



STUDY ON GORA BY RABINDRANATH TAGORE

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Abstract: Rabindranath Tagore's novel *Gora* reflects its author's evolving cultural, political, and ideological views in the first decade of the twentieth century. This period was significant not only for Tagore's engagement in and disenchantment with the Swadeshi movement, but also in terms of his critical assessment of the viability of a Hindu cultural-national identity for India. Reading the novel in the light of some of his relevant writings in and around the 1900s, this essay puts Tagore's exploration of Hindu identity into perspective in order to distinguish it from the exclusionary Hindutva ideologies later promoted and popularized in Indian politics. Using a dialogic method in the novel, Tagore pits a limited, divisive, and communalist Hindu ideology against an open, liberal, and alternative Hindu selfhood for India which is compatible with the universal-humanist perspective propounded at the end. Despite endorsing the latter perspective, Tagore nevertheless reveals his concerns and uncertainties about the position of minority communities and outsiders within that holistic paradigm of Indian identity.

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Introduction:

Rabindranath Tagore's much acclaimed novel *Gora* was serialised in Bengali from 1907 to 1909. Later, the novel was published as a book in 1910. The novel got translated several times in English. The first English translation was by W. W. Pearson in 1924. Following that, there were other translations of *Gora*, like in 1964 an abridged translation of the novel by E. F. Dodd. Then in 1997, Sujit Mukherjee translated *Gora*. Another translation by Mohit K. Roy and Rama Kundu appeared in 2008. The latest one is the 2009 translation of the novel by Radha Chakravarthy. *Gora* (1910) is Tagore's fifth and the longest novel. It is a landmark literary work in the history of Bengali fiction. The novel questions the dogmas and presuppositions inherent in nationalist thoughts like few books have dared to do so. It has epic dimension and the broad canvas of the social, cultural, religious and practical life of the 19th century urban middle class Bengal. It unfolds the vast, dynamic backdrop of Bengal under British rule, a divided society struggling to envisage an emerging nation. *Gora* is about an eponymous protagonist born of Irish parents, with strong Hindu views and deals with his surroundings of the 19th century Bengal. *Gora* is an orthodox Hindu who defines himself against the British colonial culture and finds himself approaching his nationalist identity through organised religion. He can be described as a man of revivalist Hindu

ideology. The social setting of *Gora* is late 19th century Bengal which was in turmoil. It is a political novel and a criticism of the Hindu revivalist movement of the late 19th century that the novelists like Bankimchandra Chatterjee propagated. Through the characters the novelist tries to delve deep into the heart of colonial man, society and politics of that time. He shows the frustrated colonised youth and at the same time the glorious Bengali Renaissance. *Gora*'s aggressive, loud and flamboyant brand of Hindu orthodoxy can be seen as an outcome of colonial anxiety.

Translation of *Gora*

The first translation of *Gora* was done in 1924 and subsequently reissued more than twenty times over nine decades. It was published by Macmillan & Co of London. Till 1976 they have continued it. From 1980 onwards it was reissued by Macmillan India Ltd. in the Macmillan Pocket Tagore Edition. In this edition it has been reprinted in 1983 and 1995. From 2002 onwards Rupa & Co, New Delhi has been publishing the novel and mentions that W.W. Pearson had done it in 1924. This English translation of *Gora* has many mistakes and differs from the Bengali source text. Words, phrases, sentences and even some paragraphs have been omitted. It is a 'westernised' translation of an orient text. By 'westernised' translation I mean it is for the Western readers, for

their understanding of an orient text and understanding the Eastern culture as they like to see the orient. Thus, it loses the local flavor of the theme and Indianness in it and varies from the source Bengali work and expressions which create a new and different meaning out of it. Then, we can say that this is somewhat mistranslation' of the source text and does not follow the source properly which is one of the main flaws of this translation. how less serious regarding the task of translation. Even the publishing company did not bother to enhance the quality of this translation in the long gap after its first publication.

