Her husband once states, "*Aurto ko zyada budhi ka istemal nahi karna chahye*" (Women should refrain from using their brains) (*Mrinal ki Chitti* 09:14). His statements indicate his old-stereotypical thinking where men hold the position of power and authority over women. "A woman was expected to comply and bow down in front of many restrictions and was bound to meet with opposition and obstacles if she tried to use her powers of reasoning and question the correctness and validity of existing rules and strictures. So, Mrinal had to face the flak in daring to question and go against existing norms and was severely criticized for her precocity" (Dasgupta 589).

The story questions the ideologies of Mrinal's husband and brings out the restrictions and limitations that exist only for women.

As the story progresses, Mrinal introduces Bindu in her letter, the sister of the elder daughter-in-law who was married at an early age to an abusive husband. One day, she ran away from her husband's house and came to live with her sister. Through Bindu, Mrinal again questions the deeply rooted marginalisation and oppression towards women. Bindu, who was just a child, was beaten and burnt with a stick on her back by her husband on the pretext that she broke a vase. Despite her allegations against her husband, nobody in the family cared enough to file a complaint against her husband. Rather, when Mrinal suggested that Bindu stays with them, her sister-in-law was more concerned about her mother-in-law's reaction. Mrinal writes, "*Didi ko Bindu ki halat ki parwah kam aur balki iss baat ki parwah adhik thi ki jab subha ghar walo ko pta chalega toh kya hoga*" (Sister cared less about Bindu..she worried more that..what will happen when the family will come to know of the same) (*Mrinal ki Chitti* 12:12). Mrinal's mother-in-law was unhappy with Bindu staying at her place. Although Bindu was the sister of the elder sister-in-law of the house, she hardly cared for Bindu and used to scold and misbehave with her, consciously showing everyone that she was unhappy that Bindu was staying with her. Mrinal's pregnancy becomes a turning point in her relationship with her in-laws and Bindu. Instead of being treated with care, Mrinal was forced to move into a small room with poor sanitation facilities. In *Religions and Status of Women*, Jyotsana Chatterji writes, "The people's notion about the proper role of women in the society and the social restrictions on women are all rooted in religious conceptions regarding women" (45). She questions her husband in the letter, "*Paramparaye bhi kitni ajeeb hoti h bacha jamne ke baad maa ek mahine tak ashudh hoti hai. Isliye prasav pida shuru hote na hote aap logo ne mujhe ghar ke*

peeche wale hisse mein ek chote se kamre mein bhej diya” (Traditions are so strange. The mother becomes impure for a month after giving birth to the baby. That’s why as soon as the labor pains began, you all sent me to a small room at the back of our house) (*Mrinal ki Chitti* 19:14). Later, Mrinal remembered how her daughter died immediately after being born in the small room which was declared unfit even by the English doctor. After losing her daughter, Mrinal came closer to Bindu, with whom she felt a deep sense of love and belonging. Her relationship with Bindu was unconditional, with an understanding of love, compassion and empathy. She started taking care of Bindu like her own daughter and tried to create a safe environment for her. Slowly, Bindu became a part of everyone’s life but was treated no more than a servant. She was constantly expected to wash the clothes, clean the utensils and do all the household chores, and if anything in the family went wrong, Bindu was blamed. Once, a necklace belonging to Mrinal was missing; it took seconds for her husband to blame it on Bindu. Even though Bindu lived in her sister’s house, she was not respected. She had no one to call her own except Mrinal, and since she did not belong to a wealthy family, she had no other place to go to. She quietly suffered the inhuman treatment of the family.

John Stuart Mill writes, “...she is as subordinate to him as slaves, commonly so called, are to their masters. She promises life-long obedience to him at the altar, and is legally held to that all through her life...” (17). Mrinal followed all the traditional norms of the family without questioning or objecting to them. But when she saw the same treatment for Bindu, she couldn’t resist standing against those norms. In her letter, she claims that the family did not allow Bindu to stay with them because they cared for her. They allowed her to stay with them as they were more concerned about their Bhadrakalok image. Since the family couldn’t find any other way for Bindu to leave, they fixed her marriage without

meeting the groom or consulting the bride. Bindu questioned Mrinal and said, “*Aur Kitni bar chodna pdega ghar?*” (How many more time will I need to leave home?) (*Mrinal ki Chitti* 31:08). Her question isn’t just questioning society’s traditional norms but also highlights her helplessness as she is not interested in marrying. After her second marriage, Bindu, who was severely beaten, came back to Mrinal’s in-laws. She revealed that the groom was mad and couldn’t live there. Mrinal could no longer stay silent and questioned everyone in her family. However, the family members blamed Bindu for everything that went wrong in her second marriage. Mrinal’s mother-in-law states, “*Iska pati pagal nahi hai. Ye pagal h. Arey itni mushkil se shadi krai thi iski. Ab isko kaunsa rajkumar milne wala hai*” (Her husband is not mad. She is mad. We have got her married after so much difficulty. She is not going to find a prince) (*Mrinal ki Chitti* 35:06). The family was not concerned about Bindu’s emotional turmoil or her helplessness; rather, they were concerned about their family’s image in society. Therefore, they decided to send Bindu back but Mrinal was confounded with rage and asked Bindu to stay with her. *In Issues in Feminism*, Sheila Ruth writes,

