

Research Paper

Literature



Patriotism in Tagore's 'Gora' and Vivekananda's Messages – A Comparative Studyt

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ABSTRACT

Now-a-days the trend of comparative study has become a tradition because of much encouragement to the research work and because of much interest or skill in critical study of the text than in any new literary creation. The reasons can be many. And here is one more attempt. The present article also aims at a comparative study under the title, 'Patriotism In Tagore's 'Gora' and Vivekananda's Messages – A Comparative Study', but in a different sense to show how coherent efforts have failed to wake the mankind from the centuries long sound sleep and how even in their absence their eternal words are doing tireless efforts to bring about a change for a perfection life and to protect this beautiful planet called EARTH, when the spirit of nationalism and humanity is on the altar and when our abode is under the constant fear of terrorism.

Keywords :

Whenever there is any literary discourse, the oft talked about term is 'Renaissance'. Renaissance means 'Rebirth' or 'Re-awakening'. In other words Renaissance means,

"...The discovery of the world and the discovery of the man." (A Glossary of Literary Terms: 264)

Renaissance was a movement that began in 14th century from Italy, and spread through Germany, Spain, France, Netherland, and ultimately reached England in 16th century. On the other hand Indian Renaissance came in 19th century. It was the Age when India was shaking off its centuries old isolation, backwardness, superstition, ignorance and orthodoxy and beginning to respond to new influences from the west. It was the age of transition from the old to the new in which men of genius like Tagore, Vivekananda, Narmad, Chiplunkar, Bhartendu etc. could make their mark quite significantly. Reformative zeal and spirit of nationalism were paramount in their works, speeches and messages. Therefore the literature of this particular period depicts the follies of Indian society and urges upon the need to reform the society in order to rebuild the nation.

Tagore portrays the character of Gora in his novel entitled with the same name as an orthodox minded person. He considers Brahminism as the best form of religion. He does not allow Binoy to eat in Anandmoyi's room and raises objection for keeping a Christian cook. He says to his mother, Anandmoyi,

"Scriptural rules must be accepted as final. Mother, I wonder that you, the daughter of such a great Pandit, should have no care for our orthodox customs."(Gora: III, 30)

It seems that Tagore has deliberately depicted this drawback in Gora, the central character. By introducing the character of Gora, Tagore has, in fact attempted to reform Bengal in particular and India in general. The gradual change in Gora's character symbolizes the gradual reformation of 19th century India. In his mind the idea of his motherland is supreme. He believes that there are many powerful nations in the world which have been absolutely destroyed and India alone, by reason of her restraint and the firmness, with which she has kept to her old laws, has been able to survive the adverse forces of centuries. But when he visits villages he observes that the villagers are disunited, diseased, illiterate and quite

poor. They are subject to thefts, dacoity and village feuds. He finds out the drawbacks of his nation. There is no trace of help, love, compassion and self-respect. They are full of classes and caste. The social condition and women's plight are also intolerable. There is no system of marriage of widows. Many of the villagers have remained unmarried. The Hindus are suffering from division and poverty.

Gora feels restless on seeing life in its naked form. It brings a storm within his head and heart. And Nanda's death (XVIII) makes him even all the more restless as on inquiring he comes to know that he died due to tetanus. His father had wanted to call in a doctor, but his mother had insisted that her son was possessed of a devil. She had sent for an exorcist, who had spent the whole night uttering spells and tormenting the sufferer, searing his body with red-hot-wires. And finally Nanda lost his life.

This shows how narrow minded we are! How superstitious we are! The reasons for our sufferings, in most of the cases, are our strong denial to change ourselves, to accept the change around us and to learn from others. We find an interesting discourse between Binoy and Sucharita on casteism, where the former says,

"India has offered one great solution to the social problem, namely the caste system-that solution is still being worked out before the eyes of all the world." (Gora: XVIII, 187)

However, Sucharita has a completely different perception. Love, care, compassion, sympathy, humanity are the divine attributes with which she is nurtured by Paresh Babu. She does not follow any kind of such narrow notion. Her inner conflict leads her to Paresh Babu, as we offer ourselves to God, with innumerable questions and doubts. She says to him,

"The present degenerate condition of our society has bred many faults and these faults have found their way into every aspect of our life, but are we therefore entitled to blame the real thing itself?" (Gora: XXIII, 257,258)

With his usual gentleness, Paresh Babu replies,

"I could have answered you had I known where the real thing is to be found. But what I actually see before me is the intolerable aversion of man for man in our country,—and How this is dividing and subdividing our people. Can we gain any consolation in such circumstances by trying to dwell on some imaginary 'real' thing?" (Gora: XXIII, 258)

The perceptions of Binoy and Gora regarding religion and nation are unbearable for the tender heart of Sucharita, as they are beyond her understanding and Paresh Babu is the only person to whom she can disclose her heart. She says to him,

"Why do we condemn caste distinctions?" (Gora: XXIII, 257)

