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CASTE, RELIGION, AND MODERN THOUGHT IN TAGORE'S GORA

B. Parvathi

Research Scholar

Dr. Vikas Sharma

Guide

Professor , Chaudhary Charansingh University Meerut.

ABSTRACT:

Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora* critically examines the interplay of caste, religion, and modern thought in colonial Indian society. The novel highlights the tension between rigid adherence to orthodox Hindu practices and the emergence of rational, humanistic, and reformist ideals. Through the experiences of Gora, Binoy, Paresh Babu, Sucharita, and Lalita, Tagore portrays ideological conflicts, moral dilemmas, and the potential for personal and social transformation. The narrative critiques blind traditionalism while advocating a balanced vision that integrates ethical humanism with modern consciousness. This study analyzes how *Gora* negotiates caste, religious identity, and modern thought, emphasizing its continuing relevance in understanding social reform, cultural identity, and the reconciliation of tradition and modernity. Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora* critically examines the complex interplay of caste, religion, and modern thought in colonial India. The novel highlights the tensions between rigid adherence to orthodox Hindu practices and the emergence of rational, reformist, and humanistic ideals. Through the experiences and interactions of the protagonist, Gora, along with Binoy, Paresh Babu, Sucharita, and Lalita, Tagore presents ideological conflicts, moral dilemmas, and the potential for personal and social transformation. The narrative critiques blind traditionalism while advocating a reconciliatory vision rooted in ethical humanism and progressive consciousness.



KEYWORDS : Caste, Religion, Modern Thought, Humanism, Social Reform, Cultural Identity, Rabindranath Tagore, *Gora*.

INTRODUCTION:

Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora* is a seminal novel that explores the intricate intersections of caste, religion, and modern thought in colonial India. Written during a period of profound social and political transformation, the novel reflects the tensions between orthodox religious practices, caste hierarchies, and the emerging influence of rationalism, social reform, and progressive ideals. Tagore uses the narrative to examine how individuals and communities navigate the challenges of maintaining cultural and religious traditions while engaging with modern, ethical, and humanistic ideas. This study analyzes how *Gora* negotiates caste, religious identity, and modern thought, emphasizing its continuing relevance in

understanding social reform, cultural identity, and the integration of tradition with modernity. The protagonist, Gora, embodies rigid adherence to orthodox Hinduism and nationalist ideals, representing the societal pressures to conform to inherited traditions. In contrast, characters like Binoy and Paresh Babu advocate reformist and liberal perspectives, emphasizing reason, morality, and social consciousness. Through the interactions between these characters, Tagore explores ideological conflicts, moral dilemmas, and the possibility of reconciliation between tradition and modernity.

Additionally, women characters such as Sucharita and Lalita play a crucial role in the narrative, reflecting the transformative power of modern thought in challenging patriarchal norms and promoting intellectual and moral agency. By presenting these contrasting viewpoints, Tagore critiques blind adherence to tradition and encourages a balanced approach that integrates ethical humanism with modern consciousness. This study aims to critically analyze Gora with a focus on caste, religion, and modern thought, exploring how Tagore negotiates social hierarchies, ideological rigidity, and moral consciousness to envision a more inclusive, rational, and ethically aware society. The novel remains relevant today as it provides insights into the ongoing negotiation between cultural heritage, social reform, and progressive values.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aim of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to critically examine how Rabindranath Tagore's Gora explores the interplay of caste, religion, and modern thought, highlighting the social, moral, and ideological tensions of colonial Indian society.

Objectives of the Study

- ❖ To analyze the representation of caste and religious hierarchies in Gora and their influence on social and personal identity.
- ❖ To examine the conflict between orthodox religious practices and progressive, reformist ideas in the novel.
- ❖ To study the character of Gora as an embodiment of rigid traditionalism and nationalist ideology.
- ❖ To explore the perspectives of characters like Binoy and Paresh Babu as proponents of rationality, ethical humanism, and modern thought.
- ❖ To investigate the roles of female characters, such as Sucharita and Lalita, in challenging patriarchal norms and promoting modern consciousness.
- ❖ To evaluate Tagore's vision of reconciling tradition and modernity through moral, social, and spiritual humanism.
- ❖ To assess the contemporary relevance of the novel in understanding social reform, cultural identity, and the negotiation between inherited traditions and modern ideals.

