



# ‘GORA’ – A Postmodernist Study

R Keerthi<sup>1</sup>, Dr. M. Naredra<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of English, S. V. University, Tirupati, India

<sup>2</sup>Prof. & RETD Head of Department of English, S. V. University, Tirupati, India

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**Abstract**— Rabindranath Tagore in his novel *Gora*, incorporated post-modernist features. He asserts the individuality of women through the characters of Sucharita & Lolitha. He satirizes the religious conventional beliefs of idolatry. He humorously deals with the situation in which the followers of any political/religious leaders make pomp & show whenever their leader is giving political speech / performs spiritual rituals, through the character of abhinash. He deftly portrays the psycho analysis of the modern individual in words. Brings out the ennui boredom and existential dilemma & religious skepticism faced by the modern individuals through the character of Binoy. Tagore makes Gora to fight for the cause untouchables & downtrodden. He upholds the religion humanism obliterating all caste creed & class distinctions & advocated the worship of universal spirit through the characters of Porish Babu and Anandamoyi. Tagore employed lengthy speeches a post-modernist feature there are analytical arguments logical reasonings for the protection of unity in diversity, all these features make *Gora* a postmodern novel.

**Keywords**— Boredom of modern individual, Postmodernism, Irony of situation, Character black humor, Meta fiction, Humanism, Worship of universal spirit, Independence of women, Religious perplexity, Ennui.

## INTRODUCTION

“Postmodernism is in general the era that follows Modernism. It frequently serves as an ambiguous overarching term for skeptical interpretations of culture, literature, art, philosophy, economics, architecture, fiction, and literary criticism. Because postmodernism often describes an overarching reactionary stereotype, it sometimes pejoratively describes writers, artists, or critics who give the impression they believe in no absolute truth or objective reality.”

GORA a well acclaimed novel written by Rabindranath Tagore in the year 1919 can be considered as Postmodernist fiction. It contains all the elements of postmodernism viz., Maximalism with lengthy conversations, Irony of characters, Black humor etc.

Maximal ISIM

The conversation between Gora and Poresh babu i.e., Gora said, “I am free now, Poresh

babu.....I address this prayer to you- take my hand and lead me to your true guru.” (GORA; p.474-476) is the finest example for Maximalism, the postmodernist feature. The conventional beliefs of Harimohini and rigid mentality of Badra Sundari are treated with a tinge of satirical humor.

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF IRONY

Sucharita is the example of irony of character though she can not comply with the orthodox views of Gora she gradually falls in love with him. Lolitha who degrades Binoy for voicing the opinions of Gora marries him by the end of the novel this is an example for irony of fate. The orthodox Hindu Harimohini taking refuge in Bramho family is the typical example irony of circumstance.

## METAFICTION

There is reference to journalism, articles in news papers, writing of fiction in the novel, poetry written by other poets. The poetry by Laboyina the daughter of Poresh babu is presented by Tagore in cynical manner, can be considered as Meta fiction.

#### Humanism

Tagore by making the religious beliefs of the main characters viz gora&sucharita ambiguous asserts humanism as all pervading religion. He shattered all the caste, class and religious differences just as any other post-modern writer.

#### Woman Empowerment

Sucheritha asserts her individuality in front of her suitor haranbabu. Lolita takes the bold decision of traveling with binoy in a boat, through this women characters Tagore touched the point of freedom of decision of woman a starting point for women empowerment a postmodern feature.

#### Temporai Dissortion

There is temporal distortion in the novel. Tagore employs the technique of flash back and he narrates the childhood experiences of Gora in the form of flash back. The narration of life story of Harimohini is also an example for usage of flash back technique. There is sudden reference to the movement led by Gora for the emancipation of backward classes setting aside the main theme of war against orthodox religious beliefs making this novel, novel of temporal distortion.

