Chapter-3

Gora

Gora[1] (1909), the fifth in order of writing and the largest of Tagore's twelve novels, was serialised in a literary magazine *Probasi* from 1907 to 1909. Being a complex novel, it can be studied and interpreted at different levels. Various themes such as the play of destiny, nation and nationalism, time and space, religion and spirituality, friendship, motherhood, love, caste discrimination, and woman emancipation provide a panoramic view of Tagore's idea of Bharatvarsha in the novel. Krishna Kriplani rightly says:

> *Gora* is more than a mere novel; it is an epic of India in transition at a crucial period of modern history, when the social conscience 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 renascent Hinduism and stretches out its arms towards universal humanism. (*A Life* 118)

The novel is a fascinating tale about its eponymous hero, Gora (literally, 'gora'[2] means a white man), set in Bengal- a land of relatively dark-skinned people of the Indian subcontinent. From the very beginning to almost the ending of the novel, this pivotal character advocates the practices of Hinduism. However, his observance of

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[1] The available translated texts of *Gora* are controversial. The first translation of *Gora* appeared in 1924 by W.W. Pearson (Macmillan edition). And, later Rupa & Co. published it in 2002. The Sahitya Akadmi edition of Tagore's Gora appeared in 1997. In his 'Translator's Note' to the English translation of Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora*, late Sujit Mukherjee attaches a lot of importance to fidelity to the original. He says that the discrepancy between the Bangla text and Pearson's English translation that left out large chunks of the original motivated him to produce another translation of the novel. In his words, "This discrepancy more than other reasons made me resolve to produce a new English translation. Let me claim that if it has no other virtue, at least it is a complete and unabridged rendering of the standard Bangla text" (Tagore 479). Another translation of the same novel by Mohit K. Ray and Rama Kundu appeared in 2008 (Atlantic). The most recent translation (2009) is by Radha Chakravarthy (Penguin). For the present study, I have chosen the Sahitya Akademi edition/translation of *Gora* by Sujit Mukherjee, who is one of the most celebrated translation theorists of India. The translation of *Gora* by Mukherjee is usually considered as the standard text; it is pure academic translation with an Introduction by Meenakshi Mukherjee.

[2] The Beloved Vaishnava Saint of early modern Bengal, the great Chaitanya was also called Gouranga or Gora (Sarkar, Tanika "the Intractable Problem" 44).

Hindu rituals appears ironic to the readers because of his Irish lineage. Gora himself does not know that he is not a Brahmin by birth. His assertion of self-identity as a Brahmin stands questionable in the ending of the novel when he comes to know the truth about his descent. 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 (on account of duality) can be compared to the crisis of the macrocosm of native land which is 'the white man's burden'[3] (Rudyard Kipling). Bengal (or, the Indian subcontinent in general) and the protagonist are the epitomes of Hybridity[4] (Homi K. Bhabha) in the colonial era. Thus, the novel is a journey in search of identity at individual and national levels. First, it is about the unfolding of the real self of Gora. Secondly, it is an attempt to concretize the Indianness of the motherland, which is afflicted by the foreign rule.

Tagore actively participated in the initial phase of the national movement that swept through Bengal during the first decade of twentieth century. The immediate political reason that activated this movement, referred to as Swadeshi[5] (literally meaning 'one's own country'), was the then Governor General Lord Curzon's decision to divide Bengal in 1905[6]. "But it marked the culmination of a Hindu nationalism that had been gathering steam since the last decades of nineteenth century" (Chattopadhyay 2). In *Gora*, Tagore, disillusioned with Hindu nationalism, has elaborately explored the shortcomings of the Hindu nationalism "which had briefly but intensely allured him" (2).

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[3] The term "white man", for Kipling, referred to citizens of the more highly developed nations. He felt it was their duty to spread law, literacy, and morality throughout the world. Kipling wrote a poem titled 'The White Man's Burden'.

[4] "At a basic level, hybridity refers to any mixing of east and western culture. Within colonial and postcolonial literature, it most commonly refers to colonial subjects from Asia or Africa who have found a balance between eastern and western cultural attributes. However, in Homi Bhabha's initial usage of the term in his essay "Signs Taken For Wonders," he clearly thought of hybridity as a subversive tool whereby colonized people might challenge various forms of oppression (Bhabha's example is of the British missionaries' imposition of the Bible in rural India in the 19th century.).

However, the term hybridity, which relies on a metaphor from biology, is commonly used in much broader ways, to refer to any kind of cultural mixing or mingling between East and West" (Singh, Amardeep).

[5] Swadeshi movement had an amount of Muslim participation, but in spite of this the main tenor of the movement was predominantly Hindu. See Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal: 1903-1908*(Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010), 355-377. (Foot Note No. 5 of Chattopadhyay).

[6] The partition of Bengal led the Muslims to form their own national organization on communal lines. The Hindus were not in favour of this partition, whereas the Muslims were. The Hindus believed that the partition was an attempt to "strangle nationalism in Bengal, where it was more developed than elsewhere" (Encyclopaedia Britannica). Bengal was reunited in 1911 but it resulted into resentment among Bengali Muslims who thought that the partition was in their favour and the resentment lasted until the end of the British rule which ended with the partition of Bengal in 1947.

Tanika Sarkar in "Rabindranath's Gora and the Intractable Problem of Indian Patriotism" writes that *Gora*, unlike *Anandamath*, is not based upon "the image of a freshly coined Goddess of the Motherland" and "an act of violence against Muslims of India" (37). The novel "rejects the identification of the country with Hindu disciplinary institutions and it refuses to transvalue the land as a goddess. With these two moves, it breaks open the lock between Hindu nationalism and Indian patriotism and it creates a space that belongs to patriotism alone" (37-8). For Tagore, she views that "nationalism was invariably a project of power and self-aggrandizement, of exclusion and incipient imperialism" (38).

It is not as easy and simple to open the lock between Hindu nationalism and Indian patriotism as Sarkar claims to have observed. First and foremost, Sarkar ignores that Gora personifies the land as Mother who, according to him, is "calling" him and he must "go where Annapurna is sitting, where Jagaddhatri is waiting" (Tagore 327). In the ending, Gora discovers that 'the mother', for whom he has looked everywhere, has been at his home all this time in the form of Anandamoyi whom "Tagore paints … as Mother India" (Choudhury, Nina Roy 63).

> Ma, you are my only mother. The mother for whom I have looked for everywhere–all this time she was sitting in my house. You have no caste, you do not discriminate against people, you do not hate –you are the image of benediction. You are my Bharatvarsha… (Tagore 477)

Tagore glorifies the assimilating, loving, and non-discriminatory nature of Bharatvarsha whose human representation is manifested in Gora's mother, an epitome of love and care. Contrary to Tanika Sarkar's view that "the goddess disappears as the mother returns" ("the Intractable Problem" 45) in the ending, Gora, in fact, finds the embodiment of the goddess in his own mother. Mother has been present with all her attributes from the beginning. It is Gora who lacks the vision and wisdom to see 'the mother' in his mother throughout the novel except in the ending. On the contrary, Binoy realizes very early in the novel that Anandamoyi is the "face of his motherland" (Tagore 190). He says, "May the radiance of affection of her face protect me always from all the

failures of my mind. Let this face be the image of my motherland, let it direct me towards my duty, let it make me steadfast in performing it".

It is also noticeable that the necessary ingredients for patriotism, according to Tanika Sarkar - geographical integrity, historical continuity and cultural unity, also promote Hindu nation and nationalism in India. Patriotism and nationalism, which are sentiments and take birth in the mind, cannot be unconnected mechanically with strict lines of division on the basis of an unconvincing argument that there is no "act of violence against the Muslims of India" (37) in *Gora*. Sarkar delimits the scope of nationalism in India as a solely anti-Muslim project when it cannot be ruled out that Tagore's inclination to "Indianness, embodying some unique qualities", or love for a homeland is considered to be "an ethical concept fundamental to all nationalism" [7](Mukherji, Gangeya 381).

Undoubtedly, Tagore has launched a fierce diatribe against the western ideas of nation and nationalism and favoured "one world" with universal humanism and "inter-civilizational alliance" in most of his writings (Quayum). However, in *Gora*, Tagore has not portrayed anti-nationalitarian sentiment. It is clear from the conclusion of the novel when Gora finds 'the mother' in his own mother, "who is the image of benediction" (Tagore 477) and in whom Bharatvarsha is now embodied. Here, Gora does not speak of the world but of Bharatvarsha, and the idea of Bharatvarsha, as Nina Roy Choudhury states, is "identified with faith, religion, tradition, customs and all manner of indigenous values and ideas" (60). Such Indianness is a key concept in the Indian idea of nation and nationalism.

Non-Parochial Inclusive Nationalism

The idea of nationalism is very flexible and protean in character; it changes with displacement in time and space. Gangeya Mukherji appropriately applies the term 'open texture'[8] to nationalism. Today, the critical analysis of Tagore's views and perspective

[7] Max Hildebert Boehm, 'Nationalism', in Edwin R.A. Seligman et al. (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, New York: OUP, 1996.pp 234-5. (Footnote No. xIiv of Gangeya Mukherji's paper)

[8] "Waismann's idea of open texture, more generally used in the philosophy of language, indicates that notwithstanding definition as applicable category, there still remain possibilities of a definition being inadequate, although remaining different from vagueness insofar as the definition may be fairly accurate in actual situations" (Mukherji, Gangeya 374).

reveals that Tagore was not against nationalism as such, but he was against its violent aspect. Amartya Sen calls Tagore's attitude to nationalism "dual". He says, "Tagore remained deeply committed to his Indianness, while rejecting both patriotism and the advocacy of cultural isolation" ("Foreword" XX). Tagore, in fact, does not reject nationalism, but "calls for a humanitarian intervention into present self-seeking and belligerent nationalism" (Quayum). Kedar Nath Mukherjee writes, "His nationalism was international in outlook for he was the lover of humanity" (17). Indra Nath Choudhuri, the first Chair of Tagore Studies at Edinburgh Napier University in Scotland, maintains, "…Tagore didn't reject nationalism but formed his own understanding of it by studying what was authentic in his country's history".

