

Portrayal of Women by Dr. Mu. Va. and Tagore

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to comparing the national writers, represents their culture through their writers and focus on the depiction of women in their fictional world. Both Tagore and Dr. Mu. Va. concentrates on the importance of mother tongue and women's education through their literary creations, humanistically and optimistically projects their view about women.

Keywords: Dr. Mu. Va., Rabindranath Tagore, Optimistic Perspectives, Humanism, Women's education, Cultural values, Domination.

Comparative Literature is “the comparison of one literature with another or others” (Weisstein 23), but Van Tieghem points out that Comparative Literature aims primarily at the works of various literatures in their interrelationship H. H. Henry Remak points out that “National Literature treats questions confined to one national literature; Comparative Literature normally deals with problems involving two different literatures” (P 14). Even though Van Tieghem considers the study of literature within a nation as national literature, comparatists like Ulrich Weisstein are of the view that even writers belonging to the same nation can be compared. That is why a simple attempt is aimed at comparing two national writers, Tagore and Dr. Mu. Va. Rabindranath Tagore represents Bengali culture through his writings while Dr. Mu. Va. depicts Tamil culture through his writings. The primary focus of this paper is on the depiction of women in their writings.

Both Tagore and Mu. Va. not only stress the importance of the mother tongue but also give importance to women's education through their literary creations in all respects. In both these writers one can see a synthesis of Western and Eastern culture and both are found giving importance to women's problems and consider woman as the source of inspiration to man. Both are not only humanistic but also optimistic in their views about women. One can easily find out that in both Dr. Mu. Va. and Tagore, there are only heroines and no heroes. Eradication of literacy among women is the first idea one can find in both the writers for both are the opinion that illiteracy will, no doubt, bring misfortune to women and education alone can help women to solve the problems. For example, Dr. Mu. Va.'s *Alli* of *Alli* was deserted by her husband. At this time of her distress, *Alli's* education helped her to stand on her own

feet. In the same way in the novel *Malarvili*, education helps Malarvili to take up the job of a teacher at the time of her crisis. In the novel *Kallo? Kaviyamo?*, the illiterate Mankai worked as a servant girl, but the literate Mankai did not remain as a servant. On the other hand, her education helped her to marry Arulappan. And thus, she got a good status in the society. In Tagore's *Binodini*, the literate Asha was deceived by her husband, while Asha's husband himself wondered at the behavior of literate Asha. In the novel *The Wreck* due to her illiteracy, Kamala endured living with Ramesh. But the literate Kamala ran away from Ramesh when she came to know that Nalinaksha and not Ramesh was her husband.

Both Dr. Mu. Va. and Tagore pictured various types of women characters like conservative type, revolutionary type, motherly type, flat and round type, upper, lower and middle class type, minor and pivotal type characters who are confronted with problems in their lives. Some women suffered due to their husband's domination whereas some others suffered due to social prejudices. Some of them faced problems due to fate while some others due to their own flow. In Mu. Va.'s *Kallo? Kaviyamo?*, *Mankai*, in *Malarvili*, Malarvili, in *Alli*, Alli, in *Akalvilakku*, Karpakam, Valli, Kutamma are the female characters pictured as women suffering due to their husband's domination whereas in Tagore's *Binodini*, Asha, in *Gora*, Manorama and in *The Wreck*, Kshemankari are the women pictured as suffering at the hands of their husbands and in Mu.Va.'s *Pavai*, Pavai, in *Nencil Oru Mul*, Vijaya Ammaiyar and in Tagore's *Gora*, Sucharita, Anandamoyi, mistress Baroda are the women characters who faced societal problems and in Mu.Va.'s *Nencil Oru Mul*, Vativu, in *Alli*, Inpavalli, in *Karittuntu*, Ponni and in Tagore's *The Wreck*, Kamala and Hemalini are the women who suffered due to fate and destiny. While in Tagore's *The Home and the World*, Bimala and Mu.Va.'s *Karittuntu*, Nirmala and in *Malarvili*, Kancanai are the women characters pictured as the ones who suffered due to their own flaw.

Just as Tagore received the Nobel Prize for Literature for his *Gitanjali*. Dr. Mu.Va. received many awards for his writings and just as Tagore was influenced by his family members and Renaissance leaders like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and his brother Henendranath, Dr. Mu. Va. was influenced by Gandhi, Thiru. Vi. Ka., Thayumanavar, Bernard Shaw, Cankam Literature, *Tirukkural* and *Silappatikaram*, for the amelioration of the problems of women. While Tagore's *The Home and the World* and Mu.Va.'s *Malarvili* stress the point that women caused misfortune to their family through infatuation, Tagore's novel *The Wreck* and Dr. Mu. Va.'s novel *Nencil Oru Mul* point out the idea that women suffer due to Fate or destiny. Both these writers have some similarities for both of them give priority to women's education as 'education alone can help women to come up in life. Even though they are required to excel in domestic work, they are also required to acquire proper education so as to face challenges and find solutions to problems in life. Dr. Mu. Va., while commenting on the value of women's education, said thus:

“Women must improve. The country will be like this
if they do not improve. Women need education.

