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**RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S CONCEPT OF NATIONALISM: THE
EXPLORATION OF GORA AND THE HOME AND THE WORLD**

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Abstract:

*Rabindranath Tagore was born on 9th May 1861 in Calcutta, West Bengal in an eminent and influential Bengali Brahmin family. He was a prolific and accomplished poet, novelist and playwright and is perhaps best known for his literary output and superb writing in both Bengali and English. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 for his Gitanjali. Tagore is a well-known philosopher who contributed importantly to the development of Indian philosophy in the early 20th century. Tagore was concerned with the development of Indian national identity. In his writing, he largely focused on nationalism. He considered the specific challenges faced by India in developing a national self-consciousness and it is important that consciousness to be grounded in Indian cultural sensibilities. As mentioned earlier, Tagore was not only a poet but a philosopher who tried to engage with different concepts. During the era of Tagore, nationalism was one of the important concepts which was mostly discussed and debated by many scholars. During that time, India was under the power of the British. Thus, Indian people were also developing the sentiment of nationalism among themselves. Tagore understood the importance of nationalism and observed it very carefully. After his careful analysis of nationalism, he developed a critique of nationalism. However, it does not mean that he did not have affection towards India. However, his emotions were not limited to Indian Territory and its population. He had a broader vision of world unity and cooperation. This is particularly related to the modern development of the nation and nationalism for creating a national identity promoting national unity and legitimizing certain institutions or cultural practices. For example, Benedict Anderson, in his well-known writing, *Imagined Communities* (1983) defined nationalism as "a bond between people that comes to exist when the members of a nation recognize themselves and their compatriots to be part of a nation." In one of his lectures delivered in the USA, which was later anthologised under the title *Nationalism* (1917), Rabindranath Tagore asserts: A nation, in the sense of the political and economic union of a people, is that aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for a mechanical purpose. Society as such has no ulterior purpose. It is an end in itself. It is a spontaneous self-expression of man as a social being. The present paper intends to analyse the value of Tagore's ideas in the context of the nationalism and its validity in the context of the contemporary socio-cultural and political movements. It also gives an insight of his philosophical conception on the discourse of nationalism.*

Keywords: *Influential, Philosopher, Nationalism, Spontaneous, Contemporary, Identity, Population, Political, Economic, Movement, etc.*

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Introduction:

Tagore was born in a period during which the nationalist movement in India against the British rule was developing. This is particularly related to the modern development of the nation and nationalism, creating a national identity promoting national unity and legitimizing certain institutions or cultural practices. However, these are the ideas on nationalism mostly dominated by Euro centrism. The conditions of non-European world were different. For example, nationalism in India grew in the wake of India's national movement for independence against the British Rule. This nationalism was naturally an emancipator as it would be the rhetoric upon which the Republic of India would be founded. In our own history, there have been those who have provided us with alternative narratives. These alternative narratives on nationalism provide us broader understanding of and contribute significantly to the discourse of nationalism. It provides alternative to dominant understanding of nationalism which is mostly dominated by Euro centrism. One of such alternative narratives can be found in the writings of Tagore, whose conceptualization and understanding of nationalism is important to study for our understanding. Tagore had attempted to define his understanding of a nation and nationalism in his book *Nationalism* (1917). He also dealt with the idea of nationalism in several of his novels, short stories, plays, letters, lectures, essays and articles. Most of the scholars agreed that Tagore was firmly opposed to nationalism as defined in the Western sense and favoured a cosmopolitan worldview instead. He was one of those who sought an alternative to narrow aggressive nationalism.

Nationalism in *Gora*:

Gora is the longest and the most broadly acclaimed novel of Tagore. It deals with the concepts of Patriotism and Nationalism. It embodies the writer's vision of new India climbing above the thought of the throws, group race. It is truly a solid, political and enthusiastic novel voicing the desire of the resurgent India. The focal topic of the novel has a political undercurrent. The novel reflects the politic energy of Indian-Bengali youth. It anticipates all the significant political inquiries, the clashes of the perfect between the east and the west. In Tagore's most politically-educated novel *Gora*, the hero is an uncompromising, strident patriot and a Hindu fundamentalist. The affection of his religion and the adoration of the strictly custom bound methods for his nation turn into the inspiring driving forces of his life. He energetically gains India's autonomy from the British. Freedom from outside shackles might be, for him, the first venture to re-creating a patriot Hindu state.

