Chapter-III
Adolescence Appeal in the Works of Rabindranath Tagore
Several reasons attracted the researcher to study this genius, Rabindranath Tagore as one of the three writers for this research work. Firstly, Tagore is considered to be the greatest Indian litterateur of the twentieth century. A versatile and prolific writer, his multi-dimensional genius has found expression in poetry, novels, short stories, plays, music, painting and education. He is a born artist with exceptional mastery over many arts. It can be a an earnest attempt to study his artistic world for research purpose especially his short fiction. Secondly, the other two writers R.K.Narayan and Ruskin Bond chosen here for research purpose have portrayed male adolescents more while some of Tagore’s short stories depict female adolescents wonderfully. By focusing on Tagore’s female adolescent characters there can be a balanced study of both boy and girl adolescents for this entire research work. Thirdly, Tagore is the first and only Indian to receive the Nobel Prize for literature in recognition of his outstanding contribution to literature. No doubt, his achievement is due to the form of verse, as basically Tagore is a poet. However, his stories too contain a deep emotional content; for example, The Post Master describes some fine paragraphs of the beauty of nature in poetic language. There can be a sincere effort to assess how he achieved such worldwide fame by going through some of his appealing literary works.

In field of fiction, Tagore’s contribution of short stories is more in quantity in comparison to his novels. He may be considered as one of the pioneers of the art of writing short story as a form of Indian writing in English in India. His stories have a unique place in world literature as well besides having a special place in Bangla literature. He is a versatile personality who enjoys superb creative power. In literary art, he is basically a poet. And, therefore his writing may have a touch of poetic beauty. The publisher of a collection of Tagore’s short stories remarks in this connection:

Tagore basically was a poet and won the Nobel Prize for poems. So, naturally his stories too contain a deep emotional content. The human relationships have been worded delicately in them. The poetic imagination of the writer lifts the stories to heights of idealism and at the same time the earthly thoughts keep them tethered to ground realities. These stories woven with poetic craft, deft words
and embroidery of emotional feelings turn them into
a very fascinating tapestry that leaves deep
impression on the reader’s mind. (Manoj)

Tagore’s short fiction shows an insight into the working of human mind, especially the thoughts and feelings of the helpless and the neglected. His stories are usually told in a simple and direct style which an ordinary reader can enjoy at first reading. His most of the stories are told by first person singular narrator.
The Postmaster

Rabindranath Tagore’s *The Postmaster* is a moving story of the love of a simple rustic girl, Ratan for a city-bred man. The man is from Calcutta posted as a postmaster in a village of Ulapur. It is a story of the postmaster, an educated man from urban society and an illiterate rustic adolescent girl. The postmaster doesn’t feel comfortable in the rural surroundings. He feels like a fish out of water. He craves for his family and finds the job place intense lonely. On the other hand, Ratan, an orphan young girl is also completely alone in the world. She does odd jobs and cooks meal for the postmaster. Both somehow, feel comfortable in the company of each other.

Ratan sits outside the postmaster’s room waiting eagerly for his call. Whenever, he calls her, she rushes to him asking: ‘Did you call me Dada?’ (Rabindranath, The Postmaster)

The postmaster tries to adjust in the new environment. But, the new place doesn’t please him. When loneliness pains him intensely, he begins to take interest in Ratan by teaching her to read. She responds enthusiastically and takes interest in learning. Both share the memory of their families. Poor girl memorizes some glimpse of her family members. In this way, their intimacy develops, especially Ratan’s. As an adolescent, she is governed more by emotions. She now feels very close to the postmaster.

Even as a young girl, Ratan is able to handle the household responsibilities. She does odd jobs, cooks meal for the postmaster. In comparison to other adolescent girls, she is much mature and capable of households. Perhaps, the circumstances have taught her to be so. At the age of playing with other children and study, she has begun to work and manage for her bread and butter. Many adolescents like Ratan have to begin earning at early stage of life on account of poor the economic condition of their family. They learn the hardships of life at an early age.

Like many other stories of Tagore, nature has its own role in *The Postmaster*. It rains so heavily and continuously, that it seems as if the rain will never end. As a result, Ratan gets more time to spend with the postmaster who in order to pass time teaches her how to read. They talk about each other’s families. This relationship develops on two different point of views. The postmaster feels extreme lonely. He
wanders near the pond, tries to compose poems and make some other efforts in order to pass time but in vain. Then he pays attention on Ratan. She on the other hand, responds enthusiastically in learning how to read. She seems to have received a family member in the form of the postmaster. This may be a weakness of the adolescent in particular and human being in general to be emotional and build intimacy in such relationships.

Once, on heavily clouded morning, the postmaster’s little pupil waits a long outside the room for the Dada’s call. And when there is no call from inside, she enters the room slowly. She finds the postmaster lying in his bed. He informs her about his ill health and tells her that he is suffering from fever. All of a sudden, her role changes and she behaves like a nurse. The following paragraph may be considered as one of the most appealing about Ratan by Rabindranath Tagore:

In his loneliness and in the dark dampness of the rains, he needed a little tender nursing. He longed to feel the touch of soft hands on his head, to imagine the presence of loving womanhood, the nearness of mother and sister. And he was not disappointed. Ratan ceased to be a little girl. She at once stepped into the post of mother; called in the village doctor, gave the patient his medicine at the proper times, sat up all night by his bed, cooked his kunji for him, and every now and then asked: ‘Are you feeling a little better, Dada?’ (Rabindranath, The Postmaster)

Ratan’s kind behavior and soft treatment succeeds and the postmaster recovers from the illness. But, he is determined now to move away from here. He applies for his transfer. When his transfer application is rejected, he decides to resign the job. He informs Ratan about his resignation and going back to Calcutta. The decision leaves the girl dumbfounded. Tagore depicts the futility of the girl’s love and the pathetic situation she finds herself in with great intensity:

After a while, Ratan rose and went off to the kitchen to prepare a meal; but she was not as quick about it as before. Her little head was filled with
many new things to think about. When the postmaster had finished his supper the girl suddenly asked him: Dada, will you take me home with you? (Rabindranath, The Postmaster)

Ratan innocently asks the postmaster to take her with him. But, the reply hurts her heart. The postmaster laughs and says: ‘What an idea!’ But he doesn’t think it necessary to explain the girl why the idea seems so impossibly foolish. Ratan can’t sleep that whole night. The postmaster’s laughing reply tortures her.

Naturally, the way he treats her, develops intimacy and relationship with her may create a hope in her heart to be a member of his family. She doesn’t think this question is absurd or foolish. As an orphan, she dreams or hopes for family. Ratan thinks that the postmaster may fulfill her hope to provide a shelter take her with him. An adolescent simple girl like Ratan may not think rationally. She may be unable to foresee the social and family problems that may take place in the postmaster’s life. Perhaps, that’s why he reacts in strange manner by laughing and commenting: ‘What an idea!’ (Rabindranath, The Postmaster)

As an adult and experienced man he considers Ratan’s demand impractical. But as an adolescent she doesn’t find anything like impractical or foolish. Through this conversation Tagore focuses on the working of mind of a mature and adult man and an adolescent girl on the same issue.

