

# Reconsidering Gender Issues and Women's Psychological Dilemmas in the Short Stories of Rabindranath Tagore and Doris Lessing

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## ARTICLE INFO    ABSTRACT

The literary works of Rabindranath Tagore and Doris Lessing are known for their consistent portrayal of the subject of gender and the psychological quandary faced by women. Their short stories offer a glimpse into the struggles of women in patriarchal societies while bringing to light gender inequality and female oppression. The present research article employs content analysis of Tagore & Lessing's short stories "Haimanti," "Shasti," "To Room Nineteen," and "He," which shed light on the limitations imposed on women in 19's Bengal and 1960s London and the catastrophic outcomes of such limitations. These short stories feature marginalized individuals, especially women, who fight with societal norms, struggle with economic instability, face conflict, and isolation, or experience mental breakdowns because of their social status. Using Simone de Beauvoir's feminist literary theory and examining the relationship of the female protagonists with their binary opposites, the research article aims to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges women face in both Eastern and Western societies, where they are often entrusted to second sex. The analysis also assures to explore the theme of gender issues and women's mental distress in Tagore & Lessing's selected short stories, which are a treasure trove of insights into the struggles of women in male-dominated societies and offer an eye-opening, thought-provoking, valuable apprehension into the ongoing battle for gender equality. The ultimate goal of this research is to contribute constructively to the present discourse on gender issues and women's psychological trauma, raising awareness and facilitating positive change.

**Key Words:** Gender Issues, Psychological Dilemmas, Short Stories, Tagore, Lessing, Cross-cultural study

## INTRODUCTION:

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* fundamentally transformed feminist analysis by scrutinizing the institutional frameworks that sustain women's oppression. Her critical examination of the portrayal of women as the "Other," alongside the constraints enforced by patriarchal structures, establishes a powerful analytical lens for interrogating literary representations of femininity and women's inner turmoil at the crossroads of identity and expectation.

Rabindranath Tagore, a prominent figure in Bengali literature, is celebrated for his humanistic insights and observations of societal dynamics. Born in 1861 during Bengal's cultural renaissance, his work often explores the conflict between tradition and progressive ideals. In the short stories "Haimanti" and "Shasti," Tagore reviews the patriarchal system that views women as non-essential. Through the characters Haimanti and Chandara, the victims of a patriarchal society, he highlights the dehumanization present in society.

On the contrary, Doris Lessing, a Nobel Prize-winning author, is a key figure in 20th-century literature, particularly for her exploration of gender-related psychological and sociocultural themes. Born in Persia (now Iran) in 1919 and raised in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Lessing's work addresses colonialism and gender oppression. Her stories often feature women facing personal and societal challenges, as seen in "He" and "To Room Nineteen." The protagonists, Annie Blake and Susan, encapsulate the mental exhaustion of

oppressive marriages. Lessing reviews mid-20th-century Western cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequalities, emphasizing the negative impact of cultural expectations on women's self-perception.

Hence, Tagore and Lessing address themes of systemic injustice, gendered oppression, and psychological turmoil of the female protagonists through their short stories. Tagore's Haimanti and Chandara reflect the socio-economic realities of colonial Bengal, patriarchal society, and women's silence and resilience beneath societal chains, while Lessing's Susan and Annie Blake navigate a Western domestic environment marked by emotional constraints. This article analyzes Tagore's "Haimanti" and "Shasti" alongside Lessing's "To Room Nineteen" and "He," demonstrating how these narratives highlight the marginalization of women in traditional roles and reveal the universal nature of gendered oppression within their cultural and historical contexts.

#### **PROBLEM STATEMENT:**

The portrayal of women in literature often reflects societal norms and inequalities. Influential authors Rabindranath Tagore and Doris Lessing have individually explored women's lives and struggles, yet a comparative analysis connecting their contexts is lacking. Current literature typically addresses gender issues and psychological conflicts separately, focusing on either cultural backgrounds or feminist implications. However, by the use of Beauvoir's theory of the second sex, this research will compare how Tagore and Lessing depict women's psychological struggles in response to societal beliefs and personal desires, disclosing universal challenges that transcend time and geography. By examining their narrative strategies and sociocultural commentaries, this study aims to enhance the understanding of comparative literature and provide new insights into gender and psychology in literary studies.