#### Lack of Conviction

Every main character in Gora suffers from lack of an established belief. Sucharitha vacillates between her bramho beliefs and acknowledging her aunts' belief in Hinduism. Lolitha vacillates between marrying Binoy as per the procedure of the Hindu marriage or bramho marriage. Binoy vacillates between his belief in secularism and his necessity of getting converted in to BramhoSamajin order to marry Lolitha. This vacillations faced by the characters reminds the reader, the paranoiac feature of postmodernism which means lack of firmness, uncertainty of position faced by the modern individual.

#### MAGIC Realism

Tagore employed the technique of dream related to the magic realism of postmodern era while narrating the

imagination made by Binoy about Lolitha during their voyage. The plot of the Gora is fragmentary unlike the ancient novels. The unities of time, place, and character are not maintained. The stories of various characters are stringed together to form the plot which makes Gora a postmodernist novel.

#### Industrial Revolution

The setting of the novel Kolkata represents a city assimilating the features of modern industrial revolution. The very first page of the novel clearly depicts the lack of freedom experienced by individual of modern society owing to the onset of modernization in all respects viz culture, customs and traditions. Binoy one of the characters of the novel feels ill at ease amidst din of modern Kolkata. He feels like a caged bird in the song rendered by a Baul. "Binoy felt like calling Baul home and writing down his song about the unknown bird..... Bird continued to be played in his mind." (GORA; p.1)

Gourmohan Babu (Gora) - the hero of the novel becomes the testimony for the modern youth of India of transition period who is goaded by rigid religious conventions of ancient India, though his service oriented soul is in conflict with those conventions and his mind leans towards revolutionary Zeal and Factionism. "From childhood Gora had become a gang leader ..... began cackling in the assembly of grown-ups." (GORA; p.26) While Binoy suffers from fetters of modern civilization, Gora suffers from fetters of religious conventions. These features show the post modern quality of dual mentality of the youth. It also represents post modern feature of fragmented personality.

Though Gora fights for the rights of the poor farmers and laborers, he takes himself as their benefactor and protector instead of becoming one with them. He is against the Bramho principles because they denigrated all the principles of Hindu Religion especially idol worship. He also becomes the symbol of binary views about the authority based on gender. He regards women as protectors of children and meek followers of their husbands with out listening to their words of conscience. This is again a post modernist element. "The shastras say about women pujarhagrihadeeptayah ..... by the name of worship" (GORA; p.10) He respects India as his mother and dreams of making his mother self-sufficient with abundant material and spiritual wealth. "When the captain of a ship is out on the high seas.....Until then I cannot set aside my image of a real Bharat, a complete Bharat." (GORA; p.21) but He could not view India as casteless

country. "I didn't create caste distinction..... I also abide by the belief of my community." (GORA; p.51)

According to him India should stand on the firm base of four fold caste system. The only hubris in the character of Gora is his arrogant attitude and uncompromising mentality. He never accepts others views immediately, he draws others into his views with his arguments as he is an eloquent speaker. He strives hard to avoid Binoy's mingling with Bramho family because of his possessiveness and rash temper. With these qualities he represents the impulsive and egocentric youth of the modern India. The only draw back in Gora is his sectarian attitude towards religion. He sets limits to himself in regarding himself as a true Indian. "All that I want is that limits which .....will be nothing left at the end." "If I don't obey custom, one day I may not even obey my mother." (GORA; p.16) The service rendered by him towards his fellow beings is half hearted and undedicated, due to this reason. His impulsive action of under taking the tour of villages to drive away his spell of attraction towards Sucharita becomes testimony to this fact. "He went downstairs to meet his friends.....to go and make preparations for the trip." (GORA; p.142) Rabindranath portrayed Gora as millions of youth of 20th century whose souls are chained by the conventions of religion not realizing real value of unity in diversity.

