
**FEMALE LONELINESS AND EMOTIONAL ISOLATION IN THE
BROKEN NEST**

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Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore's *Broken Nest* (Nashtanirh), translated into English by Sharmishta Mohanty, is one of the most psychologically rich and emotionally sensitive novellas in Indian literature. The novella explores female loneliness, emotional isolation, silence, emotional repression, and the emotional consequences of neglect within marriage. Through the character of Charulata, Tagore portrays the inner emotional suffering of women whose emotional and intellectual needs remain ignored within patriarchal domestic structures. Although Charulata lives within a wealthy household and enjoys material comfort, she experiences deep emotional emptiness because her husband Bhupati fails to provide emotional companionship and intellectual understanding. The arrival of Amal introduces emotional intimacy and intellectual companionship into Charulata's lonely life, gradually awakening her individuality and emotional consciousness. The study analyses emotional neglect within marriage, the symbolic use of silence and domestic space, emotional repression, and Tagore's portrayal of women's emotional individuality. It further examines how intellectual companionship becomes a source of emotional fulfilment for Charulata. The paper argues that Tagore critiques patriarchal social structures that reduce women's lives to domestic responsibility while ignoring their emotional and psychological needs.

Keywords: Rabindranath Tagore, *Broken Nest*, Female Loneliness, Emotional Isolation, Charulata, Feminism, Emotional Repression, Psychological Realism.

Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore occupies a significant position in Indian literature because of his profound understanding of human psychology, emotional conflict, gender relationships,

and social inequality. Among his many psychologically insightful works, *Broken Nest* (Nashtanirh) remains one of the most emotionally complex novellas because it examines the silent emotional suffering of women within patriarchal domestic life. Set in nineteenth century Bengal, the novella reflects a society undergoing intellectual and social transformation.

During this period, discussions regarding modernization, women's education, and social reform had begun to emerge. However, despite these progressive ideas, women's emotional and intellectual individuality remained largely ignored within traditional domestic structures. Educated women from wealthy households were often confined within domestic spaces and denied emotional freedom and intellectual recognition.

Through the character of Charulata, Tagore portrays the psychological consequences of emotional neglect and loneliness within marriage. Charulata is intelligent, imaginative, educated and emotionally sensitive. Although she possesses material comfort and social respectability, she remains emotionally isolated because her husband Bhupati is deeply absorbed in political journalism and public life. Bhupati is not cruel or abusive; instead, his emotional absence emerges from neglect and lack of emotional awareness. The arrival of Amal, Bhupati's younger cousin, gradually transforms Charulata's emotional life. Amal recognises her intelligence, emotional sensitivity, and creativity in ways Bhupati never does. Through literature, writing and emotional companionship, Charulata begins to experience emotional recognition and intellectual fulfilment.

The emotional bond that develops between Charulata and Amal therefore emerges from emotional loneliness and psychological understanding rather than simple romantic attraction. The present paper examines female loneliness and emotional isolation in *Broken Nest* through feminist and psychological approaches.

Literature Review

Rabindranath Tagore's literary works have received cognitive focus to scholarly scrutiny because of their psychological depth and emotional sensitivity. Feminist critics frequently argue that Tagore portrayed women with remarkable emotional complexity and intellectual individuality compared to many writers of his period. His female characters often struggle against emotional repression, social expectations, and domestic confinement. Several scholars studying *Broken Nest* have emphasized the psychological complexity of Charulata's character. Critics argue that Charulata's emotional attachment toward Amal develops not because of moral weakness but because of emotional neglect and intellectual loneliness within marriage. Feminist interpretations often view that novella as a critique of patriarchal domestic system that ignore women's emotional needs.

Psychological critics also note Tagore's extraordinary ability to portray emotional conflict through silence, pauses, gestures, and symbolic imagery rather than dramatic

confrontation. Emotional tension in the novella frequently remains unspoken, making the psychological atmosphere deeply subtle and realistic. Many scholars further observe that domestic space in the novella functions symbolically as a site of emotional imprisonment. The house appears material comfortable and socially respectable, yet emotionally empty. Windows, silence, empty rooms, and writing become symbolic representations of Charulata's emotional isolation and longing.

