

# Best Integrated Writing

---

Volume 1

Article 6

---

2014

## Chandara's Power

Amy Kasten  
*Wright State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/biw>



Part of the American Literature Commons, Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture Commons, Applied Behavior Analysis Commons, Business Commons, Classical Archaeology and Art History Commons, Comparative Literature Commons, English Language and Literature Commons, Gender and Sexuality Commons, International and Area Studies Commons, Medicine and Health Sciences Commons, Modern Literature Commons, Nutrition Commons, Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons, Religion Commons, and the Women's Studies Commons

---

### Recommended Citation

Kasten, A. (2014). Chandara's Power, *Best Integrated Writing*, 1.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by CORE Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Best Integrated Writing by an authorized editor of CORE Scholar. For more information, please contact [library-corescholar@wright.edu](mailto:library-corescholar@wright.edu).

**Best Integrated Writing: Journal of Excellence in  
Integrated Writing Courses at Wright State**

---

---

Fall 2014 (Volume 1)

Article #5

---

## **Chandara's Power**

**AMY KASTEN**

ENG 2040-05: Great Books: Literature

Fall 2014

Ms. Carolyn Stoermer

Ms. Stoermer notes that Amy's writing is clear, concise, and punchy, and her paragraphs and essay are structured thoughtfully to lead her readers through her points. Her skilled use of paraphrasing and summary allow her to support her argument with textual evidence without overloading this short assignment (500 to 600 words) with too many quotations. Amy also demonstrates the ability to look beyond the text itself at the larger cultural and political context of the work.

Tagore's short story "Punishment" depicts the social politics of a poor family in India. Tensions from cruel work conditions, inadequate pay, and a lack of food lead to Dukhiram Rui murdering his wife in a fit of rage. His brother, Chidam, pins the blame on his own wife without thinking, but promises her acquittal if she agrees to lie and plead self-defense. To their surprise, Chandara, the accused, rejects Chidam's story and assumes all the guilt, even though it means her death. Chidam and Dukhiram try to save her, but their new claims contradict their old testimony and are dismissed as lies. By revolting against the men and accepting the crime, Chandara gains the power to direct her own fate against their wishes, effectively overturning the social hierarchy of her society.

In the India depicted in "Punishment," women are always under the power of men and have little agency in their own lives. Chandara's father arranged her marriage to Chidam at "a very young age," leaving "childhood dolls in her father's house and [coming] to her in-laws' house" (1699). Dukhiram shows little respect to his wife, demanding she give him food without so much as a greeting on returning home and reflexively murdering her when she talks back to him (1694). Chandara and Chidam's marriage is closer, but it is implied to be based on mutual distrust. When, on one occasion, Chandara taunts her husband with extramarital flirting after suspecting him of infidelity, he threatens to break all her bones and locks her in a room as she attempts to leave (1696). Chandara is unable to confront Chidam directly about his extended trips away from home, but matching his actions is met with force. Although Chidam cares enough about Chandara to desire her affections, he quickly blames her for the murder rather than his brother, indicating he views her as of lesser importance.

By confessing to the murder on her terms, Chandara flips the power dynamic. Her husband is powerless to prevent her from speaking, as he already accused her and must bend to the legal process. Chidam and Dukhiram's attempts to contradict her are useless, because they are inconsistent with their own testimony. Chandara is in a position where she can finally make her own decisions, and she chooses the freedom of death over life in

servitude. Chidam is reduced to tears with helplessness, a sharp contrast from the influence he once held and likely similar to Chandara's own experiences (1697). Chandara's final words toward her husband are similar to his attitude in accusing her: "to hell with him" (1699).

Tagore's story paints a clear picture of the struggles of women in India. While the actions of the characters in "Punishment" may be influenced by poverty rather than malice, the underlying theme is no less potent. The situation appears extremely dire if death is presented to women as a preferable alternative to life under the rule of their husbands. Chandara's actions represent a call to push back against the oppression; although it may cost her life, she can still fight for her own power.

—