

# Tagore's Art of Characterization

Dr. Atul S. Sarode

Deptt. Of English,  
G.S.Tompe Arts, Commerce and Science College,  
Chandur Bazar, Amravati, Maharashtra.

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Tagore set up a new trend in his treatment of characters in his novels. There is a considerable digression from the erstwhile novels of Bankim Chandra. This new trend in Tagore's novels discarded the simple heroic recitals or petty romances which have been the theme in the earlier novels, by the previous Bengali writers or in general Indian writers. As Mulk Raj Anand puts, "while Bankim was a recitalist, preaching a moral, Tagore saw what the novel is, a Tolstoy had insisted a dramatic presentation through space and time of the inner change in the life a character".

Tagore characterization, though dependent on realistic psychological exploration, does not involve any existentialist choice, as it were, since he is content with lying bare such determinants as are capable of clarifying social relationship and responsibilities deriving from the character's engagement with life. Tagore was not a committed experimentalist; but to deny him any formal expertise or to judge him solely on the basis of recent innovation in novelistic technique would be indeed far from it. The art of characterization in Tagore's novels, suffer from a certain weakness of craftsmanship which results in a kind of diffuseness and looseness a 'flabbiness' of narrative. The undue reliance on chance and coincidence in some of the novels and the contrived ending of some other point towards impatience on the part of the novelist in working out a structure of ordered episodes. These drawbacks however do not greatly diminish the merit of his novels which reveal dispositions of design which are new to the novel in India. As Bhabani Bhattacharya has noted: "Each novel grown in its own individual mould, different from what has proceeded it or comes afterward. Some are more traditional in manner, other a total departure."

The use of flashback by Tagore in the structuring of his narrative (as in 'Four Chapters') which Bankim Chandra Chatterjee has not attempted points to his experimentalist basis. The employment of multiple points of view as in 'The Home and the World' and central consciousness (as in 'Chaturanga') though not with the fitness of Henry James, does invest them with a kind of,

psychological realism which Bankim's novels lack. The dialogues in his novels are marked by a dramatic verse and poetic grace besides a naturalness which invest the fictional frames with life. The use of narration in the first person, though not invariable successful, does help in eliminating authorial intervention which his predecessor has not been able to accomplish

Tagore's characters are most life-like. His characters, beneath their trappings have the eternal human essence. In his novels Tagore has used of the persons of his novels emphasizes the insight of Tagore reveals the psyche of them. He gives fragments of narrative technique through weaving the artistic situations captures the hearts of the readers and thus he succeeds in giving the clear experience of the characters in such backgrounds.

Tagore's first novel "Binodini" is a story of a young widow which has been hailed as 'one of the first and finest studies in women's psychology in Bengali, or indeed any other Indian Language'. Tagore makes a radical departure from his predecessor by turning Binodini into a complex character, thus making a shift from rhetorical to psychological characterization. Binodini, Bihari, Asha and Mahendra are the most beautiful character studies. There are about half a dozen characters in 'Bindoni'; typical specimens of the Bangali middle class. Rajyalakshmi, the mother of Mahendra, living in her own narrow world of ritual; a mother who has spoiled her son thoroughly Asha, sober docile, meek, charming and innocent women, the wife of Mahendra, and Bihari, Mahendra's friend. But Binodini overshadow all these figures. In the character of Binodini, Tagore has brought the picture of a young widow subjected to the orthodox and meaningless customs of Hindu society. The intense depiction of Bindoni's predominant in the novel is expressive or her by a cruel social system as counter pointed with her supreme capacity for self control climaxing in her rejection of Bihari's offer of marriage. Rather than consenting to a socially unacceptable marriage, she seeks, through the dynamic of self-affirmation, a more meaningful role for her rich personally, acquires thus a greatness even though she does not

emerge victorious. The progression of her character is from that of seemingly heartless coquetry to humane and idealistic self abnegations, inevitable in a social conquery to a humane and idealistic self abnegations, inevitable in milieu which is basically hostile of her aspiration of love and sympathy.

In 'Gora' Tagore's longest novel, Tagore uses a wide canvas, massive design, numerous episodes and big galaxy of life like characters. And for the first time in the novel of Tagore, a male character dominates the action. Nowhere else do we see a character like 'Gora' "so masculine in the world of Tagore's writings".

In "Gora", Tagore has used different techniques to reveal the characters. There are different characters each with a distinct individuality about them the humorous, poignant, the ordinary-characters with magnanimity and meanness as well.

