



Traces of Force Marriage: A Feminist Critique of Rabindranath Tagore's Short Stories Subha and the Wife's Letter

Muhammad Ramzan^{1,*}, Kashif Ahmad², Noor Muhammad³

^{1,3}Researcher, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Pakistan

²Lecturer, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Pakistan

*Corresponding Author: ramzan.khan21333@gmail.com

Received: 14 Sep 2025; Received in revised form: 11 Oct 2025; Accepted: 15 Oct 2025; Available online: 23 Oct 2025

©2025 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— This research examines the theme of forced marriage in Rabindranath Tagore's short stories Subha and The Wife's Letter through the lens of feminist literary criticism. The study explores how Tagore portrays the emotional and psychological trauma inflicted upon women in forced marital unions, highlighting the patriarchal structures that perpetuate these injustices. Subha illustrates the silencing of women through its mute protagonist, whose lack of agency symbolizes the broader suppression of female voices in society. In contrast, The Wife's Letter presents a more direct challenge to patriarchal norms, as Mrinal, the protagonist, reclaims her autonomy by rejecting an oppressive marriage. This analysis employs feminist theory, particularly the works of Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millett, to critique the societal norms that enforce forced marriages and deny women agency. The study argues that while Tagore exposes the dehumanization of women within patriarchal systems, he also underscores the transformative potential of female resistance. By situating Tagore's works within contemporary feminist discourse, this research highlights their enduring relevance in discussions on gender inequality and women's rights. The findings advocate for social reforms that prioritize women's consent and autonomy in marital relationships.

Keywords— Rabindranath Tagore, forced marriage, feminist literary criticism, gender roles, emotional trauma, patriarchal oppression, women's autonomy, South Asian literature.



I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Long perceived as the bastion of societal and family tradition, marriage in its form of social institution does reflect a deep significance in cultural history. But among all the things that make such an institution powerful, the trend and practice of marrying without consent—one or both have been married compulsively in many societies—been one with significant ethical as well as feminist debate. Marriage and patriarchal. These societal constructs have not only undermined women's rights but have also subjected them to emotional, psychological, and physical trauma.

Feminists condemn the idea of forced marriage due to its violations of human rights and its portrayal of women as inferior beings in patriarchal societies. Theories of feminist writers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millett discuss how marriage, if not by choice, becomes an oppressive entity. Forced marriages are also shown in literature as a way to express the hardships that women face in patriarchal society. Rabindranath Tagore, a pioneer of modern Bengali literature, vividly portrays these struggles in his works Molnár (2021),

Tagore's short stories, Subha and The Wife's Letter, present powerful insights into the subject of forced marriage and its implications. The two stories tell about women's voice suppression, loss of identity, and emotional

disturbances; hence, these are the perfect texts for feminist criticism. Though the issues under discussion are cross-cultural, the relevance of Tagore's stories to modern discourses on gender equity is extremely deep. The study intends to critically examine the theme of forced marriage as presented in the works of Tagore from the point of view of a feminist for further deliberation on its impacts on women's lives Pridmore and Walter (2013).

1.2 Problem Statement

This tradition allows no right for women to exercise control over life decisions. Instead, it gives in to submissiveness so as to treat the female as goods rather than humans with free will. Even as the world's trend is moving on to achieve and promote gender equality, forced marriages are still within the societal system of many, as it deals directly with cultural and familial obligations. This societal structure confines women within emotionally abusive relationships, stripping off from them freedom, dignity, and agency.

In literature, forced marriages are a large theme that also reveals the present gender inequalities among people. In Rabindranath Tagore's short stories such as *Subha* and *The Wife's Letter*, there are colorful accounts of forced marriages and their ramifications on the sufferers. These short stories explain how emotional sufferings are experienced among the womenfolk who are forced into marriages. All characters of the novels depicted reflect how society restrained and restricted the ladies back during the lifetime of Tagore; yet a scene very well described from their era exists throughout many regions in today's world as well Gill and Anitha (2011).

This thesis recognizes the need to deconstruct forced marriage through a feminist lens in Tagore's short stories. In this study, the way conjugal relationships are portrayed in *Subha* and *The Wife's Letter* will be analyzed to criticize the lack of consent in marriage and its emotional toll on women. The paper also touches upon the broader implications of forced marriage on gender equality, challenging the patriarchal structures that sustain this practice. Understanding these dynamics is key to evoking a lobby on the autonomy and consent cardinal to martial relationships.

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

- 1) How does conjugal relationship based on force rather than consent is explored in Tagore's selected short stories?
- 2) How does force marriage leads to emotional trauma and what are its impacts on the women character's in Tagore's selected short stories?

Research Objectives:

- 1) Analyzing conjugal relationship and understanding the importance of consent in marriage in selected short stories.
- 2) Exploring the mental repercussions resulted from forced marriage in the selected stories of Tagore.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study bears importance relevance to the incessant issue of forced marriage, especially as portrayed in literature. Rabindranath Tagore's *Subha* and *The Wife's Letter* provide profound and interesting insights into how forced marriage deters the exercise of women's freedom and emotional state. The conducting of a feminist critique of these short stories as contributions lends information toward understanding an interlock between literature, gender dynamics, and social justice issues.

The research is academically, culturally, and socially significant because it contributes to feminist literary critique on the issues of forced marriages using Tagore's works that are yet to be well explored. The study sheds deeper light into how Tagore employed his writing platform in challenging patriarchal traditions, creating space for scholarly discussion of gender inequalities within historical and contemporary settings Molnár (2021),

Culturally, this study bridges the gap between Tagore's early 20th-century narratives and current gender issues within modern societies. Despite the fact that forced marriages are rampant in various cultures, just as in Tagore's days, there is still much to be learned from the stories by understanding the cultural mores and traditions driving a culture to hold women down.