Criticizing such stereotype notion regarding caste distinction of Indians, Paresh Babu says,

"There is no harm in a cat sitting by and eating right beside you, but if certain men so much as enter the room the food has to be thrown away! How can one not condemn the caste system which has resulted in this contempt and insult of man by man? ... Those who can despise their fellow men so terrible can never rise to greatness." (Gora: XXIII, 257)

Here, Paresh Babu is like that fully developed tree, under whose shelter Sucharita, Gora and Binoy develop themselves. Binoy considers Nanda's death a stupidity and a terrible penalty. But there is a hope, somewhere, deep in Gora's heart for that tender golden ray of sunlight that would illuminate the inner darkness. He says,

"Binoy, I know quite well what's in your mind! You are thinking that there's no remedy, or if there is, it's a long way off. But I can't bear to think in that strain. If I could, I should not have remained alive. Whatever wounds my country, no matter how serious it may be, has its remedy – and that remedy is in my own hands. Because I believe this, I am able to bear all the sorrow and distress and insult that I see around me...I shall never bring myself to believe that misery is eternal. The whole will-power and thought-power of the universe is attacking it, within and without. Binoy, I urge you again and again, never even in your dreams think it impossible for our country to become free. With the conviction of its freedom, firm in our hearts, we must keep ourselves in readiness." (Gora: XVII, 171,172)

But according to Vivekananda it is difficult to have such ray of light that illuminates the inner darkness of man, when man has constructed his soul within the narrow walls, the bricks of which are bound together with the mortar containing superstition, ignorance and orthodoxy. He says that all the time we have been making ourselves smaller and smaller and dissociating ourselves, contrary to the plans which are laid down in our scriptures. We have that extreme conception that we are 'the' people in the world. He says,

"With all my love for India, and with all my patriotism and veneration for the ancients, I cannot but think that we have to learn many things from other nations. We must be always ready to sit at the feet of all, for, mark you, every one can teach us great lessons." (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda: III, 272)

Vivekananda firmly believes that we cannot do without the world outside India. It was our foolishness that we thought we could, and we have paid the penalty by about a thousand years of slavery. He says that we did not go out to compare things with other nations; did not mark the work that had been going on all around us. This is the one great cause of degeneration of the Indian mind. We have paid the penalty; let us do it no more. He believes that all such foolish ideas that Indians must not go out of India are childish. The more we go out and travel among the nations of the world, the better for us and for our country. If we had done that for hundreds of years past, we would not be here today at the feet of every nation that wants to rule India. He says,

"The first manifest effect of life is expansion." (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda: III, 272)

We must expand if we want to live. The moment we have ceased to expand, death is upon us, danger is ahead. The first sigh of the revival of national life is expansion. In 'The Future of India' he says that many times he has been told that

looking into the past only degenerates and leads to nothing, and that we should look to the future. First he agrees to this and then says,

"But out of the past is built the future." (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda: III, 285)

In fact in our past we find the both – glory and gloom. The problems in India are more complicated than the problems in any other country. Race, religion, language, government – all these together make a nation.

Plato has truly said for a state, so also we can say for a nation that no nation is self-sufficient. Every nation has many wants and has to depend on other nations for some or the other thing. Like Plato, Vivekananda says that there cannot be any progress without the whole world following in the wake and it is becoming everyday clearer that the problem can never be solved on racial or any narrow grounds. This will explain why our country for the last few centuries has not been what she was in the past. We find that one of the causes which led to this degeneration is the narrowing of our view and scope of our actions.

In one of the letters to Alasinga, Vivekananda has written how he is impressed by Americans. He says that in America they do not call a prison the prison, but reformatory. There he finds that the inmates are benevolently treated, reformed and sent back as useful members of society. He says,

"And, oh how my heart ached to think of what we think of the poor, the low, in India. They have no chance, no escape, no way to climb up. The poor, the low, the sinner in India have no friends, no help – they cannot rise, try however they may. They sink lower and lower every day, they feel the blows showered upon them by a cruel society, and they do not know whence the blow comes. They have forgotten that they too are men. And the result is slavery." (The complete Works of Vivekananda: V, Epistles, IV, 14)

This clearly shows that we cannot blame the Britisher are only for the suppression of our nation. Our nation has not progressed due to our own psyche. We have become insensitive to the suffering of our fellowmen. We do not feel sorry or we do not weep for the sorrow and suffering of the millions of poor in India. We are doing nothing for their improvement. Even we do not touch them. "Don't touch", "Don't touch", is the only phrase that plays upon the lips of those thousands of Brahmans. How mean and degraded has our eternal religion become at their hands! Wherein does our religion lie now? In

"Don't touchism" alone, and nowhere else! (V, 27)

Therefore, Tagore and Vivekananda, they both have said that first what we need to reform is our religion. And therefore, it seems that, Tagore has deliberately depicted the controversy between the Hinduism and Brahmoism, in which the latter is the most modern movement which wants to transform India into the Western system of education, politics and culture. It aims at changing India according to the western standard of civilization and aims at changing the religion into a progressive religion – the religion free from casteism, idolatry, superstitions.