> He (Tagore) thought i) it was essential for us to fight against social injustice rather than political freedom, ii) to work for an adjustment of races, to acknowledge the real differences between them and yet seek some basis of unity, iii) not to accept violent and exclusive patriotism as our final spiritual shelter but seek refuge in humanity and iv) hence his motto for Viswabharati, (the university which he founded in Shantiniketan) was *yatra viswam bhavet eka nidam* where the world meets in a nest; v) not to accept the concept of violent nationalism from the west which would mean selling our own inheritance and vi) Tagore never wanted the idea of the Indian nation to supersede the idea of Indian civilization. Tagore, as said earlier, believed in non-parochial inclusive nationalism (unself-critical Indian nationalism: Nandi) and also in patriotism which rejected violent nationalism hence he could make such a statement that I am not a patriot – I shall ever seek my compatriots all over the world (letter of Tagore to Andrews). This kind of a statement created a false impression in the minds of a large number of Indians who even attacked him and still being attacked for the 'insufficient nationalism' expressed in his song 'Jana gana mana' which became the national song of India. However, Western nationalism which became a strong basis of a nation-state became illegitimate for him as

> explained in detail by Ashish Nandi. Both Tagore and Gandhi created a moral universe and made it a part of politics and gave a bigger lofty meaning to nationalism. ("The concept of the nation-state")

This part of the chapter analyses *Gora* in the light of Indra Nath Choudhuri's views on Tagore's approach to nationalism.

(I) Preferred Social Justice to Political Freedom

The novel depicts a constant conflict between human desires and social expectations. Gora advocates the observance of all the rules of society, as society is the expression of the worldly aspect of 'Dharma'. He says, "Otherwise society will be ruined…if we do not submit ourselves to society completely through rules, then we obstruct the deepest purpose for which society exists" (Tagore 408). He believes that one should obey society without judging it. On the other hand, the Hindu society emerges as an anti-human and anti-natural system of human relationships in the novel; it suppresses personal interests of man for the vague and unconvincing collective welfare; it marginalizes those who challenge its mechanical authority. The rules of the society appear mere pretentious and unnatural; they sideline a noble figure such as Anandamoyi. The society arises as an anti-individualistic system that restricts Gora to express his love for Sucharita (141). Its grip is so powerful that Binoy finds it impossible to 'declare' that he does not belong to the Hindu community (316). "[T]he samaj is bound to pass judgment" on everyone (272); there is no escape. Krishanadayal realises that the society must not be 'upset' (32) at any cost. The society emerges as a threat to human concerns; both the Hindus and the Brahmos do not send their children to Lolita's school due to socio-religious reasons (278-81).

Understanding the dominating nature of social life in India, Tagore says, "In fact, our history has not been of the rise and fall of kingdoms, of fights for political supremacy…Our history is that of our social life and attainment of spiritual ideals" (*Nationalism* 35). He believes, "Our real problem in India is not political. It is social" (64). Thus, he gives more importance to social justice than political freedom; he is more interested in global unity and the demolition of internal social evils of the country. In

"The Religion of Man" Tagore says, "Freedom in the mere sense of independence has no content and therefore no meaning" (157). He is of the view that "freedom would have no meaning, if one oppressive power was replaced by another, replicating the structures of hierarchy. The issues of caste and gender discrimination had to be tackled first, to promote social and religious harmony among the various sections of Indian society" (Aikant 57). In the novel, Poresh Babu, the mouthpiece of the novelist, regrets over the anti-humanitarian aspect of Hindu society which "insults human beings, discards them" (Tagore 420). Gora praises the Prophet of Islam for his vehement fight against social injustice. He reminds the old Muslim man, who is whipped in face by a British, of the prophet's message:

> [H]e who submits to injustice is also guilty- he causes wrong-doing to grow. You may not understand but take it from me, being meek and tolerant is no dharma. It only encourages the wrong doer. Your prophet Muhammad knew this; therefore he didn't go about in the guise of a meek person to preach his religion. (103).

There is a strong protest against social injustice in Tagore's writings.

Tagore's famous song in *Gitanjali*- 'Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high' echoes his ideal vision of India. In the novel, Gora raises his voice against the injustice done to the villagers of Char Ghospur by the police. He bluntly tells the magistrate that the villagers "are not rogues. They are only fearless and independent in spirit- they cannot suffer injustice silently" (180). He himself does not bow down to social unfairness; he raises his voice against oppression as he believes that "[a]ccording to the principle of right action in our tradition, it is the king's obligation to do justice. When he is unjust to his subjects, he violates this principle" (184). Gora "vigorously" beats up the policemen who rough up the boys for mistakenly having taken water from the reserved tank (184). To protest against the legislative system which has "become a market place for buying and selling of justice" (185), he refuses to take any legal help.

Gora's attitude to casteism is dual. He does not make any distinction regarding caste when he mobilizes young men for physical culture and group games. However, he

follows the ritual laws of pollution and purity in his own conduct and diet. He does not see "any contradiction in this because the Bharatvarsha of his dream" is "based on an indestructible order wherein these distinctions" are "divinely ordained" (Mukherjee "Introduction" XV). Later on, Gora discovers the downside of following the caste-system which divides the society and is responsible for social disparity in the name of Hinduism. In Char Ghospur, Gora finds it intolerable "to safeguard his caste by eating food provided by that evil hearted tyrant Madhav Chatujjye" (Tagore 174). It then pains him to see that purity has become an external matter in Bharatvarsha- "What terrible anti-religious practices…" he says. Rising above "what is right and what is wrong" (175), he, under unavoidable circumstances, feels compelled to eat and drink in the house of a Hindu barber who has given shelter to a helpless Muslim boy. Nevertheless, it is only in the ending of the novel when Gora dramatically transforms altogether and symbolically voices Tagore's message of social equality by demanding a glass of water from Lachmiya, the Christian maid.

Tagore's idea of nationalism essentially carries the spirit of social equality amid sectarian tensions that attempt to divide human beings. Anandamoyi says, "[N]obody is born on earth with a caste" (15). She advocates equality and asks her husband, "If you are of such superior caste and so beloved of Bhagavan, why did he allow you to be humiliated first by the Pathans, then by the Moghuls, then by the Khrishtans?" (32). For Tagore, it reveals, there is no justification of the caste system. The novelist believes that the society must be flexible to welcome change with time. It is of no use to follow the oppressive customs blindly. Gora realizes that oil-pressers, potters and other low caste people in the villages perform their tasks with the strength of custom. However, they are scared, helpless, and unable to judge their good. "Under the threat of penalties, and through sectarian quarrels", they regard "prohibitions as the highest truth" (432). In their society, there is no unity, and the society merely obtains "compliance through threat of punishment" and does not "come to a member's assistance, when needed" (433). Customs become an impediment to achieve social liberation. Consequently, Gora, who staunchly upholds and advocates customs among educated people, attacks them in the village. For Tagore, society is made for man, not vice-versa.

The satirical portrayal of Haran Babu, Abinash, and Hindu-hitaishi Sabha (Society for the Welfare of Hindus) (7) reveals Tagore's concern as a humanist, who rejects all sectarian divisions. The novelist is clear that "[i]t can't be desirable that human beings should narrow themselves out of regard for society; instead, it is for society to constantly broaden itself out of regard for human beings" (378).

(II) Adjustment of Races and Unity

Gurudev does not favour the political assimilation of all nations; he believes in social accommodation that gives opportunities to all nations without merging their national identities and that also promotes unity at global level. He envisions peace and unity at intra-national as well as international levels. In this context, Tagore gives the example of India. Tagore says, "She (India) has tried to make an adjustment of races, to acknowledge the real differences between them where these exist, and yet seek some basis of unity" (Tagore *Nationalism* 65). He adds that this basis has been brought by our saints such as Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya and others, who preached the lesson of one God to all races of India". Gangeya Mukherji quotes from Tagore's "Swadeshi Samaj":

> …realization of the one in many, attaining unity in diversity- this is the inherent quality of Bharatvarsha…Since India possesses this quality, we will never imagine any society to be our enemy and be fearful. With ever new conflicts we will aspire for the expansion of ourselves. Hindus, Buddhista, Muslims, Christians will not die fighting each other in the case of India- here they will discover a harmony. This harmony will not be non-Hindu; in fact it will be Hindu in its essential sense. The limbs and organs of this harmony may come also from alien countries; however its life and soul shall be Indian. (qtd. 381)

Tagore understands that pluralism and diversity are the key characteristics of India though there is overall unity. He emphasises the combined role of the 'little' and 'great' traditions in shaping what he loosely defines as the Indian nation (Chakrabarty, Bidyut 94).