Socially, it seeks to raise the need for consent and autonomy in marriage away from the patriarchal systems that perpetuate marriages without, in fact, forcing them. It attempts to bring about more emotional insights into the female personalities' experiences and toward the discussion on gender parity and the right to choose self-will. It is a call to society to rethink some of the oppressions that would have them derelict in these, in life Millett (2016),

Ultimately, this study's importance is in its potential to raise discussion on women's rights and to make known the long-lasting effects of forced marriage and the contributions toward efforts toward gender equity across the world.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Feminist Literary Criticism

2.1.1 Evolution of Feminist Theory

The concern of feminist literary criticism is the exclusion of women's voices and experiences within the mainstream studies of traditional literature. Situated in the backdrop of political movements aimed at achieving gender equality, the first wave of feminism in late 19th and early 20th centuries was concerned with topics like legal practice\specifically women's rights to vote and property. But it was feminist ideology in its second wave- in the 1960s and 1970s-culture critique when feminist scholars argue that women should play a better role in literature in this context where it is understood that literature not only portrays women to be passive dependent and inferior and at the hands of patriarchies Kakar (2020),

The third wave, coming up during the 1990s, incorporated intersectionality-the term conceptualized by Kimberli Crenshaw- which was defined as acknowledging how race, class, and gender all "intersect" in a "constellation" to shape the lives of women. This cultural turn within feminist scholarship was more keenly alerting people toward diverse voices-from diverse cultural, social, historical contexts, though still largely dominated by the minor voice of woman. By the 21st century, feminist criticism evolved into a rich multidisciplinary field of study of various theoretical approaches to psychoanalytic feminism, Marxist feminism, and others. These theories analyze not only the representation of women in literature but also the structures of power and oppression embedded within a literary text.

In the light of feminist literary criticism, it is possible to study Rabindranath Tagore's works to reflect the gendered dynamics and systemic inequalities as seen in his stories. Analyzing this case of forced marriage and its effects with the theoretical approach will, therefore, point out Tagore's criticism of patriarchal values and the forward portrayal of women's struggles for independence Safdar et al. (2022),

2.1.2 Feminist Perspectives on Marriage and Consent

Marriage is perhaps the most prominent target of feminist criticism because, in many cases, it encapsulates the institutionalization of patriarchy. Feminist scholars argue that the old conception of marriage has been used through history to subordinate women, deprive them of autonomy, and disempower them; Simone de Beauvoir's work, *The Second Sex* (1949), sums it all when she claims that, with patriarchal concepts of marriage, women are reduced to "other," and become property by the patriarchal construct of society. Secondly, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970)

also critiques marriage as a political institution to support the male domination and female submission.

It is upon this point that feminist scholars argue that consent must be free, informed, and continuing. Lack of consent means that the marriage practice turns to its forceful terms that perpetually enforce gender-based oppression. Since feminist theorists have argued on psychological, emotional, as well as physical impacts of non-consenting marriages, there is a grand cause for social change so that equality and autonomy are achieved in marital relationships Quek (2018).

Tagore's short stories, *Subha* and *The Wife's Letter*, are imbued with these feminist concerns. The inability of the protagonist in *Subha* to voice her dissent underscores the fact that consent was not given in marriage practices. In like manner, *The Wife's Letter* interrogates the very normative traditions that allow duty to win over choice and which later depicts the psychological toll of such forced unions. From these two stories, Tagore assaults the oppressive forms of marriage and calls for an acknowledgment of the agency of relationships Quek (2020).

2.1.3 Applicability of Feminist Theory to Tagore's Works

Rabindranath Tagore's works have long been appreciated for their progressive gender and societal views. Women are depicted in such a manner that it goes against the patriarchal norms that were prevalent during early 20th-century India. Feminist theory is helpful in analyzing the critique of gender inequality that Tagore provides and his exploration of women's struggles for self-determination.

Here, Tagore is portraying the heroine's forced marriage as a representation of society's attitude toward a woman's wish and choice. There is a very silent tale that speaks of the psychological and emotional consequences of this woman being used as a tool in the marital institution. Through this method of feminist analysis, subordinations built into the story become deconstructed, especially on how patriarchy reduces a woman from human to mere commodity.

This includes *The Wife's Letter*, further evidence of the engagement of Tagore with feminist themes. Here, the wife's decision to leave her husband and assert independence challenges the role of women within marriage as depicted by society. Tagore aligns with feminist calls for redefining marriage as a partnership based on mutual respect and consent by foregrounding her emotional turmoil and quest for agency.

Through the feminist's critical perspective, Tagore's works stand tall as a profound commentary on women's systemic

oppression. Critiquing not only patriarchal practices but imagining a better social order, the works are undeniably very important to the discussion of contemporary feminists.

2.2 Patriarchy and Marriage

2.2.1 Patriarchy as a System of Oppression

Patriarchy is a sociopolitical system, which has been recognized as the chief perpetuator of gender-based oppression. Sylvia Walby (1990) defined patriarchy as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women." This system runs through areas of the family, economy, culture, and state that facilitate male privilege at the expense of subordinating females.

In the framework of marriage, patriarchal society appears as an institution that forces male supremacy and deprivation of freedom for women. Traditional marital norms usually disregard the female partner's interests and make them a servant or a dependent of men. Systemic oppression culminates from cultural activities, laws, and social perceptions that emphasize the concept of male superiority Beauvoir (1952), Butler (1990).