Tagore in *Gora* portrayed *Gora* as a central character, an Irish child orphaned when his soldier father was killed in battle and his mother died in childbirth adopted by a childless Hindu woman, Anandmoyi raised as a son in an orthodox Brahmin family. He was a staunch follower of Hinduism. He is an epitome of discipline, dedication and devotion that fulfilled all the duties of a Brahmin. In dress, he became "an incarnate image of revolt against modernity" (Tagore, *GORA*, 130), with a "Tiki", coarse dhoti and a caste mark of the Garge's clay. He was more concern about ritual, bathing regularly in the Ganges, performing ceremonial worship in the morning and the evening. Through *Gora* Tagore portrayed a picture of Hindu society in those times.

The author has depicted a significant period in India's history when Hindu society was very much striving hard to prevent its own crumbling in the face of challenges from within and without. Tagore's nationalism is seen in *Gora* as he wants to firmly hold customs and beliefs to save Hinduism. He wants Hindus to come back to its roots and traditions. He voiced his concern regarding the division between superstitious and the non-superstitious, between the believers and



the non-believers. According to Gora the customs and the traditions are the heritage of the country so one should preserve them. Then only our country can become united. It is very important to take pride in what country owes. The faults do exist in the society but when the people are united by the bonds of love then they can muster enough strength to combat with the evils. They will be able to neutralize poison. The reformation will come in by itself. Gora considers himself a privileged man to be born in a country which has a rich cultural heritage of its own. Therefore, it becomes the duty of everyone to safeguard its traditions, faiths and its scriptures. Tagore reveals this as: “We must not feel apologetic about the country of our birth - whether it is about its traditions, faith or its scriptures neither to others nor even to ourselves. We must save our country and ourselves from the insult by manfully bearing the burden of the motherland with all our strength and all our pride” (Tagore, *THTW*, 23).

Tagore casts *Gora* as a symbol of rising nationalism of early twentieth century in India. He felt for the plight of the countrymen and wanted the educated Bengalis fought against the British. He revealed this as: “That the people of the country had laid themselves open to all kinds of insult and insolent behaviour, that they had come to the pass of accepting it as inevitable to be treated like animals by their more fortunate compatriots and of regarding such treatment as but natural and proper- the root cause of all this Gora knew to be the deep - seated ignorance which pervaded the country and this thought nearly broke his heart. But what hurt him most was the fact that the educated people did not take on their own shoulders the burden of this eternal shame and insult, but rather could glory in their own comparative immunity” (Tagore, *NITW*, 89)

Tagore in *Gora* brings forth Gora’s transformation from that of orthodox Brahmin and Nationalist attaining human ethics in the end. His heart pours for the humanity. He became aware that Hinduism is just limited to prohibition, prohibition nothing but prohibition has proved more an impediment to progress rather than a help for national regeneration as this is revealed by the following lines: “...to Gora it was a constant agony to be brought face to face with this terrible load of ignorance, apathy and suffering, which had overwhelmed rich and poor, learned and ignorant alike and dogged their advance at every step” (Bhattacharya, 133).

Tagore manifested universality of religion in *Gora*. *Gora* is portrayed as “White” who stands for purity. When the true identity is revealed to him towards the end, Gora realized his true religion. He rose above caste and creed. He turned towards Paresh Babu who embraced all religions.

Tagore in *Gora* treated character of Gora with much sympathy. Tagore asserted the value of humanism as he depicted the ironical situation of a white man who transcends caste, sect and religion despite being a Nationalist. He portrayed him as a blend of Nationalist and his transformation in to Humanist with the altering phase of the country. The author thus appeared to suggest that religion and patriotism were not ingrained in the blood of a man from birth but are contacted by him from his surroundings and environment.