According to Vivekananda the Americans are far inferior to us in the matter of spirituality, but their society is far superior to ours. We will teach them our spirituality and assimilate what is best in their society. Every now and then he suggests us to broaden our perception. He says,

"Come, be men! Kick out the priest who are always against progress, because they would never mend, their hearts would never become big. They are the offspring of centuries of superstition and tyranny. Root out priest craft first. Come, be men! Come out of your narrow holes and have a look abroad. See how nations are on the march! Do you love man? Do you love your country? Then come, let us struggle for higher

and better things; look not back, no, not even if you see the dearest and nearest cry. Look not back, but forward! " (The complete Works of Vivekananda: V, Epistles, III, 10)

Vivekananda wants vitality in life of the nation. In one of the letters he has been asked whether caste shall go or come, whether women should be perfectly free or not. He says that he has nothing to do with the question whether caste shall go or come. His idea is to bring to the door of the meanest, the poorest, the noble ideas that the human race has developed both in and out of India, and let them think for themselves. He does not have any concern whether there should be caste or not, whether women should be perfectly free or not. He says,

"Liberty of thought and action is the only condition of life, of growth and well-being. Where it does not exist, the man, the race, the nation must go down." (The complete Works of Vivekananda: V, Epistles, VII, 29)

Vivekananda firmly believes that only the educated youth can bring a drastic change in the scenario of India. Even during his visit to Chicago he wrote a letter to Alasinga and requested him to start working according to the decided plans. He requested him to bring the educated young men together and to organize them. He says,

"Work, work the idea, the plan, my boys, my brave, noble, good souls – to the wheel, to the wheel put your shoulders! Stop not to look back for name, or fame, or any such nonsense. Remember, "The grass when made into a rope by being joined together can even chain a mad elephant. "" (The complete Works of Vivekananda: V, Epistles, VIII, 34)

Vivekananda firmly believes that we need a band of fiery patriots. He believes that India will awake again if anyone could love with all his heart the people of the country. She will awake only when hundreds of large-hearted men and women, give up all desire of enjoying the luxuries of life and exert themselves to their utmost, for the well-being of the millions of their countrymen who are gradually sinking lower and lower in the vortex of destitution and ignorance. He says to be patriots, and to love the race which has done such great things for us in the past. He says,

"I believe in Patriotism...Do you feel? Do you feel that millions and millions of the descendants of gods and of sages have become next-door neighbors to brutes? Do you feel that millions have been starving for ages? Do you feel that ignorance has come over the land as a dark cloud? Does it make you restless? Does it make you sleepless? Has it gone into your blood, coursing through your heartbeats? Has it made you almost mad? ...That is the first step to become a patriot, the very first step..." (The Complete Works of Vivekananda: III, 225-26)

Tagore has very beautifully depicted this patriotism in Gora. We find a drastic change in him. He says,

"Mother! Will you call Lachmiya and ask her to bring me a glass of water?" (Gora: Epilogue, 867)

Now what we need is that urge – adoration for nation, which Gora has. There is a scene in the novel where a servant comes to him and tells Gora that mother (Anandmoyi) was calling him. Gora repeats the words, but with new significance. He says,

"Mother has called me! No matter what happens, I have my mother. And she is calling for me. She will unite me with every one... Mother is calling me! Let me go to where the Bestower of all food, the One who maintains the Universe, is seated so infinitely far away in time and yet present at each instant, the One who is beyond death and yet in the midst of life, the One who sheds the glorious light of the Future on the imperfect and miserable Present – Let me go there mother calls me to that infinite far and yet infinitely close." (Gora: LVI, 574)

We find the same patriotism in Vivekananda when he says,

"This is the dream of my life...This is the great ideal before us and every one must be ready for it – the conquest of the whole world by India—nothing less than that, and we must all get ready for it, strain every nerve for it...Up, India, and conquer the world with your spirituality! Ay, as has been declared on this soil first, love must conquer hatred, hatred cannot conquer itself." (The complete Works of Vivekananda: III, 276-77)

Thus, we find patriotism as the pivot in Tagore's 'Gora' and in Messages of Vivekananda. Their thoughts were, in fact, a kind of risk for them as they were contradicting to their contemporary society. However, it seems that they were the visionaries, as they have foretold the things which we need today and will need even tomorrow. They both have thought in terms of humanity and have not just confined to themselves to any region or any nation. In 'Gitanjali, Tagore writes,

"...Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls... Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake." (Gitanjali: XXXV, 29)

Here, Tagore wishes for such a world where the people have not been divided by caste, creed and nationality. He wishes the integrity of his nation. He prays to God to awake his nation into "heaven of freedom", i.e. the heaven of spiritual freedom—freedom from fear, narrow-mindedness and evil desire. Thus, he prays to God for spiritual emancipation of his country and of his countrymen.

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