



Tagore's *Gora*: a far-seeing pioneering step towards Feminism and Chauvinism in colonized India

Nilanjana Ghosh

Assistant professor,

Disha Law College, Raipur, Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University, Raipur C.G, India

Email: nilabha22@gmail.com

Orcid Id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3144-8778>

Abstract:

Tagore, the painter of 19th century Indian society, a versatile genius produced an extensive volume of literary creation in comparison with any other literary personalities of the world. The present paper aiming at countenance the veiled side of Tagore's feminism and chauvinism in the dawn of the Indian Renaissance during colonization in the light of his longest and most prominent novel 'Gora'. Tagore portrayed his female characters with the natural hues of effeminate qualities along with the quest of search of the self and their crisis of cultural transition among the Brahmins, Brambhos (followers of Bramho Samaj) and Christians in colonized Bengal and India at large. Though the recurring themes (Nationalism, Chauvinism, Hindu philosophies) of the novel pivots round the central character Gora, other female characters of this novel are also equally important, in fact they stand as a spokesperson of Tagore's renaissance thought, psychological crisis of the contemporary thinkers and his ideologies (Traditional Indian vs. Western ideology) about women.

Key Words: Feminism, chauvinism, renaissance, colonization



Introduction

Tagore, the philosopher, novelist, short story writer, poet, painter and a dazzling star in the distressed colonized India; grown up in a family of scholars and artists; was endowed with diverse elements in his personality which are deeply imbedded in his characterization of the novel 'Gora'. 'Gora'; (Pub. as periodical 1907-1909) ^[1] a thoughtful literary masterpiece and a milestone, as he went into adding new aspects and values in his contemporary and further writings specially essays and novels: Rajbhakti^[2] (social and political essay), *Deshnayak* (a political essay)^[3], nationalism in *Home And the world*^[4]; presents psychological suppression of Bengali elite and role of women in the progress of society and their status in the eve of bilingual crisis in colonized India. The female protagonists Anandamoyi, a thinking mind, Sucharita brooding persona and Lalita embodiment of revolt, argue for women emancipation and stand as a role model, who can unveil herself and argue with men and society with quest for compassionate humanism. Tagore depicts actual Indian philosophy of nationalism and equality to the voice of Anandamoyi, Lalita and Sucharita that indicates Tagore's view on education **"The highest education is that which does not merely give us information, but makes our life in harmony with all existence"** ^[5]

Tagore's *Gora* portrays the crucial period of political, religious, cultural and socio-economic transition during British Colonization. This crisis oscillates the minds of the characters between glorious Indian tradition and up heave ling westernization and its impact on society. Leading characters was imbibed with nationalism though was not blind at social and moral degradation and malicious practices of racism and chauvinism. Indian society, divided into four sections according to



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work practices; (Brahmin Khatriya, Vaisha, and Sudra); steeped into superstitious malicious practices especially lower section of society and women were two deprived sections, against which Tagore always raised his voice. Through his powerful protagonist Sucharita; he conveys his contemporary stereotyped intellectuals like Vinay and Gora that **“for we women are not only the deities of the household fire, but the flame of the soul itself.”** (Tagore , *The Home and The world*)^[6]

Tagore the towering figure and social reformist was seriously concerned about women psychology and position of women with all their love, despair, consciousness and crisis of the identity of self with mainstream national spirit. At the very beginning of the novel Sucharita appears with her firm conscious self-respect like the rising sun, dazzling but calm. Tagore’s female characters are universal in appeal and response to society. They though follow or reject local boundaries and chains yet nourish a feeling of universality or Unisom of entire humanity at large with individual identity of individual religion and values but above of narrow ranges and separating lines between the people based on color, caste, creed and country. Anandamayee is the embodiment of these vision putting a strong testimony as she adopted an Irish orphan and a Christian maid; happily nurturing both of them as her own child even after the strong opposition of her own husband; partly because of her analytical open humane mindset and partly because of a vacancy in her motherhood. Her bearing against her husband and son and the threat of losing wifhood that means a protected life, establishes her as an individual who pursues her own ideas breaking the conventional frame.

“What happiness can it be for me, at every step I take, to come into collision with

Husband and child? But do you know that it was when I first took you into my



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arms that I say good bye to convention? When you hold a little child to your breast then you feel certain that no one is born into this world with caste.”

(Tagore, *Gora & Personality*, 23 Chapter 3) ^[7]

Tagore portrayed a powerful flame of social reformation and universal appeal of modernization beyond all national social racial boundaries in the characterization of Anandamoyi in that gloomy period of hundred years back from which India is questing for salvation and redemption until now.

“From that very day the understanding came to me that if I looked down upon any one for being of low caste, or a Christian, then God would snatch you away from me. Only stay in my arms as the light of my home, I prayed and I accept water from the hands of any one in the world.” (Tagore, *Gora & Personality*, 23 Chapter 3) ^[8]

Krishnadayal, husband of Anandamoyi, was indifferent to the household activity, ‘making a bid for saint hood’ wanted to handed over Gora to a padre. Anandamoyi has to go through the thread investiture of society and relatives who caste her aside because of her unorthodox habits, but she raise her voice for the sake of humanity:

“I have long ceased to take pride in my caste. Why, when your relatives made a fuss at Mohims wedding because of my unorthodox habits, I simply kept at a distance without a word of protest. Nearly everybody calls me a Christian, and whatever else comes to their lips. I accept all that they say in good part, contenting myself with the reply: Aren’t Christians human beings? If you alone



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are the elect of God, why has He made you grovel in the dust first before the Pathans, then before the Moghuls, and now before the Christians?" (Tagore, *Gora & Personality*, 42 Chapter 6)^[9]