The Second Translation was done by E. F. Dodd in 1964. This is an 'abridged and simplified' version of the novel. This is a simple translation and it does not cover the whole of the novel. It is in a story form for school children. The translation has taken almost all its wordings and phraseology from the first translation and just made it a smaller one. So, it is completely based on the first translation. According to Radha Chakravarty, —It was an incomplete version, stilted in style, and full of errors and inconsistencies (Chakravarty: 2009, xxi). There are different logic and conflicts in operation in the selection and exclusion of the portion of the novel. This translation is more involved in cultural politics than the first one. It has included portions which reflect orthodoxy, superstition, fanaticism etc. presenting Bengal in negative. It has excluded portions where British have been shown in bad light by the source text author. Even the —Preface is contradictory in itself. The translator introduces the text as, Gora is one of his (Tagore's) most famous novels, and depicts the lives and problems of orthodox and unorthodox Hindu families during the late nineteenth century (Gora: 1964, 5). Most probably, intentionally it has not included incidents like Gora's conversation with the Englishman in the steamer, or police torturing the villagers, the indigo farmers being oppressed by the British and so on. It misses natural and descriptions of the novel and left out parts where society and culture are shown pleasantly. Interestingly this translation has also used some sketches probably for the better understanding of the pupils. There are pictures for every chapter. But the pictures are not in order of facts of the plot but randomly given. The interpretations of these pictures can be different too. Altogether it's a complicated matter.

The Third Translation of Gora was done by Sujit Mukherjee, a wellknown critic, theorist, translator and Tagore scholar, published by Sahitya Akademy, New Delhi in 1997. The front leaf of the book states 'Translated from Bangla with notes'. This can be one example of the dedication of the translator towards the text. This translation claims that it has the fuller text based on the 1941 Rabindra Rachanabali

which is the complete text of the novel. Thus the translation of the novel incorporates the earlier missing things in this version. It is a kind of change in the methodology and theory of translation in the history of Gora's translations. There are many positive aspects in this translation. It has enriched target text by concentrating even on the smaller but important matters like weather details the description of the city of Kolkata, scenes and so on. The narrative and the poetic aspects of language and Tagore's style come out quite clearly. It is a professional translation that provides detailed information. There is long introduction by Meenakshi Mukherjee which summarises the thematic framework of the novel. It shows how implications of the words are significant in this novel. The translator has retained few Bengali words and expressions in the English translation as he feels that these words are not culturally transferable in the target language. The glossary also gives detailed explanation with reasonable argument for retention of things. So, for better understanding and to give the feel of the source culture, the translator has kept the Bengali terms which have been explained and glossed accordingly. It seems that the translator is more sensitive towards the source text than other previous translators.

The Fourth Translation of the novel came in 2008. It has been jointly done by Mohit K. Roy and Rama Kundu, professors of English at the University of Burdwan, West Bengal. This translation was published by Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi. It has felicity of expression, faithfulness to the source text and the modern approach adopted by the translators is praiseworthy. It is a contemporary translation of the classic novel. The translation is lively, dramatic and interesting which was missing in the 97 earlier translations of the novel. It can also be noted that the translation is the simplified version of Sujit Mukherjee's 1997 translation. It has changed, interpreted and made easy those aspects which were not so clear in the previous translations especially in the first one. The translators have tried to keep a fine balance between fidelity and freedom. It is humble to both the source text and the use of the English language (Gora: 2008, vi). This translation also offers a small 'glossary' of Sanskrit or Bengali words for better understanding of the readers, but certainly it is insufficient for a voluminous text like Gora. It has a —Critical Introduction but talks very less on the translation of the novel which was very much present in the third translation. The use of diction and syntax is simple and easier. Even these were missing in Sujit Mukherjee's translation which is generally considered to be standard and academic translation of the novel. It also has retained native words, slang and jargon that highlights Indianness and nativity and presents the

local things in a better manner. Thus this translation is quite praiseworthy from many aspects.

