



Rabindranath Tagore's Swadeshi Thoughts In The Novel Gora

DR. Kirti Jain

Associate Professor- Deptt. of English, Kr. R.C.M. Degree College, Mainpuri (U.P.) India

Abstract- *Rabindranath Tagore's essays give a whole phalanx of his Swadeshi ideas that were grandly shaping up in his mind. For example, in Swadeshi Samaj (1311B.S.) he spoke of the need for canalizing the force of the movement through constructive work. The essays published in Bharati of the 80s spoke of the need for self-reliance. In our society there is an evil in respect of the relation between the Hindus and the Muslims, which has been with us for a pretty long time. We have no escape from suffering its consequences. His novels- three out of twelve- Gora, Ghair- Baire and Char-Adhyay, faithfully mirror his Swadeshi thinking. But before going into the novels proper, it will be useful to have a look at the socio-political background of the times in which these were written. The various themes like friendship, motherhood, love, caste-discrimination, women emancipation, the play of destiny, nation, nationalism and Swadeshi-thoughts provide a panoramic view of Tagore's vision. Tagore's devotion for Swadesh reflects in Gora's opinion that the best support for our own customs and traditions can be given only by standing firmly and fastly holding them high, against the foreign and native criticism. Tagore's devotion for Swadesh reflects in Gora's opinion that the best support for our own customs and traditions can be given only by standing firmly and fastly holding them high, against the foreign and native criticism.*

Introduction- Rabindranath Tagore was not a political thinker in the sense that Aurobindo Ghosh, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, Barin Ghose and others were, he was not even a leader in the sense that Keshab Chandra Sen was. He did not enter into the vertex of politics and social turmoil, but that did not prevent him from raising his voice against the social and political injustice perpetrated in the country, against the schism and disharmony obtaining among communities, against the blind passion for imitation of the British and crooked knot owing of a section of his countrymen to the British rulers. He noticed how a blind passion for imitation of the British bred and rabid virus of hatred for the country and voiced his protest against it in his poems, essays, novels, articles and stories. His essays give a whole phalanx of his Swadeshi ideas that were grandly shaping up in his mind. For example, in Swadeshi Samaj (1311B.S.) he spoke of the need for canalizing the force of the movement through constructive work. The essays published in Bharati of the 80s spoke of the need for self-reliance.

He was deeply hurred at the disharmony among the two main communities- Hindus and Muslims. In his essay 'Byadhi Q Pratikar', he said-

In our society there is an evil in respect of the relation between the Hindus and the Muslims, which has been with us for a pretty long time. We have no escape from suffering its consequences.

His novels- three out of twelve- Gora, Ghair- Baire and Char-Adhyay, faithfully mirror his Swadeshi thinking. But before going into the novels proper, it will be useful to have a look at the socio-political background of the times in which these were written.

Gora is the fifth in order of writings and the largest of Tagore's novels. Being a complex novel it can be studied and interpreted at different levels. The various themes like friendship, motherhood, love, caste-discrimination, women emancipation, the play of destiny, nation, nationalism and Swadeshi-thoughts provide

Corresponding Author



a panoramic view of Tagore's vision. It is rightly said by Krishna Kripalani -

"Gora' is more than a mere novel. It is an epic of Indian in transition at a crucial period of modern history, when the social consequences and intellectual awareness of the new intelligentsia were in the throes of a great churning. No other book gives so masterly an analysis of the complex of Indian social life with its teeming contradictions or of the character of Indian nationalism which draws its roots from renescent Hinduism and snatches out its arms towards universal humanism".

Various factors contribute to make 'Gora' a popular novel of grand scale such as - It is the only novel of Tagore which is male dominating. This novel reveals Tagore's new concept of internationalism. This novel also gives full expression of Tagore's thoughts for Swadesh, his love, respect and concern to save the dignity of his motherland. This is the only novel to project the social, political and cultural life of educated middle class Bengal. Last but not the lest, the novel does not possess extreme poetic expression which is mostly found in Tagore's other novels. In this prospective Sisirkumar Ghose has rightly remarked that the novel marks Tagore's-

"Search for national identity".

Sukumar Sen has viewed it-

"as... something like a Mahabharata of modern India".

Tagore got the idea for the novel from his meeting with sister Nivedita, formerly Margaret Noble who was the fervent disciple of Swami Vivekanand.

Through this novel Tagore has depicted that momentous period of Indian society when Hindu society was desperately striving to save its own disintegration in the face of challenges from within and without.

The novel is a fascinating tale of Gora (white man) set in Bengal, land of dark-skinned people. From the very beginning to the almost end in the novel this pivotal character advocates the practice of Hinduism. He is proud of his motherland and much hurt to see his mother land as a slave, losing her dignity and identity under the imposing foreign education and traditions. Tagore's dignified Swadeshi thoughts are seen in Gora's opinion that foreign and native criticism of Hinduism can best be rebutted by holding firmly to our own customs and believes. Gora 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 our self. We must save our country and our self from insult by manfully bearing the burden of our motherland with all our strength and all our pride"

But his observance of rituals appears discordant because of his Irish birth. In fact Gora is a foundling child of an Irish- English couple, murdered in the Indian Sappy Mutiny. His identity is hidden from him till the very end. It is revealed to the readers at the very beginning of the novel. Even he himself does not know that he is not a Brahmin by birth. Throughout the novel he seems to live in a virtual-real world that does not actually belong to him. The microcosm of his identity crisis can be viewed on the larger canvas of the native land which is 'the white man's burden'. Thus the novel is a journey in search of identity at individual and national level. First it is about the unfolding of true self of Gora. Secondly it is an attempt to concretize the Indianness of the motherland affected by the foreign rule.