Tagore's stories describe the patriarchal institution of marriage as a means of oppression. In *Subha*, for instance, the marriage of the protagonist is forced and serves to highlight the patriarchal forces that value familial and societal expectations above all else. Again, *The Wife's Letter* expresses disapproval over the emotional and psychological control the patriarchal husband imposes on the woman, which has proven destructive to women's well-being Akram (2024),

2.2.2 Forced Marriage as a Patriarchal Practice

Forced marriage results directly from the patriarchal mindset that considers a woman as a means of control and means of exchangeable property. It is argued that feminist scholars feel that such practices spring from the notion of women's principal role in servicing familial and social interests, often through the sacrifice of their own needs and desires for autonomy. In forced marriages, women are stripped of the prerogative of choosing their marriage partners, rendering them vulnerable to emotional torture and lifelong subjugation.

In Tagore's *Subha*, the forced marriage of the protagonist has brought out the dehumanizing effect of this practice. Her inability to speak both literally and figuratively represents the silencing of women's voices in patriarchal societies. Similarly, *The Wife's Letter* criticizes forced marriage through the struggle of the protagonist to regain her autonomy in an oppressive marital relationship.

Through such stories, Tagore brings out the injustice of a forced marriage, advocating a re-imagining of it as consensual and equitable. By analyzing these narratives from a feminist perspective, this research aims at systematizing the issue of forced marriages in regard to women's rights Ahmed et al. (2024),

2.2.3 Role of Social and Cultural Norms

The perpetuation of forced marriages is largely based on social and cultural norms. For example, many patriarchal societies have regarded marriage as the fulfillment of a family mandate rather than a personal decision. Women are forced to marry due to various reasons like protecting family honor, strengthening social relationships, or performing according to traditional expectations. These social norms not only exercise gender inequality but also make the violation of women's rights normal Beauvoir (1952), Butler (1990).

Tagore's works show that societal and cultural expectations oppress the life of women. *Subha*: A marriage for a woman is carried out just as the society needs, without ever giving a care about her sentiment and consent. In *The Wife's Letter*, it is demonstrated that the way cultural values made them a subject to sacrifice in order to please others.

By analyzing these narratives, this research will try to reveal how social and cultural norms perpetuate patriarchal practices and why society needs to change for women to gain autonomy and equality.

2.3 Forced Marriage in Literature

2.3.1 Global Representations of Forced Marriage

This literature review reveals the widespread issue of forced marriages across cultures as well as how it is founded on patriarchal systems and represented in literature. According to Nasution, Adly, & Nur Cahaya (2022), the persistence of this phenomenon is deeply connected with the cultural norms surrounding it, and McCabe & Eglin (2022) explained that it could be considered modern slavery. Akram (2024) and Janjua & Kamal (2024) examined the intersection of patriarchy and forced marriage in South Asia by connecting the practices to domestic violence and psychological trauma. Nevertheless, there is a significant gap in the exploration of forced marriage in Tagore's short stories from a feminist perspective. This study attempts to fill the gap by revealing how *Subha* and *The Wife's Letter* criticize patriarchal norms and promote women's autonomy.

2.3.2 Forced Marriage in South Asian Literature

South Asian literature often portrays instances of forced marriages as a comment on the collective consciousness and patriarchy. These themes are well exemplified through

Tagore's *Subha* and *The Wife's Letter*. In the former, silencing of feminine voices is vividly portrayed due to the enforcement of marriage, while *The Wife's Letter* is a scathing critique of emotionally draining nonconsensual unions. Other authors include Bapsi Sidhwa and Khaled Hosseini, who, through stories of family obligation and patriarchal suppression, have been able to provide varying perspectives on the cultural and emotional impact of such a practice Ahmad and Ahmad (2023).

2.3.3 Gaps in Existing Research

Although a plethora of works has been produced regarding forced marriages in literature, not much work has been devoted to Tagore's short stories on the subject. The conjunction of feminist literary criticism with the theme of forced marriage is underexplored in *Subha* and *The Wife's Letter*. Thus, this paper will fill that gap by demonstrating how Tagore's stories critique the patriarchal status quo and promote feminine autonomy, presenting new perspectives regarding the emotional and psychological effects of forced marriages Ferialia and Setiawan (2020).

2.4 Emotional Trauma and Psychological Repercussions

2.4.1 Impacts of Forced Marriage on Women

Forced marriage has deep emotional and psychological effects on women. Victims often suffer from feelings of isolation, helplessness, and depression. Long-term mental health issues, such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicidal ideation, have been associated with forced marriage. The effects are mainly derived from the loss of autonomy, exposure to domestic

violence, and societal stigma attached to non-consensual unions Ford et al. (2025).

Tagore's stories truly describe these affects. In *Subha*, the silent heroine is described, and this silence symbolizes the trauma that lies inside her heart, and in *The Wife's Letter*, the heroine, who abandons her husband, truly shows psychological suffering in forced marriage. Through these novels, this paper concludes that both literary world and real-time individual sufferings should be related to the emotional and psychological disturbances of forced marriages Ford et al. (2025),

2.4.2 Representation of Trauma in Literature

The inner struggles of characters are symbolized and negotiated through symbolic and narrative elements in literature as a condition of trauma. Silences characterize forced marriages, resistance and resilience are the overall elements, which define the act of forced marriage. Thus, in Tagore's *Subha*, muteness of the protagonist is metaphorically used as silencing the voices of women and in *The Wife's Letter*, the epistolary technique helps in conveying the shattering inner turmoil and identity of agency of the protagonist.

