



## **TAGORE'S STORIES IN THE LIGHT OF DECONSTRUCTION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The 'deconstruction' as an analytical tool uncovers the 'stable' truths of a work and provides a space for the juxtaposition of opposites and the infinite potential to the readers to analyze the text according to their critical interpretation rather than the fixed interpretation of a text as the final one. This paper intends to examine Rabindranath Tagore's four short stories by using the 'deconstructive' methodology to explore the paradoxical situations that articulate and fit themselves into the various types of 'binary oppositions'.*

**New Words:** Paradoxical, Subvert, juxtaposition, interpretation, deconstructive, binary opposition.

### **INTRODUCTION**

'Deconstruction' is a genre of literary criticism that investigates the hidden or paradoxical meanings within a literary text. It was advocated by Jacques Derrida, a French philosopher, who claims that though the text keeps the fixed interpretations but this method subverts the truths and finds the varied meanings, hidden or unexposed in a text.

'Deconstruction' as movement in literary theory began as a reaction to structuralism. In 'Structuralism', the structuralists-- Claude Levi-Strauss, Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes perceived the certain signs and images in texts as providing definite and fixed meanings. The structuralists believed that "*things cannot be understood in isolation, they have to be seen in the context of larger structures they are part of*". But 'Deconstruction' exposes the multiplicities of meaning in a text. It emerged on the literary scene in the nineteen seventies, in the English and European world. It attacked on the notion of one meaning, primary discourses, or purpose as so many subjective responses exist to a word. Instead of talking about the presences, emphases or assertions in a text, it talked of absences,

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gaps and lapses. According to it, the text becomes a matter of playing games, a site on which any number of conflicts could be seen as happening, depending upon the nature, intention or preference of the player. It clearly hints at the creative intention of the author who gives a definite shape to his/her work in accordance with his/her perception or bias. Since the motive of the deconstructionist is to attack the subjectivity of the author and pave the way for readers' own reading of the text. With it, it becomes easy to find the multiplicity of meanings in a text. The assumption on which the deconstructionist's argument bases itself is that a work is a construction, a conscious act on the part of the author for making a specific representation of life. However, this representation did not conform to an objective ideal for the simple reason that it is a conscious individual construction.

For this, we can take a metaphorical example of the 'forest'. If we are careful never to step out of the beaten track as to explore its depths, we are perhaps missing all the magic, the beauty, the colour and the sound that we might come across in remote spots. If we try to find new ways, we shall know that there are so many tracks-- some of them dim and indistinct perhaps, but all are equally enchanting. So, It is, unwise, to insist on choosing only one way of them.

Likewise, in Tagore's short stories, we search some perspectives which can include in its variety and provide us a new outlook to see the things. His literary works are a combination of manifold objects-- rhythm and sound, words with their meanings and associations, mental and external images, tradition and modernity, thought and feeling, intellect and emotion, consciousness of future and present, necessity and freedom. And its unifying becomes a creative whole. But if this integrity of the whole is fragmented and grasped, one can be able to understand the varied meanings and investigate the deep human consciousness, range and depth of emotions, his soul flowing outwards and sometimes lost in contemplation. So, In order to understand the varied qualities, the study of or attention on separate parts of a text, provides a vast scope to analyze a literary work.

With this consideration, the paper examines Rabindranath Tagore's four short stories 'Aprichita', 'The Punishment', 'The Laboratory' and 'Giribala'. The text of these stories is centered on the conflict between the man -woman relationship. The deconstructionist reading of these stories subverts the established norms of the society and of oppositions, it elevates the inferior ones to the superior-considered ones.

The theme of the story—'Aprichita' (The woman unknown) supports the radical feminist theory (that had not even evolved in Tagore's time) that holds that marriage is the major cause of women's oppression and agrees with the notion of 'celibacy' (state of abstaining from marriage). In it, the bride, Kalyani and her father are humiliated by the maternal uncle

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of the bridegroom who checks the weight and purity of the gold ornaments, given to the bride by way of dowry. The story has been narrated by the bridegroom, Anupam. He is a post graduate, an obedient son and 'an eligible bachelor'. But the demand of dowry becomes a reason to reject the marriage by the girl's family. Everyone in the family of Anupam is enraged at the audacity of the girl's father. They threaten that it would be difficult for the father to get his daughter married. On this type of thinking, Simone De Beauvoir, a French writer and feminist, in her feminist text—"The Second Sex"(1942) that the inequality of the sexes is not nature's design, but a result of various social forces created by patriarchy. In society, people like Anupam think that by accepting to marry a girl, they are doing her a favour. Tagore wants to make such people to remove such a wrong notion from their mind.

