

Gora

BY: RABINDRANATH TAGORE

**Synopsis:** *Gora*, the protagonist, is a very staunch follower of Hinduism and has very high regards for his religion. He is not only a strong advocate of his religion but practices Hinduism thorough strict austerity and conviction. He is a very good orator and the leadership qualities are imbibed in him naturally. At heart, he is very optimist who dreams about ideal *Bharatvarsha*, a prosperous and happy India that can only be achieved when all castes and classes are united under the large umbrella of Hinduism. Gora is highly patriotic and sympathetic by nature who cannot stand injustice and inhuman treatment done by the upper society towards the poor and downtrodden. The impelling attitude of Gora makes him seem like a violent and arrogant person.

It is very important to note at this point that the word “gora” means “fair-skinned.” The word was also being used to refer to the fair skinned Britishers.

Gora develops soft corner in her heart and feelings of love towards Sucharita (one of the leading female characters of the novel who is a free-thinking woman). He get hurt and upset when he learns about Binoy, his best friend’s, inclination towards Brahmos. *Binoy* is a compassionate and soft spoken gentleman who initially comes merely as a shadow of the protagonist but later on emerges as more genuine and self-analyzing person.

The storyline matures these two friends come in contact with *Poresh Babu*. *Poresh Babu* is a mature person with high thinking. He and his family are followers of Brahma Samaj and represent the other facet of the society, the *Brahmos*. Being Brahmos, they have adopted more open minded and liberal lifestyle where the ladies have equal importance and say in the house. *Lolita* is the second female leading characters whose love story with Binoy runs as a parallel plot. Both Lolita and Sucharita are educated and have their own point of view towards towards life.

In this novel, Tagore has raised a strong protest against segregating women from the mainstream of the society by putting a label of Goddess or Mother on them. The leading ladies of his novel are real humans with flesh and blood who have all the natural feelings, emotions and responsibilities towards society as any other human being. They are strong with their independent thought process, self-confidence and individuality.

A revelation of truth about birth of Gora comes as a shock for him that transforms the whole course of life and thought process of the protagonist.

### **Book Review:**

Gora is a masterpiece and a monumental work in the history of Bengali fiction, rich in thought and reflection of the social, political and religious scenario of 20th century Bengal. The canvas of the novel is very vast with lots of characters woven together beautifully. Although there are so many characters in the novel, yet each one of them have their own identity and individualism. The backdrop of the story is Bengal at the time of turn of the century when it was witnessing the conflict between intense nationalism & revival of ancient spiritual values and also influence of the liberal western thought.

Gora beautifully illustrates the struggles faced by educated Indians in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The novel is not only about socio-political scenario of Bengal of pre-independent era; but the story is also about self-searching, of resolution, of conflicts and of self discovery that has been told brilliantly by Tagore. Some of the characters are way ahead of the times when this epic was written. In fact, it's through these different characters and their stories only, Tagore has woven almost every single concern of the society. For this, several sub-plots and intermediary stories and events have been added in the story which have added to its beauty. Each of the characters contributes and justifies the current status of the society in its own way.

It is a journey of a development of soul within. It is very difficult to craft an *interesting* and *engrossing* storyline with plenty of material that compel you to think about religion, fanaticism, nationalism, caste and spiritualism; and this is what sets Gora apart from other fictional novels. It questions the identity of India as a nation as well as each of its characters. Tagore, in this masterpiece, observes the difference between religion and religious fanaticism. The transition of the characters with the development of the story is so subtle and natural that you feel the complexity of it.

Gora might also be called a mirror of the Indian Renaissance and is a revisit of the Brahmo Samaj and the disruptive times when the Bengali society in *Calcutta* (Kolkata) was blatantly divided into the traditional orthodox Hindus and the liberal thinking Brahmos. Of these two, the Hindu Samaj strictly followed their reascent practices and ceremonials taking pride in it, and the Brahma Samaj, the liberal and reformed societal component of Brahmoism, a monotheistic reformist and renaissance movement of Hindu religion that was started by Raja Rammohan Roy. This awesome piece of literature does not preach or advocate any principle but is full of debates, arguments, thoughts and observations that may be interpreted in various ways. The story does not thrust any definite conclusions upon the readers anytime, rather it provokes you to think and introspect your self-being, your religion and the integrity with which you follow what

you perceive is right. Even the end of the novel is also a new beginning of the concept of secularism.

