

## Revelation of Humanism and Universalism in the Novels of Rabindra Nath Tagore

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### Abstract

Tagore showed his unbounded love for poor and exploited, who were tied in the strong social and religious evils. Though his novels are originally written in Bengali but his contribution is immense in the development of novels in pre-independence India. Three of his novels- *The Wreck*, *Gora* and *The Home And The World* are widely popular and well read. His novels are imbued with the spirit of humanism and universalism.

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The beginning of novel writing in India either written in English or in other Indian languages starts in the late nineteenth century. The spirit of individuality and sublime human dignity is responsible for the rise and growth of the novel. The art form of novel writing gave a new arena to the writers to express life and time on the broader scale. Ralph Fox writes, "*The novelist, there has a special responsibility both to the present and the past of his country. What he inherits from the past is important, because it shows, what are the sections of his country's cultural heritage which have meaning today.*" (1)

The above statement is fully applicable for the novels of Rabindra Nath Tagore. Though his novels are originally written in Bengali but his contribution is immense in the development of novels in pre-independence India. Three of his novels- *The Wreck*, *Gora* and *The Home and the World* are widely popular and well read. His novels are imbued with the spirit of humanism and

universalism. In the beginning Tagore followed the style of Bankim but soon he explored his own path of writing and led a new era in Indian fiction. In his novels he has expressed the spirit of his time. As a humanist he was aware of life and problems of the people around him, he found novel as a strong tool to portray them. Tagore showed his unbounded love for poor and exploited, who were tied in the strong social and religious evils. In his writings his vision of humanism is well depicted. "*Two of the signs are easy to spot: the disappearance of the historical romance and the appearance of the psychological novel. The romantic touches, never wholly absent from*

*Rabindranath, come from his rapport with the beauty and mystery in nature as well as subtle psychological reality deeply rooted in social, family and individual life. It is possible, even desirable, to see the novel as part of changing social history, roughly from nineteenth to the twentieth century, an*

*individuation straining at bourgeois ethics.”*

(2)

In human society marriage system plays very important role. *The Wreck* is based on the theme of marriage. Two marriage parties are drowned in a boat wreck.

The only survivors are Ramesh and Kamala. They think that they are recently married couple and try to settle down somewhere. But Ramesh realizes the error, as a result, complications begin. But the story ends happily when Kamala meets her husband Dr. Nalinaksha who accepts her.

Tagore's next novel *Gora*, although is a political novel but it reflects the transformation of thought and personality. Gora is the son of an Irish mother and the central character of this novel. His mother has taken shelter in a Hindu home in fear of the sepoys during the mutiny. His father has been killed in the mutiny. During the birth of Gora, his mother dies and he as a newly born child is brought up by his foster parents, Krishna Dayal and Anandamoyi. So Gora grows up as an orthodox and militant Hindu. He grows up and as a sturdy Hindu patriot, denounces everything alien and accepts everything Indian. He feels proud as being a Hindu. For him Hinduism is a liberal cult. *“You must understand that the Hindu religion takes in its lap, like a mother, people of different ideas and opinions; in other words, Hindu religion looks upon man only as man and doesn't count him as belonging to a particular party. It honours not only the wise but the foolish also, and it shows respect on merely to one form of wisdom but wisdom in all its respect.”*(3)

But at the same time we find Gora's

disintegrated view. In practice resorts to orthodox traditions and superstitions of Hinduism, so there is difference between theory and practice. He disapproves the marriage of his friend Binoy with a Brahmo, Lolita, and breaks up all his relations with him. Gora knows that in fanatic Hinduism, there is no place for him. So he realizes that the bond of human love is the greatest religion. In a discussion with Paresh Babu, *“In me there is no longer any opposition between Hindu, Musalman and Christian. Today every caste in India is my caste.”*(4) Actually the ironical situation appears in the novel when Gora realizes his position in Hinduism and finds that he is not full blooded Hindu Brahmin. As a result his idea changes and his faith in the rigidity of cult breaks. This is the transformation of his personality. Through his character Binoy, Tagore refuses the idea of social distinction, which ignore the bond of true love that does not permit the marriage to a Brahmin with a Brahmo. Binoy and Lolita, the devoted lover forget that they are Hindu or Brahmo. They only remember that they are two human souls. Anandamoyi is Gora's mother, she is a Brahmin. Paresh Babu is Lolita's Brahmo father. They do not find anything unworthy in the union of two willing hearts. Anandamoyi says to Binoy, *“What after all is the difference, my son, between Brahmo and orthodox Hindu? There is no caste in men's heart- there God brings men 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?”*(5)