Tagore advocates harmony and mutual understanding within and outside nations. There ought to be a note of acceptance. “Tagore puts it; a culture could reflect ‘universal ideas,’ ‘without a loss of national identity’” (Choudhuri, Indra Nath “The concept of the nation-state”). Gora, “an idealized representative of Tagore’s syncretic nationalism” (Chattopadhyay 1), says:

> Hinduism has, like a mother, tried to make place in its lap for people of various opinions and views. That is, it has looked upon human beings of this world as human beings, it has not counted them as members of a group. Hinduism accepts the ignorant as well as the wise-accents not just one form of wisdom but the many sided expression of wisdom…It is through such variety Hinduism seeks to realize oneness. (Tagore 357)

Gora mistakenly views Indianness as Hinduism. Consequently, by Hinduism Tagore does not mean the religion of the Hindus, but he refers to the essence of the land or, in other words, the Indianness of India or Hindustan. “Thus the white European identity of Gora rather than signifying ‘foreignness’ becomes instead the metaphoric equivalent of the nation with all its diversities and differences. It dissolves the binary of white European otherness and Hindu national self-fashioning” (Chattopadhyay 4).

Tagore is in support of social accommodation and assimilation. The social history of India is a witness that the foreigners had been dealt as human races, with their own religion and culture, until the British arrived as a ruling body of men who kept their identity separate and refused to get accommodated. Tagore regrets that races ethnologically different have come into close conflict in this country now (*Nationalism* 34). In *Gora*, Tagore has portrayed the period after the Sepoy Mutiny, a period of rising discontent against the unforgiving outlandish British rule. He disparages the loss of individual self-esteem in the colonial rule which is indifferent and self-centered, if not oppressive, and which has not come to India with open arms to embrace Indians, but with the claws of colonialism and imperialism to snatch away what belongs to India. Accommodation is replaced with competition and conflict when the English emerges as the materialistic colonial power ruling from the distant lands. Consequently, Gora uses

English, which is deemed as a much valued accomplishment in a colonial society, to criticize the English ways of the samaj. Tagore shows the negative effects of this sort of economic, cultural, political, and psychological invasion; he favours the harmonization and unity of races through social accommodation and assimilation, and without the loss of national identities across the world.

Gora is sure that the smouldering "ashes of the sacred fire of countries" (Tagore 356-7) will undoubtedly observe rising flames, "transcending the immediate time and place, and kindle a fire throughout the world". In spite of his patriotism and love of his race and people, Tagore advocates universal love and fraternity as essential to our growth. Societies such as India's can redeem themselves by adopting the principles of 'sarvadharma samabhava' (deference to all religions) or the Upanishadic dictum of 'vasudhev kutumbakam' (the entire world as one family) (Aikant 55). Tagore argues, "…I have no distrust of any culture because of its foreign character. On the contrary, I believe that the shock of the outside forces is necessary for maintaining the vitality of our intellect" (qtd. in Dutta, Krishna 221). Furthermore, he states that "all the elements of our culture have to be strengthened, not to resist the culture of the west, but to accept it and assimilate it" (222).

(III) Humanity: Against Exclusive Patriotism

Tagore is unique in his attitude towards nationalism; he inaugurated the meeting of the Congress party in Kolkata in 1896 by singing "Vande Matram" to his own tune, whereas he criticized militant nationalism[9] in Japan. He is primarily a cosmopolitan, universalist, and humanist. In *Nationalism*, he writes that he has outgrown the teaching that idolatry of the nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity (83). Tagore's makes it clear that he is not against any race, but that idea of the Nation which is "least human" (41). His idea of nation and nationalism is essentially humane.

Gora, which is basically a novel of discussion and not of action, exemplifies Tagore's human centric approach. When Binoy feels the lack of human affection and company, "liberating the country or preserving the community" does not seem "true and

[9] Tagore in his *Nationalism* remarks, "Nationalism is a great menace. It is the particular thing, which for years has been at the bottom of India's troubles" (74).

clear to him" (Tagore 19), and the food in the kitchen of Anandamoyi, discarded by Gora, appears "nectar" (20) to him. The novelist says that no matter how loudly Binoy supports a principle in the course of a debate, in practice he cannot place human beings higher than a principle (18). Binoy does not take tea and has given up eating bread or biscuits baked by Muslims some time ago, but he ignores customs to avoid hurting Poresh Babu's family (52). Interestingly, he himself is in dilemma regarding "how far he had accepted them (customs) as principles and how far on account of his great affection for Gora" (18). Even Sucharita's "upbringing under Poresh Babu's influence had liberated her from being bound by any communal narrowness", and "Haran Babu's steadfast advocacy of Brahmo belief was painful to her natural humanism" (93). For Tagore, humanism is supreme and indispensable.

Tagore advocates love over the tensions of religion, sect, and society through the characters of Poresh Babu and Anandamoyi. Poresh Babu's "refusal to observe the boundaries of Brahmo and non-Brahmo jurisdiction while discussing scriptural and other matters" is an epitome of Tagore's unfaltering support for humanism (94). Poresh Babu, Tagore's spokesperson, says, "Sectarianism makes one forget the simple fact that human beings are human beings first. It sets up an entirely society made distinction between Brahmo and Hindu and blows up the distinction into something larger than universal truth" (295); he rejects casteism as a source of "inordinate hatred between man and man in our country" and a "kind of contempt of one man for another, insult by one man of another" (155). Along the same lines, Anandmoyi asks Sucharita, "Is there no community, Little Mother, which ignores minor differences and brings people together on major arguments? Have communities been created only to carry on a quarrel with Ishwar?" (313). She asks her husband, "Aren't Khristians human beings?" (32). Notably, Anandamoy's name symbolically represents the bliss ('blessed with ananda', joy) of being humane.

For a humanist like Tagore, the very idea of motherland transforms from a non-living entity to a living human being. Binoy finds the image of motherland in Anandamoyi, who is loving, humane, and full of care for everyone. He says, "Let this face be the image of my motherland" (19). Gora realizes the same in the ending of the novel when he tells Anandamoyi, "You are my Bharatvarsha…" (477). To Binoy,

Aanandmoyi is "the personification of all mothers in the world" (205). The personification of motherland in Anandamoyi is Tagore's attempt to demystify the metanarrative of Bharatvarsha, which, according to him, is with us in the form of our loving mother. Anandamoyi exemplifies Tagore's idea of truth embodied in humanism; she believes that there is no perception of caste within a man's heart- "and it is there that 'Ishwar' brings men together and also comes there himself" (229). Anandamoyi feels that "nobody is born on earth with a caste" (15). It is through her character Tagore constructs the secular image of Bharatvarsha. She discards Gora's idea of 'Dharma' (16). Through the Boul's message, Tagore refers to 'freedom', which in the context of the novel becomes freedom from the shams of religion. He disapproves Gora's view that "the heart is a great thing but it can't be placed higher than everything else" (16). Binoy, Tagore's messenger, is "largely influenced by the dictates of his heart" and he cannot "place human beings higher than a principle" (18). The novelist says, "The honour of humanity had to be saved" (342).

Sectarianism belittles humanity and human relationships. For Panu Babu, "it is not a great matter to abandon Sucharita", but he "cannot allow the prestige of the Brahmo Samaj to be lowered" (250). Tagore is of the view that "natural view of things" (373) is lost by entering one particular community. Labonya and Leela, who are privately most excited about Lolita's marriage, "put on grave expressions" as they remember "the stern duty of a Brahmo household" (430). Besides, Gora's negation of his feelings for Sucharita "was a wrong committed against human nature and that is why Gora's entire inner self had turned away from the preparations of the ceremony" (470). Tagore is concerned about man's key position and dignity in the world. He attaches a lot of importance to the fullest expression of man's true nature.

(IV) Universalism in Nationalism

For Tagore, universal nationalism is "an inclusive plural concept of a nation which goes beyond the idea of exclusive nationalism and where the whole earth is a family" (Choudhuri, Indra Nath "The concept of the nation-state"). Gurudev was aware of the downside of exclusive nationalism that it would "breed imperialism" and

imperialism would "bring destruction of nation" (Mukherjee, Kedar Nath 269). In *Gora*, the novelist points out the secular character of Bharatvarsha that has the capacity to embrace all people irrespective of their caste, colour, and creed. The novel ends on a positive note when Gora's "freedom" helps him to see beyond the narrow vision of sectarianism or any kind of religious groupism, and he says, "Today I am Bharatiya. Within me there is no conflict between communities, whether Hindu or Muslim or Krishtan. Today all the castes of Bharat are my castes" (Tagore 475). "With naked consciousness", Gora is able to realise "a vast truth" beyond his imaginative image of Bharat "that was without problems or distortions" (476).

Tagore is against exclusive nationalism that is based on the policy of Nation-State and that approves 'homogenized universalism', popularized by the Western view of the world. This type of nationalism makes us selfish and confined; it encourages violent nationalism or, in other words, imperialism; it snatches one's freedom and it has self-destructive tendency (Choudhuri, Indra Nath "R. Tagore: Renaissance, Nationalism and Indian Languages" [in Punjabi] 14). Shantiniketan was very close to Tagore's heart and soul. It was planned to provide a point of confluence in India to the world community. As India is essentially secular and accommodating, the idea of Shantiniketan was conceived to promote international cross-cultural relations. In *Gora*, the writer makes it clear that the idea of being Indian has nothing to do with one's lineage; through the example of Gora, he asserts that even the child of an Irish couple can be a true Indian. Thus, Gora becomes a true Indian when he becomes aware of his Irish descent and understands the true spirit of India. Gora says, "I have taken birth this morning, with an utterly naked consciousness, in my own Bharatvarsha. After so long I have fully understood what a mother's lap means" (Tagore 476).