2.4.3 Gender and Mental Health

Any mental health outcome is heavily influenced by gender. The issue of being forced to marry entails psychological traumas in women, including the burdening of societal expectations and the trauma of non-consensual unions. Tagore illuminates these themes; he works with topics that highlight the intersection of gender and mental health in the context of patriarchal oppression.

Table 2.1: Summary of Key Findings and Literature Gap

| Author(s) | Focus | Key Findings |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| Nasution, Adly, & Nur Cahaya (2022) | Forced marriage in Indonesia | Cultural norms uphold forced marriage through traditional institutions like Namura Natomas. |
| McCabe & Eglin (2022) | Forced marriage as modern slavery | Examined cases of women sold and enslaved, highlighting forced marriage as a global issue. |
| Akram (2024) | Patriarchy and forced marriage | Explored non-consensual marriage and its emotional toll on women in patriarchal societies. |
| Janjua & Kamal (2024) | Child marriage in Pakistan | Highlighted cultural practices like Sawara and exchange marriages that perpetuate forced unions. |
| Kakar (2020) | Forced marriage as a power dynamic | Showed how forced marriage consolidates power and control, often at the expense of women's rights. |
| Pridmore & Walter (2013) | Psychological impact of forced marriage | Linked forced marriage to increased suicide rates among women due to emotional and psychological trauma. |

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adheres to a qualitative research design as it delves deep into the analysis of the short stories, *Subha* and *The Wife's Letter*, by Rabindranath Tagore. Qualitative research is more prominent in the study of literature because it entails an interpretive and contextual treatment of themes, characters, and narrative techniques. The qualitative design shall be guided by feminist literary criticism, which, therefore, sets the theoretical framework for considering the portrayal of forced marriage as well as emotional and psychological impact on women.

This study takes an exploratory research design in order to identify how Tagore critiques patriarchal norms and gives voice to the struggles of women for autonomy. The research seeks to uncover underlying messages about gender dynamics, power structures, and societal expectations from the textual elements of the selected short stories. The design is non-experimental in nature because it does not manipulate variables or test hypotheses. Instead, it depends on the textual analysis in the interpretation of the narratives to draw meaningful conclusions Feralia and Setiawan (2020).

This research design has the hallmark of reliance on secondary data sources such as scholarly articles, books, and other literary works that provide the contextual background to the findings in the wider discourse on feminist literary criticism and forced marriage. The interpretive nature of the design affords flexibility so that the researcher can change the analysis according to the themes and insights that are emerging from the texts Donnelly (2019).

Such a design will fit the demands to answer the research questions, where the theme of forced marriage in Tagore's works comes in with consequences for feminist discourse. A qualitative and interpretive approach seeks to contribute to the greater understanding of critique of patriarchy through such an advocate as Tagore for the rights of women.

3.2 Data Collection

This study primarily collects textual data from Rabindranath Tagore's short stories, namely *Subha* and *The Wife's Letter*. The two texts are considered primary sources, since they create the narrative that the analysis will focus on forced marriage and its emotional and psychological impact. Other sources of secondary data are scholarly articles, books, and research papers on feminist literary criticism and Tagore's works. These are consulted to support the analysis and provide a context for findings

within the wider literary and social discourse Butler (1990).

The primary data gathering is through the close reading of the selected short stories, analyzing the themes, motifs, and devices used in constructing the narratives regarding the experiences women face with their forced marriages. Key passages and lines of dialogue must be analyzed about the emotional/psychological states and the societal forces and cultural ways that support a patriarchal cause Janjua and Kamal (2024).

Using secondary data sourced from academic databases such as JSTOR, Project MUSE, Google Scholar, print and digital publications of feminist theory and South Asian literature, one will be able to adopt critical views that further enhance the depth and the rigor of the analysis. This review would include previous research about forced marriage, along with reviewing the feminist literary criticism to outline the gaps in literature and place this current study into the existing knowledge.

The data collection is systematic and iterative, allowing the study to refine continuously based on themes and patterns as they emerge, and integration of primary and secondary data provides an all-rounded look at the questions under research, and this can culminate in giving a better appreciation of Tagore's critique on forced marriage and what it does in feminist discourse.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework of this research is based on feminist literary criticism, which would be the lens of the study for examining selected short stories Jacobs (2022). It is appropriate to analyze forced marriages, gender dynamics, and patriarchal oppression in Tagore's works, applying feminist theory in the study for it will expose the ways Tagore critiques the social norms and calls for women's autonomy and agency.

It adopts a qualitative and interpretive analysis of the text elements in *Subha* and *The Wife's Letter*. Key elements of the framework include:

1. **Theme Analysis:** Identify and analyze the common themes in the chosen stories, like forced marriage, emotional trauma, and resistance against patriarchal norms. This is done by understanding how these themes develop in the narrative structure, character interaction, and symbolic elements.
2. **Character Analysis:** Discussing the role of female characters and their situations in a story about forced marriage. Emphasis is on the emotional and psychological conditions as well as how they react to social pressures and cultural expectations.

3. **Narrative Techniques:** Look at how literary devices like symbolism, imagery, and narration carry the themes and messages of these stories. Look closely at how stories told by Tagore reflect his critique of patriarchal practices.
4. **Contextual Analysis:** It situates narratives within their appropriate historical and cultural context to understand societal norms and values that inform the portrayal of forced marriage. The relevant secondary sources shall be drawn upon to provide an expanded view regarding themes and issues undertaken in these stories.

