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**'SOCIO POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF WOMEN' IN RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S
NOVEL "GORA"**

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ABSTRACT

Rabindranath Tagore, the colossus, learnt his own pace, learnt the importance of developing empathy and sensitivity towards the social issues of his contemporary society in a very profound manner but at his own pace. Being fully understanding the state of woman in the post-independence era resultantly he has taken the rights of the women at his hand, to get them their rights as equal to man. He has attempted to create a good ambience for the empowerment of women by making them protagonists of his novels and plays. He firmly believes in the fact that the key to women's incessant problems and their liberty from the patriarchal domain could only be possible through education. Most of the plays and novels of Tagore are centred on the life of women and their struggle for life irrespective of the situation and self-actualization which leads to their emancipation. There is no wonder for his concerns towards women and their state of being in the society, since he has much acquaintance with the social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Ray.

The paper would analyse Tagore's contribution on the emancipation of women with reference to the text Gora. The novel, Gora created and serialized at the turn of 20th century is regarded as an important milestone in the history of Indian fiction, and there have been numerous attempts to interpret each move Tagore has made here. The ongoing telecast of Gora on Door darshan channel itself reveals the influence of the same in the present scenario.

Keywords: Acquaintance, Door darshan, Emancipation, Empathy, Empowerment, Patriarchal, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Self-Actualization, Sensitivity.

Rabindranath Tagore's role in the liberation of Bengali women was a seminal one-initially, he exposed the plight of women and argued for their anatomy in his letters, short stories and essays. Through his novels he was able to construct new and vital female. Later, by his act of admitting females into his Shantiketan School, he became an innovative pioneer in education and women empowerment.

Around 1907, when the interests of nationalist's resistance to British imperialism were competing with the attraction of Western modernisation for the loyalty of young Indians. Tagore wrote his greatest novel Gora. This was the time of political upheaval in Indian, but his novel did not deal with any political agitation rather it showed the attempts that were being made to understand the newer outlook to life in the wake of western education and realization of a rational approach shared Srivastava writes in this connection:

The woman is liberated when she analyses and reflects upon her position as a woman in the scheme of things which includes the social moral and spiritual fields.(Page-17-18)

A liberated woman is completely different from the woman who thinks of seeking equality with men, asserting her own personality and emphasizing on her own rights as a woman as such, I would like to study Gora from this stand point.

Gora is set in Kolkata in the second half of the nineteenth century and focuses on the generation coming age a few decades after the mutiny. The action is informed by an atmosphere of mounting nationalism, separatism. Set in the context of a national integration of cultural, political and religious identity, the novel stages dialectics not between British colonialism and Indian resistance as western readers are accustomed to expecting but between a fiercely orthodox Hindu nationalism and the liberal Bengali Reform Movement within Hinduism, the Brahmo Samaj. Brahmo Samaj is electric and syncretistic movement in which many good western tendencies were also adopted like it was against Sati pratha, Parda System, Child marriage, caste system and was in favour of widow remarriage and education for woman although these were the British attempts that were made to bring reforms in Hinduism. Although R.N Tagore was an ardent nationalism and culture to him which was the real Hinduism. As Upendra Bhattacharya comments in Rabindranath's short story and Novel:

The area of dialectical discourses between the ancient Hindu religion and the new-fangled. Brahmo religion was marked out and extended the 'relation' between the traditionalist conservative society and reforms conscious progressivist Brahmo society gradually soured through animosity and sarcastic exchanges (Pg-323)

The corpus of the works of Rabindranath Tagore, the first Nobel laureate in Asia, has been a popular field of study for more than half a century. Extensive critical enquiry has been made into his poetic creation. In spite of his being an outstanding Indo-Anglian poet, prophet, Philosopher, novelists and essayist, much critical attention has not been paid to his fiction. In my presentation, I am dealing with the womanhood concept in Gora, a remarkable novel of Rabindranath Tagore. Throughout human history, the female persona has been portrayed as a symbol of fertility, a Goddess representing the Motherland or even as a class of people whose best place is in the kitchen and within the home. In each of these cases the woman is not part of one philosophy or the other. Tagore begins his novel with Binoybhusan, a highly educated Bengali young man who had situated himself with the socio-religious debates as education and national priorities as well as on the things that were then considered to be matters to be dealt by woman, namely the women's relationship within and outside their gender. Binoy, as he is called subsequently is seen looking out through his window in a pensive mood. While doing so, he hears a Bengali singer singing a folk song. "The unknown bird flies in and out of the cage, If I could catch it. I would place the chain of my mind on its feet. (Gora, P-1)

These lines of the text convey the very message clearly -what a man thinks about a woman. How he wants to have her according to his own wishes. Rabindranath Tagore has presented the whole milieu of the Indian society. He has depicted women who have tremendous courage and strength in trying situations and have played a key role within their ambit of operation to break down those change of restrictions.