Women are expected to serve men; physically, taking care of their homes, property, clothing or persons; economically, doing countless jobs for which women are ill paid or not paid at all; sexually age wives, mistress or prostitutes; and reproductively, assuring mean of paternity through female chastity” (86).

Therefore, the family wanted Bindu to take care of her husband and even tolerate his insane behaviour.

Due to this clash between Mrinal and her in-laws, Bindu ran away and never returned. As the story progresses, Mrinal decides to go to Puri and seek help from her brother Sarat. She gives him a letter for Bindu and asks him to escort Bindu and put her on the train taking Mrinal to Puri. But Sarat returned with the shocking news that Bindu had killed herself by setting herself on fire.

This story depicts the journey of Mrinal and Bindu, two women who were married at an early age but were never respected or valued in their house. Marriage represented a significant change in a woman's life as she moved from her parental home to a shared space with her partner. But both the women were not appreciated in their households. For Mrinal's husband, a married woman was supposed to balance multiple roles and responsibilities within the home. He never built an emotional intimacy and open communication with Mrinal. All that mattered to him was that she should perform her duties as the youngest daughter-in-law of the house. Mrinal writes, "*Aap logo ke lie kabhi bhi chinta ka Vishay ye nahi tha ki main iss ghar mein khush hu ki nahi. Mudda humesha se yahi rha hai ki main iss ghar ko khush rakh rahi hu ki nahi*" (You had never bothered to think whether I am happy in this house or not. The topic was always the same. That was I keeping this house happy or not?) (*Mrinal ki Chitti* 28:38). While marriage involves creating a shared home, it is equally important for a woman to maintain her individuality and preserve her own sense of self. For Mrinal, the space and her individuality were not maintained in her home; therefore, she decided to move out and focus on her life.

Giribala- The Self-Reliant Woman

Maanbhanjan is another story by Anurag Basu that depicts the journey of a married woman who suffers in a deeply painful, unhappy and loveless marriage. Adapted from Tagore's short story of the same name, the story revolves around Gopinath, a young zamindar who married his wife, Giribala, when they were both children. After their marriage, both of them grew up together, became good friends, and shared every detail with one another. But the relationship changed after the death of Gopinath's father as the responsibility of the Zamindari fell on him, and he could barely spend any time with his wife. Giribala, who is extremely young, beautiful and attractive, had to spend her entire time in her house waiting for her

husband to show up. Basu very beautifully portrays her loneliness and desire for an emotional connection through his camera. Giribala's action of playing chess with herself and sleeping to pass her time indicates her pain and suffering from being alone. While Giribala continues to wait for her husband, Gopinath spends his time visiting theatrical stage shows of the lead actress Latika, a popular theatre artist who is loved and admired by her audience.

Instead of going home to his wife, Gopinath is shown visiting the greenroom of Latika and begins a whirlwind affair with the artist. Engaging in an extramarital affair with Latika depicts the multifaceted nature of Gopinath, who hardly cared for his wife. His relationship with Latika defines the longstanding issue of adulterous relationships, where men do not hesitate to cross the line and ignore their marital vows. Bogusław Sygit defines adultery as an "act of marital infidelity undertaken in order to engage in sexual intercourse and therefore achieve sexual satisfaction by persons of different sexes, of whom at least one remains in a legitimate marital relationship; the extramarital sexual intercourse is conducted consciously and willingly, regardless of whether the spouse is aware of it and consents to this kind of behavior" (23). While Gopinath is in a relationship with Latika, he is portrayed as a possessive lover who does not like it when other people, especially men, gaze at her. As the story unfolds, Giribala is worried about his husband's whereabouts; therefore, she sends her female attendant to the theatre to track out her husband's activities. Later, Giribala confronts her husband and asks, "*Aap kal raat ko ghar kyu nahi aye?* (Why didn't you come home last night?) to which he replies, *Are ghar par hi baitha rahunga to kaam kaun karega?*" (If I keep sitting at home, then who will work?) (*Maanbhanjan* 13:14). Gopinath's infidelity within marriage is a deeply painful and challenging experience that shook the foundation of trust and commitment. Giribala is worried and jealous after hearing

about Latika from her attendant and decides to visit the theatre.