Her fierce feminism reaches to maturity when she retreats not criticizing her own caste and established taboos about the superiority of bramhins over other human being. Her fierce feminist ideology goes through an acid test when she is opposed by her own husband and logically, truthfully and strongly she withholds her ideology. Inter-caste marriage is still a burning issue of 21st century Indian History but Anandamoyi has such a enlighten mind for truth of human spirit and saint's vision that she exhibits, 'there is no caste in Men's heart' and God dwells where souls unite. She not only supports Vinay and Lalita in that path of revolutionary decision of their inter caste marriage but also shelter those two socially shunned creature with all her motherly affection against the protest of her own son and Husband. For her:

"Marriage is a matter of hearts coming together—if that happens, what matters it what mantras are recited? It's quite enough if the ceremony be performed in God's name." (Tagore, *Gora & Personality*, 265 Chapter 37)^[10]

Anandamoyi was that revolutionary spirit of mother India for whom Gora was wondering about, in search of national idealism who has no caste, who made no distinction and has no hatred; is the image of human welfare and temple of salvation of all Chauvinism.

Sucharita, an intellectual analytical affectionate tender bright teenage girl and one of the most leading female protagonists of Tagore; got western education at that time of colonial India and a



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member of 'Brahmo Samaj. As per her upbringing, she got the freedom of developing her individualistic views about social moral and religious matters. She denies conventional slavish mentality of bearing other's opinion and showed courage to protest against her fiancée's opinion about 'right to introduce girls to any and every one':

“If father had followed that advice, then we should have never become acquainted with you” (Tagore, *Gora & Personality*, 71 Chapter 10) ^[11]

She argues about place and position of women in respect of men and demands equality in the field of work and duties by denying traditional notions about women that woman should indulge themselves entirely in domestic duties:

“Then would not it be better for men and women to have a complete division of duties? If you allow men into the house, their duty to the world outside may likewise suffer.” (Tagore, *Gora & Personality*, 89, Chapter 13) ^[12]

Sucharita was very much eager about social matters and has a deep hatred and prejudice against chauvinism. Her intellectual impatience made her curious about two educated orthodox chauvinist youth Vinay and Gora, about their justifying views about ancient superstitions of our country and the fruit of caste produced for upcoming society. She also has the courage to decline Brahmins as a kind of divine men and dust of a Brahmin's feet purifies a man:



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“My question is this- Do you mean to tell me you find the purpose, for which you say caste distinctions were created in our society, to have been successful?” (Tagore, *Gora & Personality*, 127, Chapter 18) ^[13];

Sucharita’s national spirit and her way to recognition of the Supreme Being manifested without limit and boundaries, expressed through her ‘gracious message of a responsive heart’. She is skeptical about the views of Gora that for India there is a special path leading to God and the specialty is the recognition of Supreme Being through rituals:

“What is the relation between country and religion? Does not religion transcend country?” (Tagore, *Gora & Personality*, 149, Chapter20) ^[14];

Lalita another revolutionary mutineer, devoid of traditional feminine beauty and tenderness, depicted by Tagore as an embodiment of insurrection; thin taller darker, follows her own rules, is straightforward and makes very ‘cutting remarks’. She cannot with stand anybody who would put her in a shade or dominate her individualism instead of giving one’s own place and position. Imbued with national spirit she can stand for truth and humanity. She took a path-breaking step against her family for justice by protesting against playing an act before the tyrannical Magistrate who imprisoned Gora without any valid reason. She not only protested, against this but also persuaded other members about the real picture of this injustice. Her insurrection is established by her firm decision and act of leaving the hospitality of that tyrannical magistrate one night before the presentation of the drama; without seeking permission from her family:



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“It is not affection at all – what Gour Babu has done is quite right. Is the magistrate here to bully us, which we should have to be defending ourselves? Have we to pay them fat salaries and then pleaders as well to rescue us from their clutches? Rather than have this justice, it is truly much better to be in prison.”

(Tagore, *Gora & Personality*, 211, Chapter 28) ^[15];

Lalita defines liberty in the light of her own knowledge and understanding that liberty means ‘freedom from falsehood and attacks of meanness’. She raises her voice against the whip of religious and social leaders that they do not have the right of judging her because it is her father’s duty what he can do and understand better than anyone understands. She is ready to fight against all social evils, oppression and superstitions:

“It is often seemed to me that one puts a premium on evil by suffering it without protest. The proper remedy for evil is to fight against it.” (Tagore, *Gora & Personality*, 334, Chapter 47) ^[16];

Another feministic quality of Lalita, expressed through her enthusiastic approach towards women education. She had taken necessary steps to start a school for girls and provide necessary education free of cost in spite of adverse social, religious and family circumstances. She denied all feminine obstacles what her contemporary chauvinistic society enforced upon her:

“Suchi Didi, how it would be if we started a school for the girls of our neighborhood..... Because we have been born girls, are we to wear our hearts



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out within the four walls of our home? Are we never to be any use to the world?" (Tagore, *Gora & Personality*, 329, Chapter 47) ^[17];

Tagore's Feminism- social, cultural, political, economic and moral freedom of women is spoken up prominently in the presentation of Tagore's character gallery of 'Gora'. Though the term 'feminism' did not uttered before 1970S, it was began to practice far before the eve of nineteenth and early twentieth century and Tagore illustrates the issues of first and second wave of feminism before the revolt taken place in the first half of nineteenth and 1960-1970s. Feministic movement what actually started in united nation and United Kingdom especially by white middleclass women; presented in the novel through the Bengali middle-class women characters. 'Gora' is the embodiment of Tagore's feministic, Chauvinistic, national and renaissance spirit.

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