The story turns then to an intense sentimental point. The postmaster’s sympathy doesn’t soften her heart. Next day, she completes the households mechanically. She also rejects the financial help by her master. The postmaster assures help to her by recommending his successor. His soft words of sympathy hurt her more! Tagore narrates her condition more effectively by only few words: ‘She bursts into tears.

At last, the postmaster is prepared to go. He gets into boat and departs from Ratan forever. His heart feels heavy with sadness. At the mid-stream, he feels an urge to go back, and bring away with him that lonely fatherless child who seems to be quit friendless in the world. But, it is too late to think about it. The village is left far
behind. So he comforts himself with wise thoughts about numberless meetings and partings in the world.

While the same departure shocks the poor girl, Ratan. As an illiterate, adolescent and inexperienced of human relationships she can’t accept this incident easily. Tagore describes:

But Ratan had no such wise arguments to comfort her. She wandered about the post office with the tears streaming from her eyes. It may be that she still hoped in some corner of her heart that her Dada would return, and perhaps that is why she could not tear herself away. Such is human nature! Its foolish mistakes continue. (Rabindranath, The Postmaster)

Ratan is one of the most caring and pathetic characters who generates sympathy for girls who are left alone in this world. Every meeting ends with departure. Departure is an inevitable part of every meeting. Those who come must go.

Innumerable people meet and separate in day to day life. Such ideology may soften an adult up to some extent but the simple adolescent girl, Ratan living in an isolated village is not familiar with this kind of philosophy. The postmaster is mature enough to comfort himself with these ideas.

Tagore’s world of short fiction shows a rich gallery of characters of different range. Ratan occupies a unique place among them. This innocent, adolescent yet responsible, capable to handle households, simple rustic orphan girl is an excellent specimen of Tagore’s literary art. Ratan is one of orphan adolescent characters like Rusty, Tom, Kim, David Copperfield who struggles herself in life without family support and gains reader’s sympathy.
Tagore’s Short stories take the readers to the 19th century Indian rustic society where the adolescents used to get married especially girls at child age. Generally, girls’ parents seemed more worried and they used to begin the search for a perfect match for their daughter of 12 to 14 years. Even today in some regions of India like Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, some communities follow this tradition of child marriage. Tagore reflects such customs in his short stories. *Subha* is a short fiction by Tagore highlighting the misery of an adolescent dumb girl Subha. Her parents get her married to a man who is kept completely in dark about her serious physical defect. The girl faces the misfortune without her fault.

Tagore portrays similar character to Ratan in the short story of *Subha*. Subha is too an adolescent girl of misfortune like Ratan. But the story of poor Subha is different from Ratan. Tagore depicts here the social reality of an ordinary family living in countryside, the village of Chandipur, having three daughters, Sukheshini (having lovely hair), Suhashini (sweetly smiling) and Subhashini (sweetly speaking) who is called Subha for short. When the girl was given the name Subhashini, nobody had thought that she would never be able to speak and would be dumb when she grew up. There is irony here in the name of this poor girl. Subhashini means having sweetness in speech; while the ill-fated Subhashini is not able to speak at all. Banikantha, Subha’s father loves this silent child of his rather than he loves his other daughters; but her mother feels a sense of shame and almost hates Subha as she is not like other girls.

Subha’s two elder sisters have married with the usual difficulties and expense, and now the youngest daughter lies like a silent weight upon the heart of her parents. In Indian society, girl’s parents are worried about her marriage from the childhood of the girl. The problem worsens when the family is economically and socially lower. The problem is worst when the girl is abnormal. Subha is a physically challenged girl with inability of speech. People instead of having sympathetic approach towards such physical defect, sometimes pass comments on them and make their life more miserable. People seem to think that, because Subha does not speak, therefore she does not feel. They discuss their anxiety for her future even in her presence. Though the girl is dumb, Tagore expresses the agony of this girl:
She had understood from her earliest childhood that God had sent her like a curse to her father’s house, so she kept away from ordinary people and tried to live apart. She felt she could endure her unhappiness if everyone would forget her.

(Rabindranath, Subha)

Being physically handicapped, Subha has no friends. Other children avoid playing with her. She has already been punished by fate. She is dumb. Other children also treat her inattentively. They avoid her, perhaps because of their parents’ instruction. She is always alone, of course in the very company of nature. When her work is done, she passes her time at the river bank. At teenager age, most of the people like to enjoy the company of same age friends. But, Subha joins the whisper of stream, the voice of birds and other natural objects. When human being turns unfriendly, some other creatures may replace in even better ways. Subha has two close friends in the form of cows.

Tagore introduces another adolescent character in the story, named Pratap. He is a hopeless lad for his parents who is idle. His chief ambition is fishing. He passes most afternoon time at river bank. He comes across here Subha. She accompanies him in fishing. Their relationship develops with the passing of time. Youth is the era of whims and dreams. Tagore presents this element through Subha’s day dream:

If I only were a water-goddess! Then I might rise slowly from the river, bringing the jewel from a snake’s crown to the landing place. Then Pratap, leaving his stupid fishing, would dive into the lower world and find me there, sitting on a golden bed in a palace silver! (Rabindranath, Subha)

Though the girl is dumb, she dreams. Tagore shows her dreaming in this way. Undoubtedly it is impossible as she belongs to no royal family but to Banikantha’s family, an ordinary one.

Another important aspect of adolescent stage Tagore introduces in this story is the consciousness of growing. Subha begins to face some confusion in outer as well as
her inner world. At such stage mother is a perfect guide who can understand her daughter’s problems and helps to solve them. But, Subha’s mother hates her as she is not like other girls. Therefore Subha’s difficulties increase. Tagore points out her condition:

She grew up, and little by little began to find herself. A strange new consciousness, like a tide from the deep center of the sea when the moon is full, swept through her. She saw herself, questioned herself, but found no answer which she could understand. (Rabindranath, Subha)

There are plenty of questions regarding physical and other changes that adolescents face. Sympathetic approach from elders may help to come out from such confusion. S.P.Chaube throws light on this issue:

Adolescence is a stage in human life. During this period the body undergoes revolutionary changes. The mind and its outlook, too, experience important changes. The adolescent at the end of this period resembles the adult and leaves childhood far behind. The changes include physical, mental, social and emotional. (S.P)

The story of Subha is set in the in the last decade of 19th century. In that orthodox Indian rural society the problems of adolescent girl were more in comparison to today’s youth. In large scale of literacy and print and electronic media in the modern society may provide a better environment to the youth.