By integrating these analytical approaches, this framework makes it possible to carry out an all-inclusive and rich interpretation of the selected texts. The feminist perspective ensures that the entire analysis focuses on the gendered characteristics of the stories, thereby elucidating the systemic nature of patriarchal oppression and its implications for the lives of women.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

“A woman is not a person in herself, but a possession of the family.” (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 216)

4.1 Forced Marriage in Subha

“Meanwhile the parents, burdened with the duty of getting their daughter married, were becoming anxious. People were growing critical there was even a rumor that they would be socially ostracized” (Tagore, 2000, p.108). Tagore highlights the marriage of Subha is based on societal pressure and social expectations rather than her consent. Socially ostracizes depicts Societal pressure on parents to marry off their daughter. According to Beauvoir (1952) women are often treated as “the other” their identity and purpose are defined in relation to men and societal norms. This construction of women as “the other” leads women to subordination and oppression. Through the lens of Beauvoir forced marriage is the setting up of patriarchy through women censor their freedom and power in favor of societal expectation and patriarchal norms.

This burden and societal pressure leads Subha’s parents to arrange a fictitious or bogus marriage of her without her will. One day her parents dressed up Subha adorned her with jewelers and try to hide Subha’s natural grace. “[t]he groom came himself with a friend, to inspect the prospective bride” (Tagore, 2000, p. 109). Tagore highlights the objectification of women. According to Beauvoir (1952) in a male dominated society women consider as an object like inspection of Subha merely reducing her as a commodity rather an autonomous individual. “Subha’s parents anxious, worried, agitated...

lengthy inspection” (Tagore, 2000, p.109). They do not want to reveal the muteness of Subha which thwart Subha’s marriage.

A short story by Rabindranath Tagore, *Subha*, poignantly narrates the forced marriage of a young girl, Subha, whose inability to speak symbolizes the voicelessness of women in patriarchal societies. Her life is grounded in societal expectations and familial pressures because she was born mute, leading her to marry a man who doesn't understand or appreciate her. Critiquing this situation, he narrates his views on the institution of forced marriages that are bereft of their autonomy as performed purely out of patriarchal whims.

The story begins by portraying Subha as a meek and introverted character who takes refuge in nature and eventually forms a silent bond with her surroundings. However, her parents see her muteness as a burden when they don't want to fulfill their social obligations, and subsequently find a way to marry her off to get out of those obligations. The forced union of Subha reflects the dehumanizing results of treating women like merchandise, loved only for their usages. Her silent suffering underscores the emotional trauma put forth by a system that prioritizes honor, family, over individual well-being.

Tagore uses symbolism, such as Subha's relationship with nature, to describe her isolation and vulnerability. In contrast to her marital life's constraints, the imagery of the river and birds symbolizes a yearning for freedom and self-expression. This tragic tone for the story describes the devastating consequences of forced marriages on women's emotional and psychological well-being.

Table 4.1 key themes and impacts of forced marriage as depicted in Subha

| Aspect | Details |
|--------------------------|---|
| Protagonist | Subha, a mute young girl marginalized by her family and society. |
| Cause of Marriage | Familial pressure to marry her off due to her perceived lack of value. |
| Symbolism | Nature as a representation of Subha’s inner freedom and suppressed voice. |
| Emotional Impact | Isolation, loss of identity, and emotional trauma. |
| Critique | Highlights societal norms that prioritize family honor over women’s autonomy. |

4.2 Emotional trauma:

“Mother, don’t let me go” Tagore, 2000, p. 109). Subha is not agreeing for this marriage and pleading to her parents

but no one hear her and decide to married her without her consent.

After Subha forced marriage she is weeping of parting from her parents there her mother reprimands her "[h]er mother scolding her repeatedly lest the girl weeping leave her eyes swollen and spoil her looks, but the tear not heed her scolding". Tagore, 2000, p. 109). Tagore highlights the emotional distress cause by forced marriage in her mother anxious about her physical appearance rather than her emotion that affect her marriage. When the groom family knows that the Subha was dumb but did not realize that this was not her fault. She had not deceived anyone. She resists for this marriage but no one hear her and by force her parents arranged a factitious marriage and later Subha was victim of this marriage when her husband leave her and did another marriage for himself.

4.3 Forced Marriage in The Wife's Letter

"When a distant uncle of yours came with your friend Nirad to our house to inspect the prospective bride, I was twelve years old" (Tagore, 2000, p.205). Tagore depicts a forced marriage scenario in which a 12-year-old girl is examined as a "prospective bride." According to de Beauvoir (1952) this behavior is acting with patriarchal norms that view women as commodities to be traded rather than free agents. "[n]or need you search for a bride ... it was priced at whatever the buyer offered" (Tagore, 2000, p.207). This statement clearly depicts marriage as a business deal that treats women like commodities. According to Lerner (1986) that patriarchal societies use customs and tradition such as forced marriage to institutionalize the subjugation of women. The text that was mentioned support this idea "Priced at whatever the buyer offered" suggests that marriage is a market in which women are traded as goods and commodities rather than free individual. The bride's lack of autonomy in choosing her partner serves as an example of how patriarchal systems deprive women of agency over their own bodies and destinies.

4.4 Emotional trauma

The protagonist Mrinal face deep emotional trauma after her forced marriage she lost her identity and autonomy, neglect and loneliness, oppression and psychological abuse, empathy and additional trauma.

1) Loss of identity and autonomy:

In male dominated society when Mrinal married without her consent she lost her identity and autonomy. "[y]ou and your family never liked, never even recognized, whatever in me exceeded the second daughter in law of your house household. In fifteen year you discovered that I am a poet" (Tagore, 2000, p.207-8). These lines depicts the Mrinal

life after her marriage According to Beauvoir, women in patriarchal cultures are denied individual identity and are viewed as the "Other," existing solely in relation to males.