Binoy the other character of the novel GORA represents the youth who are the victims of skepticism due to the lack of individual freedom. He argues in favor of Hinduism because of his affection towards his friend Gora, though his heart revolts against it. "The statement of a view is one thing; when applied to a person, it no longer.....his great affection for Gora" (GORA; p.18) Binoy represents true and selfless friendship. He also represents the youth of India capable of recognizing real worth and role of women of modern India and introspecting false adherence to religious practices with out knowing their real significance. Reader perceives Binoy as mouth piece of Tagore himself when he argues with Gora about the significance of relationship between man and woman and their major role that is to be played by them for the development of India. "The relationship between man and woman can be easy ..... Isn't that false as well?" (GORA; p.11) Binoy also proclaims the importance of women while describing the qualities of Sucharitha to Gora "Binoy said that to him these days it seemed.....like the sun, to the world." (GORA; p. 85) Binoy asserts his individuality by the denial to convert himself as bramho and marrying Lolitha without any self inhibition. While Gora represents religious fanaticism at moderation as a foil to his father Krishna Dayal who represents religious orthodoxy. Binoy

represents secular spirit of mother India. He became the mouth piece to the author in advocating secular principles also. His conversation with Aanadhamoyi mother of Gora stands as a proof to this fact. "I tell you truly, ma, every time I have done pranaam to an idol..... I was feigning an extent of faith which I have not been able to achieve." (GORA; p.363) Binoy also represents a conflicting soul between adherences to the values of friendship and secularist principles of mother India. "Isn't it bad for me to pretend.....it can't be taken back. Not by any means." (GORA; p.364) Poresh babu is the symbol of universal religious tolerance and an ideal father of the modern India who shows liberal attitude towards bringing up of children.

Tagore personified his ideals of perfect woman hood as women hood of the novel. Gora gets attracted towards the beauty and personality of Sucharitha the adapted daughter of Poresh babu of Bramho family. Sucharitha is portrayed by Tagore in such a way that the reader is captivated by her serenity perseverance and word less resistance, compromising attitude. She is a loving daughter to her father and obedient in her duties of house hold. So unsurprisingly Gora draws himself towards her. "Nature had never had the opportunity to draw Gora's attention." "Gora's mind and body were simultaneously occupied this evening by this huge and still aspect of nature..... today he was enmeshed in an instant by the thousand strands of her authority and bound closely to water, earth and sky." (GORA; p.139) Sucharitha dispels his wrong notions about the role of women in the present day society. He clearly understands that the dharma of man towards his country can not be fulfilled with out the Cooperation of women. He requests her support in fulfillment of his duties towards the mother India. Through this would- be couple, Tagore depicts the post modern element of mutual attraction between man and woman in the novel.

Sucharitha is the personification of ideal woman who protects, cares the members of her family and manages house hold perfectly. She also represents another angle of modern woman of India who lingers between following ones own faith and changing notions of culture. She also asserts her individuality rather calmly and peacefully, when it comes to the question of providing peaceful refuge to her aunt Harimohini and in denying the marriage proposal brought by her aunt. She appears as an epitome of tolerance and endurance. Though she argues with Haran babu a Brahmo leader and her suitor, it appears as a peaceful resistance rather than the violent protest. On the other hand Lolita daughter of Poresh babu appears as an epitome of self respect. She challenges the deep rooted age old conventions about the status of women. Through her, Rabindranath Tagore paves way for the modern

women empowerment movement he creates her as a shrewd personality and proves it by making her to point out servile attitude of Binoy towards Gora. "She found it intolerable that Binoy was subservient to Gora." (GORA; p.145) She is also critical of the then religious notions of the people of then society and protests the rigid mentality of Gora towards religion. In another instance she opposes the arrest of Gora by British for questioning injustice committed to the lower caste villagers by them. "Tell me, Didi, will you really be able.....recite poetry?" (GORA; p.190) She is created as a foil to her mother Badrasundari and her sister Laboyina who are unflinching in their religious views, slavishly imitate the manners of British.

