

# Tagore's Ideas of Patriotism with Reference to Gora

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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" (1917) Nationalism is an overzealous, combative form of patriotism. Generally speaking, patriotism has good connotations. It is used to describe a variety of admirable feelings, attitudes, and deeds that involve loving one's country and working for the welfare of all its citizens. Nationalism typically carries a bad reputation. It is applied to political philosophies and movements that display a more intense and exclusive love of one's country—to the detriment of visitors, immigrants, and even citizens who aren't thought to belong in some way, frequently on the basis of race and religion. This paper, in trying to understand Rabindranath Tagore's reservations against nationalism and his concept of patriotism, tries to perceive the nature of nationalism in reference to his novel Gora. Finally looks at the criticism led against Tagore's ideas of nationalism and how he answered them.

According to Tagore, Nationalism was famed by imperial commercialism, peppered by the doctrine of west born out of the spirit of conflict that resulted in the First World War. In western intellectuals or society, the development of state played a crucial role. In contrast in India it was the society that drove the state, monarchs serving the society. But in contemporary times the state overshadows its master. Tagore's answer was regarding this state capitalisation on the sentiments of 'greed' and 'fear'. On one hand there was industrial consumerism, collision between labour and capital, all progress and development are defined in capitalistic terms of expansion and consumerist mindset. On the other hand, they turn to an imperialist state focused on exploitation of other races and society. Nation foregrounds spirit of exclusion and becomes the vehicle to rationalise and institutionalise it. Benedict Anderson defined Nation as "an imagined community". Most social scientists maintain that the notion of Nation is "notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse". However, in spite of such complexity in defining the institution of nation in political studies, Tagore was explicitly clear about his idea of Nation and Nationalism. In contrast in India the state was subservient to society, monarchs serving society. Here *a`la* Marx, Tagore calls nationalism the greatest aesthetic to be invented. Tagore argues in the name of nation people carry out the worst kind of self-seeking drives without being aware of moral perversion. Nation attends a demigod status. The goddess India becomes a central character in many ideas and sentiments and even gains a special status in Tagore's Gora. But once again at heart of it, the idea of nation refers to an elite club. Early nations were very much against inclusion of new nations.

Tagore 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.

Modernity and Nationalism are key components in the ideological matrix based on which Tagore explores the idea of Nation and national identity. Gora was written after Tagore became disillusioned with the violent and exclusivist nature of Swadeshi nationalism. Though he may be considered as one of the major builders of national identity, he was also a dissenter. He questioned nationalism that thrived on violence. After playing an inspirational role during the protests against the partition of Bengal, Tagore withdrew, unhappy with the strong nationalist form of independent movement. He was particularly critical of the burning down of the foreign clothes. The reason to use or not to use foreign cloth or spin the Charkha, for yarn, should, according to Tagore, be left to the economic sciences. He denounces the mass fervour, blind obedience and intolerance of dissent as he considered them dangerous for the future of India.

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". Tagore, in fact, does not reject nationalism, but "calls for a humanitarian intervention into present self-seeking and belligerent nationalism" (Quayum). 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).

Gora, which is basically a novel of discussion and not of action, exemplifies Tagore's human centric approach. Universalism in Nationalism for Tagore 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).

Tagore worked towards a vision of patriotism without excessive nationalism. This is most evidently showcased in his work Gora that can be used both as justification and understanding of Tagore's position. To understand Gora we will look at Tanika Sarkar's essay " " and understand the background of Gora. In the 19th century when Indian nationalistic thought was first rising its head we saw a few inconsistencies for example the vision and map of India was only formed during British india. There arose questions of its authenticity which were rebutted by stating a past located in hindu India: Hindu philosophy, scriptures and sanskrit texts. This gave rise to debate- reformers those who appreciated hindu past but not accepting as it was. Others who supported hindu past thought reform unnecessarily undermined it and as caste practices continued from time immemorial so something must be right about this practice. Gora the protagonist was a member of the later group and greatly resented the reformers. If one looks at his magnum opus Gora, it is found this story escapulated in the form of human study of both patriotism as a philosophy and transformation of them to reveal the true nature of nationalism. It was Tagore's involvement in the Swadeshi movement that led to his disillusionment. When the duel between of hindu nationalism on one hand and liberal thinkers on other hand- champion of hindu nationalism accused the liberals of undermining the core of hindu nationalism thereby reducing its force. Rabindranath sought reconciliation with great appreciation for hindu past and the questioning mindset of the reformers in his Gora.

Gora (1909) was serialised in the literary journal Prabasi from 1907 to 1909. It can be analysed and understood on a variety of levels. A detailed analysis of this text can give us newer perspectives to look at

the narrative of conflict between ‘nationalism’ and ‘nationalist consciousness’ that continues to arrest the imagination of the Bengali intelligentsia.

