

## Mrinal's Inner Conflict and Resolution in Tagore's 'Strir Patra'

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**Abstract:** Tagore's females are always the owners of diversity, as a minute observer of human nature; he sketched his women's every flitting desire, every yearning, every joy, sorrow, pain, despair, weakness, and strength vividly in his writing, especially in the short stories. The present paper aims to show Tagore's heroine Mrinal's internal conflict being a woman of patriarchal society in the short story 'Strir Patra' (*Letter from a Wife*). It will also try to present her decision to get a resolution of her inner conflict that she suffers from years after years based on the "Theory of Our Inner Conflicts" given by the psychoanalyst Karen Horney.

**Keywords:** 'Strir Patra', Mrinal, patriarchal society, inner conflict, resolution

### INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore was a liberal man; he saw tremendous possibilities in the women being a male of Traditional Bengali Society where women were treated badly. The suppression of women, in particular, with the sanction of religion and tradition, disturbed him greatly. So, he created his women characters with many talents, imagination, strength, and above all, dignity even under the worst kind of humiliation from men. The women in his stories always handled the pressures of their surroundings with patience, grace, and courage. Thus, even in defeat, they came out victorious.

Mrinal in 'Strir Patra' is a woman who tries to adjust to her in-laws' family throughout her married life. But, at a time, she feels that she is nothing but a doll in the hands of her in-laws. So, she finally finds out her way to liberate herself from her oppressed life.

According to the psychoanalyst Karen Horney:

At one time or another our wishes, our interests, our convictions are bound to collide with those of others around us. And just as such clashes between ourselves and our environment are a commonplace, so, too, conflicts within ourselves are an integral part of human life. (Horney, p 23, 1945)

### THE BASIC CONFLICT THEORY BY KAREN HORNEY AND THE EFFECTS

Do we really like a person or do we only think we like him because we are supposed to? (Horney, p.25) Horney further adds that every living human being has some conflicts within, especially between desires and obligations. Horney says that human beings sometimes do things because they are expected to do those, not because they wish to do the things. A little girl may wish to be a painter or a dancer but her family may not wish her to do so, their wish for her is to be a good homemaker which has been followed by women centuries after centuries. A young girl may wish to read storybooks, write poems or short stories, whereas her surroundings may hinder her desires and wish the girl to concentrate on her household works. When these girls become wives or mothers, they naturally adopt a power of adjustment and power of sacrifice, but always, our minds cannot cope with those sacrifices or adjustments. Human minds revolt someday, get involved in a conflict, a conflict between a mind and

the society, or a conflict between a mind and a family, or sometimes some inner hidden conflicts that rule inside the heart, nobody can know about it as Horney has said.

The conflict between our wishes and obligations is one of the prominent themes in the short stories of Tagore, especially his female characters always suffer from this conflict between their obligations and their wishes, thus Mrinal is also not different.

### **MRINAL'S INNER CONFLICT IN THE STORY "STRIR PATRA"**

Being the Mejobou (second daughter in law) of a traditional Hindu family, Mrinal does not ever feel that she has her own identity too apart from being the Mejobou of her in law's house as she says in her letter of the story of "Strir Patra":

I am the Mejobou of your family. After fifteen years, standing on the edge of the sea, I have learnt that I have another connection as well, with my universe and the God who rules over it. That has given me the courage to write this letter. It is not a letter from Mejobou." (Mukerjee, p. 188, 2005)

The lines of the letter disclose Mrinal's urge for her self-identity that she has been ignorant of her fifteen years of married life. From her childhood, she has been given the idea that males are more precious than females. She has been married only at the age of 12, writing poetry is her passion though she cannot share it with anyone of her in-law's house because that society gives importance to women's beauty, not to their intellectuality. Writing poetry is a type of Mrinal's search for her own space or her own identity that she continues regularly. When she first comes to her in-law's house, she gets sympathetic to the cows as she is a village girl. But the people of her law's house cannot accept her kindness towards the animals and start to jeer at her. Mrinal would have found a space if her newborn baby girl would have survived. But the baby girl dies after being born and Mrinal becomes alone. After this, she wishes to get closer to her sister-in-law's sister Bindu, but her in-law's family does not take it positively. So, finally, she finds her way to get rid of her inner conflict as her own family, her in-law's house, and the society she was in could not relieve her from her inner struggle.

### **HORNEY'S INNER CONFLICT AND THE CHARACTER OF MRINAL**

In her book, Horney talks about many reasons for inner conflicts and shares some consequences that people face after they suffer from the inner conflicts, such as:

- a. Moving toward people (Wishing to get some love, care, or attention from the surroundings to reduce the pain of inner conflict)
- b. Moving against people (Getting aggressive or having some illusions that other people do not like the person for some reason)
- c. Moving away from people (making oneself isolated from the world and wandering in the dreamland when the inner heart suffers the extreme)

Most of the people of our surroundings face one of these three as the Mejobou Mrinal of 'Strir Patra' face. As a girl child in her own family and then as the Mejobou of her in-law's family she suffers from inner conflict, a fight between her desires, her dream, and the world surroundings her. Like other people she finds some ways to get out of her inner conflict such as writing poetry, talking to the cows of her in-law's house, and getting closer to the young girl Bindu.