Tagore's idea of nationalism is not ethnic. He does not believe in "the colourless vagueness of cosmopolitanism" (Tagore *Nationalism* 34). Consequently, for him, India is "not territorial (*mrinmaya*) but ideational (*chinmaya*)" (Choudhuri, Indra Nath "The concept of the nation-state"). Indianness is a matter of culture, values, civilization, and humanistic insight for him. Tagore's idea of nationalism is a section in the wide concept of universalism. Tagore dreamed of a commonwealth of nations in which no nation (or race) would deprive another 'of its rightful place in the world festival' and every nation

would 'keep alight its own lamp of mind as its part of the illumination of the world' (Aikant 62). In his view, "[t]here is only one history- the history of man. All national histories are merely chapters in the larger one" (Tagore *Nationalism* 65).

(V) No Western Model of Nationalism at the Stake of Our Inheritance

Tagore, a peace-loving man, renounced the knighthood after the Jalianwala Bagh massacre. He didn't want the Indian patriots to imitate the western type of nationalism, which was violent in nature, at the stake of the Indian idea of human unity and fraternity.

In his works, Tagore acknowledges the differences between the Indian sense of life and the western life style in terms of culture, social values, and tradition. He pays due homage to India and Indianness. Tagore in his essay "Prachya-o-Paschatta Savyata" ("The Civilization of the East and the West") says, "Man can attain greatness both under society and state. But it would be wrong if we think that building up of a nation in the European mould is the only nature of civilization and the only aim of humanity"[10] (qtd. in Mukherjee, Kedar Nath 247). Tagore opines that India has her own ideals and it will be unwise to imitate the West. Society is in the centre of India's civilization, whereas politics is in the core of western civilization. Tagore wisely[11] chooses the Indian idea of non-violence and fraternity as the base of his concept of nationalism.

Gora is coloured in Indianness. The characters, places, beliefs, life-style, manners, customs, norms, values, and even aspirations present a panoramic picture of Bengali society in those days. In the novel, Gora claims, "Whatever is ours, we shall uphold proudly and forcefully to protect our country and ourselves from humiliation" (Tagore 28). He adds, "All that we want is to feel in every inch that we are ourselves" (28). Amid social tensions that are mainly created by the Brahmos and the colonizers, Bharatvarsha- full in wealth, full in knowledge, full in 'Dharma'- is always 'present' in Gora's mind. Gora is able to look through the misery, weakness and sorry condition of his own land and perceives some great and essential truth (57).

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[10] Tagore*: Prachya-O-Paschatta Savyata, Rabindra Rachanavali*, Vol. XII, P. 1061. (Footnote No. 2 of Kedar Nath Mukherjee)

[11] Tagore also rebelled against the petty traditions and customs of society (Mukherjee, Kedar Nath 46). He was influenced by Rammohun Roy.

In the novel, Tagore emphasizes that the legacy of Indian norms and values must be inherited; India cannot afford to imitate the western nationalism at the stake of its inherited legacy. Thus, Tagore does not give narrative space to the western idea of militant nationalism in the novel and espouses his idea of nationalism in the light of Indian culture, values, and norms. Tagore says:

> We in India must make up our minds that we cannot borrow other people's history, and that if we stifle our own we are committing suicide. When you borrow things that do not belong to your life, they only serve to crush your life. (Tagore *Nationalism* 71)

(VI) Importance of Indian Civilization over Indian Nation

In "Civilization and Progress", Tagore describes civilization as "the expression of some guiding moral force" (621-22) that has evolved in the society "for the object of attaining perfection". He finds the Sanskrit word 'dharma' the nearest synonym for 'civilization' in his own language. The concept generally refers to the essential quality of a being. He notes, "Through 'a-dharma' (the negation of dharma) man prospers, gains what appears desirable, conquers enemies, but perishes at the root."

Tagore does not want the concept of Indian nation to outshine Indian civilization. The civilization in India centres on the society; it carries forward the legacy and heritage of the past. In fact, Tagore's idea of Indian nationalism is based on the values of Indian civilization. According to Tagore, it is unwise to the greatest extent of man if he has no idea about his past and future. Tagore thus lays emphasis on "the interdependence and intimate connection of the past, present, and future" (Mukherjee, Kedar Nath 59). To reject the past of Bharatvarsha is to "dishonour truth"; it is a form of atheism to Gora (Tagore 356-7) in the novel under study.

Tagore believes that exclusive nationalism is "the training of a whole people for a narrow ideal" (Tagore "The Nation" 549); it leads them to "moral degeneracy and

intellectual blindness". This is only "a passing phase in a civilization" or "temporary mood of history". In the coming age, "the true spirit of freedom will have sway" (549). In *Nationalism*, Tagore criticizes the exclusive nationalism and claims, "Nationalism is a great menace" (74) and "India has never had a real sense of nationalism" (70) as she has accommodated different races. Tagore defines 'Nation' as the political and economic union of a people organized for the mechanical purposes of greed and self-interest. The political aspect, which was earlier restricted to the professionals in society, crossed "the boundaries with amazing rapidity" (37) when the political power spread its wings with the help of science and brought in "harvests of wealth". The idea of western Nation-State works on the principles of divisions, mechanics, and materialism, whereas the virtuosity of Indian civilization lies in the fact that it wants to bring unity in diversity. Tagore adds that government by the Nation is neither British nor anything else. He calls it an applied science and compares it to "a hydraulic press, whose pressure is impersonal, and on that account completely effective" (Tagore *Nationalism* 43). Indra Nath Choudhuri says:

> Tagore said, form yourself into a nation (nation with a small n) to mean society which was relevant to humanity and stop the encroachment of Nation with a capital N to mean a nation-state or the nations of the West…" ("The concept of the nation-state")

According to Tagore, the East and the West are complimentary to each other because of their different positions and attitudes upon life (Tagore *Nationalism* 41). The Britishers could build the destiny of India by bringing here their tribute to life. With the process of give and take, one-sided domination could be over. In fact, rather than accepting the social aspect of India, the Britishers tried to replace it with political state and thus disturbed human relations. It led to moral degeneration and intellectual blindness. Tagore calls it 'Crisis in Civilization' in one of his speeches. The constructive spirit of the West should not be mistaken for the destructive Nation of the West. The spirit of the West has brought the people of India, who are different in races and customs, closer through common law through which "we are realizing …that there is a universal standard of justice" (44). However, the benefit of the western civilization

was offered to the Indians in a "miserly measure" by the Nation of the West (45). It is the policy of the nation-state to exploit more and to give very little in return, just what is minimum for sustenance. In the fields of education and industries, little assistance was offered to the Indians who were labelled as backwards. The western nationalism represented by the British in India didn't have social co-operation as its basis. "It has evolved a perfect organization of power, but not spiritual idealism" (46). Tagore adds, "…the western Nation acts like a dam to check the free flow of western civilization… " (46).

It may be said that Tagore, keeping in view the dialectics of nation and civilization in the western world, does not want nation and nationalism to supersede the idea of civilization in India. The idea of nation is "new institution" (Tagore "The Nation" 551) and short-lived, whereas civilization has successfully survived the tests of time. The concept of pluralism or Indian unity, a characteristic of Indian civilization, was basically a product of medieval India. This fact was shared by both Gandhi and Tagore. Besides, Man's world is essentially a moral world. The cult of nation has dehumanized him to be a mechanical man. Tagore's concept of civilization is broad and it encompasses ideal life style. Nation (due to its inclination for cutthroat economic and political competition) represents 'Adharma', whereas Civilization means 'Dharma'. India's civilization is spiritual; it is known for "its inclusiveness, its all comprehensiveness" (Tagore "Spiritual Civilization" 735). "Aliens were assimilated into the synthesis; their widely differing modes of thought and life and worship being given their due places in the scheme by a marvelous interpretative process" (735).

In *Gora*, Tagore's idea of Hindu nation is superseded by the civilization of India which is assimilative and which is also underlying Tagore's idea of nationalism. Indian civilization is based on unity, whereas the Hindu nation divides men on the basis of castes and religions. In *Gora*, the idea of Hindu nation is shown as hollow, worldly, and an institution of power in the contemporary Bengali society. Abinash takes Gora's penance ceremony as an opportunity for the Hindu Community "to proclaim its power today" and to "create a great sensation" (Tagore 347). He terribly fails to realise that Gora basically relies upon Hinduism to glorify the oneness of Bharatvarsha. Tagore shows that Hinduism with its narrow divisions cannot lead to the unity of India; it

cannot be the real basis of nation. The ending of *Gora* marks a shift from Hinduism to Indianness.

Anti-Colonial/Imperial Nationalism

The idea of nationalism is part and parcel of human life as it "is a political reality of our world" (Harris VII). In *Gora*, the idea of nation and nationalism swings between two poles - Hinduism and the Brahmo Samaj in the colonial setting. Gora, once a follower of the Samaj, suddenly becomes a practicing Brahmin because he feels that the conventional attitude to religion gives him a sense of belongingness to his land. Expressing his concern, he says, "You call these customs evil only because the English books you have read and memorized call them so. You know nothing about these customs on your own" (Tagore 54). His proposition reveals his implicit censure against the spirit of one of Macaulay's oft quoted statements- "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Macaulay 314). Perhaps, this is what Gora hates the most. So, He has "one single objective: he must restore his countrymen's faith in their own country" (Tagore 435).