The Fifth Translation of Gora has been done by Radha Chakravarty in 2009, published from New Delhi by Penguin India. This translation claims that this is new, lucid and vibrant translation and brings the complete and unabridged text of the classic to a new generation of readers. Thus it indicates its readers as new generation and for those who don't know the source Bengali text. Radha Chakravarty says about her translation, The present translation attempts to redress some of the lapses and omissions, seeking to offer a lucid, readable version of this massive, complex novel to twenty-first century readers who do not read Bengali (xxi). The translator has given an eloquent introduction to the novel, and one wishes it would have been longer, as it would have been helpful to the readers for such a complex and complicated text. But on the other hand it is saddening that she talks very less on the process of translating the novel which was expected. She wrote a few paragraphs on the translation but that too all the old same story. It would have been better if the translator would have discussed little more on the methodology and techniques used in this new version. To some extent, this translation has tried to retain the distinctive cultural features of people and places depicted in the source text. In the era of chutnyfication of English the translator has kept some original Bengali words in the translated text which is quite surprising and positive. Those incorporations have added a new dimension to the target text of a hundred years old novel. The translation reflects maturity of the translator and quality of getting into the source text. Keeping the source and target culture in mind the translator has done a faithful translation, quite close to the 'original' text. But on the other hand it uses complex sentence formations. It brings hardly any gap between the Bengali and English texts. As a bilingual and bicultural writer and translator of Bengali and English, she probably knows the things better but there should be the language differences between a source and translated text which is missing in this translation. If one looks at the poem in the opening page itself can get glimpse of the translation. It has transformed the poem with different phraseology and context. The other translations of the poems are quite close though.

CHARACTERIZATION AND HUMANISM IN TAGORE'S GORA

Lolita stands as the active, lively, rationalistic and independent character of Tagore's creation. An individualist, a lover of freedom and an upholder of truth is presented as much closer to the basic qualities of humanity. Though protest is her medium of expression, Life, to her, is a practical reality.

Constraints like womanhood, tradition and religion cannot bind her splint of individualism and free thinking. Ananda Moyi, the truly blissful one becomes the centre of humanity. She tries her best in every way to make Gora's life in that family, where he was merely on sufferance, as comfortable as possible. She felt that the whole burden of love rested on her alone. It had always been her habit to adjust all her anxieties silently within herself. But for Anandamoyi, love gave the strength to progress ahead. Binoy remains astonished when he realizes that Anandamoyi was far off from his usual expectations. Binoy gets shocked to hear the advanced opinion of marriage from Anandamoyi, who feels that marriage is a matter of harts and that not of opinions. Gora stands as an inexplicable character with his acute judgment. Binoy narrates his unavoidable circumstances with reference to Lolita. The discussion becomes hot and fierce. Gora symbolizes his man, striving towards life's fulfillment and realization. Tagore in portraying Gora as an orthodox religious practitioner did not forget that his character was not a more character but that he lived who was basically a man, rather a humanist. Gora, who seems to be so rigid and abstract in his philosophy, holds an important place for women in the process of civilization. Sucharita's liberal education begins after her acquaintance with Gora and Binoy. She then revolts against the narrow dogmatic outlook and arrogant behavior of Haran who is regarded in the Brahma circles as there would be finance of Sucharita. She refuses to marry him. She is a source of comfort and solace to Anandamoyi when Gora is in the jail. To Lolita, she is a friend, philosopher and guide. She has the highest regard for Paresh Babu her godfather, preceptor, friend and guide. Sucharita's entanglement with Gora has a stamp of divinity and special purpose for which destiny leads her in a mysterious way. Deep in her heart, she feels that her relationship with Gora is no ordinary relationship of the opposite sexes. In the beginning she finds Gora, orthodox, superstitious and arrogant. But she sympathizes when she hears him speak with great conviction, faith and courage about the motherland and its people. In the course of time she understands him. Gora criticizes the Brahma ideals for which she stands for. But "every successive onslaught against her ideals has made her feel fascinated all the more". (75) She is so free from the narrow sectarian outlook that she encourages the marriage between Lolita and Binoy. Paresh Babu appreciates her. Sucharita unfolds to Gora a new aspect of reality. He derives intellectual pleasure while he discusses or argues with her. He too, likes Sucharita, undergoes a mental conflict, but of a different kind. The conflict is between the normal human urge for love and the loftier ideals of patriotism. But the two are reconciled when he