#### **THE RATIONALE OF THE STUDY:**

Literature is a powerful medium for exploring societal constructs that shape human experiences, especially for marginalized groups like women. Rabindranath Tagore and Doris Lessing, despite their cultural differences, both exhibit a deep sensitivity to the complexities of women's lives, scrutinizing their emotional and psychological landscapes. This study analyzes their short stories to connect Eastern and Western literary traditions and address women's realities. It emphasizes how literature from various backgrounds highlights universal themes of gender inequality and resistance while reflecting unique local experiences. By challenging traditional distinctions between East and West, as well as past and present, this research underscores the interconnectedness of gender and psychology in literature.

This study provides a timely reassessment of four short stories through a contemporary lens, contributing to ongoing discussions about gender equality and mental health. Ultimately, it aims to enhance our understanding of how literature portrays women's challenges and serves as a catalyst for social awareness and change.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

**The research will address the following inquiries:**

- i) How do Rabindranath Tagore and Doris Lessing uniquely paint the societal beliefs and challenges that women encounter in their short stories?
- ii) What twisted psychological dilemmas emerge within the female characters of Tagore's and Lessing's narratives, and how do these dilemmas illuminate broader gender issues?
- iii) In what ways do the narrative techniques employed by Tagore and Lessing foster a deeper comparative understanding of gender and psychological conflicts in literature?

#### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:**

The primary aim of this study is to analyze the short stories of Tagore and Lessing, with a particular focus on the female characters' psychology and their binary opposites, as well as the gender issues present in the narratives. The study aims to achieve the following secondary objectives:

- i) Examine the powerful portrayal of societal expectations and the multitude of challenges that women encounter in the short stories of Rabindranath Tagore and Doris Lessing.
- ii) Delve into the profound psychological dilemmas faced by female characters in the narratives of Tagore and Lessing, highlighting their relevance to overarching gender issues.
- iii) Assess and contrast the innovative narrative strategies utilized by Tagore and Lessing to effectively confront gender and psychological conflicts in their compelling short stories.

## LITERATURE REVIEW:

In her seminal work, *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millet (2016) examines the interplay between patriarchy and the family within the context of power dynamics. She posits that the family is the foremost institution of patriarchy, serving both as a reflection of and a connection to the broader societal framework. The family functions as a patriarchal unit embedded within a patriarchal structure, facilitating mediation between individual experiences and social frameworks. In doing so, it exerts control and promotes conformity, particularly in circumstances where political and other authoritative entities are insufficient. Sylvia Walby (1990), in her book *Theorizing Patriarchy*, describes patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices where men dominate, oppress, and exploit women.

In her analysis of Tagore's depiction of patriarchy, Mamidi (2018) notes that his writings, set in Nineteenth Century Colonial Bengal, highlight the issues within Hindu customs and patriarchal structures. These works reflect the spiritual and intellectual conflict between the Bengali Renaissance and traditional values, particularly in relation to the emergence of Colonial education and the experiences of Bengali Hindu women during this period of social change. Tufail and Sheikh (2018) also discuss the female voices in Tagore's work, remarking that their silence reveals the hardships they endure in a patriarchal society.

Prosanna (2018) states that themes such as women's liberation, women's rights, respect for women, and civility toward them are vital components of many of Tagore's significant works. Tagore advocates for women to seek their own identities and to recognize that roles like wifehood and motherhood are merely aspects of their complete selves.

Millar (2016) observes that Lessing's short narratives are characterized by a stylistic simplicity and consistency that is frequently lacking in her longer works. While her novels can occasionally exhibit cumbersome and dense prose, her short stories tend to be light and direct. They steer clear of excessive verbosity, relying on essential elements to convey vivid scenes effectively.

Lessing once acknowledged that the realist story represents the highest form of prose writing. Millar points out that Lessing's female characters embody her perspectives on women and their roles within society. Many of her short stories examine the physical and emotional dynamics between men and women, particularly in the context of marriage, which she poignantly portrays as a catalyst for dissent, dissatisfaction, and frustration.

Hossain (2018) notes that Lessing sheds new light on the various social systems and structures confronting women under traditional authority. She emphasizes the conflicts between marriage and love, motherhood and career, the injustices of double standards, the isolation experienced by single-career women, and the emptiness of marriage.

Subash (2018) discusses Lessing's acclaimed story "To Room Nineteen," which explores the conflicting impulses of instinct and intellect against the backdrop of early 1960s London. During this period, women found themselves ensnared by the social conservatism of the past, struggling to envision a future that promised choice, fulfillment, and personal freedom.

Overall, this literature review illustrates that both authors address similar themes related to women and their psychological challenges, as depicted through their narratives and the relationships between men and women.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

### **Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*:**

One is not born, rather becomes, woman. (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 293)

No biological, physical or economic destiny defines the figure that the female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine.