While many studies discuss gender and emotional repression in *Broken Nest*, the present paper focuses particularly on female loneliness and emotional invisibility within marriage. It examines how emotional neglect creates psychological suffering and how emotional companionship becomes essential for emotional fulfilment.

Methodology

The present research paper adopts an analytical and interpretive methodology based on close textual reading of Rabindranath Tagore's *Broken Nest*, translated into English by Sharmishta Mohanty. The study primarily uses feminist literary criticism and psychological criticism to analyse emotional loneliness, emotional repression, and women's emotional experiences within patriarchal society. The research also uses secondary scholarly sources discussing Tagore's representation of women, psychological realism, and nineteenth century Bengali society. The paper investigates how emotional neglect and lack of emotional communication contribute to psychological isolation.

Analysis

From the beginning of the novella, Tagore establishes an atmosphere of emotional emptiness surrounding Charulata's life. Although she lives in a wealthy household and enjoys luxury and social respectability, she experiences deep emotional loneliness because her emotional and intellectual needs remain ignored. Tagore ironically observes that, "She lacked nothing" (Tagore 4). This carries deep emotional irony because Charulata materially possesses everything but emotionally experiences emptiness and isolation. She lacks companionship, emotional understanding, communication and emotional intimacy. Bhupati, her husband, remains completely absorbed in political journalism and public affairs.

Tagore writes that Bhupati, "... was born under stars that made him a man who must work" (Tagore 3). This reflects Bhupati's obsessive involvement in intellectual and political activity. Although Bhupati is educated and progressive, he remains emotionally absent within his marriage. Bhupati's neglect is not intentional, which makes the emotional tragedy more psychologically painful. He believes he fulfils his marital duties by providing financial security and social comfort. However, he fails to recognize Charulata's emotional loneliness and intellectual isolation. A line states, "To penetrate the screen of the newspaper and claim her husband became extremely difficult for her" (Tagore 4). The newspaper functions symbolically as an emotional barrier separating husband and wife. Bhupati's attention remained directed toward public affairs while Charulata silently suffers emotional neglect within domestic space.

Tagore further portrays the emotional decline within marriage through the observation that, "... that golden radiance of a marital dawn, passed by, unaware, unknown to both of them" (Tagore 5). Emotional intimacy gradually disappears not because of emotional neglect, routine, and absence of communication. Another important observation states, "Without tasting newness, both became old, familiar and habituated to each other" (Tagore 5). Tagore's portrayal of emotional neglect demonstrates that material comfort cannot replace emotional understanding. Emotional loneliness therefore exists even within socially stable and financially secure marriages.

The domestic environment in *Broken Nest* functions symbolically as a space of emotional confinement and psychological isolation. Although Charulata's house appears luxurious and socially respectable, emotionally it remains silent and empty. Tagore repeatedly emphasizes the emptiness of Charulata's daily life. Time itself becomes a symbolic of emotional emptiness and loneliness. Her daily life lacks meaningful companionship and emotional engagement. Although physically surrounded by comfort, Charulata remains emotionally imprisoned within domestic routine. The house therefore becomes symbolic of emotional suffocation. Tagore transforms domestic space into a psychological environment reflecting emotional isolation and silence. Charulata frequently observes the outside world through windows, suggesting her emotional longing for movement, communication, and emotional freedom. The outside world symbolizes emotional possibility and intellectual life, while the domestic interior symbolizes emotional restriction.