*Today I am Bharatiya. Within me there is no conflict between communities, whether Hindu, Muslim or Krishtan (Christian). Today all the castes of Bharat are my caste .....is the ultimate realization that strikes Gora , the central character of the novel.*

Gora is a powerful story, with its perfect detailing, twists and turns through the disruptive and cultural confusion era of pre-independent Bengal which would definitely make every reader think.

### **GORA-A NOVEL BY RABINDRANATH TAGORE**

*Gora is a novel written by Rabindranath Tagore set in the 19th century India, when it was under the clutches of the British. At first, the reader may assume that it is another book about the oppression of the Indians by the British. However, this is not the case. Apart from bringing to light many problems prevailing in the society, the book deals with the inner conflict of man as he strives to distinguish between right and wrong. Woven with bursts of philosophy and arguments, this novel is directed to a person's struggle as he pursues Truth .*

*Rather than the material struggles faced by man, Gora tries to portray the inner struggles he faces in the endeavour to achieve freedom. Written in an almost poetic language, Gora raises controversial questions about the Indian identity.*

### **Summary**

In the novel Gora, Tagore brings forth his ideas through the words of the two protagonists, Binoy and Gora. Binoy is an orphaned boy, rational, highly intelligent, modest yet bright, like the ordinary run of educated Bengali gentlemen. He is contrasted against his closest friend Gora. The name Gora is short for Gourmohan, and he had earned this name because of his extremely fair complexion. Gora is an orthodox Hindu and strictly follows all customs and beliefs of the Hindus.

Gora was originally not a hindu, but a follower of the Brahmo Samaj. However, when the British harshly mocked Hindu culture, Gora seemed to realize that first he must focus on driving the British from India and only then could he focus on a particular religion. His idea was to unite all people under the common grounds of Hinduism, since according to him, hinduism belonged to the country, and being a hindu gave him a sense of belongingness to his land.

Tagore speaks through Gora, as if trying to justify, that though Hinduism was riddled by countless orthodox practices and superstitions, people had faith in it out of respect for society. To Gora, society was above everything else, and all that he did, he did out of regard for society.

Soon Binoy makes the acquaintance of his Brahma neighbours, Paresh Babu and his family. The Brahma Samaj, founded by Raja Rammohan Roy, believed in rational and liberal thinking, and was free of all the orthodox practices that traditional hinduism believed in. They believed that they were ushering in era of change, both intellectual and administrative. Most of them had faith that the British would revolutionize Indian society and free it from the bonds of various social evils. However, as mentioned in the book, some Brahmans were strongly biased against the hindus. They regarded them as ignorant and backward.

During this period, the whole of society was split into the Brahmans and the Hindus. Though the faith of the Brahmans was never to discriminate against the individual but to respect all creations, the Brahmans had a deep disregard for the hindus. Raja Rammohan Roy also preached teachings that had a hint of christian influence. However, in society at that time, being Christian was regarded as the same as faith in the English.

The reader is now introduced to Paresh Babu, his stringent Brahma wife Barodashudari, his adopted children; the demure and intelligent Sucharita and the playful Satish, his own three daughters; Labonya, the rebellious Lolitha, and Leela. Binoy also meets the conservative Brahma haran Babu(also know as Panu Babu),a teacher who is averse to mingling with anyone outside his own society. It is taken that he will marry Sucharita, but only when she turns eighteen. Binoy is not aware of this, but is greatly attracted to the beautiful Sucharita.

One day, Binoy goes to Paresh Babu's house and is interacting with his family. To his surprise, Paresh Babu also receives a visit from Gora, who was sent there by his father to ask about Paresh Babu. Soon, the orthodox Brahma Haran Babu and the orthodox hindu Gora begin to have an argument about nationality and hinduism.

Soon after this argument, Gora and Haran babu leave followed by Binoy. Gora now, refuses to speak to Binoy for going to Paresh Babu's house. However a few days later Gora decides he and Binoy are good friends and refuses to let his friend from under his control lest he become a Brahma. Gora's brother Mohan comes to Binoy to ask him to marry Sashimukhi, who is Mohim's daughter. Binoy is at first averse to this as sashi is very young, and he has known her since she was little.

