



Jorasanko

Aruna Chakravarti

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High politics, romance, tragedy and the little things that make up a family life in Jorasanko, Kolkata - the family home of the Tagores. Jorasanko was right at the hub of the Bengal Renaissance, with the family at the forefront of the movement, and its women playing a pivotal role.

In a sprawling novel that spans a unique phase in the history of Bengal and India, Aruna Chakravarti provides a fascinating account of how the Tagore women influenced and were in turn influenced by their illustrious male counterparts, the times they lived in and the family they belonged to. She paints memorable portraits of women like Digambari, Dwarkanath's strong-willed wife who refuses to accept her husband's dalliance with alcohol and Western ways; Sarada Sundari, the obese, indolent but devoted wife of Debendranath, who is appalled to see the old world order slipping by; the indomitable Jogmaya, who takes on Debendranath and splits the Tagore family in two. There are also the young daughters and daughters-in-law. The tough, resourceful Jnanadanandini who gave the women of Bengal a new way of wearing the sari and initiated the concept of 'nuclear family'; Swarnakumari, universally acknowledged as a pioneer of women's writing in India; and Rabindranath's muse the gentle, melancholic Kadambari.

Jorasanko mirrors the hopes and fears, triumphs and defeats that the women of the Tagore household experienced in their intricate interpersonal relationships, as well as the adjustments they were continually called upon to make as daughters and daughters-in-law of one of the most eminent families of the land.

Jorasanko Details

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From Reader Review Jorasanko for online ebook

Padmaja says

Beautiful book ? lovely descriptive writing. Absolutely love Chakravarti ?

Rohini says

Set against the backdrop of the Bengali Renaissance, Jorasanko is an insightful behind-the-scenes look at the lives of the women in the illustrious Tagore family. I found it charming and very evocative of the times. I can see it translating into a lovely period film.

The author has done a good job of fleshing out each of the key personalities and I finished the book with a pretty clear picture of these ladies in my head. The size of the household and the family was quite mind-boggling and I am grateful for the family tree that the author has thoughtfully provided at the beginning, otherwise I would have got lost in the maze of characters that abound in the book! The most interesting characters were Jnananandidni, Kadambari (Rabindranath's sister-in-law and muse) and Mrinalini (his wife). In fact, when it comes to these three, I was left wanting for more!

It showed how rapidly social mores towards woman changed within the space of a generation. These girls came into the Tagore family as child brides but towards the end of the book, many of their daughters enjoyed freedom and education that they themselves could never even have dreamed of.

I have never read much Tagore myself, but I think this book would be good fun for readers familiar with his work, containing as it does many back stories on what inspired some of his more famous verse. I also wonder what kind of research the author did for the book, where the fact ended and the fiction began and how much of the more controversial stories were based on gossip or hearsay.

This was a book club pick and again, we were quite divided in our views on the book. Some felt that the book was 'time-pass' but nothing special and did not reflect enough of the happenings in the world outside the household and the family. Others, and I am firmly in this camp, felt that the point of this book was to look at the world from the perspective of the Tagore women, who (with the exception of Jnananandini) lived and breathed the life within the four walls of the family mansion. And it has done that well. Looking at broader social and economic themes would have been out of the scope of this book and would have felt forced, had the author felt compelled to include them. Also, I think we tend to undervalue books that tell women's stories. Just because a story focuses on domestic relationships and issues does not make it a lesser book. I think these are important stories to tell as well.

Priya says

If I were to write a review in one sentence, I'd say 'Jorasanko' is kinda like Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "One thousand years of solitude", minus the magical realism, masterful poetic prose and of course, set in Bengal instead of Macondo. It's a story of three generations of Tagores, spanning half a century, during the Bengal Renaissance.

It's an engrossing read for the most part. When we see the family tree on the first page, it gets a bit intimidating with all the character names and relationships, but in due course of the narrative, the author eases us into the Jorasanko Tagore family and we end up becoming intimately familiar with the people and the setting.