Because forced marriage deprives women of their autonomy, unacknowledged is Mrinal's identity as a poet and her creative self, demonstrating how patriarchal marriage stifles women's creative and intellectual potential.

2) Neglect and loneliness:

"The whole sky wept to the strains of flute-music as I entered your house" (Tagore, 2000, p.207).

Tagore depicts that when Mrinal enter her husband house she feel deep loneliness and melancholy. Marriage is a joyous union but Mrinal feel internal experience of isolation and neglect because of her forced marriage. "[w]hen self-respect dwindles, neglect does not seem unjust; for this reason, it causes no suffering" (Tagore, 2000, p.208). Mrinal state that when women must suffer keep them in as neglect in forced marriage,

Women are often subjected to emotional trauma, force and lack of agency, which can result in diminished self-respect and neglect. Beauvoir (1952) argues that when emotional trauma causes self respect to decline, neglect is seen as justified, making suffering seem acceptable.

3) Oppression and psychological abuse:

"Your family have abused me daily as an over clever female" (Tagore, 2000, p.208). Tagore depicts the situation of women in a patriarchal society where women are abused because of their cleverness. So Mrinal write to her husband that I always suffered at the hands of your family because of over clever. According to Hooks (1981) misogyny leads man to violence and abuse against women. "[w]hatever the condition in which you kept me, it never occurred to me that there was any suffering involved" (Tagore, 2000, p.208). Tagore depicts the oppression of Mrinal; she states that life had no true meaning for me I have no fear of death because who have experience love and care have fear of death it show the oppression and condition of Mrinal in which she kept by her husband and his family.

4) Empathy and additional trauma:

Mrinal empathy for Bindu faces her with more emotional trauma like. "[m]y heart burst with pity for Bindu, but I could not contain my shame for you" (Tagore, 2000, p.215). Tagore explore emotional trauma of Mrinal after her forced marriage which she face for Bindu, Bindu is a victim of forced marriage and she raise voice for her but her husband family does not accept her and at the end she leave her husband house and said. "[b]ut I will never again return to your house at number 27, Makhan Baral Lane. I

have seen Bindu. I have learnt what it means to be a woman in this domestic world. I need no more of it.

In *The Wife's Letter* (Streer Patra), Tagore portrays a very strong condemnation of forced marriage by the epistolary narrative of Mrinal, who defies all societal norms to regain her lost freedom. While Subha loses her voice to her oppressors, Mrinal writes a letter that questions the dominant oppressive norms controlling her life and her marriage. It explores the psychological and emotional burden of being married against one's will, underlining the issues of consent and self-determination.

Mrinal, educated and eloquent, was married into a family that could hardly stand individualism. The husband and his parents consider her subordinate; they bound her with stringent expectations and refused her individual freedom. At this point in the story, the pivotal character, Mrinal, makes a new friend-Bindu-a young girl whom a forced marriage has condemned to tragic death. The fate of Bindu leads to the awakening of Mrinal, compelling her to discard the patriarchal values that sustain this injustice.

Tagore portrays Mrinal as strong and replete with introspection to stand apart from the literal and clichéd portrayal of passive women victimized against their will. In her letter, Mrinal claims her right to freedom and refuses to act as a bystander in the prevailing system that dehumanizes women. Her leaving her husband's house symbolizes defiance of societal norms and self-liberation.

Table 4.2 key themes and impacts of forced marriage as depicted in *The Wife's Letter*

| Aspect | Details |
|--------------------------|---|
| Protagonist | Mrinal, an educated woman who resists patriarchal oppression. |
| Cause of Marriage | Social expectations and familial arrangements devoid of consent. |
| Catalyst | Bindu's tragic fate highlights the consequences of forced marriage. |
| Emotional Impact | Loss of identity, emotional repression, and eventual empowerment. |
| Critique | Challenges patriarchal norms and advocates for women's autonomy. |

4.5 Emotional Trauma and Gender Roles

Forged marriages, as seen in Tagore's *Subha* and *The Wife's Letter*, cause deep emotional scarring in women, reinforcing patriarchal gender roles. Both stories demonstrate how patriarchal norms devalue women, forcing them into lives of emotional repression and social marginalization. The characters of Subha and Mrinal are a reflection of the psychological damage of forced unions,

highlighting the interplay between gender, power, and emotional well-being Tagore (2000),

In *Subha*, the silencing of the women's voices is represented through the protagonist's muteness, while her forced marriage exacerbates her isolation and deprivations of meaningful connections and a sense of identity. Her emotional trauma is reflected in her withdrawal from the world as she experiences the dehumanizing effects of treating women as commodities.

On the other hand, Mrinal's account in *The Wife's Letter* represents the emotional victimization of forced marriage through a bolder perspective. Her repressed and lost experiences are doubled by the sad fate of Bindu, where her death illustrates the deadly aftermath of depriving women of control. Mrinal's final act of resistance against the patriarchal order shows a refusal of the emotional and psychological burdens enforced on women.

Table 4.3 Emotional trauma and gender roles as portrayed in the two stories

| Aspect | Subha | The Wife's Letter |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Protagonist | Subha, a mute girl silenced by society. | Mrinal, an educated woman asserting agency. |
| Emotional Impact | Isolation, loss of identity, and despair. | Repression, grief, and eventual empowerment. |
| Representation | Silencing of women's voices. | Assertion of women's autonomy. |
| Critique | Dehumanization through forced marriage. | Rejection of patriarchal oppression. |

4.4 A Feminist Critique of Consent and Autonomy

Consent and autonomy therefore are central tenets of much feminist critique, and the absence thereof in forced marriage is starkly set out in two of Tagore's works: *Subha* and *The Wife's Letter*. Both stories indicate how patriarchal societies give value to family prestige and social respect over women's rights, letting them become mere passive partners in their very own lives.