### **WRITING POETRY AS A WAY OUT OF MRINAL'S INNER CONFLICT**

In the story 'Strir Patra', from the beginning to the end Mrinal is treated as a typical housewife though she is an extraordinary woman who has got much intelligence and the mind to create poetry. Her in-laws are more concerned about her beauty than her inner qualities. Mrinal's sufferings start from the time she is born. After her marriage, she searches for her own space to write poetry but in that family, women are not inspired to write poetry, so she continues that keep it a secret as she says:

I had something quite outside the common household routine about which none of you came to know; I wrote poetry secretly. However, rubbish it may have been, it wasn't walled in like your inner quarters. (Mukerjee, p. 191, 2005)

According to Horney's theory of inner conflict, some people suffer from their internal conflict so much that they keep themselves isolated from the world and roam around a world of fancy where they try to fulfill their unfulfilled desires or dream. Writing poetry is Mrinal's that dream world where she is the owner of her every will, executor of her every dream, where nobody can force her to do something or nobody can ask her not to do something. To talk about her freedom by writing poetry she adds, There I was free; there I was myself. All that about me that exceeded your conventional Mejobou, you disapproved of or didn't understand. The fact that I am a poet, escaped you for fifteen years. (Mukerjee, p. 191, 2005)

The cows of her in-law's house become her friends as the other members always keep trying to insult her. She says that at the time she had come to this house the two cows and three calves had been like old and familiar relations to her in that vast city. This is also her way to get out of the inner pain she suffers from as a woman.

Mrinal wishes to live happily in the turmoil of her in-law's house by holding on to her daughter but this time also fate does not accompany her, the baby girl dies at her birth. Mrinal becomes lonelier then. Her daughter would have been also another loophole for her to stay happy. After the death she says,

My daughter was born to die at birth. She also beckoned me to go with her. If she had lived, she would have brought to my life all that's meaningful and true. All at once I would have become a mother instead of remaining just a Mejobou. (Mukerjee, p. 192, 2005)

Mrinal's effort to write poetry in her leisure time reminds the readers Helen Cixous, a French Feminist, who as a newborn in the *Newly Born Woman* suggests the females that:

She must write herself, because this is the invention of a new insurgent writing, which, when the moment of liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history. (Cixous, p. 18, 1987)

### **BINDU AS AN EXIT POINT OF MRINAL'S INNER STRUGGLE**

After the death of her daughter, Mrinal again gets busy with her household work, and one day after the death of her widowed mother Mrinal's sister-in-law Bindu comes to her in-law's house. Everyone gets annoyed by the girl Bindu but Mrinal stands by her whereas the sister-in-law also ignores Bindu just to satisfy her husband.

Bindu and her love for Mrinal creates a space for both of them to make them free from their inner pain as Mrinal says:

I was tossed about in the tempest of Bindu's love. At times I was exasperated with her, I admit, but through her love I could get a glimpse of my own self, of which I had not been aware. This was my unencumbered self. (Mukerjee, p. 197, 2005)

Mrinal's in-laws house thinks her too much care for Bindu, "uncalled", they even do not hesitate to blame Bindu as a thief and as a police agent. Everything they do to insult Bindu and finally they give her marriage to a mad, old person. Bindu does not want to get married, but rather wishes to stay with Mrinal. But she is forced to be married and after three days she escapes from her in-law's house. Mrinal wants to keep her with her but Bindu's in-law's house threatens them by the name of the police. By her all-inner strength Mrinal says:

I don't know from where I get my strength. I could not accept that the cow that has run to me for shelter after escaping from the butcher must be, under pressure from the police, sent back to the butcher. (Mukerjee, p. 202, 2005)

But finally, Bindu leaves Mrinal so that Mrinal's in-laws do not dishonor her anymore and she gets back to her mad husband where again she escapes and commits suicide by burning herself in the fire. In all these days Bindu also works as an exit point of Mrinal's inner conflict as Horney has said that some people try to get close to other people for getting some love, care, or affection so that their conflict gets reduced. It not only happens with Mrinal but also happens with Bindu who by being neglected by her surroundings comes close to Mrinal and starts loving Mrinal madly. Unfortunately, society could not understand the minds of women and their inner struggles. Rather it was responsible for putting the woman into conflict.