Gora is a patriotic, educated Brahmin young man with a powerful political vision of his country. He was a strong critic of colonialism and the racial hatred colonial masters displayed for India. He had a burning passionate love for India and this love for people includes all kinds of people, but the reformers. He saw them as cultural renegades out to destroy Hinduism. As a reaction Gora follows all the orthodox behaviour pujas, tilak, dhoti - at least outwardly also supports caste practices of the Hindus. He doesn't accept cooked food by his mother who he has a very close intimate relationship with, because she has a maid who comes from a lower caste and separate religion and she accepts water from her. This exhibits the strong commitment to anticolonial nationalism Gora displays. This is evident in the beginning when Binoy, his closest friend, calls this as a strategy of strengthening the inside of the fort when it is invaded by outsiders.

Various themes in the work, including the role of fate, nationalism, time and space, religion and spirituality, friendship, motherhood, love, caste prejudice, and woman liberation, present a panoramic perspective of Tagore's concept of Bharatvarsha. According to Krishna Kriplani, Gora is an epic of India set in a crucial time of its modernisation judging and serialising the protagonist's idea of Nationalism from exuberant radical Hinduism to humanitarian and universal. There are several characters he is at loggerheads with. Paresh Babu an enlightened Bhramo character and his daughters Sucharita and Lolita and Gora's closest friend Binoy who all question Gora's faith and nationalistic passion. With a sort of a fairly mechanical symmetry, the novel counterposes one good and one bad Brahmo against one good and one bad Hindu: Paresh and Haran represent the two Brahmo faces who show the strength and the problems of the faith in the present. Along with two Hindus on opposite spectrum: Anandamoyee and Krishnadayal.

The novel showcases Tagore's own change in mindset from when he entered the political thought as a believer of the Swadeshi movement and even leaning towards Hindu nationalistic ideas. Gora shows evolution and disillusionment of his mindset from both Hindu nationalistic values and its ability to make India seem monolith and closed. Gora deals with modernity vs tradition, orthodoxy vs liberal, real vs ideal and nationalism vs sectarianism.

In our text, Gora's character is positioned at position 1 as the authority figure who is lost in the sense of his own supremacy (that he was born with a special mission, that he is not equal to others— that he is the protector of Hinduism), and Anandamoyee is positioned at position 2 as the character who is endowed with knowledge of Gora's Christian blood, and knows all his methods to fit into the Hindu structure as futile. Anandamoyee emphatically accepts that Gora is her motivation and solidarity to her psyche in battling against the customs restricting the entire society. But Gora's patriotism is inseparable from Hinduism. He feels at peace knowing he is one of many Hindus and Indians. Thus practises like worshipping at Triveni Ghat makes him at peace. In one of his trips he encounters the cruelty of Indians themselves towards their fellow citizens. Laughing from the deck along with an Englishman Gora laments the state of Indians and doubles down on his path persevering as a Hindu.

In one of his conversations with Sucharita, Gora gloats: “I am a Hindu! A Hindu belongs to no party. The Hindus are a Nation, and such a vast Nation that their nationality cannot be limited within the scope of

any single definition.”Gora’s patriotism, which moves within the parameters of Hindutva, is partial and remains to be incomplete. Patriotism based on the worship of the nation lacks vision and judgement. Completely immersed in blind patriotism, Gora waits for a new realisation and revelation.

At the end Gora’s self-identity as a Brahmin stands questionable 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. 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.

Interestingly, Gora converts to Hinduism only when he feels bad about the humiliation of 'his' land and its people by the British displaying what may be called ‘a colonial anxiety of influence’. 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. 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 in spite of his past action to do the same. But when it comes to a foreigner denigrating the Hindu community, Gora feels goaded to retaliate (Tagore 27). This seems to be a direct reference to Vivekananda as he had a similar experience. It is not hard to point out Gora was somewhat based on Vivekananda and sister Nivedita herself who was the one to hear the plot of Gora first from Tagore. This Irish origin of Gora direct reference to Nivedita in her burning love for nation. A lady from Ireland who accepted India as a motherland who rendered selflessness to its people.

Both Vivekananda and Gora attempted to alleviate lower caste conditions through upper caste social welfare work, wrote powerful patriotic prose, organised middle class Hindu youth to join Hindu missionary bands, and associated patriotism with Hindu pride. In order to instil Hindu pride, Gora must continually suppress his reservations about Hindu social structures. Sumit Sarkar claims that there was a division between Vivekananda's private remarks and correspondences, in which he was highly critical of Hindu standards, and his public speeches and publications, in which he was only concerned with the richness of Hindu culture.

People will "compete with one another to lay down their life" if they can witness the picture of a "genuine" "full" Bharat, Gora thinks (21-22). Hinduism, for him, is “something very large. But he never considers it a delicate thing which may wither at a slight touch” (115).