Tagore deconstructs this conventional thought and supports the self- dignity of the father who refuses to marry his daughter in a dowry-glutton family. Anupam comes to know that Kalyani has turned down many proposals during the one year. He imagines that 'the girl's father.....swallows his pride and comes to our doorstep' But it does not happen.

In the patriarchal society, male is considered as superior and courageous, but Tagore deconstructs the assumption when after one year break of Anupam and Kalyani's marriage-bond, they meet in a train. The station master approaches Anupam with a request to vacate the compartment since some Englishman already were reserved berths in that compartment. Anupam agrees to it but Kalyani argues in English with the station master that it is not a reserved compartment at boarding point and it is not necessary to vacate. An extra coach is added to accumulate the uniformed English officials. In this way, she deconstructs the view that the girls are inferior or unable to be courageous and in self-assertion.

When Anupam returns to Calcutta, he yearns for the love of Kalyani, here also, Tagore subverts the action as woman are considered more emotional than man and they are more desirous to attain the love of man but, here a male becomes passionate for a woman. Anupam without the consent of his mother and his uncle goes to Kanpur and shows his repentance for the insult caused to Kalyani's father and asks earnestly for the hand of the girl in marriage for which her father does not object but she turns down his request as she wants to remain a life- long spinster, by dedicating herself to the cause of women's education. Anupam, who is in love with Kalyani, also decides to remain as a bachelor singing a song of which the refrain is—"There is room here".

So, in the story, Tagore subverts the assumptions that the women are inferior ones and are delicate and timid. He depicts them as bold, having independent thinking and possessing self-esteem that were uncharacteristic of women in Tagore's age. The culturally constructed identities of masculinity and femininity have been broken down in the character- portrayal of

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Anupam and Kalyani. He tries to emphasize the view that ‘never the less, neither is the man, without the woman, nor the woman without the man’.

The action in the story ‘*Punishment*’ unfolds thus—The two peasant brother--Dukhiram and Chidam and their wives—Radha and Chandara share living accommodation. Radha was short—tempered. After a day’s heavy work, when the brothers returned home hungry, the elder brother Dukhiram asked his wife, Radha to bring the food. Not getting food but only harsh words from her, he in a fit of anger and kills her. But after that, he was upset and repentant. Then Chidam, in order to rescue him, requested his wife, Chandara to take the charge of the crime on her. He told her to tell the court that she was forced to kill her, in self-defiance during an argument with her.

But Chandara who loved her husband so much becomes shocked at her husband’s cruel suggestion and feels that her husband has no value of her feelings. So, she decides to end her life and not to protect herself by false reason. In the court, she told the judge that she had killed her sister-in-law because she hated her.

Meanwhile chidam understood his mistake and wanted to take all the blame on himself and to save his wife. Dukhiram also tried to save her by telling the court that actually happened. But the judge made convicted Chandara of the murder and sentenced her to be hanged.

Actually, Chidam told this lie to Chandara because of the suggestion of the village chief who happened to visit their home immediately after the murder who without much thought had said that, if he lost his wife, he could get another, but if his brother was hanged, he could never replace him. Chidam loved his brother so much that he did not want to lose him. So, he led by circumstance, requested his wife to own the crime. The village Chief’s suggestion also presents the binary opposition of male and female. The story projects this conflict of male and female into the local politics.

As a deconstructionist reading, the readers find that the portrayed woman, Chandara did not submit to the will of her husband rather she protested it passively and resented against the set norms and customs of society. She did not accept the humiliation in a submissive way rather she showed her hatred against her husband in the end of the story. In the Jail, just before the hanging when the Civil Surgeon asked her whether he should call her husband. She replied that she would like to see her mother but not him. In this way, Chandara defies the fixed meaning of sacrificing nature of a woman for others, resists the patriarchal supremacy and sacrifices the life for her self-assertion and self-respect. She chooses to die rather than live with the unloving husband. She shows that she has the right to take decision of her life.

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The story '*The Laboratory*', is a story about a typical emancipated modern woman, Sohini, a Punjabi girl of twenty years. She lives with her grandmother. She is a bold lady who walks in a sari with a knife hidden at her waist. She comes across a Bengali civil engineer, NandKishore, who has a laboratory in Calcutta and has a passion for scientific research.

Tagore deconstructs the practice of giving dowry to the boy's family. Here Nandakishore agrees to settle Sohini's grandmother's debt of seven thousand rupees and makes an unconventional marriage with Sohini by breaking all the norms and structures of the society.