Subha’s parents are anxious about her marriage. One day her father declares that they must go to Calcutta for matrimonial affair of Subha. In Indian society, a daughter is compared with the cow, who follows her parents’ in matrimonial matter without question or objection. She is prepared to marry the groom her parents choose. In the cases like Subha, girls have no choice or option of their own for the life partner. Tagore narrates this helpless condition of this poor girl:
They got ready to go to this strange place. Subha’s heart was heavy with tears. With a fear that had been gathering for days, she followed her father and mother everywhere like a dumb animal. With her large eyes wide open, she looked anxiously at their faces, trying to learn something. But, they explained nothing to her. (Rabindranath, Subha)

Now poor Pratap is left alone again. He asks Subha not to forget him. Subha’s family leaves for Calcutta. In a house here, her future husband comes with a friend to see her. It is in most of the cases in Indian society that the boy has upper hand and he observes the girl whether she is suitable for marriage or not. Like an interview, he asks several questions in privacy in a separate room and takes the decision of marriage. However, every community and castes has its own customs in such meetings. But the fact is that, mostly the boy has to take the decision. Subha’s future husband observes her and finds her suitable as life partner. The poor dumb girl speaks through tears but the boy considers it as a mark of separation from the family. The boy and his family are kept in complete darkness about the serious disability of the bridegroom by Subha’s parents.

On the suitable day of the calendar, the marriage takes place in Calcutta means out of Subha’s village. Just in less than ten days everyone knows that the girl is dumb. Subha’s parents deliberately hide the dumbness of their daughter. As a result, after her marriage, she has to suffer throughout the life. Her condition is like Tess in the novel Tess of the d’Urbervilles by Thomas Hardy, who suffers without her fault. Subha deceives no one. But, certainly she will be punished. Subha’s story is more tragic because she has to suffer on account of the fault of her own parents. It pains more when her own family members cheat her. On the other hand, Tess’s life is ruined by Alec, an outsider and not a family member of Tess. Tagore ends the story at this revelation of Subha’s disability before her in laws. Sometimes, untold word may affect more than told words. A reader can imagine Subha’s miserable marriage life which Tagore doesn’t narrate. The marriage supplies Subha with everlasting miseries. She loses Nature but does not gain man. The tragedy of her life is made clear in a few short sentences at the end of the story and the reader is left to think over human suffering which cannot be explained or understood.

84
Tagore presents the picture of shallow-minded parents of young girl Subha in this story. They think that once they get their daughter married, they will get rid of their dumb daughter. But, what about the innocent girl, who faces harsh punishment without her fault? Nobody cares her, neither family nor society and not even God.
The Home Coming

*The Home Coming* is a wonderful specimen of Tagore’s portrayal of adolescents. The story introduces Tagore’s wide range of characterization. If Ratan and Subha are touching pen pictures of female juvenile, this story highlights the adolescent world of boys. The story presents Phatik Chakravati, a ringleader among the boys of a village. He is a perfect nuisance for his family and proves a headache for his maternal uncle’s family in Calcutta. Here, we come across the mastery of Tagore in creating paradoxical situation from story of *The Postmaster*, in which the postmaster belongs to Calcutta and he is appointed in a village of Ulapur, while the central character of this story, Phatik, a lad of fourteen, belongs to a village and is sent to Calcutta for study. Both fail to adjust in the new surroundings. As a result, the postmaster resigns from his post and Phatik undergoes a serious illness in the desire of returning home.

The story begins with the description of the boys playing at river bank of a village. Phatik is the gang leader of these boys. A new idea takes place in his mind to shift a heavy log lying on the mud-flat of the river waiting to be shaped into a mast for a boat. All the boys welcome the proposal. It will make the owner of the log angry and all will enjoy the fun. An individual adolescent boy may be peaceful and harmless. But when there is group, they may make mischief and become nuisance for others. As soon as Phatik and other boys begin to turn the log, Phatik’s younger brother Makhan sits on the log. He and Phatik look like of opposite tempers. He proves a barrier in the fun of the mischievous boys. Phatik warns him to go away from there, but his brother doesn’t care. It becomes a question of pride of the leader. At adolescent phase, development of ego is rapid. When a youngster’s ego is challenged, he/she may become violent. And here, Makhan challenges his elder brother in the presence of his followers. It enrages him and he commands other boys to heave log. At last, Makhan and his glory fall down.

As the reaction of public insult, Makhan attacks the ringleader, kicks him and then goes crying home. Some boys are very smart in this kind of situation. They harm their level best to the other fighter(s) and then report at home crying about the quarrel. Their acting aims the sympathy of elders. Makhan reports at home and the servant come down from home telling that Phatik is summoned by his mother. Young boys
particularly in group are mostly active more physically. Meanwhile, a boat arrives and a middle-aged man gets down from it. He enquires Phatik about his address. But, Phatik behaves very carelessly.

On reaching home, Phatik is scolded by his mother for hitting Makhan. Phatik’s anger is now out of control. He attacks his brother in the presence of his mother. The mother takes Makhan’s side and pulls Phatik away. The poor mother is tired now on account of Phatik’s day to day quarrels. She calls him ‘little villain’. This may be the story of many mothers of adolescent boys. Sometimes, they do not know how to treat their boys when they quarrel with other children may be family members or neighboring. As a result, they beat the boys at home. In some cases, they feel incapable to control their sons and begin to cry. Since the father remains outside home most of the time for bread and butter, the mother has to handle the situation. When she fails to control the naughty boys, she beats them and appears strict. When the drama is going on at Phatik’s home, a middle-aged man turns up there. He is the same stranger who had asked Phatik about his address few minutes ago. In fact, he is Phatik’s maternal uncle Bhishamber.

After few days, Phatik’s uncle asks about the education of the two boys. Here, in the reply of Phatik’s mother, a reader feels pity for her. She tells her brother that Phatik is a perpetual nuisance, lazy, disobedient and wild. On the contrary, Makhan is as good as gold. An important change in Phatik’s life takes place when Bishamber, his uncle kindly offers to take him off to Calcutta for educating with his own children. The worried mother at once agrees. Phatik also welcomes this proposal. Tagore describes the sign of relief on the face of the mother of her disobedient boy, Phatik:

It was an immense relief to the mother to get rid of Phatik. She had a prejudice against the boy, and the two brothers disliked each other. She was in daily fear that he would either drown Makhan some day in the river, or breaks his head in a fight, or run him into some danger. At the same time she was a little distressed to see Phatik’s extreme eagerness to get away. (Rabindranath, The Home Coming, Practical English Prose and Verse)
The decision of Phatik’s going to his Uncle’s home at Calcutta doesn’t make his mother tension free. Ultimately, she is a mother and she knows her son, his habits, wild nature, indiscipline which may also trouble his relatives. Her anxiety is natural. The boy like Phatik may create more problems than his own home for his kind uncle’s family.