Regarding the creation of man and woman, Pythagoras said:

There is a good principle which created  
Order, light and man,  
And an evil principle which created  
Chaos, darkness, and woman (Beauvoir, 2011)

Thus, this study applies Simone de Beauvoir's concept of patriarchy and marriage from *The Second Sex* to examine the gender dynamics and psychological struggles faced by women in the short stories of Rabindranath Tagore and Doris Lessing. Beauvoir's approach deepens our understanding of how societal norms and marriage influence female identities and highlights the complexities of women's lived experiences.

According to Beauvoir:

This world has always belonged to males, and none of the reasons given for this have ever seemed sufficient. (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 73)

It is thus understandable that man might had the will to dominate woman: but what advantage enabled him to accomplish will? (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 73)

That means, whatever happens, men will be permanently treated as the first sex and women as the second sex, and our society, both Eastern and Western, has taught us this.

### **The Concept of Married Woman:**

Simone de Beauvoir notices traditional views on motherhood and marriage, emphasizing women's need for autonomy. Her compelling argument highlights systemic oppression while advocating for emancipation and equality, making her work a foundation of feminist thought and a thrust for gender equity movements.

Historically, women's societal roles have centered on marriage, with many still viewing it as a benchmark for fulfillment. Those who remain single often face societal discontent. In contrast, men are seldom pressured to validate their roles in the same way, finding fulfillment more readily as husbands and fathers.

Women have been degraded to dependent positions within patriarchal structures, often exchanged like commodities in marriage. Although marriage has evolved into a contractual arrangement, women's subordination persists. They gain limited property rights while still being under their husbands' dominance, adopting their identity and conforming to their social status, ultimately becoming seen as his "other half." Seventeenth-century feminist Poulain de la Barre says:

Everything that men have written about women should be viewed with suspicion because they are both judge and party.

Hence, employing Beauvoir's theoretical framework offers a powerful lens through which the study examines how Tagore and Lessing explore the complex relationship between gender and psychological distress. This analysis delves into the psychological repercussions of patriarchal norms and the institution of marriage, uncovering pervasive themes of women's oppression, resistance, and identity formation that echo across cultures. Beauvoir's insights provide both a solid theoretical basis and an analytical perspective that highlights the similarities and differences in these authors' portrayal of gendered psychological struggles.

This approach not only deepens the conversation around gender issues and the psychological dilemmas faced by women in the selected short stories but also enhances feminist literary critique, revealing how literature has the potential to challenge and transform societal norms.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis framework to strictly investigate the gender dynamics and psychological struggles encountered by women in the short stories of Rabindranath Tagore and Doris Lessing. The themes, characters, and narrative structures are used to analyze the patterns and relationships. The dialogues and language are also used for coding.

By utilizing a comparative literary analysis rooted in Simone de Beauvoir's insightful theories on patriarchy and marriage, the research seeks to reveal how societal expectations remarkably shape the protagonists' psychological conflicts. This analysis is mainly focused on the hindrance of gender roles and the impact of marital structures, ultimately highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of these critical issues.

As a sample, this analysis explores four thematically significant short stories—two by Rabindranath Tagore and two by Doris Lessing as primary sources and other textbooks and research articles as secondary sources. These carefully selected narratives offer a profound exploration of female characters as they approach societal gender norms and navigate psychological challenges. Through the lenses of marriage and social conventions, these stories enthusiastically lighten the struggles women face, making them essential readings for understanding the complexities of their experiences.

Data collection will primarily employ close textual content analysis, a robust methodology that allows for a thorough exploration of selected narratives, revealing essential themes, character developments, and narrative techniques crucial to our research inquiry. Our key areas of focus will include:

- How societal norms shape and compel female characters' agency, illuminating the impact of these expectations on women's narratives.
- Examining the emotional struggles and internal conflicts faced by female protagonists, the article will discover their mental health challenges as they grasp entrenched gender norms.
- To delve into the narrative techniques used by Tagore and Lessing—such as perspective, symbolism, and dialogue—to articulate these intricate issues with depth and nuance.

Furthermore, it will enrich the analysis by consulting a range of secondary literature, including academic articles, monographs, and critiques focused on gender studies and feminist literary theory. This comprehensive approach will ensure a robust theoretical foundation for our inquiry.

The research procedure will be then:

**Content Analysis:** The researcher will undertake a comprehensive content analysis of four carefully chosen short stories, highlighting pivotal passages that reveal gender issues, psychological struggles, and the intricacies of marriage.