After this, Gora and Binoy once again visit Paresh Babu. However, Paresh Babu is unavailable and leaves them in the company of Sucharita. Gora as an orthodox hindu, believes that he should not acknowledge women and sits in silence. Soon Haran Babu enters, and after he and Gora quarrel about the British magistrate, leaves in a temper. Gora now looks at Sucharita and instead of finding her to be an arrogant lady(as she is educated) finds her to be an intelligent, cultured, demure and strong woman.

Gora refuses to admit that he has feelings for Sucharita, so the next day he and his group of religious followers embark on a religious trip. Meanwhile Binoy is dragged by Paresh Babu's family to perform a play for the British Magistrate. During this time, Gora too, comes to the same place in order to complain to the Magistrate about the dismal conditions in a few of the villages he has visited. However, the magistrate refuses to

listen. One day, while Gora helps a few village boys resist the oppressive police, he is put into jail. Binoy wants to bail him out, but Gora wishes to stay. So perturbed by the unsympathetic nature of the Magistrate, Binoy refuses to perform the play and instead catches the first steamer back to Calcutta. To his surprise, Lolitha too, leaves her family and joins Binoy, as she now has great respect for Lolitha. Startled by this act of defiance, Binoy begins to have affectionate feelings for the rebellious Lolitha.

On coming back to Calcutta, Binoy and Lolitha meet Barodashundari's orthodox sister, Harimohini, who has come to live with Paresh Babu and his family as well. During this time, Paresh Babu receives severe criticism from the Brahmos for having taken in Harimohini and succumbing to Hindu practices. Barodashundari, in order to protect her reputation imposes restrictions on Harimohini's behaviour. A dejected Harimohini, finally is forced to live in a room in the attic along with her idols. Sucharita, who feels a deep compassion towards Harimohini after hearing her tale, begins to give Harimohini constant company. Finally, Harimohini unable to bear Barodashundari's harshness promises to leave. However, Sucharita does not allow this to happen, and takes her and Satish to a house nearby, given to her by Paresh Babu and begins to live there. Barodashundari tells Sucharita that she must not visit back often at all.

Meanwhile, rumors begin to fly about Binoy and Lolitha, who were seen together on a steamer. The Samaj begins to mock Paresh Babu and his family, and Barodashundari looks towards Haran Babu for help. However Haran Babu is already displeased, as Sucharita had refused to marry him, and Barodashundari finds no support from anyone.

Binoy now, sees that the only way to help the family and Lolitha, is to marry Lolitha. However, Barodashundari insists that Binoy must first become a Brahmo. Binoy grudgingly accepts this clause, but later goes back on it and says that he cannot become a Brahmo, and cannot marry on Brahmo terms. When Gora comes back from jail and hears about Binoy's situation, he becomes angry and tells Binoy that if he agrees to perform a marriage, they will never speak to each other again. Binoy is saddened by this, but he feels that society binds him, and sets too many rules for him, and he wishes to break away from its ties. He tells Lolitha, that she need not change her faith, and he on the other hand would go ask Paresh Babu for his consent on having a Hindu marriage.

Meanwhile Gora makes one last attempt to stop the marriage, and goes to Sucharita. Harimohini, all this while has looked upon Sucharita with subtle disdain as she is still a Brahmo and not a Hindu. Therefore, she is very pleased when Gora seeks out Sucharita's company and preaches to her about religion. However, Harimohini's opinion soon changes, as she sees Sucharita has become emotionally attached to Gora, and that he is telling her that India cannot be complete without the involvement of its women, and that women are critical in shaping society.

One day, when Haran Babu comes to visit Sucharita, he tells her that she is no longer Brahmo, but a Hindu, with Gora as her guru, and she refuses to speak to Haran Babu. She goes to Paresh Babu to confess to him about her plight, and he slowly reassures her that she need not decide whether she is Hindu or not, and that she must consider things when she is calmer.

On the other hand, Harimohini, on hearing that Sucharita has turned hindu, quickly sends a letter to her brother in law, asking him to marry Sucharita, and is anticipating her return to her old family.