This is the first story in which the woman selects her man. Even though Nandakishore knows that she is an unchaste woman, he accepts Sohini not for her good looks but for her emancipated personality. They share a common faith. He makes her also involve in his scientific research activities. She is a woman with an individuality of her own. She an unchaste woman, according to conventional standards, but she becomes a tower of strength to save her husband's laboratory.

Tagore advocates the gender freedom and decision making power for women in society. She breaks the established norm that the housekeeping is the only job for a women. Tagore breaks this norm of household keeping several decades in advance. An accident that occurred in the laboratory during an experiment leads to the sudden death of Nandakishore in his late middle age. Sohini has to close down the laboratory, and face a number of litigations.

Here Tagore makes Sohini, a new woman who fights for her husband's property legally and proves her woman- power. Like other Indian women, Sohini does not believe in performing the Hindu ritual of 'Shraddha' a ceremony done in paying homage to the departed soul of dear ones. Instead she likes to spend the money in the development of scientific research among the Indian youth, in memory of her husband, which she considers the true tribute to her husband's soul.

Tagore creates Sohini as a compassionate woman towards animals, as she treats the dog, which has broken its leg in a car accident. She also loves her grandmother and rushes to look after her during her illness, leaving behind the laboratory. But she is a determined person and keeps the strong bond and loyalty of an exceptional lover. Though the ideal of chastity which is given the supreme value in the country, is not her guiding principle. Tagore by giving the references of Draupadi and Kunti—the characters in the Mahabharat, the Hindu epic writes that Draupdi have five husbands, and four different men were the fathers of Kunti's four sons, provides a bold example against the traditional society which forces women to suppress their physical desires and pretend indifference to the sexual passions. Tagore, by giving this reference, in the context of Sohini, because she has Nila, an illegitimate daughter, not born to

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Nandakishore, wants to attack on society's strict rules of life and the practice of polygamy for men.

Tagore also posits Sohini as a woman of a new age who supports women's education. She challenges the social restriction imposed on her as a widow. She dares to expose Nila's birth-identity that is not easy to reveal for an ordinary woman. To see Nila's wayward and wanton life in enjoying Nandakishor's property, she says that she cannot inherit his property because she is an illegitimate child. Tagore also sets the thought that woman's identity does not lie in being a mother or a wife but as an individual human being. He delineates a situation when Sohini strives hard to bring Rebati Bhattacharya to continue the research work in her husband's laboratory, the aunt of Rebati prevents his initiation towards research with her superstitions. Her own daughter, Nila also distracts Rebati's research. At this point, Sohini makes it clear to Nila that she would not allow her marriage with Rebati Bhattacharya. By breaking the marriage, Sohini's laboratory is saved from the wayward Nila. Tagore presents Sohini's character not as a mere docile one but as assertive, self assured, confident and a bold figure.

In the story—'*Giribala*', Tagore shows the resistance of a married woman who portrays the patriarchy which is egoistic, irrational and over powering. He deals with the married life of a man, Gopinath who falls out of love with his wife and is enchanted with a stage actress, Lavanga. His wife, Giribala, lives at home waiting for her husband to arrive but he everyday visits the theatre and meets the actress.

Once Giribala comes to know about her husband's attraction to Lavanga. She sets out to find out him in the next evening. She was upset by her husband's attraction to Lavanga but she also gets attracted by the world of the theatre and becomes a regular visitor to the theatre.

One day, when her husband comes home, she pleads him to stay with her but, as he wanted to go to Lavanga. He snatches all her ornaments and leaves the house as she denies him to give the key to the treasury. Gopinath sponsors a play for the company and when the rehearsal is in progress for the new play, the director of the play is not pleased with the performance of Lavanga. At this, Gopinath and the director get into a fight and Gopinath elopes with Labanga and starts to live in a hill station. Through the newspaper, they come to know that the actress who replaced her has won much fame by playing the role of Mirabai. They return back to Calcutta and are eager to see the new actress. Gopinath is much surprised and furious to know that it was none than his wife, Giribala.

Tagore, in the story, deals with the theme of extra-marital relationship and deconstructs the practice of conventional society as Giribala resists the patriarchal norm of living in the inner

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compartments of the house and comes out and finds her own identity. She comes out of the sphere of walled sphere of the household and finds her own identity.

Concluding, 'deconstruction' as an analytical tool provides the opportunity to literary critics or readers to analyze the literary works with a skeptical mind about the considered final interpretations of any text and deal it with separate text. It encourages the more insightful analysis and understanding of a text.

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