Whenever we contemplate over the female characters of Tagore, the character of Sucharita, the liberated young woman with a strong mind of her own, and equally at ease within and outside 'home' as well as Anandamoyi, or 'mother' of the protagonist confined only to home and yet with a liberated outlook ready to break the shackles of dogmas, begin to lurk in our mind. The novel, created and in the turn of 20th century, is regarded as an important milestone in the history of Indian fiction, and there have been numerous attempts to interpret each move Tagore has made here. Gora is supposed to be viewed from the viewpoint Gourmohan, the Irish orphan adopted by a Brahmin family amidst the mutiny of 1857. The novel can be taken as a saga of triumph over colour and prejudices also. One another alternative is to consider the story in terms of inter-generational attempt to coming to terms with the forces of Westernization of the educated segment of Indian society. The multiple layer of meaning can be obtained from Gora as it focuses on the cultural root of Bengal and Bengalis and the debasement of the society with the onslaught of the western mode of thinking brought about by the British rule. Incidentally, Rabindranath, the author of this 500 old page novel could have named his work for several reasons after its central character's body or called Gora which could be translated into

“essence and root of a matter”. Viewing the novel through these different pedestals would produce confronting and interesting comparisons about the details of the novel. But the central theme of freedom, women education and their emancipation as well as the yearning for it would not change

The novel starts with Binoy when he faces Sucharita, face to face in a road accident, and his world begins to change forever. Binoy, like most Indian male youths, has not interested with women much, expect for those in his family. He has seen women only as a symbol of maternity (Anandamoyi) or a person who spends her entire life serving the men at home. For the first time, he looks at Sucharita’s reflection in the mirror, a face “lowered in loving anxiety glowed with a tenderness” which was to Binoy a “newly manifested wonder of nature”(pg-2). It is interesting to note that Binoy does not find courage to look at her directly: Instead he opts to look at her reflection and now he was fascinated by the beautiful face he saw reflected in the mirror. His eyes were not adequately trained to examine each line and curve of a countenance. Tagore introduce Sucharita, a central female character as a symbol of nature, and the novel progresses, he slowly but imperfectly, he transforms this symbol into a form and a figure and provides her with a very independent and individual mind. Gora is brought into the book via an argument with Binoy about the latter’s accepting to Paresh Babu’s invitation. Binoy is genuinely eager to associate himself with Paresh Babu’s family to learn more about the family and acquaint himself with this woman who lit up the whole room like goddess Saraswati.

Gora is a staunch Hindu Brahmin boy who worship in the morning and in the evening and is very careful for what he eats. He stops taking from his mother’s room as she keeps a Christian maid. In his dress also, he is “an incarnate image of revolt against modernity” (Gora p-138). His brother Mohim says:

Many a bigot have I seen in my days, but this beats them all. You are going

One better than even the Banaras or Nadia pandits(Gora-pg64)

He initially associated himself with the Bramho-Samaj for a short period of time but now vehemently abhors this new creed of the British bootlicking educated ones reflecting so much like the Christians. He does not approve Binoy’s decision to visit the Bramho neighbour. The tall, broad shouldered Brahmin fires arrows at Binoy’s “temptation”, as he proclaims that it is best to “worship women” where “they are installed as Mother”. Gora’s ideas of womanhood is extremely stereotypical and is prevalent until this day in India. The Mother is the highest pedestal offered to a woman under such scheme. The “Feminine Individual” is not given the individual status. Gora assumes Binoy’s admiration to be a vent for his lust. Gora is brought out the readers as a voice for the reformist Brahmin rather than that of an enlightened individual. The tragedy of Gora’s fate is comparable to the fate of the Indian women-who could at best be the home maker ,or a force like Kali, o r shakti ready to step out of home to destroy all evils ,but never as an ordinary woman in the educated Bengali society of that time.

Binoy is a man of the heart but Gourmohan is a man of revivalist Hindu ideology. The fallacy of Gora’s ideology is evident when he restricts Binoy from eating food served by Lachmiya, the Christian maid who saved Gora’s life when he was suffering from small pox in his boisterous years. Tagore use food as a weapon, something like a sword used to wield power and control the lives of other.