Binoy meanwhile has settled the date of his marriage with Lolitha. He is warned by Paresh Babu that he will be almost banished from society if he decides to go ahead with such a marriage. As it turns out, Paresh Babu is right. The only people who will attend such an important occasion of Binoy's are Paresh Babu himself, Anadamoyi(Gora's mother) and Sucharita. Thus Binoy gets married and ends his friendship with Gora.

Gora meanwhile has a change of heart. He believes now, that he must make Sucharita his, and rushes to her house only to find a potential suitor open the door. He goes back dejected, and does not see Sucharita. Sucharita, has gone to live with Anadamoyi to help her with wedding preparations and she refuses to marry the suitor Harimohini has chosen, claiming that she will not marry at all. Harimohini at a loss, goes to Gora, where after much persuasion from her, writes a letter saying that it is the duty of women to get married and engage themselves in housework.

Sucharita, saddened by this has no other option but to do as Gora has instructed. She seeks out Paresh babu's company and with a heavy heart, has a last conversation with him.

Finally, Gora's father, who thinks he is on the verge of death, summons Gora and in the presence of Anadamoyi tell him, that he is not their own son but a foundling during the Sepoy Mutiny, a son of an Irishman. This revelation is startling to Gora, and he runs to Paresh Babu, confesses that he no longer has any identity, and belongs nowhere, and asks Paresh Babu to be his teacher and offer him guidance in the pursuit of truth.

Gora believed that it was Hinduism which connected him to the country and he felt indebted to protect India because he was a hindu. Perhaps, by ending the novel this way Tagore wishes to emphasise that religion and love for one's country are not the same, and that to attain freedom, one must let go of the belief that he is Indian only because he was born and compelled to be so. In other words, he is an Indian because he chooses to be. He chooses to fight for the country out of sheer respect and love for it, and not because he was born to do so.

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Gora is an orthodox Hindu and strictly follows all customs and beliefs of the Hindus. Gora was originally not a hindu, but a follower of the Brahmo Samaj. However, when the British harshly mocked Hindu culture, Gora seemed to realize that first he must focus on driving the British from India and only then could he focus on a particular religion. His idea was to unite all people under the common grounds of Hinduism, since according to him, hinduism belonged to the country, and being a hindu gave him a sense of belongingness to his land.

Tagore speaks through Gora, as if trying to justify, that though Hinduism was riddled by countless orthodox practices and superstitions, people had faith in it out of respect for society. When Gora finds out that he is not an Indian at all, Tagore probably wishes to

say that hinduism is not the binding factor of society. Gora is neither Hindu nor Indian. In this sense, he advocates that mankind is above both religion and nation, and thus portrays his strong humanist philosophy.

Tagore does neither praises nor reviles Brahmo society, in his book. He is neutral to orthodox customs and practices. He thinks that people stay faithful to religion, because of society. When Binoy marries Lolitha, it shows the union of Brahmo and Hindu sects. They are shunned by society, but seem unfazed by it. The purpose of this is to show a man's liberation from the ties of society.

Thus the aim of Tagore to bring forth his ideas about humanism is clearly depicted in this book. It shows that man must rise above society, religion and the nation. Gora believed that it was Hinduism which connected him to the country and he felt indebted to protect India because he was a hindu. Perhaps, by ending the novel this way Tagore wishes to emphasise that religion and love for one's country are not the same, and that to attain freedom, one must let go of the belief that he is Indian only because he was born and compelled to be so. In other words, he is an Indian because he chooses to be. He chooses to fight for the country out of sheer respect and love for it, and not because he was born to do so.

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GORA by Rabindranath Tagore

*"Today I am Bharatiya. Within me there is no conflict between communities, whether Hindu, Muslim or Krishtan. Today all the castes of Bharat are my caste..."* is the ultimate realization that strikes *Gora*, the central character of Tagore's novel by the same name. Sadly, even after a century past this novel, how far-fetching such an understanding within us seems!

Gora is the largest and the most complex of the 12 novels written by Rabindranath Tagore. Undoubtedly a classic, this epic debates a number of issues and concerns that seem contemporary even today and easily applicable to the current scenario of our country. This book is a reflection and analysis of the multifarious social life in colonial India. It is about variations in one's own beliefs as a result of changing times, society and its manifold influences on the people, their thinking, ideologies and philosophies, and in the process, an overall transformation seen and sensed within an individual and the society in general.