A noteworthy feature can be observed here in the changing behavior of Phatik towards his brother Makhan while going to Calcutta. He is excited to move to a new place. An adolescent lacks maturity. He is more sentimental than intelligent; hence his behavior changes more rapidly than the adults. Tagore narrates:

Phatik, as soon as all was settled, kept asking his uncle every minute when they were to start. All day long he was full of excitement and lay awake most of the night. He gave to Makhan his fishing-rod, his big kite, and his marbles. Indeed, at this time of departure, his generosity towards Makhan was unbounded. (Rabindranath, The Home Coming, Practical English Prose and Verse)

The same boy, Phatik who quarreled with his own brother wildly just few days ago treats him kindly. A young boy’s anger may be temporary. He may make his enemy his best friend next moment. In R.K.Narayan’s Swami and Friends, Mani fights with Rajam and then they become close friends. And here, Makhan is his own brother. One thing comes out here from Phatik’s behavior that when a boy’s ego is challenged, when he is ill treated he may turn violent and the same boy in happy mood may turn kind and generous.

In Calcutta, Phatik’s life takes a major turn. His aunt is not pleased at all with the arrival of this unwelcomed guest. She thinks the boy is unnecessary burden to her family as she finds it difficult to manage her own three boys. It is terribly upsetting for her to manage a village lad of fourteen. Tagore, like an expert psychologist throws light here on the growth of fourteen year boy:

In this world of human affairs there is no worse nuisance than a boy at the age of fourteen. He is
neither ornamental nor useful. It is impossible to
give affection to him as to a little boy; and he is
always getting in the way. If he talks in a childish
way he is called a baby, and if he answers in a
grown-up way he is called impertinent. In fact, any
talk at all from him is resented. Then he is at the
unattractive, growing age. He grows out of his
clothes quickly, his voice grows hoarse and breaks;
his face grows suddenly angular and unsightly. It is
easy to excuse the mischief of early childhood, but
it is hard to tolerate even unavoidable faults in a boy
of fourteen. The lad himself becomes painfully self-
conscious. When he talks with elderly people he is
either unduly adult or else so unduly shy that he
appears ashamed of his very existence.
(Rabindranath, The Home Coming, Practical
English Prose and Verse)

Tagore also discusses here about one of the most touching aspect of adolescents,
feeling of love. He writes:

Yet it is at this very age when a young lad most
desires recognition and love; and he becomes the
slave of anyone who shows him consideration. But,
none dare openly love him, for that would be
regarded as bad for the boy. So, what with scolding
or beating, he becomes very much like a stray dog
that has lost its master. For a boy of fourteen his
own home is the only paradise. To live in a strange
house with strange people is little sort of torture;
while the height of pleasure is to receive the kind
looks of women and never to be scolded by them.
(Rabindranath, The Home Coming, Practical
English Prose and Verse)
It is painful for Phatik to be the unwelcome guest in his aunt’s house. Soon, the poor boy realizes that his decision to come to Calcutta is wrong. He begins to feel homesick. It is really hard for a young boy to adjust in new surrounding especially when the relatives consider him unwanted. Like the city-bred postmaster of the short fiction, Phatik fails to adjust with new place and people. He feels that he can hardly breathe. He wants to return to open country. His condition is like a lion in a circus which used to be the king of the jungle and now caged. Phatik enjoyed the position of the ringleader in his village, but in Calcutta his condition is pitiable. He is insulted at home by his aunt and at school by the teachers. He is the most backward student in the whole school. Perhaps, the boy feels inferiority complex. Many times when a student shifts into a more developed center for study, he becomes the victim of inferiority complex.

Finding himself in uncomfortable position at home and school, Phatik asks his uncle to go his home. His uncle asks him to wait till the holidays come. But the boy can’t wait till November. His aunt insults him badly when he loses his lesson book. He decides to go away without informing his uncle. In spite of his headache and possible attack of malarial fever, he leaves the home silently at night. The next morning he is found missing. Running away from home is a very common feature among the adolescent especially in the boys. They run away for some reasons like outside attraction as we find in the story I Want to Know Why, the hero, an adolescent boy runs away to watch horse race. Swami, in the novel Swami and Friends by R.K.Narayan, escapes from home because of his father’s strict nature.

Bishambar tries his best to find out Phatik. It has been raining constantly since last night. At last, he asks help from the police. At the end of the day, two constables bring him home. He is completely wet and trembling with fever. His fever rises very high. The doctor reports that his condition is very critical. After one day, his mother arrives crying: ‘Phatik, my darling.’ Phatik very slowly turns his head and says: ‘Mother, the holidays have come.’ The story ends with positive end. Ultimately, the awaited mother arrives at proper time.

Tagore emphasizes in this poignant story the natural behavior during adolescence, and describing it through the general perspective as ‘an unattractive growing age’. It is a period of life demanding the real support of family and the
whole community. Phatik’s mother treats him with prejudice. She favors Makhan. As a result, Phatik decides to go with his uncle. His aunt in spite of being the mother of three boys fails to provide motherly love for the poor boy away from home. Teachers in school treat him rudely. They also fail to support this poor student from countryside. All the adult characters except Bishambar, Phatik’s uncle do not appear mature. They fail to understand the problems of this lad. The story teller reminds the adults their significant responsibility towards the young. If they remain careless or treat the adolescents rudely, unexpected events may take place which may be very shocking. The realistic portrayal of an adolescent boy, the problems he confronts, the changes that take place in him, his strange behaviour, his longing for affection, admiration etc. are very well drawn in this story.

The treatment of women and their position in society was of serious concern to Rabindranath Tagore. Being a sensitive man and the supreme romantic poet of Bengal, he understood women in all their joy and sorrow, hope and despair, their yearnings and their dreams. Tagore found in the women of his country an immense wealth—their courage against all odds, their power of survival under the worst possible conditions and oppression, their forbearance, their self-sacrifice and gentleness. It pained him to see such colossal waste of so much human treasure. Indian woman’s rare quality of courage, piety, obedience, love and devotion are the themes of many of Tagore’s stories. Tagore had the unique natural genius to read women’s minds and he analyzed their strange structure, through his stories. Even in cruel actions and base thoughts, Tagore brings out noble feelings. He tells the world that Indian women are highly sacrificing, loving, obedient, meek, religious and kind. They adore their husbands, love their children deeply, and give due reverence and consideration to their in-laws. In his story ‘The River Stairs’, he presents a pitiable condition of female adolescent, Kusum.
The River Stairs

Tagore’s short story *The River Stairs* is a novelty in the art of storytelling where the river stairs narrate the story. Here a reader observes the use of personification. *The Landing Stairway or River Stairs* is one of the most excellent of Tagore’s stories and brings out the supreme beauty of his poetic talents very well. Tagore has the rare powers of portraying young female characters with every care. Tagore’s different females like Ratan is left alone, Subha seems to suffer endless torturing after marriage and Kusum in this story becomes widow just at the age of eight and at the end of the story she commits suicide. Various short stories depict the pitiable condition of young girls in male dominated Indian society.