### **THE PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY TO CREATE INNER CONFLICTS IN A WOMAN**

In *The Cambridge Companion to Rabindranath Tagore* edited by Sukanta Chaudhuri showed:

His short stories bring out the oppression of women and girls within and outside the family, exposing multiple patriarchal oppressions in daily life. The family becomes the habitus and matrix of patriarchal normativity, the microcosm of an unbalanced and unjust social macrocosm." (Chaudhuri, p. 241, 2020)

The patriarchal society of Tagore's time was such a society that never valued the woman, rather it always tried to suppress the dream of their woman. Not only Mrinal or Bindu, every woman in that society used to suffer from inner conflicts. They were not treated as human beings but as objects. Being a writer of Brahma Samaj Tagore has realistically presented different ways women were exploited in society. Chakraborty (2022) revealed the source of Tagore's short story "Letter from a Wife" that a young girl of Calcutta committed suicide on 30 January 1914 before her marriage to relieve her parents from the heavy burden of dowry that her future in laws demanded. Within a few weeks of this incident, Tagore wrote his short story, 'Letter from a Wife' or 'Strir Patra' in the literary magazine *Sabuj Patra*. That means Tagore's society was such a society where girls were forcefully given marriages giving dowry. At the beginning of the story "Letter from a Wife" Mrinal says that in her childhood she along with her brother fell ill with typhoid. Then her little brother died but she survived. After that the neighborhood said,

Mrinal pulled through because she is a girl. She wouldn't have made it if she was a boy. (Mukerjee, p. 189, 2005)

According to that society,

The God of Death is a past master in the art of thieving; He eyes only a thing of value. (Mukerjee, p. 189, 2005)

That means girls were valueless in that society. It was such a society where Mrinal, her sister-in-law, Bindu, nobody was given any respect, honor, or value. They even did not have any right to love anything or anyone freely. When Mrinal first enters her in-law's house, she finds nobody known to her except two cows and three calves. But the relatives of her in-law's house start to jeer at her by throwing doubts about her caste as she gets closer to the animals.

There was also a difference between the women's section and the men's section of the house. After Mrinal's daughter dies at birth, the English doctor gets unpleasantly surprised to see the bad condition of the inner quarters where the women live. On the other hand,

In front, in the men's section of the house, you have a small garden. That side of the house has good furniture and fittings. The inner quarters are like the wrong side of knitting, devoid of taste, grace, or shame. There the lights are dim, the air enters like a thief, the rubbish in the courtyard refuses to move, and the stains on the floors and walls stay on defying mortality. (Mukerjee, p. 193, 2005)

Manu says in his book that:

A virtuous wife should constantly serve her husband like a god, even if he behaves badly, freely indulges his lust, and is devoid of any good qualities. (Smith & Doniger, 115)

### MRINAL'S DECISION TO BE FREE FROM HER INNER CONFLICT

From the day of her marriage, Mrinal has to suffer a lot, her inner conflicts start from that time. After her entrance into her in-law's house, she is inspected by the women of that house who find that Mrinal is a beautiful girl. But after some days of her marriage, Mrinal realizes that beauty and intellectuality in a woman are of no use because a woman is only a woman there, nothing to be valued for beauty or intelligence. The time she comes to know that nobody will cherish her quality in that conservative society, her inner conflict starts. She tries her best to reduce the conflict between her desires and obligations but unfortunately, her surroundings do not understand her mind, what she wants or what is her dream. Everything that she wishes to hold on to is snatched from her by her fate or by the people of her own. But her mental strength is such that finally after the suicide of Bindu she leaves her in-law's house and goes to a holy place as she says in her letter to her husband:

I will not return to your 27 Makhon Boral Lane. I have seen Bindu. I have known the value women are given in your world. (Mukerjee, p. 205, 2005)

For fifteen years Mrinal tries hard to adjust to her surroundings. Her mind wishes for something, but she is obliged to do something else just to fulfill her duties as the 'Mejobou'. After all, she is a human being, not a machine, so her mind finally revolts, and leaving all her fear she takes her decision to make herself free from the shackles of society. So, Now, Mejobou has truly perished (Mukerjee, p. 207, 2005).

And to prove her freedom at the end of the letter she puts her signature as 'Mrinal', not as so called 'Mejobou' which declares that she has left her false identity as a 'Mejobou' and chosen her way to explore her own self where she would not be treated as an object, but a human being made of blood and flesh.

It is often said about Tagore that he is 'in advance of his times'. (Bhattacharya, p. 4, 2011) and Bhattacharya (2011:12) mentioned

The other issue engaging his mind at this time was the conflict between tradition and modernity, between blind religiosity and rationalism, between 'Hindu nationalism' and humanist values. (Bhattacharya, p. 12, 2011).

That is why he has had that much courage to show such a woman character existing in that traditional patriarchal society, and coming out of that with her mind to be free.

### CONCLUSION

So, being a woman of a patriarchal society Mrinal acts differently that she no more tolerates her oppressed life, rather finds out a solution to make her free so that till her death she can live her life fully under the open sky. And through the character sketch of Mrinal Tagore beautifully highlights the fact that in spite of the unsupportive social structure some woman characters come victorious finally because of their rebellious thoughts and reformist ideas.

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