

## A Feministic Study of 'Streer Patra' by Tagore

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'Streer Patra' by Rabindranath Tagore is a vivid presentation of the condition of Bengali women in colonial period. Literature reflects society or society provides the writer with the necessary resources for his plot. 'Streer Patra' graphically captures the sorrowful plight of women in society at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. 'Streer Patra' was written in Bengali by Rabindranath Tagore in the year 1914 and was published in the monthly 'Sabuj Patra'. Tagore most poignantly penned the inhuman torture inflicted on women during colonial period. As literature portrays society, it can influence the people in an overwhelming way. 'Streer Patra' greatly appeals to the reader not only because it spoke of women in colonial period but even after 100 years since it was written India has not progressed significantly in respect to women's emancipation.

'Streer Patra' is story of woman who wants freedom from societal taboos. She is the representative of thousands of women who are bound by marriage and can do nothing on their own will. They are dictated in family, controlled by patriarchal figures and made to toil from morning to night. Education which frees the mind from the bounds of superstition – was completely denied to these women. After the social reform movement some women of upper class had the opportunity to receive some education. They were mostly taught at home. Though Bethune school was established in the year and schools for women were set up, the number of women receiving formal education was pitiable. As a result, women could not have a life of freedom neither women could participate in public life. They could never think of entertainment or fulfilment of their desires. Hindu marriage Act was passed in 1872 setting upper age for marriage of men 18 and women 14. Though law was there parents flouted the law and tried to marry off their daughters to get rid of the responsibility. Women were a kind of responsibility not the source of love and affection. Moreover at 14 also a girl is vulnerable to all types of assaults in the home of her in laws. They do not mature at 14 and has the tenderness of a small girl. She with her marriage is taught to consider husband as god even if he is invalid even inhuman.

**Objectification:** Objectification of women was very clear from the facts that women's opinion did not matter in decision making not even taking decisions related to her own life. Even in serious and important matter like marriage, women were not consulted about their will and the marriage used to be finalized arbitrarily by the male members. The girls used to leave for their in-laws like other commodities that were gifted as dowry or presents. The customs or rituals during marriage and afterwards oriented women in internalizing their low positioning in family and society. Women had no right to express views, they only learnt to tolerate. Mrinal lived in an interior village with unpaved road and they were basically from East-Bengal. But mother wanted a beautiful bride for him as her eldest daughter is law failed her expectation. They took the trouble of going to that distant village as they heard that Mrinal was really beautiful. Mrinal's beauty was soon forgotten in her in-law's house, she too was treated only as a woman. Moreover, her husband felt uneasy on being reminded that she had intelligence. As if intelligence is a quality meant for men. If women were intelligent men were threatened by some unknown fear. Even Mrinal's mother (a traditional woman with patriarchal notions)

was scared about the intelligence of Mrinal. Even in her in-law's family though the women came to the conclusion that she was really beautiful. She was not loved for it. Not only the in-laws but her husband also soon forgot her beauty. But she was intelligent remained a disturbing factor to him.

Mrinal gave birth to a daughter but like the evening star she too glowed for a moment and then set. An English doctor was called as her condition was not good. The doctor on seeing the confinement room had scolded and from this one can understand that even the wealthy people with educated men in the house did not provide the would be mother a right place to give birth. After fighting with 'Jom-Raj' Mrinal recovered and went back to her routine life. Mrinal faced the grief after becoming mother but she could not taste the freedom of becoming a mother.

**Child Marriage:** As the upper age of marriage was 14, we can easily fathom that they were not adults when they were married off the first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century the situation was even worse as women were married off before they reach puberty. They were sometimes married off at the age of even five, six or seven.

**Education:** In the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century we see that with enlightenment and establishment of girls' schools. For the attempts of social reformers like Ram Mohan, Vidyasagar, Debendranath Tagore, Keshab Chandra Sen a change had taken place. Sati was abolished by William Bentinck in 1829 and Widow Marriage Act was passed by in the year 1856. As the social reformers campaigned rigorously some women were taught at home by husbands, fathers and some started to go to school. These women with limited education had the taste of knowledge. They learnt with keen interest and had the great interest in education as it opened the doorway to a greater world to them. The men at this time wanted women to get education because they wanted true companion and partner. Some men had already travelled to England for education and after returning they could understand the gulf that existed between the life of British women and Indian women. These men wanted to marry women of letters. Even if they married unlettered women, they secretly taught them to read, write and become a true companion. They wanted to have the understanding of their intellectual activities. These men with English education were the new clan with 'Bhadra Lok' tag in Bengal. They came forward for female education. They realized that society cannot progress if women remained uneducated, a family cannot prosper if its women remained neglected. By the turn of the century many women were receiving formal education and certainly a change came over in society.

But this change soon created a kind of disturbance in the family and society. While men had wanted women to be educated, most of them wanted them to remain within limit as set or given by the men in society. Whenever women wanted to stretch their wings, they cut them off. Mrinal's husband wondered why Mrinal took pain to study in the afternoons instead of giving her beautiful body rest. He questioned why spent her time on reading after all she was not going to become famous like the men.

**Room of One's Own:** '*Amar ghar to ar amar nay*' when Bindu was kept by Mrinal in her room Bindu had rashes on her body, everyone opposed the idea as everyone thought she was suffering from 'small pox' and should be sent to hospital immediately. But Mrinal objected to it and fortunately all rashes vanished immediately. Virginia Woolf's '*A Room of One's Own*' appeared in 1929 and Rabindranath makes Mrinal talk about the reality of women's life in 1914.