Tagore's use of silence throughout the novella is particularly significant. Emotional suffering often remains unspoken because patriarchal society expects women to remain emotionally controlled and obedient. The emotional transformation in Charulata's life begins with the arrival of Amal, Bhupati's younger cousin. Amal differs from Bhupati because he immediately recognizes Charulata's intelligence, emotional sensitivity, and creativity. Through literature, poetry, writing, and conversation, Amal introduces emotional vitality into Charulata's emotionally empty life. Their relationship develops gradually through emotional understanding and intellectual companionship. Tagore recognizes that Amal alone understands Charulata's writing. This recognition becomes emotionally transformative because Charulata's finally experiences intellectual appreciation and emotional visibility. Amal appreciates Charulata as an individual rather than merely as Bhupati's wife. Emotional recognition therefore becomes the foundation of their emotional intimacy.

Tagore further observes that through emotional companionship and intellectual encouragement, Charulata gradually discovers her own individuality and emotional identity. The relationship between Charulata and Amal develops not

through physical passion but through emotional communication, literary imagination, and intellectual understanding. Tagore deliberately avoids melodrama and instead presents emotional intimacy through subtle psychological interaction. Amal encourages Charulata to write creatively and express herself emotionally. Her words seemed to flow naturally as she gained confidence in her writing. Writing becomes a medium through which Charulata expresses emotions that cannot be openly articulated within patriarchal society.

Charulata gains confidence in her creativity and individuality. Before Amal's arrival, Charulata's imagination remained emotionally directionless because her intellectual needs lacked encouragement. Tagore states, "... Charu had no work to do" (Tagore 4). Emotional neglect therefore affects creativity and emotional expression as well. As Charulata and Amal become emotionally closer, emotional tension and psychological conflict intensify within the novella. Their relationship remains emotionally intimate yet socially restrained. Tagore avoids sensational romance and instead focuses on emotional longing and psychological complexity.

Emotional intimacy develops through shared imagination, literary discussion, emotional understanding, and communication. Charu anxiously listened to Amal's footsteps. This reflects emotional longing and emotional dependence. Amal's presence gradually becomes emotionally necessary for Charulata. An unfamiliar sorrow overwhelmed Charu. This pain emerges from emotional awakening and internal conflict. Charulata experiences psychological suffering because her emotional attachment toward Amal conflicts with social morality and marital expectations. Emotional repression becomes psychologically overwhelming.

The novella therefore examines the psychological consequences of emotional suppression. Tagore portrays Charulata not as morally weak but as emotionally neglected and psychologically isolated. Her emotional attachment toward Amal emerges naturally because he fulfills emotional and intellectual needs absent within her marriage. From a feminist perspective, the novella critiques social systems that deny women emotional freedom and intellectual recognition. Women's emotional desires remain invisible within patriarchal domestic structures. Emotional repression forms one of the central themes of *Broken Nest*. Charulata experiences guilt because her emotional attachment toward Amal conflicts with social expectations regarding marriage and female morality.

Fear emerges because emotional desire and social duty become psychologically incompatible. Tagore states, "... she built a secret temple of sorrow, decorated only with a garland of her tears" (Tagore 76). Tears symbolize emotional suffering, helplessness and suppressed emotions throughout the novella. Amal himself expresses emotional confusion and guilt as he gradually recognizes the emotional intensity developing between himself and Charulata. Amal became silent. Silence becomes emotionally significant. Amal understands

that their emotional intimacy threatens the emotional stability of the household. Unlike dramatic romantic heroes, Amal chooses emotional withdrawal instead of rebellion. He leaves the house in order to avoid emotional destruction and social scandal. Amal's departure becomes an act of emotional sacrifice and emotional denial. The emotional emptiness that disappeared temporarily during his presence returns with greater intensity. Charulata's suffering becomes more tragic because she cannot openly express her grief.

Patriarchal society provides women little emotional freedom to express dissatisfaction, loneliness, or emotional longing. Tagore portrays this emotional devastation through silence and emotional absence rather than dramatic breakdown. "... as the days began to go by, Amal's absence increased, by slow degrees, the emptiness of Charu's world" (Tagore 74). Absence itself becomes emotionally present in the novella. Bhupati gradually begins to recognize the emotional tragedy unfolding within his marriage. Bhupati realizes too late that emotional neglect has weakened the emotional foundation of his marriage. The tragedy of the novella therefore lies not in external destruction but in emotional fragmentation caused by silence and emotional invisibility.