**Application of Theoretical Framework:** Applying Simone de Beauvoir's theoretical perspectives—particularly her concepts of the "Other" and the institution of marriage—will facilitate a deeper understanding of the actions, decisions, and psychological conflicts faced by female characters.

**Comparative Analysis:** Tagore's and Lessing's works will be compared to uncover similarities and contrasts in their representations of women's psychological challenges within patriarchal settings.

**Synthesis of Findings:** The insights gained from both the content and comparative analyses will be synthesized to provide a nuanced understanding of how Tagore and Lessing confront themes of gender and psychological conflict in their storytelling.

This methodology promises an insightful exploration into the psychological consequences of societal expectations on women, delivering valuable perspectives on the complexities of gender and identity formation across diverse cultural contexts, as captured in Tagore and Lessing's narratives.

## **EXPECTED RESULT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:**

### **Expected Results**

This research analyzes gender dynamics and psychological complexities in the short stories of Rabindranath Tagore and Doris Lessing. It explores how societal constraints, especially related to marriage, shape the identities and struggles of female protagonists and make the woman second sex or others. Focusing on the psychological effects of oppressive patriarchal structures, it emphasizes themes like marital identity crises, psychological conflict, and self-doubt. By comparing universal and culturally specific aspects of gender oppression, the study engages with Simone de Beauvoir's ideas on patriarchy. It examines narrative techniques to enhance the understanding of the relationship between societal norms and individual psychology.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to feminist literary criticism by examining gender issues and psychological dilemmas across different cultural contexts. It also gains some new insights into the works of Rabindranath Tagore and Doris Lessing, revealing their assessment of societal norms and deep exploration of female characters' inner lives. Highlighting how literature reflects societal values surrounding gender and marriage, this research demonstrates the relevance of Beauvoir's theories in literary studies and their applicability in cross-cultural analyses.

## **DISCUSSION:**

### **Exploring Tagore's Narrative Tapestry Marital Dissolution of Self in "Haimanti"**

The story "Haimanti" investigates societal norms and highlights the struggles of women in patriarchal Bengal. It presents Haimanti, an intelligent young girl who marries Apu, a passive man. Their marriage exposes the harsh realities of a traditional household that values the financial stability of a bride's family over her personality and her qualities. Apu's family views Haimanti cynically due to her father's lack of wealth and a substantial dowry, using this as a reason for her mistreatment. Haimanti faces psychological trauma from

being misunderstood and oppressed in her in-law's house. Although Apu cares for her, he cannot confront his family's cruelty. As emotional neglect increases, Haimanti's health deteriorates, ultimately leading to her untimely death. Hence, Tagore criticizes patriarchal society for its oppressive customs, such as the dowry system, emphasizing their psychological impact on women and advocating for a more compassionate society.

Raised as a motherless child, Haimanti enjoys her father's affection but faces neglect in her in-laws' home due to her young age and his poor economic situation. This situation echoes Simone de Beauvoir's concept of how women are defined by their relationships, especially in marriage. Haimanti's union lacks genuine autonomy and stems from societal pressures, as her in-laws favor her at the beginning because of her father's wealth, even though she is only seventeen. From Apu's words, we understand that:

Even so, that my father had agreed to my marriage with a girl whose age was higher than what was considered correct was because the dowry was big since the girl was big. Shishir was my father-in-law's only daughter. My father's expectation was that the entire wealth of the bride's father would one day fill the belly of the son-in-law's future. (Mukerji, 2005, p. 174)

Following Haimanti's marriage, her father-in-law learns that her father is merely a school teacher. Consequently, her previously positive experiences come to an abrupt halt, and she begins to be treated poorly. On one occasion, they insult her severely regarding her age. One distant grandaunt of Apu comments: "My goodness! Our bride's age seems to be even more than mine." (Mukerji, 2005, p. 180)

The gas lighting escalates to a troubling level, prompting another elderly woman to voice her concerns.

"If she not have something more than we do, why would Apu travel so far to get himself a wife?" (Mukerji, 2005, p. 180)

When Haimanti is asked about her age, she candidly responds that she is seventeen. In contrast, her mother-in-law, seeking to persuade others, falsely claims that Haimanti's actual age is eleven, stating that her father has declared this. Subsequently, Haimanti's mother-in-law becomes furious, and the entire household turns against her, insulting her over this issue. Thus, Tagore portrays Haimanti's situation.