But Gora tells Panu Babu: 162 ...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.... (61) But still Gora feels during colonial times patriotism must be based on complete love and respect for the Hindu India- everything Hindu India stands for, even the caste system. Personally he hates these but at the level of Ideal of nation he is not prepared to compromise with his ideal of Hindu society.

Gora's idea of Hindu religion blinds him to the miserable condition of the villagers at one time. Tagore indirectly suggests that the Hindu nation cannot be the one and all nation of Bharatvarsha, which is known for its diverse cultures and creeds. He claims to Sucharita when talking of caste even if they do not understand the reason behind it is important to follow it as it is part of the whole system. But his feeling

is challenged when he visits the villages and sees the actual cruelty faced by lower castes and even is forced to take food from a lower caste. Gora admits to himself that Muslims have stronger ties of mutual self-help and solidarity because they are not divided by caste. It is a paradox seen in Gora that his private reflections often are in contrast with his public orthodox self. He calls Nanda (a member of his band of youth from various castes) the future of the movement despite him being of lower caste and is greatly saddened by his death. And laments western medicine not used on him. He is enraged at the treatment of the Muslim fruit seller by British and advises him to stand against it reminding of the rebellion of Mohammad. He admits to himself the truth behind Binoy's statement that he had never thought about the impact of women on the national movement before.

His earnest request to Sucharita to think of the Bharatvarsha and his admiration for her reveals to readers even as the staunchest believer he is in two minds about the actuality of the practises. The brahmanical Hindu patriot Gora represents a part of Rabindranath that the author had only recently discarded. But Rabindranath knew its compelling power. Gora, even as a Hindu hardliner, represents a bright light, he articulates the majesty of a subjugated people rising up to confront injustice and racism. Gora is its self-expression at its strongest point. What makes him especially convincing and compelling, however, is that he himself is torn.

Hindu nationalism – Rabindranath would say, all nationalisms – transacts in the currency of the imagined made real with words: Early in the novel, his friend Binoy asks him: Tell me, Gora, is Bharatbarsha something real to you? Binoy is uncertain about the reality of the icon for whose sake Gora asks him to turn away from a Brahmo girl who attracts him. Wherein lies the intoxicating and compelling power of the country that must be worth the sacrifice? Unless he, too, can experience reality as an actual presence the way Gora can, he cannot part from his new romantic emotions. Gora says: My country is real and clear to me all the time, but you will not find her in Marshman Sahib's History of India, she lives inside my heart... I may lose my way, I may drown and die...but that blessed refuge still exists, my country, always filled with wealth, knowledge, faith. ...There is a true Bharat, we need to search her out, go there, draw out our lifeblood, our souls, our wisdom from that place... We have weakened ourselves with self loathing, once we embrace pride for the entire country, the truth of India will become manifest. His vision of India combines the living Bharat with abstraction- Dhyaner Bharat. But this imagination is given an aura of reality. Whatever is imagined is real. Here his friend Binoy questions the gap the way Gora has portrayed the homeland and the poverty that characterises contemporary India. Gora concedes India is suffering from poverty, diseases, squalor still it has to be viewed as the motherland, goddess. Gora argues she is our goddess and has to be worshipped not with flowers but sacrifices, life, blood. Sarkar points out this portrayal of India as a goddess of political necessity. Many kinds of incompleteness have to be covered up with a human picture of a goddess. But, at another, simultaneous level, it is also a necessary adornment of the goddess because the perception of her misery is also a call for battle. In Gora's description of the goddess, two distinct historical layers fuse. One is the time of the goddess of Anandamath who manifested herself to Hindu patriots. The other is the immediate past of the Swadeshi movement with its Extremist rhetoric of blood and thunder, and the beginnings of revolutionary terrorist action of political assassinations.

Gora values the idea of Bharatvarsha to the reality, even when trying to locate the country he draws on ancient philosophy. But this led to his disappointment when he actually realised the state of the real rural Bharatvarsha. Tagore cautions against the glorification of ideals as seen in patriotic movements rather patriotism of a real, live nation state with its faults acknowledged may lead to a better future.

Gora proves again and again that ideals cannot be more than individuals. Anadamoyee states when she held Gora in her hands she gave up her hindu ideals and Gora's existence proves to her love for all exists. In Binoy and Sucharita we see despite their reluctance they learn to agree with Gora's ideals because of the love for the man himself. But ultimately both decided love for individuals was far greater and distanced themselves from Gora's vision. Ultimately Gora's identity itself proved that even greater than ideals of his Hindu Bharatvarsha was his own love for India despite not being a hindu or Bhrahmin. In one instant he is bereft of his past as a hindu whatever Gora was standing for gets strategically rebutted and he realises his love for Bharatvarsha had remained true to him, he now chooses to love his country. Here Gora's vision evolves from nationalism to a particular piece of land, heritage into a wider vision of his mother Anandamoyee who does not make any difference between individuals. Gora ultimately asks his mother to ask your Latchmiya to give me water. I will also be accepting water from her. Wider characteristics of mother converted to. The goddess vanishes as the mother reappears(Tanika Sarkar), but here lies some inconsistencies.