The river stairs narrates the story of miserable young girl Kusum. In the very beginning, it is clearly mentioned in the tale that Kusum returns her father’s home as she is a widow. She got this shocking news through a letter. Her husband was working at far-off place. His death seems a mystery somehow because his dead body was not brought home but only the letter revealed this tragic news. Tagore narrates the pitiable condition of Kusum after her husband’s death:

A widow at eight years old, she had rubbed out the wife’s red mark from her forehead, taken off her jewellery, and come back to her old home by the Ganges. But she found few of her companions there. Bhuban, Swarno, and Amla were already married, and gone away; only Sarat remained, and she too, they said, would be married in December.

(Rabindranath, Tales From Tagore)

This passage indicates the pathetic tale of Kusum. She becomes widow at the age when she even can’t understand the meaning of marriage. Like her sari, her life also becomes colorless. Tagore draws a verbal picture of Indian pre-adolescent girl whose life becomes a curse before she begins to live it. As a social reformer Tagore criticizes such social evil. He reflects the stories of many ill fated girls like Kusum in his fictional works who become the victim of child marriage. Tagore’s another short fiction *My Fair Neighbor* also reveals the cruelty of Indian society of his time. This
too is a tale narrating the condition of a young widow. Tagore shows a revolutionary step in this story by the remarriage of this widow. It is not with Kusum only that she gets married at very young but her friends and other girls of her age too have got married or about to marry. Kusum differs from them as she has become a widow.

One continues to grow even he/she is widow/widower. Kusum grows leaving her childhood behind and moves towards youth. Tagore notes nicely this transformation of Kusum:

As the Ganges quickly grows to fullness with the coming of the rains, even so did Kusum day by day grow to the fullness of beauty and youth. But her dull-colored sari, her gentle, thoughtful face and quiet manners, drew a veil over her youth and hid it from men’s eyes. Ten years passed away, and no one seemed to have noticed that Kusum had grown up. (Rabindranath, Tales From Tagore)

Tagore’s narration of Kusum’s in few words suggests certain important things. Being a poet basically, he makes use of figure of speech freely and effectively. By employing simile, he compares the growth of Kusum with the flood of the river Ganges. Many people comment that youth is the period of flood, the flood of feelings, sentiments, and attraction for opposite sex. Secondly, Kusum appears like a representative of Indian rustic young girls who follow the established rules and regulations by the elders. In comparison to today’s adolescents, Tagore’s youngsters had very limited freedom to live life according to their wish. Kusum is like identity of the young girl of Indian society of Tagore’s time. She is shy, gentle, well-mannered and completely aware of her widowhood and grows in such a way that people can hardly notice of her growth. Contemporary society is bold in this sense. In cities, young girls wear fancy dresses instead of traditional and try to catch eyes of the people towards their growth. They expose their physical development through short dresses and make a kind of show of their being young. Rustic society in India is not so orthodox now in the matter of changing lifestyle of people. However, the influence of modernization is slow here in comparison to urban locality. Within this short passage of few words, Kusum reaches a strange stage of life, the adolescent era from
childhood. Tagore’s mastery of developing story can be observed here when he writes: ‘Ten years passed away.’ Very rapidly Kusum enters the post adolescent phase from childhood according to the need of the plot.

The story of Kusum takes an important turn when a tall, young, fair-skinned sanyasi takes shelter in the Siva temple of her village. As it happens in most of the villages of India, the news of his arrival spreads everywhere. The women leave their water pots and crowd into the temple to get his blessing. They come to him for advice, for comfort, and some for medicine. Months pass. A woman from the village where Kusum had been married expresses a doubt that the Sanyasi looks like Kusum’s husband, the younger son of the Chetterjee. But another woman argues that he is dead. Here, Tagore creates a kind of mystery towards Kusum’s husband.

One evening as the Sanyasi is coming down the stairs, he meets Kusum sitting there alone. When she bows low at his feet. He gives her blessing and inquires about her. She tells her name to him and returns her home slowly. But the sanyasi remains there sitting on the river-stairs for long hours that night. Afterwards, she pays regular visit to the Sanyasi and listens to his sermon and takes his blessing. Then all of a sudden she stops visiting him. He sends for her. At last she arrives but she seems confused. She looks unhappy when the sanyasi asks the reason for her absence, she explains some vague feeling she felt in her heart. She narrates a dream she had seen. Tagore is a distinctive storyteller who tells a lot in few words. He describes Kusum’s dream in ambiguous way:

I have worshipped someone as a god, and the joy of that perfect love filled my heart. But one night I dreamt that the lord of my heart was sitting in a garden somewhere, holding my right hand in his left and whispering to me of love. The whole scene did not seem at all strange to me. The dream ended, but its memory remained. Next day when I saw him, that dream-picture was in my mind. I no longer thought of him as a god, but as a man. I ran away from him in fear, but the picture still stays with me. Since that day my heart has known no peace; all has
grown dark within me. (Rabindranath, Tales From Tagore)

Thus Kusum expresses her feeling towards him and starts to cry. The *sanyasi* tells her that he is leaving the place and being a sanyasi he doesn’t belong to this world. He asks her to forget him. The *sanyasi* bids her goodbye and moves away. Without a word Kusum bows to him, and places the dust of his feet on her head. Tagore ends the story with following symbolic words:

The moon set: the night grew dark. I heard the sound of something falling into the water. The wind cried madly in the darkness, as if it wanted to blow out every star in the sky. (Rabindranath, Tales From Tagore)

In this way, stepping into the Ganges, Kusum sacrifices her life. The river stairs, as the narrator of the story mentions a big event or accident in only one sentence: “I heard the sound of something falling into the water.” (Rabindranath, Tales From Tagore)

Tagore’s this technique of ending the story at such stage makes a reader interpret a lot. The end of some of Tagore’s stories leaves a reader thoughtful. The story of Ratan and Subha are the examples of such art of Tagore’s storytelling.