"She looked at me like a frightened doe." (Mukerji, 2005, p. 182)

On a different occasion, Haimanti faces humiliation for merely asking her mother-in-law to teach her the rituals of puja. Growing up without a mother, Haimanti has not had the chance to learn these customs, but her in-laws perceive this as a deficiency in her character. Consequently, they embarrass her by stating: "Good heavens! What is this now? What sort of an atheist's daughter is she? The Goddess Lakshmi will soon desert this family." (Mukerji, 2005, p. 183)

Haimanti's in-laws became increasingly rude, even scolding her sister-in-law for caring about her. They opened a letter Haimanti sent to her father and questioned her frequent correspondence, claiming they could find no fault in her behavior. Despite being gentle and pure-hearted, Haimanti faces accusations from her critical in-laws that she distracts Apu from his studies when, in reality, she has always been his inspiration and supportive companion.

This conflict between Haimanti's desires and societal expectations illustrates de Beauvoir's idea of women as the "Other," a marginalized group defined in relation to men. Consequently, Haimanti often feels pressured to sacrifice her aspirations, independence, and individuality to conform to her assigned roles.

I had to give up nothing; my family, my way of life, nothing at all. Haima had to drop everything before coming to me. I had not considered before the extent of her sacrifice. In our house, she had been sitting on a bed of thorns; (Mukerji, 2005, p. 185)

The application of Simone de Beauvoir's theoretical framework to Haimanti highlights a profound interplay of psychological and emotional challenges shaped by patriarchal structures.

A seventeen-year-old girl from the mountains, who has been raised in an environment of complete inner and outer freedom, begins to suffer deeply in the oppressive atmosphere of her in-laws' home. She becomes so isolated that she engages in silent conversations with the sky through the iron bars surrounding her. Although her father wishes to bring her back home, her father-in-law continues to deny this request. Concerning Apu's perspective:

Do you know, the day the people of Aradhya demanded that Sita must be sacrificed, I was amongst them! And those who have, through the ages, sung to the glory of that sacrifice, I have been one of them! (Mukerji, 2005, p. 188)

Does the statement obscure Apu's mistake from others? Can he indeed evade the guilt of having abandoned his wife during her difficult moments?

Thus, Haimanti is regarded as the "Other" in a male-dominated society, enduring both external and internal forms of oppression that limit their autonomy and self-identification. She is the victim of a patriarchal society and suffers from inner conflict because of the oppression of her in-laws. Her journey from the beginning to the end powerfully highlights the tragic consequences faced by a married woman in an environment that denies her the opportunity to define her own identity beyond societal expectations.

### **Resigned Feminity in "Shasti"**

In "Shasti," Tagore features the injustices women face in a patriarchal society. Set in a rural Bengali village, the story follows two brothers, Dukhiram and Chhidam, and their wives, Radha and Chandara. After Dukhiram kills Radha in a moment of anger, the brothers plot to frame Chandara for the murder. When confronted, Chandara chooses silence, rejecting a life of oppression. Her response reviews the systemic subjugation of women, showcasing their helplessness in a patriarchal framework. The narrative explores themes of injustice, betrayal, and the constraints imposed by societal norms.

Life is so unfortunate for the woman that just because she has not cooked food (this is also because her husband has not brought anything home to make food), she replies like:

Where is the rice that I'll give you. Did you bring me any? Do I go out now to earn it?" (Mukerji, 2005, p. 49),

In the story, Radha gets murdered by her husband, Dukhiram; where the terrible incident is described as follows:

He roared like an angry tiger, "What did you say!" and in a flash, without thinking, brought down the hatchet on his wife's head. Radha toppled and fell near her sister-in-law's lap and died instantly. (Mukerji, 2005, p. 49)

To save his brother from being accused as a murderer, Chhidam Rui blames his wife Chandara, saying Ramlochan uncle:

During their quarrel my wife struck her sister-in-law on the head with a hatchet. (Mukerji, 2005, p. 51)

Is not it also unfortunate that without doing any crime, innocent Chandara has to take all the blame of killing her sister-in-law just because she is a woman, just because, if he loses his wife he can get another, but if his brother is hanged, he won't find another. (Mukerji, 2005, p. 51)

Simone de Beauvoir's theory of the story "Punishment" deepens the exploration of the female protagonist, Chandara, as she navigates the oppressive constructs of patriarchy and gender roles. Additionally, her sister-in-law, Radha, is another victim of patriarchal oppression. De Beauvoir's statement that "one is not born, but becomes a woman" highlights that womanhood is a social construct, illustrating how women are viewed as the "Other" within patriarchal structures. Radha and Chandra are both treated as "others" in the story, where society and their husbands treat them as inferiors.