In *Subha*, the protagonist's consent is denied when her parents get her married against her silence. This silence has become a metaphor for societal silencing of women in the name of respectability. The same is a reflection of broader societal critique; denial of agency to women is discussed here.

This contrasts the dignity and receptiveness born out of the right of consent with the hurt that denies this right, specifically in emotions and psychology matters.

In *The Wife's Letter*, the story of Mrinal shifts the focus of the plot towards autonomy wherein she tries to retrieve herself from her oppressive marital relationship. Leaving her husband is a valiant attempt at self-determination that would challenge a woman's commitment to sacrifice all for her man. The author, through this plot of Mrinal on her way from repression to emancipation, has effectively voiced a critique against patriarchal values that infringe on women's autonomy.

Table 4.4 Compares the portrayal of consent and autonomy in the two stories

| Aspect | Subha | The Wife's Letter |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Consent | Absent; marriage arranged by parents. | Absent; societal expectations dominate. |
| Autonomy | Denied; Subha has no agency in her life. | Asserted; Mrinal reclaims her identity. |
| Critique | Highlights the harm of silencing women. | Advocates for women's self-determination. |
| Resolution | Tragic; Subha's silence persists. | Liberating; Mrinal chooses freedom. |

4.5 Comparison of the Two Stories

Tagore's *Subha* and *The Wife's Letter* are complementary in the way the themes of forced marriages, emotional shock, and womanly roles surface. Both appear to be anti-patriarchal in nature, and yet they go differently in presenting women's free will and culmination. Together, they provide a nuanced exploration of what systemic oppression makes women face.

While silence in *Subha* epitomizes the silencing of women in general, and to that extent is an affirmation of it against the compulsion of forced marriages, the tragic ending highlights how patriarchal domination has taken a grip such that it barely leaves space for resistance or even hope. On the other hand, *The Wife's Letter* is a stronger story of rebelling against society by Mrinal as a powerful statement of freedom. The story ends with the empowerment of the theme that questions traditional views of women and advocates self-liberation.

Table 4.5: Main similarities and differences between the two stories

| Aspect | Subha | The Wife's Letter |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| Theme | Forced marriage and silencing of women. | Forced marriage and assertion of autonomy. |
| Protagonist | Subha, a mute and passive character. | Mrinal, an articulate and assertive woman. |
| Narrative Tone | Tragic and reflective. | Empowering and rebellious. |
| Resolution | Subha remains silenced and oppressed. | Mrinal reclaims her freedom and identity. |

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

It approached the subject of forced marriage through the feminist lens of Rabindranath Tagore's short stories *Subha* and *The Wife's Letter*. The critical analysis suggests that these stories offer patriarchal criticism in which the heroine, left without her self-will, undergoes emotional and psychological torture. *Subha* depicts the enforced marriages when the society silences the women. She makes the silent character's silence systemic suppression of her voice. In this context, it has a tragic storyline as it narrates how the women are dehumanized by forced unions Pridmore and Walter (2013).

On the contrary, *The Wife's Letter* is a more aggressive narrative, where Mrinal's decision to leave her husband makes it a bold rejection of patriarchal oppression. Her letter calls for a reconsideration of women's roles in marital relationships and speaks for consent and self-determination. The research also shows how Tagore employed literary devices like symbolism and epistolary narration to criticize social norms and strengthen the voices of women.

The two stories together emphasize how the force of marriage dominates women's lives from estrangement to loss of self-control. It highlights the claims of self-esteem and freedom as basic rights, thus making the challenge of changing values in the society to place dignity and freedom of women first.

5.2 Implications for Literature and Society

The findings of this study will be of immense interest to literature, as well as society at large. This implies that the literary critiques, of scope, while keeping the core of feminism can actually add to the understanding through

novel insights to the critique against patriarchy, a vital characteristic as presented in Tagore. Accordingly, there adds flavor to the discourse concerned with the dynamics between the genders, hence women's representation within South Asian literatures through exploring forced marriages, as well.

In regard to the modern issue of social inequalities and female rights, in reference to Rabindranath Tagore's writing, the above analysis throws adequate light on a great social question like forced marriage is still dominant around the globe because cultural or societal practices are that powerful by which people start to follow the traditional way and abandon individualistic freedom. The emotional and psychological trauma the woman faces in forced unions, presented in the stories of Tagore, suggests that societal reforms are needed for equality and justice Villacampa 2020.

Tagore's stories also serve as a call to action against oppressive practices and towards women's empowerment. By giving women, a voice and focusing on their agency, his works inspire readers to challenge patriarchal systems and build a more just society. Findings of the study underscore the transformative potential of literature as a medium for social critique and change.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies might further elaborate the topic of the forced marriage and its place in literary social and cultural complexities. For instance, a comparative study between Tagore's work and other works of South Asian writers such as Bapsi Sidhwa or Khaled Hosseini would shed light on the representation of the practice of forced marriage and gender forces in varied cultural contexts Akram (2024).

Another line of research is the reception of Tagore's feminist themes in the contemporary world. One can look into how contemporary readers understand his critique of forced marriage and whether his works influence the current debates on gender equality and women's rights.