Some of the characters are truly memorable, in their personality (Jnanadanandini) or the pathos they invoke in us (Kadambari, Sarada Sundari) or the expectation they raise in us, of achievements that we know happened (Rabindranath Tagore). Each character is given due importance and we come away feeling content and familiar.

That said, towards the end, it kinda got to me. By the time we reach the life stories of the third generation, it all feels a bit repetitive and stale, with hardly anything that grabs our attention. It becomes predictable. And I wish that wasn't the case. It almost made me give it a 3 star. But then the first 85% of the book was truly a masterpiece.

I'm not sure yet if I'm going to pick up the sequel. Maybe a break would do me good. It was just one too many Tagores to deal with in the first book!

Sumit says

I don't have words to describe the beauty of this extraordinary book. The book is sad and truly mirrors the hopes and fears, triumphs and defeats that the women of the Tagore household experienced in their intricate interpersonal relationships, as well as the adjustments they were continually called upon to make as daughters and daughters-in-law of one of the most eminent families of the land.

Adite says

Jorasanko is a fascinating book. The author paints an amazing portrait of Bengal's most illustrious family: the Tagores. What was life like for the women who were married into the family at the tender ages of six/seven years? Were the men, who were helming revolutionary social change in Bengal and India, as empathetic towards the conditions of their own women? The domestic conflicts that shaped the personalities of many of these women are at once heart rending and inspiring. There is Jnanadanandini who evolves into a strong, confident and independent-minded woman with the help of her progressive husband and then there is Kadambari -- the poet Rabindranath's muse -- who fades away in the claustrophobic environment. The only flaw in this history-inspired novel is its structure: it flits from character to character without giving the reader the opportunity to delve deeper into a few prominent characters. Even so, it's a must read for anyone who wants a deeper, closer look at the life and times of the Tagore family.

Jahnavi Jha says

Reading Jorasanko was a different experience all together. The blend of several generations of the Tagore family and the author's ability to pack so much into just one book has left a lasting impression on my mind. Each and every character from the head of the household to the servant stands out. This book was a welcome

change from the unending book series that have become so popular today. The fact that you can tell such detailed stories about almost four generations of Tagores in just one book is a wonder in itself. I found myself deeply immersed in the lives of the inhabitants of Jorasanko, especially the women. I cannot help but appreciate how far we have come as a society in terms of how women now lead their lives. I would strongly recommend this book to everyone regardless of whether they have read many of these stories in Bengali already. Overall, this book is a real masterpiece, well researched and gripping. Looking forward to the next one, Daughters of Jorasanko.

Soumya says

An unputdownable book after a long time.

Jorasanko is wonderfully written and takes you through the Tagore household over the years. It concentrates mainly on the lives of the women in Tagore household-Digambari, Sarada , Jnanada, Kadambari, Swarnakumari and Mrinalini. A very apt description of women-women relation dynamics as life happens. Jnanada remains a puzzle, though she is so warm and nice to all women, why is she so hard on Kadambari? Offers a peak into the great mind of 'Robi' and his life and circumstances.

A very good read.

Neha says

Jorasanko is an absorbing read. It gives us a brilliant insight to the world of Bengal Renaissance. The characters are beautifully etched....the paradoxical Debendranath who, on one hand believed in educating the women of his household but preferred keeping them in purdah, Sarada Sundari, who reluctantly embraced progress, Jnanadanandini, who can be a role model for women today. And who can forget Kadambari! Her angst and pathos are wonderfully worded in this book. But, for me, the highlight of this book was the way the character of Mrinalini was portrayed. Never once did Kadambari overshadow Mrinalini. Both were given equal importance.

Madhura says

If someone asks me to describe Jorasanko by Aruna Chakravarti in just three words I would choose expansive, wonderful and tragic. A riveting family saga, spanning three generations of the Tagore family, Jorasanko is part reality and part fiction. I came to know about Jorasanko through bookstagram. I had read Rabindranath Tagore's biography in school. I was always curious to know more about his family, especially his wife and daughters because not much is written about them.