Even though Gora preaches the ideology of placing woman at a Mother’s mantle, yet he forgot to pay respect to a woman, Lachmiya who mothered him along with Anandamoyi. As “The statement” of a concept “no longer has the same certainty” (Gora pg-18) when applied to a person. Gora is incapable of this theory to practice association, and this impotency is magnified when Gora interacts with the womenfolk of the novel-particularly when he is shown as abstaining from communication with Sucharita in several encounters that they would have in the novel.

Anandamoyi, the daughter of a learned Banaras scholar, discards “the tradition of seven generation” (Gora pg-13) and chooses to be an outcast in her own house for love of Gora whom being childless, she regards as a God’s gift to her. Without succumbing to the blandishment of Gora, she assumes the responsibility of Binoy’s marriage to Lolita which is objected to by the rigidly secreterian Brahmas as well. Her defence of the marriage gives an indication of an enlightened mind, free from all vestiges of communal bigotry and religious intolerance:

..... Marriage is a matter of hearts coming together -if that happened what matters it what mantras are recited?..... There is no caste in men’s hearts-there God brings man together and there He

Himself comes to them. Will it ever do to keep Him at a distance and leave the duty of uniting men to creeds and forms (Gora pg-183).

Anandamoyi, an idealized character, stands isolated in her family and exemplifies the ideals which Gora comes to cherish towards the end of the novel, the distinction between the two being that the former has gained the breath of vision by his intellect and the latter through the warmth of her heart. Her husband is like many "forward" thinking Bengali youth who catered their intellect and loyalty to the services of their English masters. Although her transformation into the magnanimous human persona is not dealt with in much detail in the novel, the change is something, modern feminists would praise. Normally the last name of the Indian woman changes in a marriage, and she is begged down further in the family matters. She has to satisfy herself with the little man obliged with her. But in Gora Anandamoyi is shown as raising an Irish British orphan as her own child. Even though she is not his biological mother, she holds her self strong amidst societal pressures and shunning to raise a Gora child as a part of her own family. This is one of the first individualistic traits depicted in Anandamoyi. As Binoy discovers very early in the novel, Anandamoyi is the "face.....of this motherland" (Gora pg-19). He is able to differentiate between Sucharita, a girl he has affection for, and Anandamoyi who is his "Ma"-for both of whom he has respect and admiration. Tagore gives his female characters individual faces, just as the men in his novel have. Interestingly, the number of female to male characters is equal. The women who are the pillars of the narratives go through drastic transformations, too. In contrast to Anandamoyi, Baradasundari is a Brahmo Samaj woman who is doubtful of everything Hindu. Barada's change is superficial. Tagore introduces the hypocrisy of the modern educated class through the voice of Baradasundari who has a sour taste for idol worship, traditional dress, religious names and everything that is non-Brahmo.

Tagore delicately balances the growth of womanhood by providing opposing examples almost like binary opposites and churning out a victor from them. Tagore methodically plays the tunes of the individuals versus societies in his novel. It becomes clear when we have a look at the character of Anandamoyi as she is a noble hearted woman who did not want to get into verbose argumentation on which was the right path, but one who desired to enhance and enrich our growth as 'human beings' without which religions, societies, customs, ideologies-with all progressive or reactionary ideas-can become a terrible bondage. The freedom that she had accorded to Gora, and the ease with which she has shown to be able to assimilate the others who came in her life-story added to her weakness for the nobility and gentility in Binoy's approach. All her actions bore testimony to this fact. In Tagore's depiction of Anandamoyi's womanhood, there is no disrespect or denial of religion, but a profound and unspoken protest against what people themselves often make out religion to be. The character of Anandamoyi has been shown to be reflected in so many ways in the novel, with liberal and tolerant attitudes of her finding reflections in others who Gora comes to contact with, and from whom he learns something in his life. It is not only the liberal and humanistic streak in Paresh Babu that attracts him and in Binoy, in whom he sees the reflection of the same values that Anandamoyi stood for -the broad humanistic concerns, but even later in the depict of Gora leaving to be away from his home and see the world little bit, when he came to a predominantly Muslim village, which happened to be the only one of that kind in that area, where he found only one Hindu family, a barber, who also took care of a Muslim boy. Responding to Gora's approach for his non-Hindu conduct, the barber says, "What is the difference, Sir? We call him as Hari, they as Allah, that's all"(Gora pg-133). This neighbourhood is in trouble because it is the only neighbourhood that has submitted to the unjust impositions of the British Sahibs. Although it remains unspoken, Gora finds here in Sardar, the leader of the Muslim village, the grit and determination to stand up and refuse to be subjugated. It was here that Gora realised that liberal humanism was more precious than sectarian beliefs, as we find him reflecting while sympathising the victims of injustice.