Tagore in *Nationalism* points out the hypocrisy of the imperial power in India in the following words:

> We have seen in our country some brand of tinned food advertised as entirely made and packed without being touched by hand. This description applies to the government of India, which is as little touched by the human hand as possible. The governors need not know our language, need not come into personal touch with us except as officials; they can aid or hinder our aspirations from a disdainful distance, they can lead us on a certain path of policy and then pull us back again with the manipulation of office red tape...But we, who are governed, are not a mere abstraction. We, on our sides, are individuals with living sensibilities. (40)

This comment aptly fits in the case of the indifferent British Magistrate, who rebukes Gora for his interference in Char Ghoshpara. Gora voices the socio-cultural distance between the ruler and the ruled in the following words: "You know much less about those conditions than I do" (Tagore 180).

On the canvas of fiction, Tagore portrays the attempts of 'English nationalization' of India by the colonizers. When Gora raises his voice against the misfortune of the villagers of Char Ghoshpara, Haran Babu, an active member of the Samaj, tells the British magistrate that most people are not yet able to imbibe the best aspects of English education, and some are so unthankful that they are not willing to admit that the British rule is a matter of divine dispensation. He adds, "The sole reason for this is, they have learnt their lessons by heart while their moral training remains incomplete" (180). The magistrate responds, "Their moral training will never be complete until they accept Christ". In this case, Haran Babu is simply 'mimicing'[12] (Homhi K. Bhabha) whereas the British magistrate is striking the lash of 'hegemony'[13] (Antonio Gramsci). Gora regrets that the influence of the colonial masters is so strong that 'amateur patriots' have no real faith and are hopeless. "If Kuber were to grant them a boon on his own, I am fairly certain that will not ask for anything more than a brass buckle from the belt of one of the Viceroy's peons " (Tagore 22).

The British being the ruling class had power to determine 'Superstructure' (Marx). It is clear that the British colonization did not affect 'the Indian subcontinent' merely financially, politically, and geographically, but did so culturally and psychologically as well. In this regard, Dipankar Roy in his paper "Representation of the National Self- Novelistic Portrayal of a New Cultural Identity in Gora" writes:

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[12] "Mimicry in colonial and postcolonial literature is most commonly seen when members of a colonized society (say, Indians or Africans) imitate the language, dress, politics, or cultural attitude of their colonizers (say, the British or the French). Under colonialism and in the context of immigration, mimicry is seen as an opportunistic pattern of behavior: one copies the person in power, because one hopes to have access to that same power oneself. Presumably, while copying the master, one has to intentionally suppress one's own cultural identity, though in some cases immigrants and colonial subjects are left so confused by their cultural encounter with a dominant foreign culture that there may not be a clear preexisting identity to suppress" (Singh, Amardeep).

[13] "'Hegemony' in this case means the success of the dominant classes in presenting their definition of reality, their view of the world, in such a way that it is accepted by other classes as 'common sense'. The general 'consensus' is that it is the only sensible way of seeing the world. Any groups who present an alternative view are therefore marginalized" (Gramsci 215).

> Colonization can never be merely viewed as the unleashing of processes of economic exploitation. It has cultural aggression as its necessary corollary. It destroys civilizations. It empties the colonized subjects of all their traditional belief systems, cultural practices, and ritualistic moorings. It undermines their very sense of self. The loss of 'self' under colonialism – when humanity reduced to a monologue- results in the colonization of minds. (386)

That's why, a modern looking Bengali gentleman with an Englishman jeers at "weak and insignificant" (Tagore 47) common people on the deck and is "keen to show that he didn't belong to the common herd of his countrymen" (47). The Bengali man calls his people, "stupid people of the country who are no better than animals" (48). Under the influence of the English education, Haran Babu also finds many flaws with Bengali character and believes, "no Bengali would be able to administer properly the district placed in his charge as magistrate or judge" (53). Gora denounces this attitude as "the conventions of educated persons acquired by imitation and from book learning" (49) and alludes to the teaching of English in India as a kind of politics for the construction and sustenance of British colonies.

The metanarrative of the feminine Bengali man was constructed by the British during the colonial rule. Karishandayal, perhaps to keep himself aloof from the idea of 'feminine' Bengali men, tried to 'mimic' the colonizer. "There was a time when, working in the west, and mixing with the British soldiers, he had freely eaten meat and drunk liquor. In those days, he considered it some kind of manliness to go out of his way to insult native priests, hermits, Vaishnav mendicants and other professional religious men" (25). Gora's mobilization of young men for physical culture and group games can be viewed as a compelling challenge to this discourse. The English acts against the core values of the tradition of Bharatvarsha and those who work with them "tend to form a class of persons quite different from their countrymen" (133). Gora says, "the deputy magistrates of today have begun to look upon their countrymen as cats and dogs…when one is raised on somebody else's shoulder one looks down on one's countrymen…." (133).

The Hindu image of Bharartvarsha appears to be at stake because of the English Missionaries' evangelization. Thus, to save Hinduism, Gora, who is president of the Hindu Hitaishi Sabha, states, "We shall not allow our country to stand in the dock like an accused person and be judged in a foreign law-court and according to alien laws…..Whatever is ours, we shall uphold proudly and forcefully to protect our country and ourselves from all humiliation" (28). However, Gora's criticism of the foreign culture is not mainly direct; it is focused on the Brahmo Samaj that was known for its English ways and manners. With regard to it, Meenakshi Mukherjee says:

> Gora's polemics however are not directly aimed at foreigners. Rabindranath shifted the discourse to another arena- the Brahmo-Hindu tension in the late century Bengal- the Brahmo Samaj being the most palpable institution through which both the religious and social impact of the west was mediated in Bengal. ("Introduction" to *Gora* XIII)

Gora's idea of nationalism is explicitly anti-colonial at one level. He believes that his country will be "liberated" and "the British cannot always drag it about on a chain tied to their ship of commerce" (Tagore 102). He says, "So long as we are subservient to another nation, we shall have to abide strictly by our rules. This was not the time to judge whether it was good or bad" (400). Noticeably, almost all the characters except a few, who are the followers of the Brahmo Samaj, feel antagonistic towards the British rulers. Only people like Panu Babu and Boroda Sundori are very fond of the English way of living and consider British rule as a blessing of God. On the other hand, some people like Mohim and Karishandayal show a lot of respect to English officials because of petty selfish reasons. Mohim flatters the English officers, but he has no respect for them. He believes that through it, "some portion of what belongs to us may be restored to us – and that, too, without any danger of breach of peace…It is true patriotism" (24). Mohim tells that the new English boss in the office "doesn't sanction leave if one's mother has died, says one is lying" (23). It suggests the construction of a metanarrative by the British that the Indians are liars.

In general, Gurudev has portrayed the anti-British feeling in Bengal through the discourse which is chiefly focused on Hinduism. He shows that the Muslims also hate the British Rulers. Simultaneously, one cannot deny that the novelist has also carved a soothing niche for the liberal attitude of the Western mind. The characters of Poresh Babu and Anandmoyi give testimony to it. Even Gora advocates western medical science over 'false beliefs' when Nanda dies. Indra Nath Choudhuri rightly says that Tagore was against worshipping Nation as God due to the destruction and violence done in its name by modern nation-states. Nevertheless, he loved his land and never abandoned a basic anti-colonial or anti-imperialistic stance. He even renounced his knighthood in protest against Jalianbala Bagh tragedy in Amritsar in 1919. However, he simply did not want Indian patriots to imitate European nationalists ("The concept of the nation-state").

Sectarian/ Religious Divisions and Tagore's Idea of Nationalism

The setting of the novel pinpoints the disruptive times when Bengali society in Kolkata was mainly divided into the traditional orthodox Hindus and the modern liberal Brahmos. The Brahmos criticized Hindu orthodoxy, idol-worshipping, caste system, etc. On the other hand, the Hindus denounced the Christian ways of the Samaj and justified their criticism as a penalty "for having deliberately broken away from the community" (Tagore 8). When Sucharita, a Brahmo, is about to shift to her new house with the Hindu aunt, Haran Babu says, "Sucharita, this is a day of mourning for us. You are falling back from the truth that had sustained you for so long" (271). On the contrary, at one place, Gora says to his Hindu friend Binoy, "It is a matter of great sorrow to me that you are bent upon cutting yourself off from the people of your own country by marrying a Brahmo girl" (324).

In the novel, Hinduism and the Brahmo Samaj are mainly presented as socio-political necessities rather than the two paths leading to spiritual upliftment. For Abinash, 'Dharama' is strictly confined to the "gross" (136) aspect of Hinduism, and it stoops down to "farce" in the view of Gora (319). For Harimohini, the rituals of Hinduism are of supreme importance for a Hindu "identity" (336) in the society. Binoy also admits that he has turned religious beliefs of his community into "subtle debating

points". Otherwise, religious faith remains quite "undeveloped" in his life (343). Gora does not eat in his mother's kitchen because of Christian maid Lachmiya. He believes, "[T]he heart is a great thing but it can't be placed higher than everything else" (16), and "[r]ules given by religious custom must be obeyed, it can never be otherwise" (14).

Religion/Sect arises as a disintegrative force in the novel. To speak of the Brahmo Samaj, Baradasundari, who is "very particular in distinguishing between things that were Brahmo and things that were not" (43), takes English culture as "part of the religious faith of the Brahmos" (44). Careless to the core philosophy of her sect, she is more into worldly show off. She has changed Radharani's name to Sucharita. In the same way, Haran Babu's "sectarian enthusiasm and its dry narrowness" keeps him away from "Ramayan-Mahabharat-Bhagvad Gita as separate as the property of Hindus". Among other religious texts, the Bible is his only support (94).