Possibly "interdisciplinary analyses based on literary studies that integrate sociological or psychological perspectives may be necessary to fully understand how forced marriage affects the emotional and psychological lives of individuals. It may also consider ways in which education and legal reforms could correct systemic issues revealed through the Tagore narratives identified by Nasution et al. (2022)."

Lastly, translation of feminist writings of Tagore for the readers across the world with a focus on its applicability to contemporary discussions regarding human rights and social justice will definitely be dedicated in the future.

Researchers will continue to read Tagore's works as a part of ongoing discussions regarding gender equality and how transformative literature can be.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ahmad, Z. & Ahmad, A., 2023. Socio-Cultural and Economic Consequences of Forced Marriages: A Case Study of District Swabi Tehsil Razzar. *CARC Research in Social Sciences*, 2(1), pp.12-17.
- [2] Ahmed, N., Fedosov, A. & Huang, E.M., 2024, October. 'Women just have to accept it when the man wants it': An Investigation of the Practice of Forced Marriage and the Potential for Design Interventions. In *Proceedings of the 13th Nordic Conference on Human-Computer Interaction* (pp. 1-14).
- [3] Akram, A., 2024. Patriarchy, Gender-based Violence and Construction of Womanhood: A Feminist-Psychoanalytical Study of Elif Shafaq's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World*. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 44(2), pp.377-386.
- [4] Beauvoir, S.D., 1952. *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books.
- [5] Butler, J., 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.
- [6] Donnelly, P.G., 2019. *Wedded to Warfare: Forced Marriage in Rebel Groups*. Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy (Tufts University).
- [7] Efrilia, E. & Setiawan, D.B., 2020. Khaled Hosseini's World View on Afghanistan Society Depicted in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. *Linguistics and Literature Journal*, 1(2), pp.34-39.
- [8] Ford, J.V., Shah, A., Reiss, F. & Hirsch, J.S., 2025. Missing pieces: A critical review of research on forced marriage and a call for family scientists to study forced marriage. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*.
- [9] Gill, A.K. & Anitha, S., 2011. Introduction: Framing forced marriage as a form of violence against women. *Forced Marriage: Introducing a Social Justice and Human Rights Perspective*, pp.1-22.
- [10] Honkala, N., 2022. "An Unhappy Interlude": Trivialisation and Privatisation of Forced Marriage in Asylum-Seeker Women's Cases in the UK. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 41(3), pp.472-497.
- [11] Jacobs, R.P., 2022. Married by the revolution: Forced marriage as a strategy of control in Khmer Rouge Cambodia. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 24(3), pp.357-379.
- [12] Janjua, M.M. & Kamal, A., 2024. Understanding the Role of Patriarchy in Perpetuating Child Marriages in Pakistan: A Qualitative Exploration. *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, 5(4), pp.117-131.
- [13] Kakar, S., 2020. Child/forced/servile marriages \rightleftharpoons Human trafficking. In *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*, pp.503-519.
- [14] McCabe, H. & Eglen, L., 2022. "I Bought You. You Are My Wife": "Modern Slavery" and Forced Marriage. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, pp.1-24.

- [15] Millett, K., 2016. *Sexual Politics*. Columbia University Press.
- [16] Molnár, S., 2021. The Fundamental Right of Marriage in the Constitutions of European Countries. *Central European Journal of Comparative Law*, 2(2), pp.181-196.
- [17] Nasution, M.I., Adly, M.A. & Nurcahaya, N., 2022. The Role of the Namora Natoras Mandailing Traditional Institutions in Forced Marriage in Affairs Cases. *Jurnal Mahkamah: Kajian Ilmu Hukum dan Hukum Islam*, 7(1), pp.43-54.
- [18] Pridmore, S. & Walter, G., 2013. Suicide and Forced Marriage. *The Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences: MJMS*, 20(2), pp.47.
- [19] Quek, K., 2018. *Marriage Trafficking: Women in Forced Wedlock*. Routledge.
- [20] Safdar, A., Abbas, S. & ul Zafar, N., 2022. Tracing the Voices of the Oppressed: A Reading of Bapsi Sidhwa's Novel *The Pakistani Bride*. *Journal of Social Sciences Advancement*, 3(3), pp.186-192.
- [21] Tagore, R., 2000. *Selected Short Stories* (S. Chaudhuri, Ed.). Oxford University Press.
- [22] Villacampa, C., 2020. Forced Marriage as a Lived Experience: Victims' Voices. *International Review of Victimology*, 26(3), pp.344-367
- [23] Beauvoir, S. de. (1949). *The Second Sex*. Translated by H. M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Books.
- [24] Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- [25] Chodorow, N. (1989). *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- [26] Goldman, E. (1917). *Anarchism and Other Essays*. New York: Mother Earth Publishing.
- [27] Millett, K. (1970). *Sexual Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- [28] Mernissi, F. (1991). *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- [29] Ahmed, L. (2014). *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- [30] Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- [31] Pateman, C. (1988). *The Sexual Contract*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- [32] King, M. L. Jr. (1963). *Letter from Birmingham Jail*. Birmingham, AL: American Friends Service Committee.
- [33] Crenshaw, K. (1991). *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color*. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.
- [34] Amnesty International. (2015). *Choice and Consent: Forced Marriage in the Human Rights Framework*. London: Amnesty International Publications.
- [35] Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [36] Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (1948). United Nations General Assembly.
- [37] Seligman, M. E. P. (1975). *Helplessness: On Depression, Development, and Death*. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman.
- [38] Ulrich, L. T. (1976). *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History*. Harvard University Press.
- [39] Spivak, G. C. (1988). *Can the Subaltern Speak?* In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (pp. 271–313). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- [40] hooks, b. (1984). *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press..