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## The lost jewels: Loss of womanhood in a genteel patriarchy

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### Abstract

This paper seeks to portray a gender critique of Tagore's short story "The Lost Jewels" and delve deep into the man-woman relation as depicted by Tagore in the short story. At the same time, the paper attempts a comparative study on Tagore's short story "The Lost Jewels" and Satyajit Ray's film "Manihara".

**Keywords:** Womanhood, patriarchy, gender, film, genteel

### Introduction

Over decades women in the traditional literary domain, have been portrayed to be infatuated with gold and jewels. There are stories of women having ignited an unquenchable fire of disquiet in the family domain for nothing but their monstrous rush after gold and jewels. Their cravings for barren metal, seen in many fictions, have ended with their fall— both material and moral.

In Tagore's story, "Manihara" titled "The Lost jewels" in its English rendition Manihara, the female protagonist and cynosure of the story, is depicted to have been smitten with cravings for gold / jewels. Now, it is an entirely malechauvinistic argument that such gold rush is an ingrained property of women's nature.

Barring a malafide intent to disfigure women into merely mundane creatures of a debased nature, there is nothing in such an argument. It would be just as much unjust to argue that discontent with the way Nature has framed them, or being too self-conscious, women prefer to be brilliantly ornamented; nor is it at all true that women being backward in terms of intellect, seek to cover it up behind an extrinsic halo, Each of these arguments is meant to inferiorize women to her male counterpart. And needless it is to mention that Tagore, while etching out his heroine as one obsessed with ornaments, was motivated by any of the arguments as mentioned.

In fact, Tagore, wishes us to be insightful and to probe deep into the chemistry of Mani's conjugal relationship with her husband Phoni Bhusan, into the sterility of her life as a woman, into an oppressively clumsy and unprospective world to which she was confined. Her husband phoni Bhusan, a businessman, was "a modernized Bengali" and in the narrator's pointed repartee, "lost the God-given power of his barbaric nature ....". This was what "loosened the conjugal ties". What remained then was just a sickening habit of living together in lonely isolation under the same roof.

A revisionary study in between the lines is a must for the reader in this case. On account of the story being short, leaving us in dark of Mani's backdrop, we need to construct, through the high suggestiveness of Tagore's expression / explanations the landscape of the women protagonist's (Mani's) mind. In attempting at this construction, we sadly excavate how dangerously precarious the marital ties of Mani and Phani had been from the very outset.

Phani Bhusan, "turned out of the machine of modern civilization, an absolutely faultless man," fell short of that formidable personality which is so ardently coveted by the woman, so that she might employ the sweet and sour feminine devices which she has "inherited from her grandmothers of untold centuries.....". Phani Bhusan being "submissive" of his own accord, acquiesced in Mani's desire for jewels without her persuading him into obeisance. She did never ever savour the joy of triumphing over him by her typical "female faculties".

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These having been left unused, her woman's nature had been atrophied; simultaneously, it stifled her passion for him because of Phani Bhusan's dearth of romantic fervor. His mechanical supply of ornaments/ jewels to her, begot in her mind an equally mechanical attitude, an all -aggressive consumerism, treating him as a mere machine for turning out her Dacca muslins and her bangles .....” The narrator aptly points out that Bhusan's foolishness lies in imagining that “to give is the way to get”

In his futile effort to please her by bestowing on her unasked for gifts of expensive junks, all that Bhusan achieved was not her love ---- but only a cold indifference from her. Naturally the very fabric of their relationship silently kept getting weaker and weaker in the same way as the banks of an increasingly less navigable river goes on eroding little by little until it collapses all together one day with a terrifying bang.

It would be an error on our part to think that phani Bhusan was immune to patriarchal lapses. The narrator reveals to us that the gentleman, despite being too “submissive, had in his character a typically chauvinistic trend---” ...he brought away his wife to his house and kept her to himself alone “, having forgotten that even though a wife is also looked upon as a mere property as other possessions are in a male-dominated society, she is not after all inanimate. She is very much human, with feelings and sentiments, usually keener than those of her male counterpart. so, if a man seeks to monopolize her, she would react with repulsion.

In trying to possess Mani by keeping her to himself, Bhusan earned nothing but her increasingly mental separation from him. He lost “her beyond recovery”. In addition to that, Bhusan did another irrecoverable foible; he inculcated in his wife a sort of morbid apathy about fellowship and small acts of kindness and charity and had her heart chilled with inhuman miserliness. She was ill -disposed to give a few pice to a religious mendicant,.....” Her husband's unscrupulous generosity simplify just intensified her jewel-thirst and hardened all her mellow feminine virtues,love being the prime one. She contracted a cringy habit of hoarding. In her hand “nothing was ever lost; whatever she got, she saved up most carefully,with the one exception of the memory of her husband's caresses”. Conspicuously, she retained her youthful beauty while her mind and morale decayed. The narrator comments with a banter; “I suppose youth is best preserved with the aid of a heart that is an ice-box”.

Phani Bhusan had a passive nature which was why he hardly ever sought to delve deep into his wife psyche. He hardly ever tried to explore the source of Mani's moral hollowness which she desperately tried to fill up with temporal valuables. If he had ever sought to discover the mystery sincerely, he would have seen that Mani's childlessness as well as her confinement to a stifling atmosphere in a huge empty mansion, had devoured all her tenderness and left in her heart nothing but a voiceless cry of anguish. In her desolation, she not only hoarded ornaments and jewels, but even such trash as empty “soap boxes”. Phani Bhusan, except for being a producer of valuables for her, was a non-entity in her arid life.

Therefore it is only natural that she snubbed cold – heartedly when he timidly asked her for her jewels to overcome his business crisis. There is no love in her life; her jewels were “her only object of love”. Besides, women of the high middle class hardly possess cash (they were not allowed to

step in the world to earn, either). Naturally their ornaments gave them a sense of security. It was same with Mani. So she winced at the fancy of her jewels being “thrown into the bottomless abyss of trade”. She could not reconcile herself to the idea of parting with her jewels which she reared “like a child growing from year to year “. Mani's desperation to keep the jewels to herself drove her into a reckless journey into the dark with her cousin Madhu, a damned rogue who presumably murdered her to grab the jewels.

After two consecutive nights of dream visitation, Bhusan saw in the third night Mani's skeleton that “glittered and sparkled with gold and diamonds”. Beckoned luringly by the skeleton, Bhusan shadowed it and walked into the river after the skeleton had descended to it. He was finally “plunged into eternal sleep”.

Manihara, forming a part of Satyajit Ray's triptych ‘Tinkanya’, ends in a purely gothic air. The story of the film ascends the climax at that hair-stirring moment when Phani Bhusan is encountered by the blood – chilling stare of the apparition of his wife, who shakes her head, indicating ‘no’ in resonance to his ecstatic outburst: “Mani – you've come!” We simply get aghast as a bejeweled skeleton grabs the gold necklace Phani Bhusan had brought for Mani, exploding violently into a marrow- freezing giggle.

At the end of the narrator's story, the unknown listener accuses it of having many factual errors in the story, and then suddenly melts away into thin air.

Ray's cinematic treatment, his dexterity in creating a frightening air of eeriness, his application of music, and most importantly, his unique presentation of the theme and his characterization are simply wonderful. Kali Banerjee, by his easy- going acting, enlivens and romanticizes Phani bhusan who, In Tagore's story is a weak- boned, clumsy genteel. Kanika Majumder, featuring as Manimala, embodies in herself Manimala's cryptic psychic dilemma, her depression for being childless, her dark cynicism and her Mammonlike hunt after jewels, that results in a gruesome tragedy.

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