In the novel, religion/sect mainly appears to be a matter of ostentatiousness. Although some characters claim to remain committed to their faiths, yet they do not appear enough firm and stable. There is a world of difference between precept and practice. Haran Babu is the secretary of the girls' school (91). He advocates marriage of girls at eighteen. However, he himself gets ready to marry fourteen years Sucharita. He says, "[T]he question of her devotion to him and of her fitness to work for the welfare of the Samaj could be tested later" (97). Krishnadayal, who observes austerities to attain salvation, says that "lapses may be overlooked" (405) in the case of Gora. He is afraid that his pension is bound to be stopped if the secret of Gora is revealed. Before Sucharita, Binoy admits that he believes in caste system, but the readers know that he drinks water brought by Lashmiya and his observance of bits of Hindu orthodoxy is to maintain his friendship with Gora. Some of the opportunistic characters like Mohim, Krishnadayal, Horimohini, and Panu Babu compromise with the ideologies of their sect or religion for their personal benefits. They follow their religion/sect in a very mechanical way; they basically undermine its philosophical foundation. Tagore criticizes this kind of ritualistic attitude. Dr Mohammad Omar Farooq says, "In Tagore's writing, there is no disrespect or denial of religion in general, but a profound protest against what people themselves often make out religions to be."

Interestingly, Gora converts to Hinduism only when he feels bad about the humiliation of 'his' land and its people by the British. This shift is noticeable for its motive- it is not religion itself but the idea of a united nation that motivates him to opt for Hinduism. Thus, he finds traditional customs and rituals as a means of affirming national unity. When a British missionary writes a newspaper article attacking the Hindu community and its ancient texts, and challenges the Hindus to engage in debate with him, Gora flares up as soon as he reads this. He himself is given to condemning the shastras and popular Hindu customs whenever he finds an opportunity to do so. But when it comes to a foreigner denigrating the Hindu community, Gora feels goaded to retaliate (Tagore 27). Gora admits it before Sucharita that he has never sought Ishwar and infact his stress on Hinduism is his respect to "the devotion of my countrymen" (375). Under the veil of his idea of Hinduism, Gora clearly wishes to instil the feeling of nationalism among countrymen (375).

Gora embraces "everything of Hindu community" without reservation and as a whole as he, according to Binoy, views Bharatvarsha from some "grand elevation" (41). If people can see the image of a "real" "complete" Bharat, Gora believes, they "will compete with one another to lay down their lives" (21-22). And, Gora tells Binoy that it is "our mission" to "make them see" "the clear picture of truth" (22). He argues that it is the need of the hour to show unreserved and unhesitating respect for everything that belongs to our country. By continuously feeling ashamed of the country, "we have allowed the prison of servility to weaken our minds" (22). Binoy tells Sucharita, "…he (Gora) does not hold to our customs because he thinks they are the best" (74). He only wants to resist the possible devastation of all the customs of the country "brought about by our wholesale condemnation of them arising out of a blind disrespect" (74). On some other occasion, Binoy says that Gora "insists on indiscriminate observance because he feels that if he yields on minor issues of Hinduism, foolish people may develop some disrespect for the larger issues and consider it their victory" (116). Otherwise, Hinduism, for him, is "something very large. But he never considers it a delicate thing which may wither at a slight touch or die if roughly handled" (115). Gora tells Panu Babu:

> …Much greater than the need for reform is the need for love, for respect, Reform will come within us when we have united as a people……Then, once we have united as a people, the country can decide or the divine guide of the country can decide which custom will be retained and which discarded. (61)

Within Hinduism, division and solidarity go hand in hand. Every Hindu is related to another Hindu through the thread of 'Dharma'. However, at the same time, casteism divides the Hindus into different categories. Gora, who observes the rules of touching and being touched, also visits "low caste people of his neighbourhood" (99). He claims, "there is no escape for you until you can liberate the people below" (101). "The system of caste distinction, that is, discrimination according to vocation" is justified according to Gora- "we have adopted working for the world as our dharma, because work leads not just to success but to liberation" (111). Gora's idea of Hindu religion blinds him to the miserable condition of the villagers at one time. He decides to remain away from "getting sucked into a whirlpool" (452) because "he was a Brahman of Bharatvarsha; his duty was to worship the gods on behalf of Bharat; his work was to practice austerities on behalf for Bharat" (444).Tagore wittingly portrays Hinduism as an anti-social and anti-human force in order to glorify his idea of universal nationalism. He indirectly suggests that the Hindu nation cannot be the one and all nation of Bharatvarsha, which is known for its diverse cultures and creeds. The Hindu ideology of 'purity' views everything that is non-Brahamnical (the others) as impure. It places Brahmans at the center and marginalizes the others. Although the Brahmans are to protect the others, yet they cannot "come too close" to them (453). Gora feels pain to see that some faultless people "have to undergo confinement and humiliation by being denied the worlds's privileges granted by Ishwar" (206). However, the same path which claims to lead to Ishwar through Hindu rituals restrict him to do something substantial for the deprived people. It is paradoxical.

Tagore was a religious minded person. His concept of religion was primarily related to spiritualism, universalism, and humanism[14]. He, himself, states, "My religion

[14] About the interconnectivity of the Brahmo Samaj and Hinduism, Rabindranath says, "I was born in a Hindu family, but accepted the Brahmo religion. ... The religion we accepted is universal in nature; however, it is basically the religion of the Hindus. We accepted this universal religion with the heart of Hindus" (Azad, Abul Kalam "The Other Side").

is a poet's religion...Its touch comes to me through the same unseen and trackless channel as does the inspiration of my songs" (Tagore *A Poet's Religion* 25). In his essay "Rajbhakti"(1906), he writes, "O my nation…in front of your seat Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, are waiting for a long time, being attracted by the call of the Almighty" (qtd. in Roy, Dipankar 390). Poresh Babu gives voice to the same idea of religion in the novel: "…what is the Brahmo community or the Hindu community- his (Ishwar's) concern is humanity itself" (Tagore 370). Truth is of the utmost importance for Poresh Babu, who says, "I pray to Ishwar that, whether at a Brahmo assembly or near a Hindu temple, I can always bow unprotestingly to truth- that no interference from outside should prevent me from doing this" (116). Tagore believes that all religions and sects ultimately link man to one God. When Gora objects to the upbringing of a Muslim boy in a Hindu home, the barber replies, "There is very little difference, sir. We take the name of Hari, they call to Allah, that's all" (171). Binoy, Tagore's mouthpiece, also believes that 'Dharma' is above both society and individual (323). For him, 'Dharma' or his sense of being Hindu does not merely mean "obeying a set of meaningless rules about touching and eating" (339). Confining Hinduism to rituals is "disrespect for Hinduism" (339).

In *Nationalism* and "The Indian Society", Tagore has used the terms such as 'Hindusim', 'Hindu civilisation' and 'caste system' in general context of India as if India had been represented by the Hindus only. In reference to social unity in India, he writes:

> Her (India's) caste system is the outcome of this spirit of toleration. For India has all along been trying experiments in evolving a social unity within which all the different peoples could be held together, while fully enjoying the freedom of maintaining their own differences. The tie has been as possible, yet as close as the circumstances permitted. This has produced something like a United States of a social federation, whose common name is Hinduism (*Nationalism* 77).

Kedar Nath Mukherjee says, "It requires to be precise here that the poet by the term 'Hindu' did not mean people professing particular religion but the people of India as such" (251). However, the novelist has been cautious while using the terminology to

reach a secular ending in *Gora*. Besides, the presence of 'Boul'[15] in the opening chapter of the novel prophesises the secular ending of the novel and adds the element of Indianness.

The novelist highlights that man is so much conditioned by his socio-cultural forces that he is likely to be narrow and biased against the others' position. Harimohini thinks that Brahmos "were a sect of Christians" (Tagore 258), and Lolita's idea of Hindu woman is shattered when she sees Anandamoyi (224). At one place, Gora urges Sucharita to see the people of Bharatvarsha in their completeness, instead of viewing them as non-Brahmos (356-7). However, he also misunderstands the Indianness of India with Hinduism. Tagore beautifully portrays religious/sectarian intolerance which is also a matter of space and time, as one's time and space in society and personal attitude determine one's perspective to justify the respective social position. When Gora's position from an orthodox Hindu is changed to a man with Irish lineage, his perspective also changes from the position of a Hindu nationalist to a humanist. Besides, Sucharita is not a born or converted Brahmo, but she is raised in the Brahmo family of his uncle Poresh Babu. Her faith fluctuates between Hinduism and Brahmoism, chiefly due to her debate about polytheism with Gora. Similarly, Anandamoyi, whom many people call a Khrishtan (312), finds the Hindu and the Brahmos almost the same because of her liberal attitude and the special circumstances she has faced in her life: "I can't make out where they are different" (312).

Tagore's idea of Indian nationalism is accommodating; it is above religious and sectarian divisions. On the other hand, Hinduism is presented as a religion of restrictions and self-control, which makes "this Bharat" "only the embodiment of prohibitions' (Tagore 36): "Forbidden, forbidden, there was forbidding all around!" (208). When Gora comes to know about his Irish lineage, he understands that "from north of Bharatvarsha to its south, the doors of every temple" (474) are closed to him now. Hinduism as a ritualistic religion cannot be the real basis of Tagore's nationalism.