discovers that Sucharita is “the manifestation of all that was sweet and pure, loving and virtuous in the homes of his motherland.” (272). He, who was a bigot till then, now understands people outside his community, like Sucharita and Paresh Babu. The union of Gora and Sucharita is the union of tradition and modernity. It stands for universal love which knows no barriers of caste, community, race and nation. Lolita, influenced by Gora’s ideal of patriotism and spirit of nationalism could not tolerate the unjustified arrest of Gora by the magistrate, in whose house they are to enact a play. Therefore, she decides not to take part in the play and also asks Binoy not to allow himself to be persuaded by anybody.

Lolita does not believe in the traditional division of duties between men and women. She wants to serve the people by teaching and starts a school, but the Brahmo-Hindu conflicts stand in her way. She wishes to take part in the national movement and involves herself in the upliftment of the country. In matters of marriage too, Anandamoyi’s views are more liberal than others. She tells Binoy not to marry Sashi, the daughter of her step-son, Mohim, since she is a child. On the other hand, she encourages the intercommunal marriage of Binoy and Lolita. Without caring for social customs and despite the opposition from Gora, she takes upon herself the responsibility of arranging the marriage of Binoy and Lolita. Born in an age of tradition and taboos, Anandamoyi is not a docile woman. She is such an independent person and staunch individualist that she does not follow any of her husband’s religious fads. She does not think it inconsistent to lead a life different from that of her husband and at the same time serve him and her child. Anandamoyi shows the same love, affection and concern for Binoy that she does for Gora. She understands like a mother all the subtle workings of Binoy’s mind. She does not hesitate even to oppose Gora in her support for Binoy’s marriage. Binoy too has great regard, love and devotion for Anandamoyi. He wishes to return to God all his learning and knowledge to take refuge in her lap, and become a child once again. He tells Sucharita that he is prepared to die young if only Anandamoyi, who knows his drawbacks and virtues, writes his biography. In short she is “the image of all the mothers in the world” for Binoy. The fiery, dashing and rebellious Lolita, at her first meeting with Anandamoyi is overwhelmed by the latter’s compassion and affection. Her troubled mind finds peace and solace in Anandamoyi’s company. She confesses to Anandamoyi that on seeing her she learns Anandamoyi’s relationship with her son is not an ordinary one, commonly found between a mother and son. Her faith that Gora is a consecrated child born to fulfill something great gives her strength to break away from the traditions and oppose the whole society.

Her great confidence in Gora’s mission in life makes her believe that he is not a coward to allow any man-made laws to stand in the way of what he feels to be right. Rationality in Anandamoyi saves her from becoming a blind mother who knows only to love the child, but never to criticize. Her love is critical and therefore she is not blind to Gora’s drawbacks. She warns him about his religious fanaticism, and never accepts his dogmatic religious view. A comparison of Anandamoyi with Paresh Babu enables us to understand her better. Both have a secular and liberal outlook and sympathetic understanding of the people they come into contact with in life. They have clear thinking, unperturbed minds and are free from fanaticism. Both act as philosopher and guide to their respective wards. Both are humanists.

Conclusion

In post-colonial translation, the source text or the target texts both are important. There are no hierarchies in terms of language or culture. It happens to be like reviewing of text going through in its root. Thus, it goes back to the author. It takes a turn towards the source culture. Thus, culture remains the important aspect of post-colonial translation. It is like the decolonisation of the language, text and the culture or a coming-out from the trauma of the effect of the colonisation in every angle. Where the first two translations are colonial translation and it shows the hierarchy of languages the later three are quite different in this regard. These translations apply post-colonial framework and method of translation. Thus the polysystemic approach of the texts is very much prevalent. With retaining of the bhasa words, the readers feel about the source text. From the glossary and notes they can go into the source culture and think of the core matter of the text. Thus, there are hardly any hierarchy and burden of colonialism of language and one over other. Here all the languages are almost in the same line.

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