Chandara's relationship with her abusive husband exemplifies marriage as a mechanism of oppression, revealing a significant imbalance of power and autonomy. This dynamic underscores the systemic forces that confine women to submissive roles, ultimately leading to Chandara's tragic fate. Her experience reflects how patriarchal structures perpetuate cycles of suffering. During a visit to the ghat, her jealous husband, Chhidam, confronts her, highlighting the tension in their relationship.

If I ever hear that you've gone to the ghat alone, I'll break every bone in your body." (Mukerji, 2005, p. 54)

After his speech, when Chandara responds that there will be blessed peace for all time, he steps forward, grips her hair, drags her into the room, and locks the door behind her.

Chandara's acceptance of blame for her sister-in-law's death and her self-sacrificial nature highlight societal conditioning that pressures women to align their self-image with male expectations. The situation reflects de Beauvoir's idea that women often internalize subordination and see their suffering as a duty to family and male approval. Toward the end of the trial, when Chhidam realizes that Chandara is determined to take the blame, he tells the court...: "Your honour, believe me, my wife is innocent." (Mukerji, 2005, p. 57) Nevertheless, it is too late. Chandara is such a woman of personality that she repeats the same story right through, from the police to the sessions court, without budging an inch that she has killed her sister-in-law.

Now, the question is, why has she done this? Why has she willingly sacrificed her life? It is because she has better understood that she does not have any value. Being a wife, she is nothing to Chhidam as his brother is to him. A woman is nothing but a working machine in a patriarchal society. So, until she can serve, she is counted. The time she stops giving service, her time ends. Thus, she, without any hesitation, surrenders herself to society's decision.

Regarding Tagore's stories "Haimanti" and "Shasti", Huque (2018) says: Through the two stories, we get pictures of the hypocrisy of married life and the sufferings of women in patriarchy who can be subjects to femicide. By accepting femicide, both Chandara and Haimanti embrace a world free of gender inequality, humiliation, perpetual evil, physical abuse, subjugation, suffering, and orthodoxy, and become free birds that any man will never cage. They denounce the selfish, loveless, hostile world.

### **Unveiling Lessing's Narratives**

#### **"To Room Nineteen"- Wings Clipped, Soul Unbound**

The story follows Susan Rawlings, a middle-aged woman in suburban London who lives with her husband, Matthew, and their four children. Although their marriage appears perfect, Susan feels increasingly empty and isolated, marked by mutual respect and companionship.

When her children start going to school, Susan struggles to find a purpose in her life and begins to feel isolated for the first time when Matthew talks about his extramarital affair with a girl in such a way that nothing actually happened. Despite Matthew's stable job providing financial security, she feels stifled and yearns for independence. Attempts to fill the void—through home improvements, gardening, and socializing—fail to bring her satisfaction. Her husband's casual disloyalty further intensifies her sense of disconnection, which she tolerates as part of their marriage.

Thus, the nervous breakdown of Susan Rawlings starts. First of all, she occupies a room in her house, but that is not enough to make her feel free. Still, she feels engaged and disturbed. She then retreats to a cheap hotel room in London, known as "Room Nineteen," seeking solace from the demands of her life. This sanctuary offers temporary relief, but it fails to ease her more profound existential despair. As her nervous breakdowns continue, she imagines an evil figure controlling her fully. Moreover, she seeks an escape from it.

As her isolation grows, so does her sense of purposelessness. Unable to reconcile her internal struggles with societal and familial expectations, she ultimately takes her own life in the hotel room.

In the story, Susan Rawlings' identity is shaped by societal expectations that define the traditional roles of wife and mother. At the beginning of the narrative, Susan appears to have achieved domestic success—she has a stable marriage, a comfortable home, and children. However, this outward appearance conceals the suffocating existential reality she endures. Her identity is lost within a patriarchal framework, where her worth is primarily measured by her conformity to societal norms rather than by her intrinsic individuality or ambitions. Matthew's extramarital affairs are also an indication of patriarchy where even after being disloyal to his wife, he stays normal.

This relational context positions her as the "Other," existing mainly to meet the demands and expectations of her family, which limits her opportunities for genuine self-expression or autonomy. In Susan's words:

Then I married, and from the moment I became pregnant for the first time I signed myself over, so to speak, to other people. To the children. Not for one moment in twelve years have I been alone, had time to myself. So now I have to learn to be myself again. (Lessing, 2008, p. 421)

The story, "To Room Nineteen" examines the patriarchal structures that constrain women and the psychological challenges they face. Susan Rawlings exemplifies de Beauvoir's ideas about the social construction of femininity, the loss of self through marriage, and the internalization of societal expectations that undermine female autonomy.