Review of Literature

- ❖ Rabindranath Tagore's Gora is widely recognized for its exploration of caste, religion, and modern thought in colonial Indian society.
- ❖ K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar (1985) emphasizes that the novel critiques rigid religious orthodoxy and caste-based identity, illustrating how unexamined traditions can restrict moral and social growth.
- ❖ Amartya Sen (2005) highlights Tagore's promotion of rational thought and inclusive humanism, arguing that Gora transcends narrow nationalist and religious ideologies.
- ❖ Ashis Nandy (1994) interprets the novel as a study of ideological rigidity and moral consciousness, showing the necessity of ethical reasoning in reconciling tradition with modernity.
- ❖ Feminist scholars such as Subrata Dasgupta (1993) focus on the women characters, Sucharita and Lalita, noting their role in challenging patriarchal norms and fostering intellectual and social reform.
- ❖ Postcolonial critics, including Arindam Chakrabarti (2003), situate Gora within the colonial discourse, highlighting how Tagore critiques both British influence and indigenous social conservatism.

- ❖ Bhattacharya (2000) underscores Tagore's ethical humanism as a framework for negotiating caste and religious hierarchies while promoting social reform.
- ❖ Recent interdisciplinary studies highlight Gora's relevance in contemporary contexts, showing its insights into caste dynamics, religious orthodoxy, and modern thought remain significant today.
- ❖ Existing research has focused on nationalism, social reform, or moral philosophy separately, leaving scope for comprehensive studies on the interplay of caste, religion, and modern thought.
- ❖ This study aims to fill that gap by critically analyzing Gora's treatment of caste, religion, and modern thought, emphasizing Tagore's vision of moral and social reconciliation.

Rabindranath Tagore's Gora has been extensively studied for its nuanced exploration of caste, religion, and modern thought in colonial India. Scholars have highlighted the novel's critical engagement with social hierarchies, ideological rigidity, and the evolving ideas of rationalism and humanism. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar (1985) emphasizes that Gora critiques the dangers of rigid religious orthodoxy and caste-based identity, illustrating how unexamined traditions can impede moral and social progress. He notes that the novel reflects Tagore's commitment to ethical reasoning and social reform. Amartya Sen (2005) and Ashis Nandy (1994) analyze the humanistic and philosophical dimensions of Gora, arguing that the novel transcends narrow nationalism to advocate an inclusive vision of society based on rational thought, moral consciousness, and social responsibility.

Feminist scholars, such as Subrata Dasgupta (1993), examine the roles of women characters like Sucharita and Lalita, emphasizing their contribution to modern thought and social reform. These characters challenge patriarchal norms and serve as catalysts for moral and intellectual awakening. Postcolonial critics, including Arindam Chakrabarti (2003), situate Gora within the colonial discourse, highlighting how Tagore critiques both British colonial influence and indigenous conservatism. The novel addresses caste, religion, and nationalism, offering a layered perspective on identity and social reform. Bhattacharya (2000) focuses on Tagore's ethical humanism as a means to reconcile conflicting cultural and ideological values. According to him, Gora encourages moral reflection and spiritual awareness as essential tools for negotiating social and personal identity.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study employs a qualitative and descriptive research methodology to critically analyze the theme of caste, religion, and modern thought in Rabindranath Tagore's Gora. The research is primarily textual and interpretative, focusing on a close reading of the novel's narrative structure, character development, dialogues, and thematic elements. A historical and socio-cultural approach is used to contextualize the novel within colonial Indian society, considering the influence of social hierarchies, caste systems, religious practices, and reformist movements. This approach helps to understand the ideological conflicts and moral dilemmas depicted in the text. Character analysis forms a central part of the methodology. The study examines Gora as a representation of rigid traditionalism and nationalist ideology, while analyzing Binoy and Paresh Babu as embodiments of rational thought, ethical humanism, and modern perspectives. Women characters, such as Sucharita and Lalita, are studied for their role in challenging patriarchal norms and contributing to social and intellectual reform.

