

GRIPPING DEATH - A PSYCHE OVERBURDENED

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ABSTRACT

Rabindranath Tagore was a leading proponent of the Bengal Renaissance has also imprinted his expertise in the stream of literature. Tagore has delved into the nuances of the female psyche and his female characters serve as a perfect testimonial in the genre of short stories. Kadambini and Kusum are two such typical characters from the story "Lining or Dead" and "The Ghat Story", which are analysed. Through these stories the article proves that when the mind is overburdened it grips death as a best choice. Moreover, Rabindranath Tagore portrays the effectiveness of death to be better than life in a domineering patriarchy.

Keywords: *nuances of female experiences; indomitability of death; Cortard's Syndrome; leitmotiv; morbidity; ecological elements; moroseness.*

In the timeline of Indian art, music and Bengali literature if any exemplary has played a pivotal role, it could be none other than Rabindranath Tagore, and he was a Bengali polymath of expertise in the field of Arts and Science. Being a leading proponent of the Bengal Renaissance, his contribution towards the field of art and literature catapulted the social awareness and reforms. His act of renouncing the honor of Knighthood due to the massacre in Jallianwala Bagh, is a testimonial which is an inclination he exhibited towards the social cause.

Rabindranath Tagore's legacy of literature, paintings, sketches, doodles and songs are still an edifice in the Visva-Bharati University founded by him. Facts pertaining to his personal life reveal that Kadambari Devi, Rabindranath Tagore's sister-in-law had a strong influence on his writings. She served to be his best critic and the loss of Kadambari Devi, who committed suicide, had a devastating effect on the Tagore's life. Often his works are found to have a reflection of his time spent with Kadambari Devi. An excerpt from the official web site of the Nobel Prize bolsters this statement;

He maintained a warm friendship with, and a strong Platonic attachment to, the literature-loving wife, Kadambari, of his elder brother, Jyotirindranath. He dedicated some poems to her before his marriage, and several books afterward, some after her death.

These glimpses of reflection found in his work make his literature profound for his audience. It often makes the readers to ponder on the question that, how could Tagore traverse through the insights of the nuances of female experiences. However, it makes the reader relish every story for its diction that describes the theme, plot with an intertwined leitmotiv of nature complementing a fine chemistry with humankind. A similar thought in concurrence is being shared in a journal by Prof K.V. Dominic.

Scholars frequently praise Tagore's short stories for the deeply human quality of the characters and relationships.

Rabindranath Tagore pioneered the genre of short story, in Bengali writing at the age of thirteen. His collection of short stories from Galpaguchchha is an enumeration of eighty four short stories. The motifs, his cast of characters are a resonance of the aforementioned fact, forming the crux of his short stories. The ecological elements such as the rainy night which flooded the ground; the lonely grave yard; the noise of frogs and cricket and the fathomless well into which Kadambani plunges, are symbols of morbidity leading to death. These symbols are intelligently used by the author to surface the moroseness as a dominant theme. In addition to the symbols with a critical analysis of gender issues in this story, the author disports the predominance of patriarchy. The dependency of women on men is showcased with subtlety by the author.

While John Donne rhetorically mocks at the indomitability of death in his poem "Death Be Not Proud"; Rabindranath Tagore in his two short stories "Living or Dead" and "The Ghat's Story", portrays death to be the best choice. This article is an analysis into the hypothesis of two women characters in the stories, The women who play the protagonist of these stories relinquish life. It is done to prove existence and to win over the mind.

The story *Living or Dead?* is a depiction of a young widowed woman, Kadambani Devi who does not find kinship in her maternal house as well as in her matrimonial house. Frequent deaths of the maternal members and donning widowhood, at a young age have belittled her existence. However, the attachment developed to her nephew; an attachment which cannot evince reasons but pure love is all that Kadambini enjoys in her life.

Love cannot prove its claim by any document which society accepts, and does not wish to prove it; it merely worships with double passion its life's uncertain treasure. Thus all the widow's thwarted love went out to wards this little child.(chpt-1)

When Kadambani's life finds cherishment in the child's company, her life machine seizes to work for awhile until she is taken to the cremation ground. This incident plays a crucial role in Kadambani's life. After her heart resumes its function, Kadambini is perplexed of her existence. She is bemused to the extent that at times she believes that she is a wandering soul. Anupama Sarkar's review of *Living or Dead* exhibits a deliberation akin .

The pathos of Kadambini vacillating in the netherworld of living, while masquerading as a dead person was heart wrenching.