This way in the entire novel we find Tagore's liberal humanistic views. His view is basically woven with characters and plots. He has depicted his characters with genuine sympathy and proper understanding. One group of characters are reactionaries like Haran, a narrow minded Brahmo, who finds nothing good in his own culture, Gora, a fanatic Hindu, who criticizes everything alien and rationally accepts Indian. One group of characters are progressive and farsighted. Anandamoyi, Binoy, Paresh Babu, Suchitra and Lolita are progressive and farsighted. They believe in that religion cannot create a difference in human society. Among the characters, Gora is the central figure. The striking feature of his character is his progressive attitude towards human society. In the beginning he is a typical orthodox Hindu. He grows and develops but a turning point comes when he knows the truth of his birth and parentage. His fanatic Hindu attitude suddenly changes. He feels freedom from the shackles of customs and moves to on a new wide horizon of his life. The transformation of vision brings the novel to the climax. He discusses with Paresh Babu, "*Today give me the mantram of that Deity who belongs to all Hindu, Musalman, Christian and Brahmo alike- the doors to whose temples are never closed to any person of any caste whatever- He who is not merely the God of the Hindus, but who is the God of India herself.*"(6)

No doubt, Tagore has given a wide canvas of his novel with agile characters, alive incidents and impressive dialogues in unified forms. Gora is not only the fictional character but a universal idea of Humanism.

Krishna Kriplani has compared this novel with *War and Peace* of Leo Tolstoy.

Tagore's next novel is *The Home and the World*. It brings us into the arena of Indian politics, which is mixed with good and evil. Sandip is the prominent character and symbol of fire brand nationalist leader. He influences Bimla, who has lived the sheltered life of a Hindu wife, and takes her out of home into the world. Her husband, Nikhil wants her to participate in the political affairs. But she develops the extra-marital relations with Sandip. This incident actually a new episode in Bangla novel and Tagore would have to find for her way back home.

Nikhil's liberal patriotism influences Bimla. Actually he the epitome of patriot in traditional India and he does not believe that end justifies the means. He is influenced by the Western culture but at the same time he exhorts the people to burn British goods and resorts to violence when opposed. Nikhil criticizes Sandip's narrow mindedness nationalism as a wicked legacy of the Western military style. In a conversation, he tells Sandip, "*To tyrannize for the country is to tyrannize over the country.*"(7)

The theme of this novel is presented allegorically. Bimla represents India but Sandip represents Western type of nationalism. Tagore's prophetic vision reflects all around in this novel. He thinks, Indians were to employ in their struggle for independence. It seems that he is suggesting that for some time India may like Bimla. He further feels that violent forces may influence but ultimately it will resort to non-violent methods as advocated by Nikhil.

Thus this novel well reflects the aspects of violence and non-violence in the British India. It seems that Tagore advises to correct the misguided plans and activities of revolutionaries. This way he tries to justify and restore his vision of humanism and universalism in his novels through his characters. Bimla, Sandip and Nikhil are main characters Nikhil and Sandip do not change much in the course of the novel but Bimla is an exception. She alone changes under the stress of trial and error and failure. Transformation of vision and personality is the basic feature of the novel. As K.R.S. Iyenger says, “*She has to work out her salvation in diligence, through tribulation and experimentation and suffering and disaster; she has verily to go through the fire and brimstone before she acquires the discrimination to see the difference between gold and tinsel, between Nikhil who has the innate strength to face a crisis and Sandip who takes to his heels the moment the difficulties start. The cardinal issue, of*

*course is between God and Caesar, the ineffable realm of absolute values and the limited arena of fireworks. Nationalism and patriotism are not enough. If bureaucratic tyranny roused Tagore, the tyranny of fanaticism -be it religious or political- moved him no loss, and he raised his voice against it. For Bimla ( and for Indian too is so far as she is symbolized I Bimla), it is double education, the moving towards vortex that is the Sandip, brand of revolutionary action and the return to the old safe moorings, though now enriched and chastened by the experience of the World.”(8)*

To evaluate the novels of Tagore is an act to penetrate his character’s mind and interpret psychologically. His novels put great influence on the Indian English novelists on the broader sense of the exposition of socialism, realism, aesthetic idealism and embracing humanism with all pervading poetical beauty.

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