Nationalism in *The Home and the World*:

The novel *The Home and the World* is written by a famous personality Rabindranath Tagore. It was initially written and published in Bengali in 1916 and later translated into English by Surendra Nath Tagore. This social and political novel is based on the different cultures of the society. The novel's central theme is love, the tradition of society and nationalism. The novel is about the Swadeshi movement in Bengal, the partition of Bengal, East Bengal and West Bengal in 1905. The Swadeshi movement was one of the large protests and movements of that time when

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British Colonial Rule controlled India. It played a significant role in the independence of India. The novel talks about the conflict between tradition and modernity and contains a detailed discussion of the love triangle between the characters present in the novel. Tagore discussed the tradition's personal and political aspects and offered a deep study of human emotions and the stress when a tradition experiences a sudden change in its legacy.

The story revolves around three main characters. Nikhil, a progressive zamindar, supports and follows Western ideals and encourages his wife Bimala to embrace her independence and mental growth. Bimala, a young and sheltered woman, finds herself ragged between her loyalty to her husband and her growing fascination with Sandeep. Sandeep, a charming and brave nationalist leader, fights for a radical and militant approach to the freedom movement. This study aims to analyse the representation of Indian Nationalism by focusing on the ideological conflict and how the resolutions of the conflicts represent the idea of nationalism. It is believed that this novel presents a criticism of the Indian tradition and nationalism and Tagore defined his nationalist perspective through this novel. Tagore presented his views through the conflict between the characters that represent different attitudes. In the novel *The Home and the World*, there is a clear representation of the clash between East and West. This novel also presents the issues in India regarding the nation's instability in facing the new era of modernism and independence. In India, there were two distinctive views on nationalism. The first view of nationalism was reflected through the advancement of Indian industry. The constructive nationalist tends to build things to make betterment of the country. On the other hand, there were extreme nationalists who tend to do brutal things such as burning foreign goods as they thought that using foreign goods was a reflection of support towards British colonizers. The novel *The Home and the World* portrayed this issue and reflected it through the conflicts inside the home as a representation of the conflicts of the nationalist movement in India in the early twentieth century.

The national anthem, the nation is considered as a mother that must be protected as she nurtures her children. Tagore made Bimala as the female symbol of the nation. The symbolization of India in the figure of Bimala could be seen in several aspects. The first aspect is of her physical appearance. In the first chapter, she is described as a woman who has dark features. This can be seen as the symbolization of India in the way that it is perceived as dark which signified the dark times in the early twentieth century which happened in India caused by the colonization. Nikhil, on the other hand is on the whole opposite of Sandip. Through the character of Nikhil, Tagore highlights his concept of working for the nation. A positive and more vibrant endeavour for the country's development is presented through the portrayal of the character of Nikhil. Nikhil who belonged to a rich landowning class is an opposite of other exploitative landowners like Harish Kundu. Nikhil too wanted to work for the nation and was enthusiastic for the country's development. His way of nation-building is by working for the country's development. His belief is "Let us dedicate our lives to removing the root of this sorrow in our country" (Tagore, *GORA*, 106).

Tagore, through the portrayal of Nikhil and his master Chandranath Babu, puts before us a critique of Sandip's ideology as well as his ideas about working for the nation's cause. Nikhil helped the poor and downtrodden people of his estate. When Panchu was threatened by Sandip he found solace from Nikhil. In order to help the impoverished, he lent them money. It is this generosity that causes him a great financial damage. They both aim to make the countrymen self-reliant. It is keeping this object in view that Chandranath Babu did not give Panchu money as a gift but as a loan to be repaid when the latter was threatened by Sandip and his gang. Nikhil is



critical of the extensive use of violence by the movement leaders. There's hardly a conversation of Sandip and Nikhil in which there is no clash of opinion between them, and when the latter doesn't condemn Sandip methods and violent activities. He is against the destructive elements in the movement. He was in the view that one need not burn the foreign articles on the protest of boycott. He says "You should not waste even a tenth of your energy in this destructive excitement" (Tagore, 24). Nikhil who was branded a traitor to the nation's cause, himself, has been all this while a true practitioner of Swadeshi. Bimala also acknowledged the fact that when Swadeshi had not become as popular as it was then, Nikhil used to import Indian artifacts.

