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## Disnarration and a few unanswered questions: A critique on Tagore's portrayal of women in his fiction

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### Abstract

This paper seeks to attempt a critique on the portrayal of women in Tagore's fiction. Gerald Prince introduced the concept of disnarration, which refers to the silences in narrative structure. In Tagore's fiction too, we find those silences. This paper would try to delve deep into the silences and also find out answer to some questions which remain unanswered.

**Keywords:** Woman, gender, silences, Tagore, fiction

### Introduction

Very few literary luminaries have been able to demonstrate such great astuteness as Tagore does in probing into the inner world of woman. Let me seek to justify this observation by showing how the great artist of literature delves deep into the intricacies, desires, despair and inner-struggles of his women protagonists in novels like, *The Wreck (Noukadubi)* and *Char Adhyay*. With her realization that Ramesh's affection for her is different from the intimacy a wife expects from a husband, Kamala continues to be oppressed with a storm of emotional disturbances. In the words of S.C. Sengupta: "Kamala could not define the emotion that stirred in her breast as she gazed upon the wild sky and the turmoil of the night; it may have been fear and it may have been joy."

However, with her rather incidental encounter with Nalinaksha, her real husband, the author's sole interest seems to place her in Nalinaksha's path. The man, who has so long given her the position of a wife and yet preserved her from sin, quickly and curiously vanishes from her mind. S.C. Sengupta observes: ".,The development of characters is sacrificed to the necessities of the plot."

Ela in *Char Adhyay*, embodies more of Tagore's reason for his objection to the enlightened women's involvement in political turmoil than a palpable individual with characteristic distinction. Her end too is shrouded in vagueness. In the words of Narayan Gangopadhyay:

.As regards the background, characters, the structure of the story, the novel appears simply a made up tale.

This however, is not the reason for my resentment.

The real heart of the matter is, that the novel is very weak.

The style is decorative, yet does not startle. The characters do not seem flesh and blood figures, rather caught up in the draft of the story. The agony of Atin who has lost his true vocation (Brata) or the tragedy of Ela hardly touch us.

But the dramatic structure of *Char Adhyay* is its chief attraction. For some unknown reason, the dramatic structure becomes clear in later novels of Rabindranath. In this respect, the value of *Char Adhyay* must be acknowledged. (1987:451-452)

In my attempt at a critical appraisal of the female protagonists of *Gora*, I would like to point out that all those characters arrive at the end of the day, at a free, ever-widening horizon of life, where castes, creeds and all other sham disparities are convincingly replaced by the Tagorean Universalism. What counts in the end is not parochialism or jingoism, what counts is the kindling of the beacon of undivided humanity.

This is what binds the heroes and heroines together as unfettered human souls, whose leit motif is to love, love and love alone. At the centre of the novel, stands erect Anandamoyee, the very embodiment of what Tagore writes in a private letter in January 1921: ".

The complete man must not be sacrificed to the patriotic man, or even to merely moral man. To me, humanity is rich and large and many-sided.”

Tagore gives us an insight into the vices of child-marriage, untouchability, dowry etc. in this great fiction.

In dealing with seemingly “small” female characters, Rabindranath prefers to be economical. I think, he might have given them a bit larger space. He picks up them, as I mentioned before, and then leaves them casually. All the striking figures in Tagore’s novels, like Sucharita and Lalita in *Gora*, hail from the upper-middle class and elite families. In their high-flown rhetoric, spick and span attires and high profile demeanour, they all seem to be on a plane, much higher and more exclusive than the rank and file of the mundane life. It may sound presumptuous on my part, but, sorry, I cannot help commenting that the worshipper of Universalism, is a bit miserly in treating the downtrodden like Lachmia, the Christian maid, Nanda’s mother, the Barber’s wife and so on. However, it might be viewed as an honesty on Tagore’s part, for he himself modestly acknowledges his lack of first-hand knowledge of the underdogs belonging to the grey horizon of the society. To transcribe his lines in English: “Je ache matir kachakachi/se kobir bani lagi kan pete achi” (I am all ears to the message of that poet/who is close to the soil).

The women protagonists of the Tagorian novels are endowed by Tagore with unique imaginative value as touchstones of human possibility. Such idealization is born of a benign harmonization between his dream of “the fair woman [who] sleeps for ages till she is touched by the magic wand” and the needs of the “age of mutilation of individuals” which called for the bolder strategies of positiveness. (Tagore, 1929: 178). His women protagonists traverse towards their Bildung and imbibe vitality, education and experiences of life in its multi-spectra.

Tagore entrusts his women with a mission of building a better tomorrow. He writes in “Personality”: “.the civilization of competing commerce and fighting powers must make room for that stage of perfection whose power lies deep in beauty and beneficence women can bring her fresh mind and all her power of sympathy to this task of building up a spiritual civilization, if she will be conscious of her responsibilities.” (Tagore 178).

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