



## TREATMENT OF ANTI-COLONIAL NATIONALISM AND RELIGION IN TAGORE'S GORA

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Received : 17/06/2017

1st BPR : 22/06/2017

2nd BPR : 01/07/2017

Accepted : 09/07/2017

### ABSTRACT

Nationalism can define and interpret through its growth in India as reflected in the novels by Indo-Anglian writers. In fact, the Indo-Anglian Fiction has reflected various aspects of this nationalism. Tagore novel Gora, shows all those aspects of nationalism. Gora has the theme of nationalism needed in multi-racial multi-religious community like India. It exemplifies Tagore's vision of new cretistic Indai, rising above the consideration of caste, community and race. Tagore not only asserts the value of humanism in the life but also point out the danger faced by the national awaking in the country at the beginning of twentieth century. Tagore warns Indian against the drivelling of national movement towards a militant Hinduism under the stormy influence of extremist leaders.

From a study of struggle of the Indians for freedom from the colonial rule we can define nationalism as a weapon for a dominated community's fight against the foreign rule of an imperialist country. Nationalism may be also defined and interpret through its growth in India as reflected in the novel by Indo-Anglian writers. In fact, the Indo-Anglian Fiction has reflected various aspects of this nationalism. One aspect of nationalism as shown in the early Indo-Anglian novels is the spirit of self-identification or self assertion. Indian freedom movement can be divided into three phases. The first phase involves spontaneous unorganized armed rebellions against the newly established British rule. The second phase involves the demand for self-government for Indians while the English educated Indian still expressed their willingness to remain under the British Empire itself. The third phase expresses Indian people's demand for complete independence from the British rule.

Tagore's novel Gora, shows all these aspects of nationalism. Gora, the longest and the most widely acclaimed novel of R. Tagore, has the theme of nationalism needed in a multi-racial and multi-religious community like India. It exemplifies Tagore's vision of new, syncretistic India, rising above the considerations of caste, community and race. At the beginning the central character Gora seemed to be a bigoted and xenophobic Hindu nationalist. But he undergoes a process of realization of his ideals and achieves a liberal humanistic ethics at the end. So the novel has contemporary relevance. It is really a strong political and patriotic novel voicing the aspirations of the resurgent India. The central theme of the novel has a political undercurrent. The novel reflects the patriotic zeal of Gora and also projects all the important political questions, the conflict of the ideals and aspiration between the East and the West. In the character of Gora "Tagore has tried to bring about the fusion of the East and the West"<sup>1</sup>. The novel covering a wide canvas marks Tagore's "search for national identity"<sup>2</sup>. It also represents his efforts "at projecting an image of India which is at once, historical and ahistorical."<sup>3</sup> It is, "perhaps the most complete picture of the life of Bengal towards the end of twentieth century"<sup>4</sup>. The main plot of the novels



concerned with Gora's attitude, beliefs and conceptions and with his attempts at upholding them against disillusioning experiences and the final discovery of truth about himself whereas the Boney Lolita sub-plot brings into focus the Hindu Brahmo conflicts. The main incidents of the plot serve as landmarks in the protagonist's journey of self-discovery. Gora's nature is addicted to extremisms never doing anything half-heartedly. "The knowledge leader of a band of little revolutionaries" he always felt "too delighted if got a chance in the street of quarrelling with an Englishman"<sup>5</sup>. Later, as an enthusiast of Brahmo samaj he was in the habit of harrying the Brahmin Pandit who gathered round his father whose newly cultivated orthodoxy prompts him to nearly cut off all relations with Gora. The Brahmin baiter is transformed, at the beginnings of the story into a Brahma bait by the learned pandit Vidyavagish and Gora plunges headlong into a fervent defense of "the blameless excellence of Hindu religion and society"<sup>6</sup>.