In the ending of the novel, Gora comprehends the openhearted instinct of Bharatvarsha, which he earlier misunderstands with that of Hinduism. He becomes true

[15] According to Tagore, 'Bouls' "have no images, temples, scriptures or ceremonials, who declare in their songs of divinity of Man, and express for him intense feeling of love" (*The Religion of Man* 89).

Indian nationalist when he comes to know about his Irish lineage. He does not negate his love and respect for Bharatvarsha; he, in fact, accepts the plurality of India. He qualifies to become 'Bharatiya' (475) when he rises above the narrowness of lineage and caste divisions. In the ending, Gora requests Poresh Babu to teach him "the mantra of that deity who belongs to all- Hindu, Musalman, Khrishtan, Brahmo- the doors of whose temple are never closed to any caste or race- the deity not only of Hindus but of Bharatvarsha" (476). "The novel then is not just a search for self-identity but for secularism that is inclusive and indigenous at the same time" (Choudhury, Nina Roy 65). Tagore's idea of nationalism has its roots in social accommodation, acceptance, and tolerance.

The Idea of Nation: Bharatvarsha

Sylvie Guichard in *The Construction of History and Nationalism in India* proposes that the term 'nation' is not a substantial entity. It is usually used as representing a real community. By this, one "treats a category as a group" (11). The members of a group do interact. On the other hand, the members of the same category have common characteristics and are brought about by some classification, but they lack interaction. It is best exemplified in Anderson's 'Imagined Communities' (11). Along these lines, Tagore develops the idea of nation in *Gora*. Gora psychologically holds all common men of his country together. His understanding of the 'category' of Bharatvarsha is based on his interactions with the 'groups' he forms with Abinash, and with others during his visit to the rural interiors of Bengal. In other words, the category of Indian nation is represented through the groups to Gora. Consequently, when Nanda dies, Gora says that his death has "hurt my whole country" (Tagore 101). He asserts, "I remain one with everyone in Bharatvarsha. They are my own. I have not the least doubt that in all of them the subtle spirit of Bharatvarsha is perpetually at work" (137). Gora claims that the life of each inhabitant of Bharatvarsha is "surrounded and occupied by the entity (Bharatvarsha), that unless we are aware of it we are reduced in size and blinded in perception to things around us" (135).

Gora strongly views Bharat as a Hindu nation and crystalizes the ideology of nationalism through Hinduism with a difference throughout the novel except in the ending. "In Hindu nationalism, a la Savarkar, land is birthplace not only of the people

and their ancestors but of faith; hence Indian Muslims and Christians do not qualify as full-fledged Indians since their faiths were born outside the land"[16] (Sarkar, Tanika "The Intractable Problem" 38). However, Gora loves all Indians including the Muslims and the untouchables, but he cannot tolerate liberal reformers, who are "cultural renegades to him, pale mimics of their colonial masters, trying to destroy something in the name of reform for which they have neither understanding nor sympathy" (42). For Gora, denigrating the Brahmos only shows that a Hindu is a "normal healthy person" (Tagore 8). And it is 'natural'. He claims, "Otherwise nothing will work nor will it be worthwhile to live" (9). Gora denounces the Brahmos, who according to him have broken the bonds of Hindu community and "show off by becoming Brahmos" (9). Interestingly, the phrase "bunch of people" (8) for the Brahmos reveals the almost negligible space of the Brahmos in Gora's idea of Bharatvarsha, which is vast and primarily Hindu. Becoming a Brahmo, according to Gora, is to "end up on the heap where dead cows are dumped" (9). Gora calls the Brahmos "a predatory species" (12).

Gora has mistaken India's accommodating spirit for Hinduism; he interlinks the idea of Indian nation with Hinduism. To safeguard Indian nation, he follows Hindu rituals. He decides to bathe at Tribeni because he wants "to become one with this crowd of common people, thereby submitting himself to one of the great movements in the land and longing to feel within his own heart the upsurge that moved the heart of the country" (33-34). He has keen desire to be one with the country men: "I belong to you. You belong to me" (34). Gora admits that Hinduism for him is, in fact, a basis for showing respect to his countrymen. He says, "I am not sure if I respect my idol but I do respect the faith of my countrymen. What the entire country has worshipped for ages remains worthy of my worship too" (373). In Binoy's opinion, Gora has been "born to embody the self-knowing of Bharatvarsha" (75).

The idea of nation in *Gora* is woven around "collective self-consciousness" (Grosby 10). There is a note of acceptance for whatever belongs to Bharatvarsha or 'us'; this sense of belongingness lays foundation for nation in the novel. Gora says, "…I want to share the seat of dishonor which Bharatvarsha occupies at present, forsaken by the rest of the world, humiliated- this is my Bharatvarsha of caste discrimination, of

[16] V D Savarkar, *Hindutva*, Bombay, 1923. (Footnote No. 6 of Sarkar's paper "the Intractable Problem")

blind superstition, of idol worship" (Tagore 324-5). Gora expresses due respect to Bharatvarsha despite its negative attributes: "surrounded by famine and poverty, pain and humiliation" (88); he says, "I don't wish to do anything that will set me even a hair's breadth apart from Bharatvarsha" (324). Gora reposes faith in collective will; he refuses to take any legal help and shares "the fate of the helpless in the kingdom" (185). He seems to have found "a profound and grand unity in Bharat's various manifestations and varied efforts" (137). Gora asserts his national identity before Panu Babu and says, "I am on the side of those whom you call illiterate- my customs are those which you regard as superstition" (61).

Gora believes that "Bharat possesses a special nature, a special power, a special truth- and only by the fullest manifestation of these will Bharat be preserved and achieve its fulfilment" (134). Gora tries to convince Sucharita that she truly belongs to Bharatvarsha; he encourages her to feel the Indianness of India by breaking down the cocoon of her sect. He asks Sucharita, "Regain your Bharatvarshiya self and force and thereby achieve liberation" (136). He asks her to broaden her view of Bharatvarsha, which is beyond the narrow walls of her sect and which "is connected with the basis of countless lives" around her (362). Gora says that it is important to understand our country because our Shastras also advise: 'Know thyself- otherwise we cannot attain mukti'. He cannot tolerate a person snapping off his links with his country. At present, "our main task is to become one with the whole country" (67).

A nation asserts its identity and individuality by safeguarding its interests and ideology from antithetical forces. Gora tells Haran Babu, a follower of the Brahmo Samaj, "We won't tolerate being reformed-whether by you people or the missionaries…Before wanting to reform us, be our kinsman first- otherwise even good counsel from you will harm us" (62). Gora upholds the idea of Hindu nation by clinging to "the belief of my community" (51) as he thinks that not following the community would be "chopping off the branch we are sitting" (51). Gora makes it clear that before the grand idea of Bharatvarsha- "vast consciousness known as the Hindu people (354)", the Brahmos appear "bunch of people" (8). He asserts, "Hindus are not a group or party. Hindus are a great people" (354). He adds that the Brahmo community "didn't create the twenty crores of people who live in Bharatvarsha" (356).

Gora's idea of Hindu nation is idealistic, imaginary, sentimental, and fanatic to some extent. He admits that he hasn't yet realized the truth of "the field I have chosen" (87); he knows "about love for one's country only from reading books" (87). He glorifies the past and wishes to revive the orthodox Hindu values in the modern age. His romantic idea of the past makes him an escapist and he is seen in conflict with the real in the present. His approach is not logical and he admits his lack of understanding about the "scale" of the society (386). Abinash's pomp and show of the Hindu religion pains Gora, and he asks himself, "Alas, where is my country? Is it a reality only to me?" (326).

Poresh Babu rejects Gora's idea of nation, as he finds it difficult to console oneself "by thinking of some imaginary 'real' thing" amid "inordinate hatred between man and man in our country" in the name of casteism (155). He says, "Society has many countless rules…Truth has to be freshly discovered by men in every age through conflict and challenge" (408). His liberal and progressive attitude outshines Gora's traditional conservatism. Gora professes his ignorance when he visits rural areas of Bengal; he realizes, "How isolated, narrow-minded, weak- how completely unaware of its own strength, ignorant of and indifferent to its welfare was this vast and isolated rural Bharatvarsha!" (170). *Gora*, Tanika Sarkar says, fails to find a convincing locus for Indian patriotism. "Patriotism straddles an ambiguous and unstable ground ("the Intractable Problem" 45). Gora portrays the ideal idea of India "something different from and opposed to its actual appearance" (43). "…What is past, what is memory and ideal, what is hidden and opaque is more real than what is experienced, present and visible. This substitution becomes a real need as actual experience offers no real resource" (44).

In his essay "What is Nation", Tagore writes that there is no substitute word for 'nation' in Bengali. Therefore, he is in favour of retaining the original English word 'nation' in Bengali. If Indian words such as 'Brahma', 'Maya', and 'Nirvana' could be used in English language and literature, there is no harm in retaining 'nation' in Bengali (qtd. in Mukherjee, Kedar Nath 248). Tagore's idea of nation is akin to Renan's view of nation. He is of the opinion that a nation is to be built around the glories of past and the willingness of present, to the extent that "the people can sacrifice and suffer, they will

be united" with the bond of love. Thus, the concept of nation is a spiritual element. However, unity is not achieved in the same mould in all the countries. In Europe, the basis of this unity is political, whereas it is social in the case of Hindu civilization (250). "The Scythians, the Jats, the Rajputs, Nepalese, Assamese, Rajbanshis, Dravidians, Tamils, Nairs all in spite of their separate identity of race, religion, language, customs and traditions are living together with cohesion" (251). "It is difficult to build nation in India in the pattern of the west for he (Tagore) considered unity as internal and spiritual instead of political" (252).