He used Indian pencils, soaps, oil lamps and other merchandise in spite of the fact that he can easily afford the western articles which were much more convenient than those Indian articles. Still, Nikhil disavowed his support to Sandip's movement, as he asked him to clear off all the foreign articles from his estate. Nikhil was against this coercion, he saw it was against his ideal as it means dictating others who cannot afford to do so. He compared it to tyranny "To tyrannize for the country is to tyrannize over the country" (Tagore, 132). Bimala represented Bengal, who was torn between Nikhil and Sandip's ideologies. While the forms were emblematic of western values, the latter was symbol of his passion and dedication to the Swadeshi movement. Although this novel has political implications, my focus will be on Bimala's agency throughout the novel. Therefore, I will examine the novel to show the shifting role of the women during this period. The new woman was to be an educated and brave wife as an appropriate partner of an English educated nationalist man, able to run an 'efficient' and 'orderly home' like her Western counterpart, be high-minded and spiritual like the women of the 'golden' age, become 'graha lakshmi' like the Divine Lakshmi and fulfill her primary role as a courageous mother producing heroic children for the service of the nation. If the model was absurd and inimitable and indeed full of contradictions no one was bothered. That was the new woman the nation needed and it was the women's duty to live up to it.

Although the women's duty as a householder and the wife was necessary, the Bengali middleclass was becoming strongly influenced by the Victorian England, which allowed the reordering of women into new models. Nikhil and Sandip were portrayed as flat characters, different from Bimala who was portrayed as round character. Sandip and Nikhil represented different ideologies existing in India in the early twentieth century. They had the tendency to be flat characters as they symbolized ideologies which did not change throughout time. The existence of those two characters brought different insights for Bimala and changed her mind, moulding her into a round character. Nikhil and Sandip represented the moderate nationalist ideology and extreme nationalist ideology and those ideologies were portrayed as contradictory. This contradiction showed Tagore's objection on the issue of extreme nationalism. If we relate this case to the ending of the story, we can see that Tagore tried to open the minds of the readers by presenting his ideology through the character of Nikhil. Yet, at the end of the story, he made a twisted plot which seemed to undermine and doubt his own ideas of freedom.

The tragic death of Nikhil signified Tagore's scepticism towards the future of India. He was anxious that India's future will be ideal as dreamt by many people inside the country. Bimala's fate can be seen as the representation of India's fate readers cannot predict Bimala's fate because of the tragic accident that happened to her husband. This event raised many questions about the continuity of her life, which symbolized the future of India. India still did not have certain future. The crossroad of her life made the story more complicated. We can see that Bimala's confusion upon the choice is India's hesitation in facing a new era. There are three distinctive views on



nationalism presented in this novel through the key characters, Nikhil, Bimala and Sandip. Nikhil represents the moderate view on nationalism. Here presents the ideology of Rabindranath Tagore. He carries the most perception of the nation in Tagore's point of view. On the hand, Sandip represents the extreme nationalist view. Between these two distinctive views, Bimala represents the diplomatic view on nationalism.

Conclusion:

Tagore believed that productive social work and education were the only ways for liberating India from political and cultural tyranny from within and outside the nation. This anti-nationalist emotion, envisaged against a backdrop of a larger ideology of love, creation and universal human companionship occupies Tagore's novels *Gora* and *The Home and the World*. He pursued this message in quite a few of his other works. Hence, it depends upon the human civilization to work towards a global society based on the principles of inclusiveness, equal opportunity and sympathy for all human beings as an alternative to indulge in the model of chauvinistic nationalism, as it creates parochialism, binarism and racism trapping people in a logic of self-centredness, exclusivism and immorality. Therefore, one may conclude that the singular strain which runs through Tagore's concept of nationalism over the years is that of universal humanism. It is neither against the freedom of the country nor against progressive modernism that Tagore voices his protest but against a self-ravaging system of politics and organisation that is detrimental not only to India or the East but to the entire humanity at large. He advocated the importance of the national movement but one with a constructive ideal at its core, rather than a spirit of violence which lay dormant in the psychology of the West and has finally roused itself and desecrated the spirit of Man. Hence, the poet's final prophecy that a new dawn will emerge from the East where the sun rises. A day will come when unvanquished Man will retrace his path of conquest, despite all barriers, to win back his lost human heritage.

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