Gora becomes most punctilious about rituals, bathing regularly in Ganges performing ceremonial worship in the morning and evening and taking particular care of what he touches and eats. He stops even taking water in his mother's room, as she keeps a Christian maid and does not also permit his friend Binoy, and fellow crusader Binoy to eat in his room. In dress he becomes "...an incarnate image of revolt against modernity"<sup>7</sup> with "tiki" coarse dhoti and a castmark of Ganges clay. Taunting him his brother Mohim says: "Many a bigot have I seen in my day, but this beats them all. You are going one better than even the Benares or Nadia Pandits"<sup>8</sup>. Tagore's nationalism is seen in Gora's opinion that foreign and native criticism of Hinduism can best be rebutted by holding firmly to our own customs and beliefs. He strongly opines:

....We must not feel apologetic about the country of our birth-whether it be about its traditions, faith, or its scriptures neither to others nor even to ourselves. we must save our country and ourselves from insult by manfully bearing the burdens of our motherland with all our strength and all our pride<sup>9</sup>. When Hinduism is in the beleaguered state, he considers it his mission to defend casteism, rituals and superstitions to the point of being and unthinking fundamentalist. He proclaims to Binoy:

....Gourmohan is such an incorrigible fellow that he never apologizes for his superstitions to any one at all<sup>10</sup>.

By preparing that ground, as it were, Tagore now introduces the first of the many incidents that shake the self-Complacency of this incorrigible neo-Hindu nationalist and sets him on the path of self-introspection.

As Gora cannot dissuade Binoy from visiting the Brahmo Samagists who are regarded as renegades, he himself pays a visit to the house of Paresh babu where he stoutly defends Hindu rituals and rather rudely declines their hospitality. Despite his dislike for them, he cannot but be touched by Paresh Babu's saintliness and his foster daughter, Sucharita's tender beauty and keen intelligence. A strange restlessness overtakes Gora-partly due to the widening gulf between him and partly due to the impact of his visits to Paresh Babu's family.

The novelist vividly records how Gora sees for himself the manner Hindu religion with. its innumerable proscriptions and restrictions has kept the people divided and ignorant in the following words:

... to Gora it was constant agony to be brought face to face with this terrible load of ignorance, apathy and suffering, which had overwhelmed rich and poor, learned and ignorant alike and clogged their advance at every step<sup>11</sup>.

Gora becomes aware of the futility of strict observance of orthodox custom by Hindus without feelings of compassion for others in the predominantly Muslim village of Ghosepura whose natives had been fighting unitedly and daringly against the exploitation of foreign indigo planters braving all tyranny and oppression by the police. The only Hindu resident of the village, a barber, had given shelter



to a Muslim boy whose father had been imprisoned. Responding to Gora's reproach for un-Hindu conduct the barber says:

What is the difference, sir? We call him Hari, they as Allah, that's all<sup>12</sup>

Gora is moved by the contrast between the simple humanity of the unorthodox Hindu barber and ignoble and selfish conduct of the Brahmin rent-collector of the Indigo Factory- "A regular limb of Satan", 35. So he rejects, the Collector's hospitality and, going back to barber's house, reflects:

What terrible wrong have been doing by making purity an eternal things! Shall my caste remain pure by eating from the hand of this oppressor of the poor Mohemmedans and be lost in the home of the man who has not only shared their miseries but given shelter to one of them at the risk of being outcasted himself<sup>13</sup>

Thus time and again Gora is confronted with the shortcoming of Hinduism, but nevertheless holds on militantly to it through a mistaken notion of patriotism.

In the novel Gora's character has been depicted with wider Catholicity and sympathy. He is shown as a symbol of the rising nationalism of the early twentieth Century in India. He represents the aspirations and sentiments of educated Bengalis of his age, who agitated against the injustice and arrogance of the British rulers, and being conscious of their slavery, tried to seek out their cultural heritage and protect it from all types of onslaughts. To Gora, therefore, everything that is Indian is sacred and everything that is Indian is to be interpreted. In term of undiluted Hinduism. By giving emphasis on the cultural unity of India transcending caste, sect and religion Tagore not only asserts the value of humanism in the life but also points out the dangers faced by the national awakening in the country at the beginning of the twentieth century. He warns his countrymen against the driveling of the national movement towards a militant Hinduism under the stormy influence of extremist leaders like Tilak, Bipinchandra Pal and Aurbindo Ghosh "Beside by depicting the ironical situation of a white man cultivating the under bounded love for Hindu religion and nation the author appears to suggest that religion and patriotism are not ingrained in the blood of a man from birth but are contracted by him from his surroundings and environment"<sup>14</sup>.

Thus Gora can be viewed in the nationalist perspective through Gora's conscious effort to exalt Hinduism and build Indian nationalism on its basis.

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