The novel is filled with the women's triumphs, sorrows, hopes and dreams. Many of them were intelligent and very talented. Rabindranath's sister Swarnakumari was a prolific writer. However, due to the repressive tradition of purdah many Tagore women did not get a chance to explore their talents. Given a chance, some of them would have been as famous as Rabindranath Tagore.

To read the entire review click on the link: <https://www.theliterarycircle.com/book-reviews/jorasanko-by-aruna-chakravarti>...

Sthita Nayak says

Jorasanko - I dwelt in the Tagore's era. These 400 pages breathed a life into me. Life of poems, of velvety green patches of land, of mansions in the Tagore's era, of red sindoor and alta, of ululations, of exotic food, of age-old traditions, of match making, of early child marriages, of celebration of death, of joint families, of paan-clad lips, of jute plantations, of Bengal Renaissance, of Brahmo Samaj Movement. I engrossed in some pages and at times, and with some I felt as if I should put the book down and take up another. But then a parental feeling crept up in me, it's just one more page and I can listen to its platters. At times, I shut my kindle and saw the 'faces made of rubber that registered the sweep of emotions at one time'. I heard the cadence as the poems written by Tagore's family were sung. Gratitude filled the lives of the young girls that were married into Tagore's family and they fumed all their energy, patience and commitment to the large family.

Families rose and ebbed, and the Tagore's struggled for dowries and fill the hollow cultures. Books, Poems and Music danced throughout. I found a resemblance of this book with "Snow flower and Secret fan". I smiled at the lines and if you are reading my review I am sure you will too

"Why is it that men always pull together ...and women never?" .

It was followed by another set of lines

"Women unburden themselves so easily ... she would understand and sympathize, for bonding between sois was total and unconditional. If we could whisper in a corner Legs stretched out at ease...now staring at the eaves".

Some day I am going to visit the Shilahidaha Kuthibara - Tagore's residence and relive the pages of Jorasanko.

Adrija says

Jorasanko was an absolutely riveting read. This book brought to light how extremely gifted and strong-willed each and every woman of the Tagore family was. It provided an insight into the lives of lesser known members of the family. The author has researched extensively for this book and it's truly a gem. The way she's crafted the independent minded, courageous Jnadanandini and the simple, loving Mrinalini is a feat to behold. But the one character who struck every chord within me is the Kadambani. Her story kept me up at night pondering over the tragedy that befell her. Overall, this is a very well written book and I would recommend it to one and all.

Harshali Singh says

This book was recommended by a friend. And though I had picked it up a while back I was unable to read it till now.

After finishing the exhausting Catch 22 I wanted to dip my mind into something which was brimming with emotions. My fingers automatically touched the spine of this book.

Jorasanko is the home of the famous Tagore Family of Kolkata. The book is a look into the lives of the women of the family spanning three generations. The women who brought change standing up in the face of

accepted patriarchy and the ones who faded into the folds of history without causing any ripples.

The author has researched her characters with love. Every aspect of their personalities has been outlined without bias. Hence there is no villain except maybe their own decisions and circumstances that keep getting in their way.

Budding writers should read this book just to understand the art of building and etching characters that a reader can relate to and invest in.

This reader enjoyed their complicated relationships and their fight for survival in a world so tragically tipped against a girl child.

The texture of the rich Bengali culture, the food, the clothes, the men, the way of life, the dichotomy of educating girls and yet wanting to keep them away from their rights, holding on to the custom of child brides even by so called enlightened women and many such social issues are beautifully presented.

It could have been 50 pages short as there is a sequel and the end could have been used as a dramatic beginning for the next one but that is just me. It rushes in the end when one wants to continue with the languid pace of the book, I wanted more not less, in that bit.

Enough said, highly recommended. I am getting the sequel for sure.