There are some hints in the story to doubt the *sanyasi* as Kusum’s ‘dead’ husband. He might have accepted the ascetic life after writing a lie to her that he was dead. In that case the *sanyasi* is a selfish, cunning, irresponsible, dishonest hypocrite. He might have recognized Kusum when he saw her at the Ghat, whereas his new sanyasi appearance prevented her from identifying him. Some strange, inner urge might have prompted her heart to love him. Commenting on this story K. S. Ramaswami Sastri quotes Mr. Rhys who in his recent book: *Rabindranath Tagore: a Biographical Study* Well says:
In this story Rabindranath Tagore reveals the heart of Kusum by the slight interrogative touches which he often uses to give reality to his spiritual portraits of women. He is one of the very few tale-tellers who can interpret women by intuitive art. The devotion and heroism of the Hinduism he paints are ‘of a kind to explain to us that though the mortal rite of Sati is ended, the spirit that led to it is not all extinct. It lives re-embodied in a thousand acts of sacrifice, and in many a delivering up of the creative-self, and its pride of life and womanly desire. (Ramaswami)

This story is the story of sacrifice of Kusum’s childhood as well as her life. She like innumerable Indian women sacrifices everything for true love. And in male dominated Indian society men continue to deceive the women on the name of pure love.
**Gora**

*Gora* is the most complex of the 12 novels written by Rabindranath Tagore. This classic novel deals with a number of issues regarding society, religion, politics and individual life of the last few decades of 19th century India. The novel is a social document. It manifests an individual’s beliefs with changing times, society or community and its diverse influences on people. It also shows coexistence of religious tolerance and disharmony, changing status of women and overall transformation seen and sensed within an individual and society in general. *Gora* is more than a novel. It is like an epic-novel of India in the transition period under strong influences of Renaissance when social and conscience and intellectual awareness of new ideologies, English education etc. emerged. No other book gives so detailed analysis of the complexity of Indian social life with its contradictions. It is a story of second half 19th century Bengali society especially Calcutta city which was starkly divided into two- the traditional orthodox Hindus and rational, modernized, liberally thinking *Brahmos, Brahmo Samaj*. The Hindu society observed more orthodoxy and felt proud to follow Vedic rules and caste system while the *Brahmos* were in constant clashes with orthodoxy and fervidly opposed all idol- worship, caste system etc. Yet both communities had their own drawbacks; the Hindus were divided into many castes and sub-castes and facing the evils like untouchability while the Brahmos faced hypocrisy and sense of superiority with their English education. *Gora* has been described by Krishna Kripalini as:

*Gora* is the epic of India in transition at the most crucially intellectual period of its modern history….it is to Indian fiction what Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* is to the Russian. (Kripalini)

This classic novel introduces a wide range of characters, major and minor, male and female portrayal of people manifests Tagore’s rich gallery of characters. There is Satish, Suchrita’s brother, a boy of ten and Krishna Dayal, Gora’s father, Paresh Babu are aged characters; and the most important people are youth Gora, Binoy, Haran Babu, adolescent girls of Paresh Babu are Sucharita, Lolita, Labonya and some other people. At times the book leaves readers in dilemma, unsure and
drained. Also, it seems highly unlikely that the men of ages 21 and girls around 14 are so matured and have high clarity of thoughts. Readers would hardly agree with the portrayal of female characters introduced here by Tagore mainly with Sucharita and Lolita who play a vital role in the novel. Sucharita is introduced in the very first chapter on the second page when Binoy meets her for the first time. Tagore describes:

What wonderful eyes! It never occurred to him to ask whether they were large or small, black or brown. At the very first glance they gave an impression of sincerity. They had no trace of either shyness or hesitation, but were full of a serene strength. (Rabindranath, Gora)

This detail indicates natural beauty of an adolescent girl, Sucharita as well as purity of her heart. She is a growing up girl but the way she is portrayed by Tagore, nobody will agree with her being a teen age girl. She shows extreme maturity, understanding power of human nature. Perhaps, she appears more mature and more intelligent than most of girls of her age because of her being a member of the Brahmo Samaj. There is also one more reason for her intellectual development that is her guardian Paresh Babu who is more than a father for her. He believes that girls should be given liberty to debate and discuss various public subjects with learned people. In this way, they can know people’s ideas and learn from them. This liberal or friendly approach works and his girls are capable not only to discuss and debate with Gora, Binoy, Haran Babu and other visitors of their house but they firmly stick to their own opinions and decisions. Sucharita seems wiser and more mature than other daughters of Paresh Babu. From her manners, discussions, understanding power, readers develop an impression that she must be a mature person. It is the conversation between Baroda, Paresh Babu’s wife and Haran Babu, a leading member of Brahmo Samaj who intends to marry Sucharita which reminds readers about the age of Sucharita.

Haran replied to Baroda: “That goes without saying. I was only waiting for her to reach her eighteen year.”, “You are over-scrupulous,” said
Baroda, “It is enough that she has passed her fourteen.” (Rabindranath, Gora)

At that time, the age for a girl’s marriage was about fourteen or below it. And many of Tagore’s female characters in other novel and short stories like Subha, Kusum get married at this or before this age of fourteen. Even in this novel, adolescent girls like Lolita, Manorama, Sucharita’s meternal cousin get married at such stage and Sashi, Gora’s niece is going to get married at the same age. However, Sucharita’s personality is different; at adolescent age she seems to have a great control over her excitements, attraction for opposite sex and emotions. She is like the flow of river of plain that flows calmly with controlled pace. Most of adolescents seem like a stream that advances rapidly jumping from stone to stone with uncontrolled speed. Paresh Babu argues with Haran about Sucharita’s marriage with him. Tagore describes this conversation:

Paresh Babu somewhat mystified, “But you used to say,” he objected, “that it is wrong to marry a girl under eighteen. You ‘ve even written to that effect in the papers.” “That does not apply to the case of Sucharita,” explained Haran, “for her mind is unusually developed for her age.” (Rabindranath, Gora)

This conversation shows that Sucharita’s mental growth is more than an average adolescent girl. Haran Babu considers her to be grown-up before she completes eighteen years. She is attracted towards Gora but she can control her emotion for him. On the other hand, Lolita, her younger sister declares rebel against Brahmo Samaj for her love for Binoy Babu. Sucharita takes no more time in identifying her affection for Gora. She can differentiate Haran Babu who intends to marry her and Gora whom she likes. At initial stage of her acquaintance with Gora, she feels profound magnetism towards him. Tagore narrates:

Now, as she looked on his face, she could see, beyond all party opinion or ulterior benefit, the man
Gora. For the first time in her life she now saw what a man was, and what his soul was, and in the joy of this rare experience she completely forgot her own existence. (Rabindranath, Gora)

With the passing of time this attraction transforms into worship of Gora. Her feelings purify the attraction of an adolescent girl and take her on the path of sacred relationship. She considers Gora as her Guru. In that orthodox society such relationship was not acceptable. She had to struggle against many obstacles; some of them were Haran Babu, Harimohini, Baroda and of course society itself. But she faces them bravely. She learns to think, to know and love her own country from Gora. She for a long time listens eagerly to him with bowed head about the glory of mother India. She puts aside her shyness and said with simple modesty to Gora: “I have nevre before thought about my country so greatly and so truly.” (Rabindranath, Gora)

This remark indicates Sucharita’s upliftment. Hardly any discussion between her and Gora take place about love, life and marriage. They talk mostly about society, God, religion, country and general and serious issues of their time. Tagore displays the bond between them through their behavior, actions and reactions. He shows a silent river of love that flows in both hearts. Even at the end of novel, they do not get married.

