

‘Gora’ - A Mirror of Social, Political and Cultural Life of India

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Abstract: *The writer of our National Anthem, Rabindranath Tagore was a man of versatile genius. Mahatma Gandhi rightly called him ‘Gurudev’. He became Asia’s first Nobel Laureate, when he won the 1913 Nobel Prize in Literature for his ‘Gitanjali’. It is a collection of short poems. He was a great poet, short-story writer, musician, dramatist, novelist and nationalist. Kalidas, Dante and Shakespeare influenced him much. He achieved a perennial success in Bengali as well as in English language. Tagore was much influenced by the Upanishads. His father used to tell him great epics. So this is the chief reason why he can create such great works. Tagore became well aware of the Hindu caste-system and other orthodox customs as he remained the secretary of Adi Brahma Samaj. He condemned these customs. Out of his twelve novels, the famous are the novels of conflict like ‘Chokher Bali’, ‘The Wreck’, ‘Gora’, ‘Ghare Baire’, and ‘Farewell, My Friend’. In these works, Rabindranath examined how the spirit of the age influenced the life of the people.*

Key Words: *A socio-political novel, the depiction of the Indian Renaissance spirit, touch of nationalism and internationalism, national consciousness.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Gora reveals Tagore’s liberal humanistic views. It is the longest and most widely acclaimed novel of Tagore. The novel reflects the patriotic zeal of Gora or Indian-Bengali youth. Commenting on Gora’s technique K.R.S. Iyengar remarks: “Notwithstanding the wide canvas and moving multiplicity of character, incident and dialogue, the novel is a unity, and this comes from Gora himself, who is both the centre of the action and the circumference of the play of ideas. The rest serve largely to explain him, or are explained by his relations with him”. The present novel exemplifies Tagore’s vision of new India rising above the considerations of caste, community and race. It projects all the important political questions, the conflicts of the ideals between the east and the west. Tagore was primarily a poet but he too found that the medium of the novel was the fittest vehicle for expressing thoughts as well as undercurrents of human mind. That is why the central theme of the novel has a political undercurrent. It is really a strong political novel voicing the aspirations of the resurgent India.

2. The Elements of Socio-Political Novel:

From social point of view, the novel focuses on the caste-system. Gora, the protagonist, is quite orthodox in the institution of caste-system. He, with Krishna Dayal, discusses the merit of a Brahmin family. He thinks that caste-system is the wisest method of division of labour and intellectual work. We know that the whole society has been divided into four castes – Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishyas and Shudras. Suchitra and Binoy also discuss the caste-system. Raja Ram Mohan Roy founded the Brahmo movement in 1828. He wanted to transform India into western system of education, culture and politics. It wanted to change Hindu religion into a progressive religion free from casteism, idolatry, problems of widowhood and superstitions. Thus, the controversy between Hinduism and Brahmoism is presented in this work. One group led by Gora, is a perfect follower of Hinduism. He is the chairperson of the Hindu Patriot Society. In addition, another group is led by Haran and the family of Paresh Babu which strongly believes in the principles of Brahmoism. Tagore highlighted the social condition of Bengal. Gora finds that people are totally looted and exploited by the English administrators. Caste-system, dowry-system, problem of widowhood etc. social issues prevail strongly in Indian society. Marriages were not based on freedom of love.

Suchitra, Lolita and Binoy are portrayed by Tagore to bring into focus the Hindu-Brahmo conflict, which forms the secondary theme of the novel. When she is adopted by Paresh Babu, she becomes engaged to the Brahmo principles. Nevertheless, because of Haran’s ill-behaviour, she feels drawn to Gora. Suchitra is compelled, by circumstances, to leave Paresh Babu. Thus, in the early stage of the novel, she was caught in rigid Brahmoism. She, with Gora exposes the false, ridiculous and old religious system of marriage. Like Gora, she is also enlightened soul. In creating the character of Paresh Babu, Tagore keeps the personality of his father in mind. His father Debendranath was called ‘Maharshi’. So, like his father Paresh Babu is also saint-like man. He loves peace and calm atmosphere. He has a full faith in god. His thoughts are full of social reformation. He spends most of his time in prayers and contemplation. Thus, he is one of the characters who show Tagore’s social ideology. “Gora” has been considered as... “the greatest novel written in any Indian language.” Tagore’s socio-political views are presented by certain

characters. There are two types of characters in this novel, though they show a great contrast among them. The characters like Gora, Krishna Dayal belong to the orthodox Hindu group. While Paresh Babu, his daughters, Binoy and Anandmoyi belong to the group of Brahmos. Thus from social point of view some characters are staunch whereas the rest have very liberal view of religion.