Samarpita says

Jorasankho is a book that will pull you into the three generations of the Tagore family and give us a sneak peek into the lives and times of one of the first and most influential families of Bengal. While most of us know all there is to know about Rabindranath Tagore, it is intriguing to read the role the women of the house played in shaping each of the male characters in the family. Whether it is Sarada Sundari, Jnanada, Kadambari or Mrinalini, Chakravarti has done an immense amount of research to flesh out each of the women, and also most of the men. The book will make you go through a gamut of emotions, you will want to laugh at the young bride Genu who suffers because she is not able to find a rathole in her new house, empathise with Sarada Sundari who has patriarchy so ingrained in herself that she wrongs a lot of the women in the house or cry at the fate of Kadambari, the one who loved and lost. The book shares so many intimate conversations that would have happened between the inmates of the house. For Bengalis who are taught to revere Rabindranath Tagore almost as soon as they are born, this book brings him down from the pedestal and we witness his life from a different perspective, he is a normal man, albeit with loads of talent and charm. But we do see the man's faults. I would recommend this book to everyone who is interested in the Tagore family, it gives an extraordinary view into the family. It will definitely leave you wanting to go back to that time, to witness all of it yourself. The only thing that saddens me is nothing to do with the writing but the fact that so many of the women, both daughters-in-laws and daughters were amazingly talented and could have done a lot had they not been restricted to the abarodh. I wish it was a world that was less conservative. Maybe more members from the family could have become as famous as Rabindranath Tagore.

Debjani Banerji says

Jorasanko takes you into the Bengal Renaissance time. It takes you into the world of the Tagores.. Their history.. You get engrossed into their lives.. The superstitions, the royal grandeur, and interesting to know about their past the Pirelli Brahmin stain in their ancestry.

It tells you how Bengal lived in those days.. Women were always given a lower status.. It was always the Men that won. It also tells you, even though a modern family, even if it is Rabindra Nath 's daughters, how they believed in child marriages, and how the daughters and wives were all barely nine or ten when they got married. However some women stood out in the family.. Tripura Sundari, Jnanadandini, Kadambari, Mrinalini, Sarala .. This is the take of the Tagores Women.. Who willed themselves to be strong in spite of not much help at their Jorasanko Men.

The part where Kadambari loses her life is poignant and we feel was it all in waste? That part remains hauntingly with us, after you have read it.

Also a tad disappointed with Robi 's role.. In his personal life, as a family man, as a father to his children.. You seem to be let down.

He seems to grow and be the poet you imagined when he is with Kadambari.. And maybe his poetry and his songs and stories have that as a background. His intense romanticism is not there in his personal life. Only in his writings.

The last part of the book is a let down.. I think the author has gone too quickly over each and every part of the last generation. .. Maybe her second part of the book Daughters of Jorasanko will open the characters more.

But overall a gripping and enthralling book of the Bengali psyche.. And if you are a Bengali, you will relate much more

Adam says

I have visited the large palatial residence of the Tagore family in the Jorasanko district of Calcutta twice. Between those 2 visits I bought a copy of "Jorasanko". On my second visit to the Tagore residence, which is a 'must-see' place in Calcutta, I met the deputy director and asked her what she thought about Ms Chakravarti's novel. She said that it was fairly sound from the factual point of view. With that approbation, I decided to read "Jorasanko".

This lengthy novel - or is it really a history - deals with the lives of the women in the branch of the Tagore family that lived in the residence at Jorasanko. It describes the complexities of living in a large joint family, especially one as illustrious as the Tagores. Moving in places, informative in others, this book makes for a pleasant read - a well-written family saga. Luckily, a family tree is given at the beginning of the book. I had to refer to this constantly, so large was the Tagore family. I marvelled at the way that the author managed to handle so much information about the lives of so many branches of the family, but kept wondering how much was fact and how much was fiction. And, this disturbed me. I could not make up my mind whether the author was writing fiction or biography even though she does point out at the beginning that hers was a work of fiction, but some things relating to important historical figures were not. It upset me that I did not know which parts were history and which parts were not.

The book has further stoked my interest in the Tagore family, but now I feel that I wish to read a properly annotated biography.