Even if we close the schools for men for two generations, then nothing will happen. If only women get knowledge, then superstitious belief will leave the country. Otherwise even if one Vivekananda is born in each house, then the same blind life will remain for ever” (Kallo? Kaviyamo? – P. 69)

Both the writers, stressing the value and importance of education for women in the novels, have created characters – both major and minor, as ‘educated’ for education does bring out a turning point in the lives of most of these women characters. For example, in Mu.Va.’s novel *Kallo? Kaviyamo?*, Mankai, an illiterate servant girl, is depicted as the one attaining good social status in the society only through education. In his *Pavai*, Pavai gets the courage to face her problems only through education. In Tagore’s *Binodini*, the innocent and shy Asha begins to understand the world through her education and in his *The Wreck*, education helps Kamala to realize the importance of a wife’s role in life through education. It may be said that both the writers fall in line with the slogan – “Each one, Teach one” – through their novels. For example, in Dr.Mu.Va.’s *Kallo? Kaviyamo?*, Aruppan taught the illiterate servant girl Mankai. In Tagore’s *Binondini*, the illiterate, innocent Asha is taught by her husband Mahendra. According to them both, if only women are given education, society would improve. They attest to the following view of Gita Muharjee:

“Women educated in the right way will contribute immensely to build up a strong nation by rearing up able and ideal citizen”

(Roy 109)

One can see the mingling of Eastern and Western Cultures in Dr. Mu. Va. and Tagore’s novels. Tagore himself once said:

“It is providential that the West had come to India and yet someone must show the East to the West, and convince the West that the East has her contribution to make to the history of civilization, India is no beggar to the West. And yet even though the West may think she is I am not for thrusting of western civilization and becoming segregate in our independence. Let us have deep association”.

(Iyengar 101).

Both Tagore and Mu. Va. were bent on picturizing some of their educated women either to run a school or to do some missionary activities. Ladies taking up jobs is one of the features of western cultures. Dr. Mu. Va.'s Alli in his novel *Alli* is depicted as serving the people as a doctor and in *Malarvili*. Malarvili is described as serving as a teacher and in *Gora*, Sucharita and Lolita shown as running school for children. Even though some of Mu. Va.'s and Tagore's women characters were influenced by Western culture, they were not shown as completely carried away by western culture. William Cenkner observes:

“... Tagore is the first writer in modern India who brought his women out of the kitchen and bed-room and into the Parlour where they argue with men and exchange ideas while still remaining very feminine” (P 115).

Sucharita of Tagore's *Gora*, and Hemnalini of his *The Wreck* could be cited as examples for the combination of Eastern and Western cultures. Though highly educated, both of them follow their Eastern culture in giving respect to their elders like Tagore, Dr. Mu. Va. also made his women characters never forget their Eastern cultures. For example, in Dr. Mu. Va.'s *Kallo? Kaviyamo?*, the heroine Mankai, just as a western lady led her life in Bombay as a working woman, but in her heart of hearts, she remained an Eastern lady. Both the writers were so strong in their belief that women is the source of inspiration to man. In Tagore's *Gora*, Sucharita is the source of inspiration to *Gora*, whose patriotic ideas are moulded to a great extent only through his affection for Sucharita. Likewise, in Dr. Mu. Va.'s *Karittuntu*, the hero, the artist, is inspired by his lady love.

Both Dr. Mu. Va. and Tagore are optimistic. Their optimistic approach is reflected in their novels. In Dr. Mu. Va.'s *Alli*, Alli's husband had gone away from her. At that time, Alli did not act like a coward. On the other hand, she survived by doing social service to the people like Nivetika. In the same way in Tagore's *The Wreck*, Kamala did not take away her life when she had come to know that Ramesh was not her real wedded husband. She hoped that she would join her husband Nalinaksha. Both the writers resemble each other in most of their views but one can see a slight difference between Dr. Mu. Va. and Tagore's views regarding woman's chastity. Tagore seems to be more liberal in his attitude than Dr. Mu. Va. For example, in Tagore's *The Wreck*, Kamala lived with Ramesh. Through Kamala, Tagore suggests to people that women like Kamala must be accepted by society as a chaste woman even though she lived with other man. But in Dr. Mu. Va.'s *Karittuntu*, we see Nirmala leading a secluded life with Kamalakkannan. In Nirmala's case, Dr. Mu. Va. seems to punish her for escaping from her first husband intentionally at the time when her first husband was terribly in need of her. If Dr. Mu. Va. was broad-minded as Tagore, he could have pictured Nirmala as one leading a normal domestic life with Kamalakkannan. This slight difference between Dr. Mu. Va. and Tagore could have been due to their time gap. Tagore lived in Pre-

Independent India (1861-1941) and Dr. Mu. Va. lived in Pre- and Post-Independent India (1912-1974). And it may also be due to differences in the culture of their regions.

To conclude, it may be said that both Dr. Mu. Va. and Tagore are said to have brought out through their novels the many-sided personality of woman characters, for both believed that “unless women’s position is improved and house wives are educated leading to wisdom, our country will not prosper” (Gupta 55). After reading Shakespeare’s comedies, the readers may feel that Shakespeare has no houses but only heroines. In the same way, after reading Dr. Mu. Va.’s and Tagore’s novels, one can feel that both these writers have no heroes but only heroines, women characters in their novels.

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