

**CHITRA DEFEATS ARJUNA WITH THE WEAPON OF LOVE AND  
BEAUTY**

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***Abstract***

*In ancient days, women were looked down upon in all aspects of life. She was considered subordinate and parasite. She was not independent to lead her life. The rights of woman were completely neglected. She was not given a significant value or position in the society, and had no equality like man. Many women writers had attempted to pen down their free thinking, but they had to battle against the wind of male domination, and yet, some have succeeded in penning down their thoughts boldly. Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Virginia Woolf, and Elaine Showalter are some of the prominent figures in history who courageously exhibited women's literature and stood equally with men. Modern age is considered to be the age of feminism. The women in the modern period have crossed the barriers of society. They have proved their equality to their male counterparts. Rabindranath Tagore has brought out his women out of the kitchen and placed them in the active stream of life. Feminism in Rabindranath Tagore challenges the traditional view of woman as the weaker sex.*

**Keywords: gender consciousness, equality, feminism, importance of women, freedom**

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A small girl was playing in front of her house with other children. Suddenly, there was lightening in the sky, and consequently, the doors of the sky opened up and started drizzling, then, gradually, it turned into a heavy downpour. She immediately took a receptacle and started collecting the rain drops. Once the container was full, she then carefully took it inside the house. Likewise, thoughts are born like rain drops in every person's mind. They are like gems, which need to be collected in order to make into a beautiful wreath.

Thinking is a very powerful weapon in the world today. Man began to materialize this faculty from the beginning of this world. Every human person born in this world has the capability of using this power for the construction of a better tomorrow. Throughout the ages, we were under the impression that women did not have this potentiality, which, of course is a wrong notion. As human beings, we are social animals; we were created male and female. We need the contribution of thoughts from both man and woman without which this world cannot move ahead. It is like the coin, which has two sides and cannot be used, if only printed on one side. Over the centuries, women were looked down, and were not allowed, or even given significant value to express their thoughts. According to T.S. Eliot, all of us are born with the ability for reasoning and we are all born poets and thinkers, but only bold people express their thoughts without fear, and many of us bury this capability deep within us.

According to Greek mythology, women were perceived to be more as sexual objects than individuals. Many were taken advantage of by the Gods and by human beings. One would see that women's rights were very limited, and they were not allowed to express much of their freedom. Within this time period, women were blamed for wars, destruction of towns, and the death of men.

Women portrayed in medieval literature were surprisingly a lot more candid and sexual than one might expect of an era where the ideal of femininity was Mary, the mother of Jesus. In actuality, the women in the literature of the period, as well as the historical female figures seemed to be torn between the ideal and the physical desires, and domineering character that her antagonist, Eve, embodies.

In Elizabethan literature, the theme of misogyny and superiority of men was the typical notion that authors took within their writing. Women were not looked into as a person, but were considered a mere necessity for the procreation process. Women continued to be split between the ideal of the Virgin Mary, and her fallible counterpart, Eve. Unfortunately, the Virgin Mary was one of a kind, so there was often a general distrust of women. This distrust of women leads to most works degrading the female race, and terming females as the "other" was the one,

**CHITRA DEFEATS ARJUNA WITH THE WEAPON OF LOVE AND BEAUTY-JOSEPH MARIA  
KUMAR ADDAGATLA**

which was to be feared. Equality between the sexes was not present within this era, and is evident from the numerous writings degrading the female race.

In Victorian and turn of the century literature, the role of women in 19th century literature was one in which they redefine their place in society by accepting an image of themselves, which involved both home-centeredness and inferiority. Elizabeth Gaskell did not concede to the idea of women's inferiority, although she does concede to the notion that a woman's place is at home, as is evident by her portrayal of Bessie in her poem "Cranford." In this time period, women were being portrayed as protagonists more often than in the past.

According to twentieth century literature, women's roles in literature have evolved throughout history and had led women to develop into strong independent roles. Modern literature has served as an outlet and sounding board for women's rights and feminist pioneers. Female writers have come to the forefront and provided today's readers with a vast array of ethnic and cultural perspectives. Women in modern literature often include strong independent females juxtaposed with oppressed women to provide examples for young female readers and to critique short comings of our society.

Feminism is not a new term. To be back to the history, feminist movement started in the late 1500 and early 1600 centuries. This commencement of feminism kick started to the women's right, like right to education, employment, and also politics. Interestingly, many women writers emerged and produced works regarding the plight of women.

Many feminist women writers who have contributed literature to the society wrote chivalric novels. Most of their novels had women protagonist and were based on the glory of women in the world. Feminist women writers still strive to uphold the rights of women through their works like poems and novels.

Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Virginia Woolf, Elaine Showalter, were some of the gems in history who have taken bold and daring steps and entered into the world of literature through the threshold of their writings. They have taken a step, which no one has ever taken so far in history. They expressed their thoughts and views boldly amidst the storm of superiority of men.

Mary Wollstonecraft is known to be the 'Grandmom' of modern feminist writers. She is considered to be the first feminist in England, which was an extremely patriotic society. Her works on feminism include; 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women' published in 1792. It was a great feminist work, where she stressed that 'intellect will always govern and sought'.

The famous poems by Emily Dickinson, "Success is counted sweetest" and "The bustle in a house", is said to be too strong and have a common theme of the role of women and their role in the society. Most of her work portrayed that the female perspective is of little consequence to

***CHITRA DEFEATS ARJUNA WITH THE WEAPON OF LOVE AND BEAUTY-JOSEPH MARIA  
KUMAR ADDAGATLA***

most in a modern, patriarchal society, and traditionally, the roles of women are secondary to those of men.

George Eliot is known famously in the Victorian Era as a liberated woman. She is also considered as the role model for many women during her period. Her literary work 'Middlemarch' has a strong plea for feminist rights.

Jane Austen, a female novelist has brought out strong-headed female protagonists in her novels. Be it the 'Pride and Prejudice' or 'Sense and Sensibility', she always made her female protagonist a rational thinker. Virginia Woolf praises Jane Austen for her boldness in her writings.

Whoever has read 'A Room Of One's Own', by Virginia Woolf, will surely get an answer about what exactly the feminist writer tries to say in her works. Virginia Woolf, always stressed on women's freedom and also argued that women's experience, particularly in the women's movement, could be the basis for transformative social change. In A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf imagines that Shakespeare had a sister, a sister equal to Shakespeare in talent, and equal in genius, but whose legacy is radically different. This imaginary woman never writes a word and dies by her own hand, her genius unexpressed. If only she had found the means to create, argues Woolf, she would have reached the same heights as her immortal sibling.

Elaine Showalter coined the term gynocriticism. Gynocriticism is the study of feminist literature written by female writers inclusive of the interrogation of female authorship, images, the feminine experience and ideology, and the history and development of the female literary tradition.

Bell Hooks calls for a feminism that breaks barriers: 'A genuine feminist politics always brings us from bondage to freedom, from lovelessness to loving,' she writes. 'There can be no love without justice.' (Feminism is for everybody)

The greatest poet, philosopher, and artist, Rabindranath Tagore wrote many stories, plays, dramas and novels; painted over 3,000 pictures; and took an interest in science. Apart from all these, he wrote broadly on women, although that is not much talked-about part of his work. In the short stories of Tagore, struggles and sufferings of women are accentuated, and the roles of his female characters, as well as their inner strength, keep on changing with a change in the society. Overall, three aspects of women's life-relationship between men and women, their social oppression, and the avatar of a new woman who is confident and makes her own decisions have been depicted by Tagore. He recommended women to find their own identity as wifedom and motherhood, are just part of their entire self.

In Tagore's writings, women are portrayed in varied ways. Though, most of the female characters in his work lived a traditional life, they were not at all passive. Rather, they were outspoken.

***CHITRA DEFEATS ARJUNA WITH THE WEAPON OF LOVE AND BEAUTY-JOSEPH MARIA  
KUMAR ADDAGATLA***

- In the early phase of his writings (1881-1897), the social injustice against women was the main area of concern. The inner strength of a woman was depicted through mythological female deities. Tagore emphasized that women should not be passive under any circumstance.
- The second phase of his writings (1893-1913) was regarded as the most imaginative phase by William Cenkner, former Associate Professor of History of Religions at the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C. During this phase, the Indian woman was portrayed as an urban and educated woman.
- In the third phase of his writings (1914-1941), women were openly speaking against the ills of the society, like untouchability, the caste system, and religious pretense. Much emphasis was given on higher education of women.

Rabindranath Tagore was fully aware of women's role in the society. So the portrayal of women in his work can be regarded as one of his most important contributions to the society. Literature plays an important role in the establishment and growth of the society. Plots depicted in fictional writings are inspired from the reality.