Thus, through Lolitha and Sucharitha Tagore uphold assertion of individuality and independence of women respectively. Through BadraSundari and her daughter Labonia, Tagore mirrors the society's servile and comical imitation of alien manners which reader perceives as a postmodernist element. "Poresh Babu's wife BadraSundari.....bound by some machine." (GORA; p.43) "She told Binoy with due emphasis.....spoken to Labonya." "Badra said to Labonya.....to show this to every new visitor." (GORA; p.46) On the other hand Aanandamoyi mother of Gora is created by the author as an embodiment of mother India her self. She becomes the emblem of unity in diversity and exhibits it in her thoughts, words and deeds. She acts as a foil to the other elder women of the novel viz., Harimohini and BadraSundari who represent deep rooted religious conventionality and extremist religious Liberalism respectively. "Can't you stay in our community with whatever you believe in now? ..... You mustn't deceive yourself in a serious matter like this." (GORA; p.364) "There may not be any similarity between two human beings.....And why should difference in beliefs or opinions be any bar?" (GORA; p.366) Through her Tagore brings forth the moderate liberal attitude towards religion amidst the conflict between religious fanaticism and extreme liberalism towards it, which brings the modern Indian religious atmosphere in to the readers mind. "Ma, you are my only mother..... You are my Bharatvarsha..." (GORA; p.477)

Tagore tried to wipe out all the caste distinctions by shattering the prejudices of Gora about caste and religion by fostering the ideal of single citizenship in his mind. This reminds the reader about anti caste and anti-religious movements of modern India. Tagore appears as a modern social reformer when he asserts independence of marriage to women. Thus, through characterizations of Gora, Tagore presents the postmodern ideals such as assertion of

individuality, independence and self-respect, building Casteless, non-Religious society safeguarding the independence of women by respecting their views and granting freedom of marriage at their will to them. He also presents postmodern elements such as skepticism, lack of freedom ennui boredom internal conflict of the modern individual and conflicts between old and new values young and old generations. Through Harimohini in the novel Tagore represents the struggle for existence predicament of old people of the Indian society which is applicable even to this day. Tagore deftly deals with the change of perceptions of human beings through his in depth character analysis through their dialogue delivery which paves the way for post modernist psycho analysis. As far as the style of writing is concerned Gora is just like any other modern novel with a coherent plot the whole story is narrated by omniscient author so the novel has excellent pictorial effect. The reader can place himself in the situations of the novel as it is the miniature photo copy of the comprehensive Indian society with ordinary individuals in it he achieves the universality of the characters by capturing their emotions, feelings, opinions just like Shakespeare rather than concentrating on the description of their external details.

Tagore never employed high flown language. The language is simple and lucid. Though there are lengthy conversations between the characters, they are easily comprehended by the reader. This novel contains all the ingredients of modern novel such as heroes, heroines, jealous suitors in the form of Haran Babu who can defame a girl if she does not concede to their proposals. Reversal of fortunes, unexpected turns in the story, discovery of identity at the end of the novel, which brings the feel of watching a modern day's film to the reader. There is an element of pastiche in Gora as the main characters shed their qualities that are acquired by them through the influence of their respective community and assume the voice of citizens of India.

Tagore achieves the participation of readers in the novel by making them to ponder over various issues such as child marriages, orthodox, religious beliefs, importance of secularism and single citizenship, after the completion of the reading of the novel.

Thus, it can be concluded that GORA can be hailed as a Postmodernist fiction by critically examining all these complexities of modern Indian scenario in it.

#### OUTLINE OF THE NOVEL

Gora is the story of fictional individual who believes that the protection of Hindu culture is essential for the strengthening of Indian culture. He speaks against the

Brahmo culture and their worship of universal spirit. He follows all the religious injunctions imposed on Brahmins by the end of the novel, He was disillusioned after knowing the fact of his Irish lineage. He understands that Indian culture & civilization are tolerant of all the religions, here importance is given to compassion, Motherhood & pity.

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