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## The Minor Women Characters in Tagore's Novel *Gora*: A Study

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### Abstract

This paper seeks to attempt a feminist critique of the portrayal of the minor characters in Tagore's novel *Gora*. The minor characters have played a great role in the development of the plot. These characters often become the mouthpiece of different class and religion in our society. The minor characters often play a major role in carving out the destiny of the principal characters of the fiction.

**Keywords:** Feminist, women, religion, class, society

Each of Tagore's nine novels, built around the themes of family, community and gender, has at its centre stage a principal female protagonist. The only exception is *Gora*, where the protagonist is a man named Gourmohan or *Gora*. We find in Tagore's earlier works, child-like girl heroines or naive marginalised women confronted with social/parental antagonism. His later novels, written in the third literary epoch, revoke the pattern through intellectually enlightened, mature heroines with greater social authority. As daring fictions of female Building, these novels delineate young women from orthodox culture. They are caught in the cross-currents of tradition and maturity. They emerge from this ideological strife, educated, refined and wiser for the experience. Terms such as "Bildung". "Apprenticeship", "Apprentissage" in different languages represent novels of this specific mould. Such novels offer us a deeper insight into the protagonist's inner-history and convincingly give coherence to her radically transforming education through the structure of experience. The dominance of the social context in Tagore's novels is a conscious strategy that brings home a tantalizing period of transition between Hindu conservatism and British modernism from which the radically contrived "new women" of Bengal emerged, representing forces of constructive growth from both sides. Eschewing one stage of development to be elevated to another, Tagore's women protagonists are inspired by promptings of self-exploration and self-luminosity, as well as an unavoidable need to build up an identity within the stupendous whirl of shifting social structures. Consequently, Tagore's heroines from his fictions are assigned to non-conventional roles even though their activities are confined within the structures full of historical, psychological and social resonance from the past. The protagonist's pain-staking journey through the jagged unpredictable and precarious avenue of life is a maturing process, a passage that assumes the traits of an epic myth if one perceives her intrinsic Odyssey as analogous to the external epic adventures of discovery. As fictions of self-cultivation, Tagorian novels are closely identical to Bildungsroman. Max Waundt in his extensive introspection of Goethe's Wilhelm Meister segregates five general flash points of archetypal novels in this category, which not only differentiate Bildungsroman, but also track down their genealogy from those of other categories of novel. According to him, those five features are:

The focus on 'inner life', which relates it [Bildungsroman] to the novel of sentiment, itself an outgrowth of the romantic novel (Liebesroman); 'The striving for knowledge of the world'; of the novel of travel, itself a later development of the novel of adventure; 'the critical attitude to the world' of the satirical novel; the 'presentation of individual development' of the psychological and biographical novels; and 'the colorful portrayal of life and the world' of the broader novel of culture. (Shaffiner 1983:7).

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A close and careful reading of Tagore's novels, especially *The Wreck* (Noukadubi), *The Home and the World* (Ghare Baire), *Chokher bali*, *Char Adhyay* enable us to discern the presence of the aforesaid features in the way the female protagonists in these fictions are treated, as well as in the manner, in which their personalities and characters have been developed from one stage to another.

Harimohini, Sucharita and Satish's aunt in the novel, represents someone who is victim turned accomplice. Her desperation evolving out of her life-long deprivation and plights, and her frantic possessiveness about Sucharita form together a very interesting subject of the strange psychosis of a widow in a precarious situation. When she comes to Paresh Babu's house, apparently in order to spend the rest of her life with her niece and nephew, she is reduced to a destitute. However, no sooner does Harimohini shift with Sucharita and Satish to Sucharita's house, than she is rapidly transformed from a weak and helpless woman into an aggressive and possessive one. Initially, she treats Binoy and *Gora* with affection, but now she becomes alienated from both of them. Binoy now appears to her as no true Hindu almost an atheist. As for *Gora*, his argumentative and pro-active brand of Hinduism, almost modern despite its avowed orthodoxy, is alien to her.

#### **Feminist critic, Rajul Sogani writes**

Soon, her (Harimohini) self-centered possessive nature reveals itself in her desire to control Sucharita's activities, relationships and opinions. All her energy is directed towards guarding Sucharita and pulling her into her own world of Hindu orthodoxy....her frantic efforts to cast Sucharita in an orthodox mould and her appeal to Sucharita's friends to help her enterprises makes her a hideous figure a victim transformed into a tyrant. (Solagni 2002:154).

Another female character in *Gora*, Barodasundori, reminds us to a limited extent of Mrs. Bennet in Jane Austen's fiction *Pride and Prejudice*, particularly because of her over-indulgent penchant for exhibiting her daughters' talents. Her snobbery and self-flattering thought of her Brahmma nomenclature being a status symbol of progressiveness, provoke us to chuckle mockingly at her. She scorns everyone outside Brahmma Samaj; she teaches her daughters to disdain Hindu women much to the peril of vitiating their young minds with sectarian filth. Barodasundori insisted ridiculously that her daughters should sport shoes and socks, in complete ignorance of their unsuitability in a hot climate. She thinks it to be a sign of modernity. According to some, she is not unlike a modern caricature of a Feminist a "Bluestocking".

A few more minor female figures are succinctly depicted in *Gora*. Like Gulliver holding the Lilliputians on his palm, Tagore picks the small people up for instantaneous playful observation and then leave them indifferently on the road side to go ahead with his main characters. These rather neglected minor female characters are Labanya, Lachmia, Sashimukhi and so on.

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