Tagore grew up with his fourteen siblings in his family's Jorasanko mansion. His family was extremely rich, upper-caste, Pirali Brahmins and the women who married into the family were often very young, uneducated and overwhelmed by the intellectual and social superiority of the Tagore household, but almost all of them educated themselves to be worthy and equal of the Tagore men. His sister-in-law, Jnandanandini entered the household when she was seven and is credited with being progressive. She attended the governor's party alone and even travelled alone as a heavily pregnant woman along with her three children to England and set up house, awaiting her husband's arrival. She was also the first woman in their household to step out of the joint family establishing her own home, her husband lived elsewhere, but their marriage remained rock-steady.

Sister-in-law, Kadambari Devi was nine when she entered the household and Rabindranath seven.

'She was his childhood princess and was to become his best friend, his mother, his strongest critique and his muse.' Their relationship went through three stages – the first stage where he saw her as a lost princess that needed protection, the second where she mothered him and the third when they were both teenagers and were developing a love for poetry,' said Ms. Chakravarti.

He is the man who created a lot of positive energy about women; he believed in women empowerment, he had a lot of intelligent ideas about women but he could not go completely against his readership who wrote to him askance with the idea of an adulterous woman having

**CHITRA DEFEATS ARJUNA WITH THE WEAPON OF LOVE AND BEAUTY-JOSEPH MARIA  
KUMAR ADDAGATLA**

a chance at happiness – 'kill her off or send her to an ashram', were some of the suggestions made by his readers for his serialized stories.

Women have proved their equality to their male counterparts. The modern women are not Feminism, is a kind of revolt of women against social conventions. Feminine consciousness is, of course, consciousness of females for equality with males. An attempt has been made to focus on the feminism reflected in Tagore's 'Chitra. Rabindranath Tagore has brought out his women out of the kitchen and placed them in the active stream of life. Feminism in Rabindranath Tagore challenges the traditional view of woman as the weaker sex. Tagore's Chitra is as strong as man. She is expert in riding, hunting, duel, and war. She is a type of terror for the evildoers in the state. She had ambition to challenge Arjuna in a single combat. When Arjuna in the forest rejects her, she does not go home weeping. She tries to exhibit her strength and power by gaining perfect beauty from Madana. She seeks revenge against her insult of rejection by making him to surrender before her borrowed beauty. Chitra lived in a good olden days, but she had a sense of feminism as a modern lady. She proved her equality.

Rabindranath Tagore's women characters are as conscious as modern ladies. They try to gain self-improvement. Tagore has given priority to his female characters. Chitra had never considered herself inferior to male counterparts. So, she learnt the duties of male. Chitra's desire of challenging Arjuna in single combat shows her modernity. She loves her people like her children. Rabindranath Tagore has described the journey of his women characters from ignorance to knowledge. Self-consciousness in all the characters play vital role in their development. As far as Chitra had no consciousness as woman, she was just the princess of the land. When she sees Arjuna, she realizes for the first time her womanhood. Physical attraction enhances passion in her heart for Arjuna. She makes an experiment of penance and borrowing beauty due to her self-consciousness. Arjuna violates his vow of celibacy under the impression of Chitra's heavenly beauty. Chitra gets courage and inspiration out of her self-consciousness and acts further.

Chitra, story of the play is based upon an old Hindu legend, Mahabharata. The relationship portrayed in the play is as close as that between nectar in the flower and the honey in the comb. Chitra grows up as a man, strong and hardy. When she sees Arjuna, she instantly falls in love with him and realizes womanliness in herself. Chitra proves her ability by defeating Arjuna in the battle of romance. Rabindranath Tagore's women characters are superior to other ordinary women in the society. They are role models for the women. Suffering women can improve their circumstances by imitating the women characters of Rabindranath Tagore. They may realize their strength and may improve their condition.

Woman has the ability to weigh equally like man. In this process, man is not superior or woman is superior, both are equal. The play, Chitra adapts part of the story from the Mahabharata and centers upon the character of Chitrangada, a female warrior who defeats Arjuna with the weapon of love and beauty, not in the physical battle of swords.

**CHITRA DEFEATS ARJUNA WITH THE WEAPON OF LOVE AND BEAUTY-JOSEPH MARIA  
KUMAR ADDAGATLA**

In actuality, what happens when mother gets sick? Mom is there to take care of everything. She is the one who must stay home from work. Even when big, strong Dad is sick, Mom takes care of him. On the other hand, when Mom gets sick, she isn't cared for much. She doesn't need to be taken care of. She can handle it herself. Modern research suggests that women actually are stronger than men at every stage of development.

'Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details in the activities of man, and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him.' (Mahatma Gandhi)

It is not important to exhibit superiority over man or woman. As a human being, we need to cultivate the right attitude about equality among both sexes, which in turn creates freedom to both man and woman to enter into the world of literature.

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