The entire novel revolves round the atmosphere of revolt and preparation of freedom. We can see that the development of Gora is at the hand of the slave people of Bengal. We can also see lots of sufferings and unjust punishment by a cruel foreign rule. Tagore highlighted the condition of Bengal in the novel. Gora comes to know that how the people are looted and exploited by the English administrators. At political level, the atmosphere of revolt and preparation of freedom prevails in the whole novel. Thus as a political novel, it projects Tagore's vision of the individual's role in India.

3. Touch of Nationalism and Internationalism:

The flow of internationalism runs through the novel, when Gora comes to know that he is the son of an Irishman. When he became aware of true human nature and spirit as well as identity, he says... "Today, I have become so pure that I can never be afraid of contamination even in the house of the lowest of castes". Even in the epilogue of the novel, we study the proposal of internationalism. At the end of the novel Gora, comes to meet Anandmoyi. He laid his head at her feet and said...

**"Mother, you are my mother! The mother for whom I've been
Searching all day was all the time sitting in my room at home.
You have no caste; you make no distinctions and have no hatred.
It is you who are India."**

Thus, Tagore has beautifully interwoven the themes of nationalism and internationalism in the novel. The touch of Hinduism and Brahmoism can also be seen. Even a character like Gora suddenly turn to Brahmin because he thinks that it is the sense that give him a sense of his mother land. His this sense of religion highlighted in his own words when he himself says..."You call these customs evil only because the English books you have read and memorized call them so. You know nothing about these customs on your own." The colonization of the British had its great impact on Indian subcontinent as not only socially but also politically and culturally. The people of Ghoshpara have to face bad luck at that time Gora took their side and in this regard, he talk to Haran Babu. Later Haran Babu tells the British magistrate that people were unable to absorb English education. And because of British rule some of them are ungrateful. They learnt their lessons by heart while their moral training remains incomplete.

We can say that novel stands on the two major pillars i.e. Nationalism and Internationalism. Majority of the characters follow the Brahmo Samaj. Character like Pannubabu and Baroda are the followers of British ruler and English life. For them English life is a boon. Whereas Mohim and Krishnadayal show respect to the British people. They are selfish and they found their personal benefit. Thus, novelist creates the western attitude through such characters. Such characters have attraction towards English officials, while such characters have their own attitude. Some of them have their personal reasons. In this way, we can see that Tagore has special favored to anti British motion in Bengal. The same theme reflected in his "Gitanjali" – a collection of songs. As we study it, we come to know that even Muslim people also against the British officials. But the main issues of caste-system and gender discrimination structured very artistically in the novel by the novelist. Tagore's art of social and religious unity can be seen in his mouthpiece Gora. When he says... "Today I am Bharatiya. Within me, there is no conflict between communities, whether Hindu, Muslim, or Christian. Today all the castes of Bharat are my castes"

Because of his epic like characteristics, a critic like Sukumar Sen calls the novel "Gora" as... "Something likes a Mahabharata of Modern India". In the late nineteenth century, Bengal was in the grip of a political conflict on the basic issue of the partition of Bengal. That issue was held by Lord Curzon. He undertook a political movement in Bengal. Tagore portrays Gora as a national leader who work for the betterment of Indian peasants. Gora is the most patriot character of the novel. As a true nationalistic hero he had taken a vow to serve mother India. As a hero of the novel he remains a faithful servant to his country. Even when the English Magistrate Brownlow sentences Gora for one month imprisonment for interfering with the police, Gora sets up the image and an atmosphere of strong freedom fighter. He become astaunch nationalist. Thus, novel 'Gora' deals with the spirit of nationalism. Tagore has portrayed realistically the rural people of Bengal and their suffering in it. And, therefore, a critic Krishna Kripalani calls it... "The epic of India in transition; it is to Indian fiction what Tolstoy's 'War and Peace' to the Russian." Tagore describes the social, political, cultural and religious picture of Bengal during the second half of the 19th century. The novel gives the picture of Indian society, which progress to achieve universal unity. Really, 'Gora' is a realistic novel. It shows the minds of men and women of the time. It is a strong fight between the British Rule and the youths' efforts to fight the British Rule. That is why essentially we can call "Gora" as a nationalistic novel. It is indeed... 'a saga of human life'. We see that Tagore is more interested in describing the humanism on the base of nationalism and internationalism.

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