Bharatvarsha is personified as Mother who, according to Gora, is "calling" him. He must "make this journey to go and see her" (Tagore 327). He terribly fails to see the embracing nature of Bharatvarsha though the idea is clear in his transcendental vision, but obscure in reality. He says, "Mother has called-and I must go where Annapurna is sitting, where Jagaddhatri is waiting" (327). Bharatvarsha, which is known for diversity, has accommodated different perspectives and views without losing its Indianness; it has welcomed all without discrimination. Rabindranath himself describes the influence of Indian diversity in his own Bengali family, which was, according to him, the product of "'a confluence of three cultures, Hindu, Mohammedan, and British'[17]. Rabindranath's grandfather, Dwarkanath, was well known for his command of Arabic and Persian influences, and Rabindranath grew up in a family atmosphere in which a deep knowledge of Sanskrit and ancient Hindu texts was combined with an understanding of Islamic traditions as well as Persian literature" (Sen, Amartya "Tagore and His India"). It is only in the ending of the novel, the protagonist realises that it is not Hinduism but Bharatvarsha that has welcomed the people of various opinions and views; this is the real basis of 'the spiritual principle'. The scope of Gora's idea of nation broadens and attains new 'shape'. Guichard rightly says, 'nation' is 'regarded as a process, an idea that is being continually shaped by discourse…The nation is what is said about it (saying being understood in a very wide sense in this case) (Guichard 11).

[17] Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man* (London: Unwin, 1931, 2nd edition, 1961), p. 105. (Foot Note No. 1 of Amartya Sen's "Tagore and His India")

The Position of Women

According to Tagore, the West has lost its consciousness under the spell of nation, which is a political and economic union of a people organized for the mechanical purposes of greed and self-interest (Tagore *Nationalism* 38). The living bonds are being replaced with merely mechanical organization. The natural thread that holds man and woman together in harmony is shattered, and a sort of competitiveness has taken birth. "The very psychology of man and woman about their mutual relation is changing and becoming the psychology of the primitive fighting elements rather than of humanity seeking its completeness through the union based upon mutual self-surrender". Nationalism has attacked the root of social relation, as it has turned man towards professionalism, wealth, and power, leaving behind woman alone "to die or to fight her own battle unaided". Nation disturbs "the harmony of the higher social life" (39).

Tagore understands that woman is marginalized in the patriarchal set up of India; she is referred to as a goddess in the religious discourse, but she is exploited in reality. Besides, the idea of nation and nationalism has also discriminated against her; it has marginalized her in the nationalist discourse. Tagore is aware that "[w]e see Bharat only as a country of men. We don't see the women at all" (Tagore 106). In his opinion, by disregarding women "as mere women, we also reduce and disregard our country" (107). Binoy, Tagore's mouthpiece in *Gora*, denounces "poetic untruths" about women when actually they are seen "within the narrow confines of domesticity in weakness and immaturity" (168). It pains Binoy to see that all over Bengal, "regardless of whether she was genteel or low born, woman" has no "umbrella over her head" (167). It is important, he feels, to "perceive the feminine principle of our land manifested in the actual women of our country" and unless we see women "fully developed in intellect, power and generous responsibility we shall never visualize our country as brightly as we should".

In the novel, woman is viewed from two perspectives. According to Shastras, Gora says, women are 'pujarha grihadeeptayah' (10)- that is, they are worthy of worship because they light up the house. He adds, "The proper place to worship women is where they are installed as Mother- the altar of the pure-bodied right-minded mistress

of a household" (11). He disapproves the western custom of honouring women for lighting up the "hearts of men" (10). He also claims that "effusion about women in English books has its basis in nothing else but sexual desire" (11). Thus, there is a clash between western and Indian cultures pertaining to the idea of an ideal woman. Binoy, the mouthpiece of Tagore, befittingly says, "These are merely two different reactions of two different kinds of people. If you condemn one, you cannot excuse the other". He points out, "If all that poetic fantasy produced by the British is false, how do you judge your own excessive stress on shunning woman and gold as evils" (11). Tagore says that woman, in Indian tradition, deserves a high pedestal. He visualizes woman as Shakti, "the living symbol of divine energy whose inner shrine is in the subconscious depth of human nature and outer manifestations in sweetness of service, simplicity of self-dedication and silent heroism of daily sacrifices" (Tagore "Women's Place in the World" 676).

In the social web of relationships, Tagore reveals, women are misrepresented through social constructions. Gora's idea of modern woman is seized by "a low opinion of her dress without having really looked at it" (132). A Hindu woman is considered as irrational and secondary being by people such as Krishandayal, who believes that "elaborate discussion" of religious matter "would be beyond the understanding of women" (32). Tagore has also portrayed the objectification of women in the novel; he writes, "Among lower castes, girls could be obtained for marriage only by offering a fairly large bride price" (434). Woman is presented as a burden in the Bengali Hindu society of those days. Mohim is worried about "the high price of bridegrooms in the marriage market" (79) and his own daughter is a trouble to him. Madhav also claims to be into all bad things to save "enough money to be able to afford good marriages" for his daughters (177). Harimohini suffers in her in-law's house for giving birth to a girl.

Sucharita finds that men, in general, are responsible for the miserable condition of women in Bharatvarsha, as Men "don't let them learn anything more". She says that women are 'moulded' and 'confined' to home by men and consequently they remain "undeveloped". In this case, women "are bound to hinder and spoil the work sought to be done by men, pull that down and thereby take their revenge" (127).

In *Gora*, Tagore has portrayed some very strong women characters who appear ahead of their times, a step ahead 'the social liberation of the 1850s'[18]. In the Brahmo family, Poresh Babu never wants to keep his daughters "chained" (301). He respects their individual opinions and faces criticism at social front for his liberal attitude. Even his own wife does not support him. The condition of woman is better but not satisfactory in the Brahmo Samaj. Women are allowed to interact with men, but the signs of lack of space for them are evident. For example, "no one had thought it necessary to consider Sucharita's opinion in the matter" of her prospective marriage with Haran Babu (95). Dejected by the attitude of the Brahmo Samaj, Lolita asks, "Why should the Brahmo samaj intervene, raise hurdles for me, in an area where I see nothing unjust or against dharma?" (299). Lolita asserts her individuality and decides not to perform in the magistrate's house and leaves for Kolkata unescorted. She even supports Gora's refusal to take any legal help as a protest against the British magistrate (187). She faces social criticism and strongly affirms, "I shall never accept defeat" (275). Perhaps, it is the fault of characterization that these two girls appear old and mature for their age, though Tagore does inform the reader that Sucharita's mind "matured more than her age and situation warranted" in the noble company of Poresh Babu (91).

Anandamoy is not a meek or docile lady; she is humane and courageous. During the Sepoy revolt, when a memsahib came seeking shelter in his house, Karishanadayal was afraid to keep her, but Anandamoy told a lie to him and let her stay in the cowshed (31). She is a personification of humanism. She is also viewed as the symbolic representation of Mother India. Gora, full of emotions, finds Bharatvarsha within her, his foster mother. He says:

> Ma, you are my only mother. The mother for whom I have looked everywhere all this time she was sitting in my house. You have no caste,

[18] "It may be interesting to know what social liberation meant in the 1850s. In an autobiography written in the 1850s we read about a rich Parsi young man who would send his servant to wake up his wife, sit with her in the phaeton (tonga) with a driver driving them 10 Km outside Bombay, not talking at all, getting down, the man walking ten steps ahead, the woman walking ten steps behind; not conversing, not holding hands, not even walking side by side, but one ahead of the other, then after some time coming back; again sitting in the phaeton and going back home. This was considered social liberation. And this young man felt that he had acquired a comrade and not just a wife, because they had walked together, though ten steps apart from each other" (Chandra, Bipan *Essays on Indian Nationalism* 42).

> you do not discriminate against people, you do not hate- you are the image of benediction. You are my Bharatvarsha…. (477)

Tagore glorifies Anandamoy's belief that people are above religion or caste.

Gora finally realises that nation is incomplete without the significant place occupied by women. He says, "I keep thinking now that the true self of Bharatvarsha will not be revealed only to the eyes of men. The manifestation will be complete on the day it is revealed to the eyes of our women. …Service to Bharatvarsha will never be sanctified if you stay away from it" (376). He feels that his duty towards Bharatvarsha is incomplete without women. He sums up, "the farther we keep women, the more dismissive we are of their value, and our manhood grows weaker in the same proportion" (330). Gora paints the image of woman in the following words once he has realized her potential and contribution to life:

> This image would invest every home in the country with grace, affection and purity. She was the goddess who nourished the children of Bharatvarsha, tended the sick, consoled the miserable-she whose love redeemed the meanest of men, she who never abandoned even the most wretched among us to our misfortune- who, in spite of being an object of adoration herself, worshipped the least worthy of us. The grace-endowed and dexterous hands of this Lakshmi were forever dedicated to serving us and we received her infinitely tolerant and forgiving bounty as Ishwar's blessing. (Tagore 330)

Tagore's message is clear: "Woman should use her power to break through the surface and go to the centre of things, where in the mystery of life dwells an eternal source of interest" (Tagore "Woman" 414).