'Gora' is the principal character of the novel. Dr. Narayan Gangopahdyay has termed Gora as "the most precious documents of Indian thoughts" Dr. Sukumar Sen has said that in Gora "there is unity and contradiction between individual and the society, society and the religion, religion and the human truth." Prabodh Chandra Sen writes that "the ideal of human fraternity which has been presumed by Tagore as the way of India has been expressed through Gora's meditation". Gora is the picture of Tagore's heart and his imagination. The novel is the story of Gora's exploration of the form and the shape of India. In Gora's character, Tagore has brought the picture of a true patriot in the background of 19<sup>th</sup> century India. Political dependence and economic backwardness and the internal discrepancy have made him more sad. His haughty nature is soon attracted towards a greater truth, the truth of patriotism. He even accepts his imprisonment to protest the injustice of the rulers. But after he is released, we do not find him to involve in greater political solution. He is of the view that foreign and native criticism of Hinduism can best be repudiated by holding firmly to our own customs and beliefs. He thinks that the nation cannot be saved until and unless the internal discrepancy and internal dividedness are eradicated.

Tagore's master-stroke lies in his choice of 'Gora' the 'foundling child' of an Irish English couple murdered in the Indian sepoy Mutiny-as the passionate advocate of Hindu revivalist nationalism. Gora's identity is hidden from him and he grew up as an orthodox, fanatic Hindu. He develops a strong pollution complex and becomes

most punctilious about rituals, bathing regularly in the Ganges, ceremonial worship and being cautious of what he eats, Gora's strong fanaticism and obscurantism also act as a wide gulf between him and Sucharitra. Nothing short of a staggering crisis swerves him from his domestic stance. But when the secret of his birth is revealed to him he is greatly shocked, as one with "no mother, no father, no country, no nationality, no image, no God even" The excellence of Tagore's artistry is seen in his reserving the revelation of Gora's identity to a moment when he is about to be proclaimed as "The light of Hinduism." If accomplished it could have been inversion of his inward process of revelation, which underlines the plot structure of the novel. Having detailed Gora's muffled voices from within about the incalculable damages done to Hindu society by the prevalence of superstition and obscurantism Tagore clinches the insights with the final discovery of his identity. Thus, the final denouncement is in the nature of coup de grace rather than a *deus ex machina* device. For a few moments Gora feels as if he was suddenly waken up from a dream but soon his immense inner strength asserts itself As Bhabani Bahattacharya observes the shock of the revelation is readily accepted by Gora because he had been yearning for an escape from "the inner strains of his self-imposed obligations" At the end of the novel we see Gora proclaiming himself as the true Indian.

"..... Today I am really an Indian. In me there is no longer any opposition between Hindu, Mussalman and Christian. Today every caste in India is my caste, the food of all his is my food ..... I feel, Paresh Babu that I am alive again"

Anandamoyi, one of Tagore's noblest creations emerges from the novel as the eternal type of Indian mother, who in her tender care, is not inhibited by caste, creed of nationality. All customs and habits have been turned into pieces and he has brought her out of all limits and has made her to reach the infinite, that is himself. This type of portraiture which is so vigorous, so verdant, cannot be found in any other novel of Tagore. There is no prevention in her appearance. She spreads her gleams in different incidents. Tagore has portrayed this character with ardent endeavor and has given it the true essence and the fragrance of beauty. Tagore's true vision of Universal divinity can be visualized in Anadamoyi's character. She can be considered as 'the mouth piece' of Tagore's philosophy.

Paresh Babu is the true revelation of Tagore's conception of religion. His life is the account of search of truth. Though he is in Brahma Samaj he is not under the limitation of a particular class. He has been searching for the truth. His exploration has tremendous impact on Sucharitha, Gora, Binoy and Lolita's characters. The portrait of Sucharitha, Lolita and Binoy are intended by Tagore to bring into focus the Hindu-Brahma conflict which forms the secondary theme of the novel. Sucharitha, the ward of Paresh Babu is a typical Indian Renaissance product with all the love and broad-mindedness well disciplined and kind. Gora's patriotism has thrilled her and his sincere spirit of self-sacrifice appealed to her imagination. But Gora's obscurantism and fanaticism put a barrier around him and prevented her feelings from developing into love. Despite his rigid Hindu orthodoxy she feels drawn to Gora because his burning patriotism finds a sympathetic echo in her.

The 'Home and the World' is a superb study in the psychological analysis of character. In the novel, we feel Tagore's adept use of the multiple points of view technique which makes for a clear renunciation of the motives and states of mind of the principal characters. The device of presenting separate segments of the story through different characters helps Tagore to highlight the internal conflicts and convulsions. The principal character in the novel are Nikhil, his wife Bimala and his close friend Sandip.