The accident of birth frees him from the oppressive weight of his caste purity, which had separated him from his own people. He knows all the doors of the temple are closed to him but he has finally found his India. "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). He runs to Paresh Babu and Sucharita and begs their guidance to show him the real deity of all Indians. Here we see Nationalism to humanism, Cosmopolitanism. Ultimately patriotism without nationalism- composed within Hinduism.

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 (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 Anandamoyee whom "Tagore paints ... as Mother India" (Choudhury, Nina Roy 63). 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. In Gora as well as his other political novel, Ghare-baire (1916), Rabindranath seems critical of the deification of women as the spirit of the country, as done by Bankimchandra Chatopadhyay before him- an act which involves a denial of her status as a living human being.

Gora has the ability to be both European and Indian. The naming, in fact, is crucial. The word Gour or Gora means "white" and refers to both the white race and the adored Vaisnav saint of early modern Bengal, the great Chaitanya. Sree Chaitanya's name was associated with breaking down the caste barrier but also

to accommodate all those fallen outside the societal barrier. The meaning also refers to Anandamoyee accepting a white child, the true reading of Hindu civilization.

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. Tagore is against exclusive nationalism that is based on the policy of Nation State and that approves 'homogenized universalism', popularised 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).

Noticeably, almost all the characters except a few, who are the followers of the Brahma Samaj, feel antagonistic towards the British rulers. But finally *Gora's* patriotism has a particular past and understands Hinduism in a particular way otherwise nation and nationalism cannot be developed. It stands for a particular land and people against a particular land or people, like India vs Britain. Rabindranath harps the point that love for the motherland doesn't mean denouncing 'other' even in colonial times.

Throughout his life, Tagore remained deeply critical of nationalism, a position that pitted him against Mahatma Gandhi. Tagore argued that when love for one's country gives way to worship, or becomes a "sacred obligation", then disaster is the inevitable outcome. "I am willing to serve my country; but my worship I reserve for Right which is far greater than country. To worship my country as a god is to bring curse upon it," Tagore wrote in his 1916 novel, *The Home and the World*. The words were spoken by Nikhil, one of the two protagonists in the novel, who many thought to be Tagore's alter-ego. Tagore considered that apart from political freedom, the freedom of mind is more important. The Euro-centric notions of freedom have forced us to consider political freedom as an ultimate destination in the journey of the freedom movement in our country. Blind faith in Europe will instead increase our greed for possession. Hence, we should give up this narrowness and be more comprehensive in our inward and outward expressions that extend freedom of mind. Ultimately, this freedom of mind finds harmony with the human soul and at large human life. He also believed that there is only one history, i.e. history of man and other histories are mere chapters in the larger one.

Though Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi shared a philosophical affinity and mutual respect, their disagreement on nationalism would culminate in debates that continue to be relevant. Tagore had warned Gandhi that there remained a thin line that divided nationalism and xenophobia.

First regarding the point political independence is important but what is even more important is social independence. Like Rammohan he believed we should pick and choose matters that help social revolution. His contemporaries argue first comes political independence absorbing the western positives can wait. If we focus too much on this it would seem slavish imitation. Secondly from nationalists his criticism of nationalism seems mistaken. They argue there lies a difference between selfish commercial western nationalism and self deterministic oppressed nationalism. If Europe gave birth to imperialistic monsters there is a need to fight it. But even in that point of view there needs to be solidarity and unity between the aspirants. As in times of colonialism imperial rule itself acts as a cementing bond between exploited people. Tagore insisted on going beyond that as bonds of negative character will not survive when the

common external enemy disappears and they will turn on one another. Tagore talked about positive disintegration of inner caste, community, gender, regional based differences. Without social liberalisation political liberalisation remains hollow. Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Christians will not die fighting each other in the case of India- here they will discover 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 defined as the Indian nation (Chakrabarty, Bidyut 94). 146 Tagore advocates harmony and mutual understanding within and outside nations.

In Gora, Tagore has not portrayed anti-nationalist sentiment. Tagore's idea of nationalism has its roots in social accommodation, acceptance, and tolerance. Here ideal patriotism turns to humanism, ideal of universal truth. Kind of love Anandamoyee portrays for all kinds of people can be displayed at the national level: love for humanism. Through Gora he makes a point of patriotism without nationalism and humanism, Manab Dharma. We call him a Cosmopolitan thinker, combining his critique of nationalism with humanism.

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