Susan's marriage to Matthew exemplifies this perspective of marriage as an institution that reinforces women's subordination by relegating them to traditional roles. Although their relationship initially appears respectful, it soon becomes evident that Susan's emotional and psychological needs are overlooked. Matthew's infidelity underscores the imbalance, as his actions conflict with the expectations placed on Susan as a dutiful wife.

As the narrative progresses, Susan's discontent intensifies, leading to a deep sense of existential emptiness. The weight of domestic responsibilities, coupled with societal pressures to find fulfillment in these roles, exacerbates her alienation from her true self. De Beauvoir's insights into the erasure of women's identities within marriage resonate with Susan's struggles, as her public persona starkly contrasts with her inner aspirations.

Her retreat to "Room Nineteen" serves as a powerful symbol of her quest to reclaim autonomy, reflecting de Beauvoir's belief that women must assert their independence to escape the constraints of patriarchy.

Miss Townsend, I'm here in your hotel because I need to be alone for a few hours, above all alone and with no one knowing where I am. (Lessing, 2008, p. 430)

Her wish to be alone gets so worse that she becomes obsessed with getting alone as she says:

She was determined to arrange her life, no matter what it cost, so that she could have that solitude more often. An absolute solitude, where no one knew her or cared about her. (Lessing, 2008, p. 430)

Nevertheless, what does she do in a rented hotel room, room no. Nineteen? She replies:

Why, nothing at all. From the chair, when it had rested her, she went to the window, stretching her arms, smiling, treasuring her anonymity, to look out. She was no longer Susan Rawlings, mother of four, wife of Matthew, employer of Mrs Parkes and of Sophie Traub, with these and those relations with friends, school-teachers, tradesmen. (Lessing, 2008, p. 437)

The room becomes so close to her that she starts thinking:

This room had become more her own than the house she lived in. (Lessing, 2008, p. 437)

According to Seklem (2014), Susan's madness symbolizes a rebellion against a male-dominated society. Özsert (2014) discusses how patriarchy confines women to passive roles, resulting in feelings of entrapment that contribute to Susan's suicide, which Ningchuan and Yiping (2012) interpret as a psychological surrender.

Simone de Beauvoir highlights the concept of internalized oppression, in which women feel guilt for failing to meet societal expectations. Despite successfully fulfilling these roles, Susan grapples with a sense of inadequacy. Her isolation in Room Nineteen reflects her struggle to balance her desire for autonomy with societal pressures.

Susan's tragic suicide underscores the detrimental effects of patriarchy on women's mental health and serves as a critique of the restrictions placed on women's self-expression. Viewed through de Beauvoir's lens, "To Room Nineteen" reveals the existential challenges women face within a confining societal framework, illuminating marriage and domesticity as sites of female oppression that exact an emotional toll on women's identities.

### **The story "He"- Embracing Solitude in the Shadow of Betrayal**

Doris Lessing's story "He" examines the contrasting lives of two women, Mary Brooke and Annie Blake, to sketch societal gender roles. Mary, who is single and independent, experiences loneliness and faces judgment from society, while Annie, a married mother, grapples with the overwhelming demands of domestic life. Through their interactions, the narrative highlights the psychological dilemmas women encounter, demonstrating that both independence and traditional roles fail to provide true fulfillment under patriarchal expectations. Lessing advocates for a deeper understanding of women's struggles and their individuality in this story.

Beauvoir's theoretical framework offers a valuable perspective on Doris Lessing's short story "He." The protagonist, Annie Blake, struggles with gender norms, motherhood, and societal expectations. Her concept of patriarchy is evident in Annie's internal conflicts.

Annie's identity is primarily defined by her role as a mother, influenced by the pressure to be a "good mother." The incident creates emotional strain and ties her self-worth to her performance, limiting her individuality and aspirations.