Though Sucharita loses her parents in childhood, she receives fatherly affection from Paresh Babu and motherly love from Anandmoyi. This orphan girl becomes troublesome for Baroda when her widow and unfortunate orthodox meternal aunt Harimohini comes to live at their house. Baroda is a strict follower of Brahma ideology and Harimohini is a Hindu who whole heartedly follows Hindu ideology and performs rituals, idol worship regularly. Sucharita finds it challenging to balance between these two middle aged women of opposite customs.

Sucharita as a daughter impresses readers. She remains a very loving and obedient daughter for Paresh Babu. She understands this kind hearted old man in the best way. The loving father has solution of his daughters’ every confusion. He can read their mind. She freely and frankly discusses every matter with him even she has two motherly figures in the same house, Baroda and Harimohini and outside ofcourse Adandmoyi. Sucharita spends a lot of time with her father and learns many things from this scholar and yet very humble man. She accompanies him for walking,
meditation, reading etc. It was quite uncommon for that society to find such modern people. For an average father, the prime duty was to find out a suitable bride-groom for his daughter. He thought constantly and worried about dawry to be paid to son in law’s family. In some cases high dawry was paid to buy a better bridegroom. Only finding a proper match for daughter was not enough, settlement of amount and ornament with the bridegroom’s family was another challenge for the father. Gora’s brother Mohim is found constantly worried about his adolescent daughter Sasi’s marriage. He tries his best to get Sasi’s marriage with Gora’s closest friend, Binoy. When Binoy is no more interested in this marriage, Mohim arranges Sasi’s marriage with Abinash at a very high price of dawry.

On the other hand, Paresh Babu is a different father. He focuses on the mental development of his daughters. He prefers education for girls. He provides an inspiring and liberal atmosphere for his daughters. As a result, Sucharita grows as a wise, obedient and mature girl; Lolita can recite English poetry in impressive way; Laboyana can paint well. All children are brought up with liberty and love. They develop a great interest in art and literature. Sucharita is trained under special care and kindness of such broad minded and loving fatherly figure. Her moving to her ancestral house, she does not feel any distance with Paresh Babu. She frequently pays visit to her true shalter.

It is really very interesting to compare two characters of almost of the same age of opposite sex portrayed by the same writer. Tagore’s short story *Home Coming* presents an adolescent boy, Phatik who proves to be a perfect nuisance for his mother. He creates tension for his mother every day. Tagore narrates the mental condition of the boy’s mother when he is departing from his mother to go to Calcutta for study with his uncle. It is an immense relief to the mother to get rid of Phatik who is a cause of tension for her.

On the other hand, the same writer presents extremely paradoxical picture of an adolescent girl, Sucharita in this novel *Gora*. Surely, there is the difference of sex between both the characters but they are at the same stage of life and creation of the same author, Tagore. Sucharita seems more and more mature and sound minded. Her intellectual level is incredible. She begins to know her country and develops more respect for mother India. She wants to serve her country. This kind of devotion is rarely found in adolescents. She says to her younger brother Satish:
Do you know how great our country is, and our race?” continued his sister. “How can I explain it to you? This is a wonderful country! How many thousands and thousands of years has God’s purpose been working to make it surpass all other countries in the world? How many people from other lands have come to make this purpose complete? How many great men have taken birth in our land? How many great wars have had their scenes laid here? What great truths have found utterance here? What great austerities have been performed? From what a variety of standpoints has religion been studied? And how many solutions to the mystery of life have been found in this land? This is our India! You must know her as great, little brother, and never forget her or hold her in contempt! What I am telling you to-day you will have to comprehend one day— in fact I believe that you understand some of what I am saying even now. You will have to keep one thing in mind— that you have been born in a great country, and with all your soul you will have to work for her. (Rabindranath, Gora)

Every adolescent is brought up in different environment. Many factors affect directly and indirectly on their development. The examples of two adolescents indicate this fact. Phatik troubles his mother while Sucharita wishes to serve her mother land.

Another significant portrayal of adolescent girl in this novel is Lolita. She is second daughter of Paresh Babu and Mistress Baroda and Sucharita’s younger sister and close friend. She possesses different personality from her sister. She is a rare growing up girl of her society with distinguished qualities. She manifests many common as well as uncommon characteristics of adolescence phase. She is governed
by emotion and takes the things sensitively. Sometimes she seems short tempered. She posseses rebellious spirit. She also has independent thinking power that can analyse matters. On the other hand, she shows some common features of a growing up girl. She looks very vital and every time ready to react. Like most of adolescents she is attracted towards opposite sex, Binoy Babu. She is more emotional rather than to be rational. She is a sensitive girl.

Lolita’s physical appearance is ordinary. She is dark with complex face. She is tall and quite thin. Therefore, her mother is found worried about a suitable husband for her. It is fact and often observed particularly in Indian society that a bride should be fair and beautiful. The bride-groom and his family expect the girl to have fair skin and charming face. On the other hand, the bridegroom’s look is not so important. His family back-ground, skills, abilities and financial condition are equally or more deciding factors for the marriage. The bride’s family inquires about the profession, character, family back-ground, economic status and future of the boy. This is general perception regarding expected features in both sides; however, there may be exceptions in this regard. Lolita’s mother seems anxious about Lolita’s marriage because of her dark and complex face. But her father sees in her face not that of a complexion or features but of the soul which there finds its expression. The father finds inner beauty of this girl. He observes pleasant and faultless face with firmness of strength, the brightness of independence. So her father is not worried about Lolita and her future. Paresh Babu’s observation proves true with the advancement of the story. Lolita appears as a spirited and courageous girl.

Lolita differs from most other growing up girls of her time. She belongs to the Brahma Samaj. She has courage to express her own opinion about society, God, religion, politics and such other serious issues that is quite not expected from an ordinary teen-age girl. In Tagore’s time, an ordinary teen-age girl was brought up in traditional environment. She could hardly get opportunity for education. Most of the parents considered daughters as burden. Right from the birth of girl childthe parents were worried for a suitable bridegroom and settlement of dawry. Paresh Babu’s family can be considered modern here. His daughters grow in liberal and inspiring environment. Lolita and her other sisters develop their own talents, hobbies, independent thinking and decision power. Paresh Babau’s each daughter posseses certain talent. Lolita can recite English poems impressively. Mistress Baroda and her daughters receive an invitation from Magistrate for performance of a drama scene in
English in a ceremony. Lolita is also going to present her talent of poetry recitation in this programme. Everybody admires her performance at practice. But this artist is rebellious and patriotic in spirit. When she comes to know about Gora’s arrest by British Govt. for defending poor and innocent Indian students, she at once declares that she is not going to perform her recitation before British Magistrate and other high level English officials. This decision indicates her profound respect for Gora and devotion for her country.