One of the Tagore's greatest literary achievements in *Broken Nest* is his use of psychological realism and symbolic imagery. Rather than using dramatic confrontation or melodrama, Tagore presents emotional pain through silence, pauses, gestures, unfinished conversations, and symbolic spaces. The title *Broken Nest* itself carries deep symbolic significance. A nest traditionally symbolizes emotional security, domestic harmony, marriage, and emotional belonging. However, Tagore presents a household that appears socially stable yet emotionally fragile. Externally the domestic structure survives, but emotionally it collapses. Silence remains one of the most psychologically meaningful elements of the novella. This silence contains emotional helplessness, guilt, sorrow, and emotional distance simultaneously. Tagore's psychological realism emerges from his understanding that emotional suffering often remains invisible and unspoken. Emotional loneliness develops gradually through neglect, silence, and absence of communication rather than dramatic emotional conflict.

From a feminist perspective, *Broken Nest* critiques patriarchal domestic systems that ignore women's emotional and intellectual individuality. Charulata represents women whose emotional lives remain invisible within socially respectable households. Tagore portrays Charulata as intelligent, emotionally sensitive, imaginative, and psychologically complex. Her emotional attachment toward Amal develops because Amal recognizes qualities ignored within her marriage. Emotional understanding and intellectual companionship therefore become essential aspects of emotional fulfilment. Tagore refuses to morally condemn Charulata. Instead, he focuses on the emotional and psychological conditions responsible for her emotional suffering. The novella therefore critiques

patriarchal expectations that reduce women's lives to domestic responsibility while ignoring their emotional desires, emotional loneliness, and intellectual needs. Tagore's feminist sensitivity remains remarkable because he portrays female loneliness with extraordinary empathy and psychological realism.

Contemporary Relevance

Emotional loneliness within relationships continues to exist despite social modernization and changing gender roles. Many individuals continue to experience emotional isolation even within socially successful marriages and relationships. Tagore's exploration of emotional neglect therefore remains universally meaningful. The novella also remains relevant within contemporary feminist discussions regarding emotional labor, emotional invisibility, women's individuality, and emotional communication within intimate relationships. Tagore's understanding of emotional loneliness appears psychologically modern because he recognizes that human beings require emotional understanding, communication, and emotional recognition in order to experience fulfilment. Material comfort alone cannot create emotional happiness. Through Charulata's emotional suffering, Tagore demonstrates that emotional companionship is essential for meaningful human relationships.

Conclusion

Rabindranath Tagore's *Broken Nest*, translated into English by Sharmishta Mohanty, remains one of the most psychologically insightful and emotionally powerful novellas in Indian literature. The novella demonstrates that emotional loneliness can exist even within socially respectable marriages when emotional communication and emotional understanding are absent. Charulata experiences emotional emptiness not because of material deprivation but because her emotional and intellectual individuality remains ignored.

Bhupati's emotional neglect emerges not from cruelty but from emotional unawareness and excessive involvement in public life. Amal's arrival transforms Charulata's emotional world because he recognizes her intelligence, creativity, and emotional sensitivity. Tagore's portrayal of emotional intimacy remains psychologically realistic because emotional connection develops through communication, emotional recognition, and creativity rather than physical attention. Through symbolism, silence, psychological realism, and emotional restraint, Tagore critiques patriarchal domestic systems that ignore women's emotional and intellectual needs. The enduring significance of *Broken Nest* lies in its universal exploration of emotional loneliness and emotional invisibility. Even in contemporary society, emotional isolation and emotional neglect continue to affect human relationships. Ultimately, the novella demonstrates that meaningful human relationships require empathy, emotional communication, emotional recognition, and intellectual understanding. Without these emotional foundations, even socially stable relationships become emotionally fragile.

Through Charulata's silent emotional suffering, Tagore presents one of the most powerful literary representations of female loneliness and emotional isolation in Indian literature.

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