The story mirrors the institution of motherhood, reflecting de Beauvoir's analysis of marriage and its reinforcement of patriarchal norms. Annie's identity becomes confined to her domestic life, shaped by societal expectations that often undermine her mental well-being, as Annie shares with Mary Brooke:

Nasty temper he's got. I'd be up summer and winter at four, cleaning those offices till ten, then cleaning for Mrs Lynd till dinnertime. Then if he got home and found his dinner not ready, he'd start to shout and carry on-well, (Lessing, 2008, p. 97)

Her words declare that to make a home, Annie works so hard, but her husband does not do anything as she says:

But he never lifted a finger. Bone lazy. Men are all the same. (Lessing, 2008, p. 97)

Furthermore, the readers get the idea of internalized oppression, in which women are conditioned to accept their subjugation. In "He," Annie's psychological struggles are influenced by her husband's continual pressure on her. Annie reveals this to Mary, stating:

I'd have the kids and the cleaning and the cooking, and working all day-sometimes when he was unemployed I'd bring in all the money...and he wouldn't even put the kettle on for me. Women's work, he said. (Lessing, 2008, p. 97)

Domestic responsibilities hold little value for a man who continually undermines the woman. Annie's words evoke the sentiments expressed in Linda Pastan's poem "Marks," which captures the frustration of being unappreciated. The wife and mother find themselves increasingly exasperated by her family's judgments, feeling criticized despite her full day of work.

Annie's sons, Charlie and Tommy, do not reach out to her, with only Dick taking the initiative to send her a letter, which brings her some happiness. Her husband is self-centered; as Annie puts it, "He never felt for anyone but himself." As a result, she harbors no feelings for him and does not even wish to shed a tear over their failed marriage. He has chosen to leave her and their three sons to marry another woman, whereas Annie has devoted her life to her husband and children, but now she seeks independence.

Beauvoir's theory of "the Other" provides insight into how patriarchal structures affect Annie Blake's psychological and emotional well-being as an "other." The narrative studies the constraints of motherhood and societal expectations of women that, in trying to fulfill others' desires, the woman suffers from extreme mental distress and isolation in their lives.

Annie's journey to redefine her identity beyond motherhood exemplifies de Beauvoir's concept, highlighting the challenges posed by social institutions. This exploration reveals the psychological effects of internalizing patriarchal norms and underscores the need to recognize and address societal pressures that influence perceptions of motherhood. Understanding these dynamics can help support women in embracing a multifaceted identity that goes beyond traditional roles.

### **Juxtaposing Perspectives**

Examining the stories of Tagore and Lessing through the perspective of Simone de Beauvoir reveals that the women in both authors' works encounter similar struggles. They are victims of a patriarchal society and male oppression, often viewed not as individuals but merely as women. Both writers illustrate power-structured relationships in which men regard women as mere dolls, subjecting them to physical and psychological torment.

In this context, marriage becomes a tool for men to mistreat women. Through marriage, men effectively enslave women, treating them as servants responsible for managing household duties. The heroines of these stories—Haimanti, Chandara, Radha, Susan, and Annie—face identical challenges and become victims in similar ways, whether in Eastern or Western settings. Though the final resolutions of their lives are not the same, they are perceived as "Others," "Outsiders," and "Strangers" solely because of their gender. Haimanti's embodied oppression, the cultural gaslighting of Chandara, the psychological confinement of Susan, and the entrapment of Annie represent every woman's inner cry against their social structure and marital institution. Their wishes go unfulfilled, and their dreams remain unrealized; they exist primarily to comply with the demands of their surroundings just because they are woman, just because they are not born but made women. Finally, the study serves to illustrate how literature profoundly reflects the universal psychological dilemmas and inner turmoil faced by women, transcending barriers of caste, creed, race, and culture. Through nuanced narratives, it highlights the struggles of identity, societal expectations, and emotional conflict, emphasizing the shared human experience of women across diverse contexts.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS:**

This research marks the significance of Rabindranath Tagore and Doris Lessing in their examination of gender issues and the psychological struggles faced by women. Through their evocative storytelling, both authors illuminate the constraints imposed by patriarchal societies and the emotional burdens women endure. Tagore explores the socio-economic challenges of colonial Bengal, while Lessing delves into the domestic pressures of mid-20th-century Western life, together highlighting the universality of female oppression and resistance.

Employing Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theoretical framework, this study reveals the intricate dynamics of gender roles and societal expectations, focusing on the psychological journeys of characters such as Haimanti,

Chandara, Susan, and Annie. Their experiences not only analyze societal constructs but also affirm women's concern and strength.

Ultimately, this comparative analysis enriches feminist literary criticism by offering fresh insights into the intersection of gender, culture, and psychology. The findings affirm the transformative power of the narratives crafted by Tagore and Lessing and emphasize the urgent need to address ongoing gender inequities in contemporary society. These stories continue to inspire advocacy for gender equality, demonstrating literature's capacity to reflect and challenge social norms.

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