Gora is a story set in the disruptive times when the Bengali society in *Kolikata* (Calcutta) was starkly divided into the traditional orthodox Hindus and the modernized liberal thinking *Brahmos* – indoctrinated by the Brahma Samaj. The Hindus unfailingly followed and took pride in their nascent practices and ceremonials while the *Brahmos* were in constant clashes with orthodoxy and vehemently opposed all idol-worship, caste system etc. Yet both communities were not devoid of their own hypocrisies, contradictions and flaws. These were also the times when the English education had become more

acceptable across the society and the intellectual awareness amongst the youth was at rise.

Pitted against such a social background are numerous characters each of which is unique and strongly individualistic. In fact, it's through these various characters and their stories that Tagore looms upon almost every single concern of the society mainly the religious narrow-mindedness. Hence the novel is woven with several sub-plots, intermediary stories and events which, though sometime seem to meander away from the main theme, add on to the beauty of the story.

Gora, the protagonist, is a strong advocate of Hinduism and practices his religion with high regards, thorough conviction and strict austerity. He is a natural leader with exemplary oratory skills, fair and tall stature and a resonating voice. However, his forthrightness and impelling attitude make him seem an arrogant, self-asserting, violent person who thrusts his opinions unto others. But Gora at heart is an eternal optimist dreaming about his ideal Bharatvarsha, a prosperous and happy India, which according to him is achieved by uniting all classes under the large umbrella of Hinduism. As a person he is highly patriotic and sympathetic – cannot stand injustice and high-society atrocities over poor and the downtrodden.

His denial of his newly developed feelings for Sucharita and then the slow dawning of role of women in his dream country Bharatvarsha, his hurt when he learns about Binoy's inclination towards Brahmos, his shock upon knowing the facts relating to his birth, then his aversion to religion/ caste system and his final repentance for forsaking his mother's feelings in his pursuit have all been beautifully brought forth. This particular character has been etched so very well that you love and hate him both at the same time or constantly keep oscillating between the feelings of repugnance and appreciation.

Binoy, the best friend of Gora, is on the other hand a soft spoken, easily convincible and compassionate gentleman who initially comes across as a mere shadow of Gora but, in subsequent development, emerges as more genuine and self-analyzing. A golden-hearted person with high conscience, who cannot intentionally hurt anyone or refuse anything, is in constant dilemma about rights and wrongs. This is the character with which most of us can identify ourselves. He symbolizes the uncertainty that we undergo in our lives at various stages. He is also the reflection of the contradictions and ceaseless conflicts within us, between the heart and the brain, selfishness and humanity, good and the bad.

The story takes shape when these 2 Hindu boys come in contact with Poresh Babu, a mature and high thinking gentleman, and his family who represent the other facet of society, the Brahmos. They have adopted a more open-minded life style where even the ladies of the house have equal prominence. Sucharita and Lolita are the heroines who are educated and with their own point of view in life. The latter character is much ahead of



her times and during the course of the story undergoes transition from a confused, guilt-ridden meek girl to a brave realistic person who has no hesitation about accepting her feelings for Binoy. Sucharita on the other hand maintains her demeanor throughout even while undergoing an agitation within herself for being attracted to an opposite mindset personality, Gora.

Tagore here voices a strong protest against alienating women from the main stream by lending them devotional status of goddess or mother. His heroines are full-blooded normal human beings having their emotions, feelings and responsibility towards society. The ladies are characterized as strong individuals with independent thinking and self-confidence.

There are many other interesting characters like Anandmoyi – has no religious affinities, believes in one God and is symbolic of Mother India; Baradasundari and Haran Babu – relentless Brahmos; Krishnadayal and Harimohini – fanatic Hindus; Mohim and Abinash – the hypocritical part of the society. Each of these characters in its own way contributes and justifies the status of society.

At times the book leaves you confused, unsure and drained yet no questions raised seem inappropriate or irrelevant. The story line is not preachy or advocating any principle instead full of debates, arguments, contemplation and musings that may be interpreted in various ways. There is no definite conclusion thrust upon the reader, rather it keeps you thinking about virtues of your ownself, your religion and the rectitude with which you follow what you perceive is right. Even the end is not definitive but only a new beginning of the concept of secularism.