Moreover, Lolita shows unbelievable daring power by running away alone at evening from the Magistrate’s house to show her protest against torturing of the British police on innocent students and Gora. She finds Binoy Babu in the same ship she takes for Culcutta. They travel together through night journey. Hardly an adolescent girl of Tagore’s time could think of such a bold step. Yet Lolita takes such courageous decision and faces the consequences bravely. She does not care for her mother’s promise to the Magistrate’s family. She follows her inner voice. She appears here as a rebellious girl from politically point of view. She supports whole-heartedly Gora and other innocent Indians by running away from the programme just before few hours.

On the other hand, Lolita violets social rules too. She has a soft corner for Binoy. She falls in love with him. The problem that arises here is of religion. She belongs to the Brohmo Samaj while Binoy is a Hindu. However she sticks to her true love and faces the society bravely. She faces Haran Babu, her own mother and other Brahmos with regard to her relationship with Binoy. Only Paresh Babu, her father stands by her in her decision to marry a Hindu young man, Binoy. Their marriage takes place in the presence of very limited people. Anandmoyi supports Binoy and Paresh Babu blesses Lolita for this marriage. Lolita appears as a protestant for society in this entire issue. An ordinary girl can not dare to face such situation.

Besides, Lolita is a frank and pure hearted girl. She likes and loves Binoy throught the novel. She unlocks her heart before her friend like sister, Sucharita and admires Binoy: “What a nice man Binoy Babu is, isn’t he, Didi?” (Rabindranath, Gora)

This question is no attempt to test what is in Sucharita’s mind. Lolita admires frankly her beloved before her sister. Meanwhile, Sucharita’s meternal aunt Harimohini comes to stay at their house. She is orthodox Hindu. She is given separate room in the house. She follows Hindu customs strictly and worships idols. The host
family observes the Brahmo parinciples. Under the same roof at Paresh Babu’s house two religions are followed simultaneously. They do not respect each other’s religion except Paresh Babu and Sucharita. In such rigid environment, Lolita’s daring to marry a Hindu young man Binoy introduces her extra-ordinary courage and true love for her beloved.

Like other daughters of Paresh Babu, Lolita is an independent thinker. She is aggressive and short tempered. She passes many sharp and offensive remarks to Haran Babu, a leading activist of Brahmo Samaj. She discusses with other visitors at her home about society, religion, God, and many other serious subjects. Her high respect for Gora shows that she is not a typical Brahmo girl. She does not have the same attitude like Panu Babu and other Brahmos. She has her own ideas and she also believes in truth and patriotism.

She shows inner strength to pave a new way for the orthodox mentality of her society. She wishes to start a school for girls’ education. After a lot of struggle, she succeeds to start the school at Sucharita’s new house but unfortunately, they can’t run it for long time. Surely, she seems immature in this matter. She does not appear sound minded and good planner in the case of opening this girls’ school. But, this is not her fault. She is enthusiastic enough for this challenging task but being an adolescent she lacks experience and patience. Despite her failure in this attempt, her personality appears stronger and bolder. Tagore introduces adolescent and adult female characters in this novel with their own individuality. Lolita has her own personality. She is plain speaker, courageous, spirited and pure hearted girl. Her behavior seems more of an adult than of a teen-age girl.

Gora is a novel of vast scope and rich in thoughts. The story reflects the social, political and religious picture in Bengal at the turn of the 19th century. Tagore presents a realistic picture of Bengali society. This society was very orthodox. The story of Harimohini’s past is extremely moving. Actually, she is a specimen of first half 19th century female life in the society. Girls had no scope for education and freedom of life. Their condition was pitiable. Hardly they got opportunity to love and live with their parents. Before they began to understanding life and responsibility, they found themselves under the burden of marriage and serious responsibilities. Harimohini narrates her miserable past before Sucharita. She says:

When I was eight years old I was married into the well-known Palsha family of Roy Chowdhuries,
who were as wealthy as they were high born. But my fate was not meant to be a happy one, for some misunderstanding arose between my father and my father-in-law over my dowery, and my husband’s people could not for a long time forgive what they regarded as my father’s parsimoniousness. (Rabindranath, Gora)

Tagore depicts the moving story of adolescent Harimohini. She was married at only eight years age. There was a large family at her husband’s home; she had to help in kitchen for cooking for sixty or seventy people. Sometimes she did not have sufficient food for her own self at very late noon. The moment she finished her own food, she had to start cooking again for the evening meal. There was no any specific place for her to sleep. She did not receive any sympathy from her husband. The husband of this pre-adolescent girl was also premature. And naturally, he had no sense of respect or responsibility for his little wife. This kind of practice seems inhumane today, but it is a painful reality of Tagore’s time. A girl of pre-adolescent stage is expected to play with dolls and friends. She and her friends may arrange the marriage of dolls and play such games. Here she becomes the doll in the hands of elders.

When Harimohini gave birth to a girl child, her condition worsened. For centuries, Indian society is male dominated. Even when a woman blesses another married woman, she wishes: ‘Be the mother of male children.’ In the great Indian epics ‘The Mahabharat’, ‘The Ramayan’ elders say to married women: ‘Shat putravatibahava.’ That means they wish hundred sons for the married woman. The girl child is unwanted. The desire for male child can be observed even today. In many cases female child is killed within the womb of her mother. Therefore, the society has to run campaigns like ‘Save Girl Child’. This is shameful for modern society. In Harimohini’s words:

When I reached my seventeenth year, my daughter Monorama was born. My position became still worse because I had given birth to a mere girl. And
yet my little girl was a great joy and comfort to me in the midst of all this humiliation. Deprived of all affection, whether from her father or any one else in the house, Monorama became to me an object of care as dear as life itself. (Rabindranath, Gora)

The novel Gora familiarizes the adolescent characters particularly growing up girls. Tagore presents here intelligent and broad minded adolescents like Sucharita and Lolita. They are capable enough to draw attention of reader with their maturity, modern ideas and some other human qualities at their young age. On the other hand, Tagore also depicts the realistic picture about girls in Bangali society of his time that is pitiable. The novel presents a paradoxical set of girls here living in the same society and at the same time. A common girl in the novel can hardly get opportunity of education or liberty to live according to her will. She is bound to follow traditions made by orthodox society. She is found sacrificing her desires on the name of customs when she has to marry at just the child age.

Third chapter points out adolescence aspects found in select fictional works of Rabindranath Tagore. His portrayal of juvenile characters in novel Gora and short stories is unique. The young characters Phatick Chakravati, Sucharita, Lolita, Ratan, Subha indicate Tagore’s deep understanding of the psychology of the growing ups. When the readers go through Phatik’s portrayal of character, they find Tagore at the best at portraying male adolescents. But it also true that his creation of female adolescents is equally powerful and appealing.
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