People around attested that she is alive by their casual conversation. Incidentally, the first to catch sight of her was a traveler. He came up, and said:

"Mother, you look a respectable woman. Wherever are you going, alone and in this guise?" Kadambini, unable to collect her thoughts, stared at him in silence. She could not think that she was still in touch with the world, that she looked like a respectable woman, that a traveller was asking her questions. (chp-3)

Though Kadambini knows that she is bonded with earth and living folks around her she doesn't return to her in-laws place, who believes that, she has demised. She knew that she would be feared for a bad omen, or a wandering spirit. Under the confusion about her existence Kadambini chooses to go to her best friend Jogmaya's place. Kadambini requests to accept her as servant and finds a short-term shelter with the conviction that she is a soul that has visited the home of Yama and cannot consider her to be living. Her conversations with her friend are found with the underlying tone of uncertainty, which made Yogamaya bewildered. Probably the behavior of Kadambini proves that Kadambini had eventually acquired a partial Cortard's Syndrome.

Cotard delusion is a rare mental illness in which the affected person holds the delusional belief that they are already dead, do not exist.

With an increasing horror, Yogamaya's husband sets out to find the whereabouts of Kadambini returning with news from Kadambini's matrimonial house stating that she is dead. When he discloses the same to Yogamaya, she loses her consciousness. With a turmoil created in the life of a friend, Kadambini feels dejected and returns to her marital house where she thinks that she could reclaim the love for her fostered child. Even there Kadambini is dreaded as a ghost and to prove her existence as a human to the patriarchy of the house, Kadambini injures herself to show that she bleeds and not stopping there, she drowns herself, let goes her life to ascertain that she is alive.

The *Ghat's Story* is yet another short story of Rabindranath Tagore that portrays how the protagonist had to perish to obey orders and to overcome her mind. The author introduces the story with an interesting narration done by the Ghat- a flight of steps leading to the river. The Ghat is personified and it is a monument which stands as testimony for lives of many women of that place.

The Ganga is receding from me a step each day; I am also growing older in step with her.(31)

The author even denotes that the ghat is so old to have witnessed many stories. The personification of this symbol becomes the delicacy of the story. As it is a very appropriate endeavor of the author, this interesting method of narration makes the audience feel that they are a visitor of the place at the ghat, to whom the ghat is recounting the life of people and other interesting events and facts. The same is affirmed by a published review

"The Ghat's Story" (Ghater Katha) written in November 1884 in which the broken steps of a landing stage speak of the peaceful lilt of life in rural Bengal shattered by emotional.

At the start of the story the ghat takes immense pride and pleasure to say that monuments like it and surroundings have many stories to tell than the people there.

If events were etched in stone, you could have read so many tales of old inscribed on my step; listen intently to the murmur of water and you can hear many forgotten stories of the long past.(30)

But it is the story what is told by Tagore through the voice of ghat. It is the story of Kusum, a young girl, who often visits the ghat ; who had spent most of her joyfull days with her friends at the ghat. Later, the ghat missed the presence of Kusum for a short period of time. Through the ghat's exclusive story of Kusum, the author helps the audience to harken the ineffable voice of the matriarchy. Similar to the previous story in this too, the protagonist resorts to death, to win her mind and to be in a way amenable.

The happy child like life of Kusum is sawed off with her marriage and after a short period she returns to her place for the ghat to narrate the remaining story. The ghat's woeful narration becomes very effective at this point of time depicting the forlorn life of Kusum.

Today, the sudden absence of that music made the evening murmur of the waters strangely sad for me; the breeze rustling up the mango grove seemed to raise a wail.

Kusum had been widowed.(33)

The narration of the mournful events, rework for a short span with the arrival of a sanyasi resembling Kusum's dead husband. At an instance Kusum's veil slips for a close observance of each other. Kusum's spiritual interaction with the sanyasi increases, making her look as fresh as a mayflower. After a short break Kusum reappears to disclose her amorous dream, where she has sanyasi as her companion. Howbeit, sanyasi expressed his denial by not reacting to her words. He enunciates that Kusum will never be able to meet him again as he was leaving the place and orders Kusum to abide to what he says.

'He has commanded me that I must forget him.' Uttering this, Kusum slowly stepped into the Ganga.(40)

Kusum chooses death for a futile life. A life; where she would not be able to calm her mind, if she were alive. The choice may be emotional but a right one in her case. Indeed both these stories of Rabindranath Tagore reinforces the choice of death by women who have it as an only option when the mind is overburdened with a dismal of existence; where Kadambari proves her aliveness through death and Kusum chooses death as she decides, through this way she will conform her master's wish and subdue her mind. As Monami Mukherjee posts the same stating that:

The author focuses on the difference between death as society sees it and death as a real point of departure from life. At times it becomes uncanny in the implication of dissolution of these boundaries not just externally but within the individual's psyche.

In both the stories life overburdens the quality of living and departure becomes the compulsive choice of the psyche by the characters - **Gripping Death.**

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