The main plot of the novel concerns with Gora's attitudes, beliefs, conceptions and with his attempts at upholding them against disillusioning experiences and the final discovery of truth about himself whereas the Binoy Lolita sub plot brings into the focus the Hindu Brahmo conflict.

Gora is addicted to extremisms. He does not do anything half heartedly. That is why because of his rigid faith in Hinduism he becomes punctilious about rituals, bathing regularly in Ganga, performing ceremonial



worship in morning and evening and taking particular care of what he touches and eats. As his mother keeps a Christian maid he stopped even taking water in her room. He wears dhoti and puts caste mark of Ganga clay on his forehead. His brother Mohim taunts at him-

"Many a bigot have I seen in my day, but this beats them all. You are going one better than even the Banares or Nadia Pandits".

Tagore's devotion for Swadesh reflects in Gora's opinion that the best support for our own customs and traditions can be given only by standing firmly and fastly holding them high, against the foreign and native criticism. Gora's following statement proves Tagore's love and respect for Swadesh-

"... we must not feel apologetic about the country of our birth-whenver 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 burden of our motherland with all our strength and all our pride".

Despite his dislike for Brahmo Samaj Gora can not restrain himself from being touched by Paresh Babu's saintliness and his foster daughter, Sucharita's tender beauty and keen intelligence. Very soon Gora realizes how Hindu religion with its innumerable proscriptions and restrictions has kept the people divided and ignorant. Tagore gives voice to his own love for his native land and hatred for all conservative thinking that stands as a hindrance and obstacle in the unity of the people of his motherland in following words of Gora-

"The tradition which merely divided man into classes and separated class from class driving to a distance love itself, did not want to carry into effect the result of man's intelligent thinking and only put obstacles at every step in the way of man's coming and going".

Thus time and again Gora is confronted with the shortcomings of Hinduism, but nevertheless holds on militantly to it through a mistaken notion of patriotism. There comes the climax of the novel when Gora stands exposed in front of the hidden secret of his birth now revealed to him as one with-

"No mother, no father, no country, no nationality, no lineage, no God even".

This revelation of Gora's identity changes his life totally. Now the cause and devotion of Gora towards Hinduism seems to him of no use. Now he realizes that his devotion to his Hinduism was not caused of his birth in this race. But as this reality confirms him that he is not a Hindu but an Irish by birth, his devotion to his caste is also lost. Now he finds himself free from all bonds. His vision has widened and a new concept of humanism is merged in his old notion of patriotism-

"Today I am really an Indian! in me there is no longer any apposition between Hindu, Mussalman and Christian. Today every caste in India is my caste, the food of all is my food... all these days I have been carrying about with me an unseen gulf of separation which I have never been able to cross over".

In general through this novel, Gurudev has portrayed the anti British motion in Bengal under the veil of Hinduism. He shows that Muslims also hate British rulers. Tagore's famous song in Gitanjali-

Where the mind is without fear

Switches light on his ideal vision of India. In 'The Religion of Man', Tagore says-

Freedom in the mere sense of independence has no content and therefore no meaning.

He is of the view that freedom would have no meaning if one's apprehensive power is replaced by another, replicating the structure of hierarchy. The issue of caste and gender discrimination has to be tackled first, to promote social and religious harmony among the various sections of Indian society. The novelist points out the secular character of Bharatvarsha, who has the capacity to embrace all the people irrespective of their caste, colour and creed. The novel ends on a positive note, Gora's freedom helps him to see beyond



the narrow vision of sectarianism or any kind of religious groupism. In the end Gora says-

"Today I am Bhartiya within me there is no conflict between communities, whether Hindu or Muslim or Krishtan. Today all the caste of Bharat are my caste".

Though Tagore was never actually involved in politics, he never detached himself from serving his mother land through his writings. All his writings highlight some or the other social and national problems. In Gora he deals with disharmony among the people of India caused by narrow and conservative thinking of caste and creed. He has also projected the insult and criticism which the mother land had to bear under the rule of Britishers. Tagore wants that like Gora, every Indian should also be unshackled from all kinds of discriminative thinking and develop a harmonious outlook for all.

It is in this spirit that he envisions a world-

"Which has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls".

Interested in the demolition of internal social evils of the country and global unity, Tagore has projected his views in Gora. In spite of his patriotism and love for his race and people he, even for one moment, can not forget to emphasis universal love and fraternity as essential for our growth.

REFERENCES

1. Mohit K. Ray, Studies on Rabindranath Tagore, (Volume-1), (New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2004) (Preface)
2. Kriplani Krishna- Tagore : A Life.
3. Ghose, Sisirkumar, Rabindranath Tagore (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994).
4. Sukumar, History of Bengali Literature (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1960).
5. Rabindranath Tagore, Gora (Delhi: The Macmillan Company of India Ltd., 1998).
6. Banerjee, Hiranmay, Rabindranath Tagore, New Delhi : Publication Division, Government of India, 1971.
7. Bhattacharya, S. Tagore and the Word. Calcutta : Das Gupta & Co., 1961.
8. Chakravorty, B.C. Rabindranath Tagore, His Mind and Art. New Delhi : Young India Publications, 1971.
9. Tagore, The Gitanjali.