She looked at her husband, who was applauding Latika's performance and decided to do some roleplaying for her husband. She dresses up beautifully and decides to seduce her husband by not giving him keys and asking him to spend some time with her. Giribala says, "*Aapke sath kch pal guzarne ke lie dil taras gya hai*" (My heart is yearning to spend some time with you) (*Maanbhanjan* 25:04). But Gopinath, the selfish and controlling husband, gets angry and starts beating his wife for not giving him the keys. His actions serve as a stark reminder of how patriarchal men view women as inferior and themselves as superior. In *Gender and Power*, Raewyn Connell discusses power and states that social relations like authority, aggression, and ideology play a role in how power is exercised inside institutions, the state, the military, and the home. But his controlling and possessive behaviour wasn't just for Giribala but for Latika as well. As the story unfolds, Gopinath walks into the rehearsal practice and witnesses the director's criticism of Latika. He later asks her to elope with him, leaving Giribala all alone.

After eloping with Gopinath, Latika thinks about the new actress cast in the play instead of her. She craves to perform at the theatre and asks Gopinath to help as he has promised to start a new play for her. Gopinath, who had fallen in love with an artist, however, made fun of theatre and advised her to disregard it. She says, "*Main Kalkatta ja kar dekhna chahti hu ki meri jgha kisne li hai*" (I want to go to Kolkata and see who replaced me). Gopinath replies, "*Kar di na apni tawaifo wali baat, do kodi ke natak ke lie*" (Spoken like a true blue courtesan. All for a worthless play) (*Maanbhanjan* 35:32).

When the two returned to Kolkata and visited the theatre again, they found Giribala performing. Gopinath was shocked to see his wife performing at the theatre as an artist and tried to spoil the show but was asked to leave the theatre.

Through the two women, Giribala and Latika, Basu takes the audience on the journey of a housewife and a theatre artist. Both the women were in love with Gopinath, but he did not respect either of them. In her married life, Giribala's days were filled with the duties of being a wife, and her relationship did not give her happiness or freedom. Her marriage with Gopinath made her feel as if she was trapped in a cage as she was physically and mentally tortured by her husband. But, after her husband elopes, she picks herself up and proves that she does not need a man to find success. Her act of finding her own happiness, success and fame brings out the strong woman who defiantly resists oppression and neglect and strives to make their life better for themselves.

Kalyani- A Strong and Independent Woman

Aparichita adapted from Tagore's short story of the same name, depicts the journey of Kalyani, who talks about her discovery of identity beyond marriage. The story shares the practice of dowry imposed on fathers of daughters, who are forced to pay a massive amount of money and jewellery to get their daughters married. In India, even today, dowry is practised and reflects the question of the respectability or social standing of the bride's father. If the father fails to meet dowry demands, the consequences are faced by the family and the bride. "What made dowry so important from the 1870s on was the formation in Calcutta and elsewhere of a salaried Bengali 'middle class', often called the *bhadralok* (respectable or gentle people), a conglomerate of many different castes and social groups..." (Majumdar 437).

The story, which moves back and forth, begins with a young man, Anupam, accompanying his mother to Haridwar, where he hears the sound of a young woman, Kalyani, who is sitting in the next compartment. The director then takes the audience two years back to Anupam's maternal uncle discussing his marriage with

the family members. There was a significant reflection patriarchal thought of Anupam's uncle when he was more concerned about dowry than the girl. He says, "*Dekho log aise hone chahiye jo Gareeb ho, lekin dahej dene mein aana kani na kare*" (Look the people should be poor but should not haggle in giving dowry) and further adds, "*Ladki ayegi sone mein lad ke, lekin rahegi sar jhukake*" (The girl will come laden with gold. But will stay with her head lowered) (*Aparichita* 06:33).

Anupam's friend suggested Kalyani, the only child of businessman Shambhunath Sen from Kanpur, as an ideal match for Anupam. Further, Ajit (Anupam's uncle) fixed the marriage of Kalyani and Anupam on the prospect that the two families were a good match. Certain demands, such as the bride's family shall host the wedding in Calcutta etc., were made by Ajit. Anupam's uncle was more concerned about his social image in society and how much dowry the family could offer and was not concerned if the two were suitable for each other. Anupam, who was a soft-spoken person, was always scared of Ajit and would, therefore, always obey him. Ajit's behaviour of asking for dowry and later insulting the family depicts the attitude of the Bhadrakol community of colonial Bengal. As the story moves forward, the audience witnesses Kalyani and Anupam beautifully dressed up as the bride and groom. But, just before the wedding, Ajit introduces the goldsmith to Shambhunath Sen and asks him to bring the jewellery worn by Kalyani so that the true value of the jewellery can be assessed. Insulted by this, Kalyani's father first called Anupam and asked him to speak to his uncle regarding this matter, but Anupam, who was always scared of his uncle, did not intervene. Finally, the father was forced to bring the jewellery to the goldsmith, which was confirmed to be authentic and of good quality. After this incident, Kalyani's father fed food to all the guests and called the wedding off. He says, "*Ajit ji apni haisiyat ke hisab se main jitna kar sakta tha utna*