The event of Ghoshpara sparked a shock to Gora's heart. Only after his encounter with the poor barber family does Gora learn to adopt Binoy's philosophy of applying principles to people. His time in the jail cell gives Gora time to reflect on himself and amusingly enough he is plagued by the same romantic disease he had accused Binoy-of-love. During this trance of Gora, he sees Sucharita's tender face in the mind. His puzzlement is not unique as neither Sucharita understands her affection towards Gora, a man she'd considered to be hard, ragged, loud spoken and outright scary. Tagore inhibits a soft touch to his lead

characters and makes them look true to life more than words would have described them. This is also the same that Gora has his renewed realization of India.

Tagore gives feminism a meaning of his own. He provides his feminists lead to find themselves in the face of society without hurting others. Anandamoyi and Sucharita are not causes for mighty disasters as they lack the extreme pride which is often the folly of larger than life characters of epics. Tagore keeps himself away from making his feminine players superhuman beings Sucharita's initial hostility towards Gora is convincing. Moral cleansing is not an objective of Gora rather Tagore takes care for the change in novel's characters and takes most of his characters through a life journey in which they are able to discover their own values and views. Feminism at an accelerated pace only annoyed the people of India at that time. Tagore published Gora in 1924, although it appears serially even earlier. The story was written contemporary to the times Tagore lived in. Lolita's failure in Tagore's tool to convince the feminist in Indian society that the sudden outcry for freedom and dissolution of woman from Hindu society would get them very little -the little Baradasundari got from her Brahmo feminist ideology that let her wear revealing clothes, and converse with men in day light. Even this 'little' freedom would have meant a lot for the womenfolk of the that time, but it was not something for which one had to bring forth a cultural and Social revolution.

Tagore uses psychological realism to paint a better picture of freedom- a freedom without any chain, just as the bird's independent of the Baul's singer song. Indian novels were often platters of greater than the eastern philosophy and had little flesh and blood of the characters , but in Gora Tagore successfully webs life of feminism in a unique unadulterated fashion. Despite Lolita's social failure, Tagore benevolently gives Lolita a ticket to maturity in her conversation with Anandamoyi in which she tells Anandamoyi that it is not "necessary for him to give up all that to established mutual relation with another human being."(Gora-pg-366)Binoy's dilemma disappears with Anandamoyi's help , who convinces him that there is no need to change. Thus, Binoy grasps the totality of the gnawing Tagore's humanism through the blooming of his relationship with Lolita. Tagore brings his belief in humanism in the forefront when Binoy says, "if affection can n't put up with differences exist anywhere in the world?" (Gora -pg – 367)

Tagore is notorious for dealing with the "whole" of a concept rather than the fineness of it. In Gora, Tagore successfully blends his wholesome philosophy of human nature with the details of everyday life. One has to appreciate the liberal face of Hinduism that Anandamoyi stood for, a position to which Gora is finally shown to have reached after travelling a full circle. It was not a position easily reachable by a woman who was not educated in a western tradition, nor was a Brahmo who would be engaged in this kind of debate at a socio-cultural level. The debasement that corroded the aspect of humanism in the Hindu society of those days is hinted at by Paresch Babu in his discussion with Sucharita when he mentions that with the advent of British Legal system bring in equality among practitioners of all faiths. The Hindu society would collapse with its stratification and inner contradiction. As against the true picture of the great fall in the morality and human values among Hindus, Anandamoyi stood out as an exceptional woman who mothered Gora to believe in those values that went against sectarianism.

The novel seems to reveal the odyssey of a young man Gora. He had a liberal Hindu surrogate mother in Anandamoyi, much ahead of her time and society in understanding the spirit of humanism in the Hindu way of life. In her conduct throughout the novel, we find her to be a noble hearted woman who did not want to get into verbose argumentation. Undoubtedly both the female characters have liberal outlook in their thinking.

The one, Sucharita finds herself at equal ease within and outside home and strong mind of her own; the other, Anandamoyi, too is ready to break the shackles of dogmas prevailing in the contemporary society of their times. Tagore has persistently advocated for the equal rights for woman as they would enhance and enrich our growth. Gora is relevant even today.

To conclude the study, I may assert that Gora is an attempt not to preach from the pulpit but to permeate a sense of true human quality among man and woman and to inspire them to be nationalistic, patriotic and socially conscious. Tagore as a creative writer stands alone and must be judged alone.

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