In the character of Nikhil, we see a true picture of a patriot who reflects the extra-national ideas that the one should possess. Nikhil a landlord of substantial means, is a man of noble ideas. Gently, rational and thoughtful, he cannot approve of any political programme based on violence and cunning. Nikhil has rationalistic and constructive approach with emphasis on self-reliance and righteous means, to the problem of Indian emancipation. Nikhil though supports Swadeshi has not wholeheartedly adopted the spirit of Bande Matram. His "dull, milk and watery Swadeshi" does not appeal to his wife Bimala. Nikhil, though perturbed and pained by Bimala's growing infatuation with Sandip, refuses to intervene and waits patiently for her realize the truth of circumstances and recent herself headlong rush to ruin. He even refuses to banish foreign goods from the markets and argues that it is for the people to choose between indigenous and foreign goods. He declares, "To tyrannize for the county is to tyrannize over the country" he believes in the eventual triumph of the good.

As opposed to Nikhil's genuine patriotism, sandip is opportunistic and means for

achieving personal power. He is a hypocrite, unscrupulous, capable of sweeping along everyone with magnetism, sophistry and rhetoric. He is a man of action, dynamic, adventurous, experienced in the use of stratagems. Sandip goes about inflaming the people with the cult of Bande Matram and the concept of freedom by force Sandip exploits Bimala, Nikhil's wife by exploring her as the "Queen Bee" of the Swadeshi workers. Through clever flattery she lays a share for her mind and body by hailing her as the "Shakti of the Motherland" A juggler of words, Sandip succeeds however in winning the sympathies of Bimala and also prepares her to steal the gold sovereign's from her own house. Tagore has represented Sandip as a black-hearted Patriot who shut the door on humanity and truth, and for his own utterly selfish and inflamed, immature minds to frenzy in the name of patriotism.

In characterizing Bimala, Tagore has put his great efforts to expose, beautiful young wife torn between two men she loves and likes. Bimala has lived the sheltered a life of a Hindu wife and the "Home" is the world for her until Sandip makes his disturbing appearance. In the opening chapter, we are acquainted with Bimala as a true house wife, devoted to her husband and shares his ideals until she is swept off her feet by the eruption of the Swadeshi Movement. It breaks down the barriers between the home and the world for Bimala. In this critical situation the fiery eloquence of Sandip holds Bimala spellbound. She admires the seemingly glowing patriotism of Sandip. Bimala's attraction for Sandip at first is purely intellectual but soon changes from admiration to infatuation. Bimala is temporarily swayed by the maddening cry of "Bande Matram" and robs her own house. Like a cunning thief, for the sake of so called national cause. But, she is horrified when in lucid interval the ugly truth flashes on her, and she detests wholeheartedly the filthy means of Sandip to worship the Mother. His greed and lust masqueraded and paraded as nationalism, are extremely repulsive to Bimala now. She repents sincerely for her folly in looking down on her husband Nikhil, as an impotent idealist, whom she misunderstood up till now.

Tagore's perception of Indian reality and the contemporary issue is modern in the projection of themes. Though his novelistic technique lacks the skill of craftsmanship he remains pioneer in initiating the psychological novel based on social reality. Though he has not contributed anything strikingly new towards the novelistic technique, his novels marks the transition from the tradition of historical romance which characterized the Indian novel up to his time to the realistic tradition that

has set it with him. It is Tagore who introduced the spirit of social realism and liberal humanism into the Indian novel and it is to him that the modern Indo-Anglian novel owes its moral and humane concern to its projection of contemporary reality.

By 1916, Tagore's writing reached the heights of glory. In spite of many distractions his creative work continued uninterrupted and the fountain of his writing flowed freely. A new orientation of his creative work began about this time, leading to a complete change in his diction and technique. His style is simple and even colloquial in respect of his vocabulary and quite unconventional in choice of themes. His writings are straight forward narratives devoid of rhetoric and exuberance. Their matchless simplicity shows delicate art and careful composition. His skill in technique is to be found in a new mode of imaginative expression in which accuracy of observation is blended with direction of expression, though the beauty of fresh and rhythm is not lost sight off. Tagore has remarkable freshness of look melodies which broke forth from his imagination. There are in his writings new emotional attitudes and values which had not been exploited before. It has been rightly marked that these show "how amazingly varied as well as superbly easy, was his workmanship....."

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