mene kiya" (Mr. Ajit. I did what I could as per my status). He further adds, "*Jo log ye samajh sakte hai ki main apni beti ke gehno ki chori kar sakta hu, aise ghar mein main beti bhayh nahi sakta*" (people who think that I can steal my daughter's jewellery I cannot marry off my daughter to such a house) (*Aparichita* 26:14).

The insults hurled at Kalyani and her father by the groom's maternal uncle during the marriage led to the cancellation of the marriage. During the colonial era and even today, where the bride's family is supposed to meet all the demands and face all the insults, Shambhunath Sen chose his daughter over societal expectations. He knew that his daughter would never live happily in a family that did not respect the bride's family. As the story moves forward, the director takes the audience to the train, where Anupam hears the voice of Kalyani. Kalyani, a strong and independent woman, impressed Anupam when she argues with two British passengers who demand possession of their train compartments. This incident showcases a huge difference between Anupam and Kalyani. While Kalyani is depicted as a strong woman fighting against all the injustice, Anupam is depicted as a timid person who cannot fight for things that are right. It was during the train ride that Anupam and his mother learned that Kalyani was the same woman Anupam was supposed to marry. Later, Anupam feels guilty and decides to rectify his mistakes by asking for forgiveness from Shambhunath Sen. He shares that he has disconnected himself from his uncle and, therefore, now wants to marry Kalyani. Shambhunath Sen forgives Anupam and says the marriage decision is up to Kalyani. However, Kalyani rejects the marriage proposal and says, "*Vivah tutne ke baad mujhe mere jivan ka vastavik uddeshya mila, ek nayi disha mili*" (After the wedding was broken, I found the real goal of my life, I found a new direction) (*Aparichita* 37:08). She shared with him that now she has a career devoted to educating young orphan girls and will launch a school for orphan

girls.

The story brings before the audience a strong, independent, spirited, and open-minded woman who refuses to marry and lives life on her own terms. Unlike the women of colonial Bengal who were forced to marry as per the family's choice, Tagore's story has portrayed progressive women whose opinions and perspectives were far ahead of their time. Through his web series, Anurag Basu has described Kalyani as a woman who strives to find her identity in a male-dominated society. The story also contrasts people who follow and support the dowry system with those trying to fight against these embedded social rules.

CONCLUSION

Over the years, it has been perceived that the institution of marriage defines a woman. All household chores such as cooking, cleaning, taking care of the children and many more have been considered the sole purpose of women. Women have been taught since their childhood that their main goal in life is to serve others. Several filmmakers, namely Vikas Bahl, Abhishek Varman, and more have, through their creative pieces, reflected on the experience of women who are married or might be getting married. Anurag Basu has, in his works, depicted the struggles of women who were stuck in a stereotypical and patriarchal society. In the stories of Rabindranath Tagore, Basu presents the story of Mrinal and Giribala, who were married and Kalyani, who was bound to marry. Marriage for these three characters has been portrayed as a cage where women suffer. Simone de Beauvoir writes, "...the young girl becoming absolutely passive; she is married, given in marriage by her parents. Boys marry; they take a wife. In marriage, they seek an expansion, a confirmation of their existence but not the very right to exist; it is a charge they assume freely" (505).

The three of them emerge as strong and independent women fighting against social norms and discovering their own identities.

In *Mrinal ki Chitti*, Mrinal, a woman confined to her household activities, fights against the customs and traditions made for women by moving out of her husband's house to have a peaceful life. While *Maanbhanjan*, depicts the life of Giribala, who was married to a wealthy zamindar who had lustful intentions for a theatre artist. Like Mrinal, Giribala breaks the traditions of being a housewife and starts her career as a theatre artist. The two women fought with stereotypical men who believed women should be submissive and follow the norms made for them. *Aparichita*, featured an independent woman, Kalyani, who strived to find her way in a traditionally male-dominated society by rejecting marriage and discovering things that gave more meaning to her life. All these three stories, written by Rabindranath Tagore, portray female characters as strong, progressive, bold, courageous and independent-minded young women.

Declaration by Author

Acknowledgement: None

Source of Funding: None

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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How to cite this article: Nimisha Yadav. Bold, resilient and fearless: representation of women in Anurag Basu's *Stories by Rabindranath Tagore*. *Galore International Journal of Applied Sciences & Humanities*. 2025; 9(3): 127-137. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/gijash.20250313>