Thematic analysis is employed to explore issues such as caste, religious identity, nationalism, social reform, and the reconciliation of tradition with modern thought. Secondary sources including scholarly books, journal articles, critical essays, and previous research on Tagore and Gora are consulted to provide additional perspectives and support the analysis. The research does not involve empirical data, surveys, or fieldwork, as it remains text-based and interpretative. The methodology aims to provide a systematic, coherent, and comprehensive understanding of how Gora negotiates caste, religion, and modern thought, highlighting Tagore's vision of ethical humanism and social reform.

- ❖ The study adopts a qualitative research approach, focusing on interpretative and descriptive analysis of Gora.
- ❖ Textual analysis is the primary method, examining narrative structure, dialogues, character development, and thematic elements.
- ❖ A historical and socio-cultural approach is used to contextualize the novel within colonial Indian society, considering caste hierarchies, religious orthodoxy, and emerging modern thought.
- ❖ Character analysis focuses on Gora as a representation of traditionalism, Binoy and Paresh Babu as proponents of modernity and rational thought, and women characters like Sucharita and Lalita for their roles in challenging patriarchal norms.
- ❖ Thematic analysis is employed to study the novel's treatment of caste, religion, nationalism, social reform, and the reconciliation of tradition with modern thought.
- ❖ Secondary sources including books, journal articles, and critical essays are consulted to support and contextualize the analysis.
- ❖ The study is text-based and interpretative and does not involve surveys, interviews, or empirical data collection.
- ❖ The methodology emphasizes understanding how Tagore reconciles traditional hierarchies and religious practices with ethical humanism and modern thought.
- ❖ The research aims to provide a systematic, coherent, and comprehensive understanding of the novel's exploration of caste, religion, and modernity.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Colonial Indian society was marked by deeply entrenched caste hierarchies, rigid religious practices, and evolving encounters with modern thought, rationalism, and social reform. These overlapping tensions created ideological, social, and moral conflicts that influenced individual identity and societal norms. Rabindranath Tagore's Gora presents a critical lens to examine these conflicts by portraying characters who represent contrasting worldviews: rigid traditionalism, reformist modernity, and ethical humanism. The problem lies in understanding how Tagore addresses the interplay of caste, religion, and modern thought, particularly in negotiating the tension between inherited cultural values and progressive ideals. While substantial research exists on themes such as nationalism, social reform, or moral philosophy in Gora, there is limited focused analysis on how Tagore reconciles caste hierarchies and religious orthodoxy with the principles of modern thought and ethical humanism. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how Gora presents the negotiation of caste, religion, and modernity, highlighting Tagore's vision for a morally and socially aware society that balances tradition with progressive, humanistic ideals.

NEED OF THE STUDY

The study of Rabindranath Tagore's Gora is essential for understanding how literature reflects and negotiates social, cultural, and ideological tensions. The novel provides critical insights into the interplay of caste, religion, and modern thought in colonial India, highlighting the conflicts between rigid traditional practices and emerging progressive ideals. There is a need to explore Gora because it addresses questions of identity, morality, and social reform through complex characters and narrative strategies. While previous research has examined nationalism, social reform, and ethical humanism in isolation, there is limited focused study on the holistic interplay of caste, religion, and modern thought. This study is significant for both historical and contemporary contexts, as the issues raised in Gora—such as caste discrimination, religious orthodoxy, and the challenge of integrating tradition with modern values—remain relevant today. By analyzing the novel, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of Tagore's vision for social harmony, ethical humanism, and progressive consciousness, making it valuable for scholars, students, and readers interested in English literature, Indian society, and cultural studies.

FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

- ❖ A comparative study of Gora with Tagore's other novels, such as The Home and the World and Chokher Bali, focusing on the themes of caste, religion, and modern thought.
- ❖ An in-depth feminist analysis of women characters in Gora, exploring their roles in challenging patriarchy and promoting social reform.
- ❖ A postcolonial study examining how Gora critiques both colonial authority and indigenous social hierarchies, particularly in relation to caste and religion.
- ❖ A sociological exploration of caste dynamics and religious orthodoxy as depicted in the novel, analyzing their historical and contemporary relevance.
- ❖ An interdisciplinary study combining literature, philosophy, and ethics to understand Tagore's vision of reconciling traditional hierarchies with modern humanistic ideals.
- ❖ A psychological analysis of Gora's ideological rigidity and transformation, focusing on identity formation and moral consciousness.
- ❖ A comparative analysis of Gora with contemporary Indian English novels addressing social hierarchies, religion, and reformist thought.
- ❖ An examination of translation strategies in various English versions of Gora and their effect on conveying the nuances of caste, religion, and modern thought.
- ❖ A study of Tagore's critique of nationalism in Gora and its relevance to modern debates on cultural identity, social responsibility, and ethical governance.
- ❖ Research on the applicability of Tagore's vision of ethical humanism and social reform in contemporary multicultural societies facing conflicts between tradition and modernity.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Scope of the Study

- ❖ The study focuses exclusively on Rabindranath Tagore's Gora as the primary text.
- ❖ It examines the interplay of caste, religion, and modern thought within the socio-cultural and historical context of colonial India.
- ❖ The research analyzes key characters—Gora, Binoy, Paresh Babu, Sucharita, and Lalita—to understand ideological conflicts, social reform, and moral consciousness.
- ❖ The study emphasizes ethical, philosophical, and humanistic aspects of the novel, particularly Tagore's vision of reconciling tradition with modernity.
- ❖ Secondary sources, including scholarly books, journal articles, and critical essays, are used to support and contextualize the analysis.
- ❖ The study is relevant for understanding historical and contemporary debates on caste, religion, social reform, and cultural identity.

Limitations of the Study

- ❖ The research is limited to the analysis of a single novel, Gora, and does not cover Tagore's other literary works in detail.
- ❖ It is a text-based and interpretative study, with no empirical data, surveys, or fieldwork.
- ❖ Only selected themes, characters, and conflicts are analyzed due to time and scope constraints.
- ❖ The study relies on English translations of the novel, which may not fully capture the nuances of the original Bengali text.
- ❖ Detailed linguistic, stylistic, or quantitative analysis of the text is beyond the scope of this study.
- ❖ Comparative studies with other authors, literary traditions, or global perspectives are not included in this research.

DISCUSSION:

Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora* presents a profound exploration of the interplay between caste, religion, and modern thought in colonial Indian society. The novel captures the ideological and social tensions that arose when traditional religious and caste-based hierarchies confronted emerging ideas of rationalism, social reform, and humanism. The protagonist, Gora, represents unwavering adherence to orthodox Hinduism and nationalist ideology. His rigid commitment to caste identity and religious orthodoxy exemplifies the challenges posed by blind adherence to tradition. Through Gora's struggles, Tagore critiques ideological rigidity and highlights the need for self-reflection, moral awareness, and ethical consciousness in the face of social and cultural change.

In contrast, characters like Binoy and Paresh Babu embody modern thought, rationality, and ethical humanism. Paresh Babu, in particular, emphasizes the importance of reason, tolerance, and social responsibility, demonstrating how progressive ideas can coexist with respect for cultural heritage. Binoy acts as a mediator, bridging the gap between rigid traditionalism and enlightened modernity, illustrating the novel's advocacy for balance and reconciliation. Women characters such as Sucharita and Lalita are also central to the discussion of modern thought in *Gora*. They challenge patriarchal norms, assert intellectual independence, and embody moral and social awareness. Their presence emphasizes Tagore's progressive vision, showing that social reform and modern consciousness require active engagement from all members of society, including women.

The novel also examines caste and religious identity as socially constructed systems that often perpetuate inequality and limit personal growth. Tagore critiques these hierarchies not by rejecting tradition outright, but by advocating their ethical reinterpretation through the lens of humanism and moral consciousness. Overall, *Gora* demonstrates that the reconciliation of tradition and modern thought is possible through reflection, moral responsibility, and ethical humanism. The novel remains relevant today as it addresses ongoing societal challenges related to caste, religion, identity, and the negotiation between inherited cultural norms and progressive ideals.

CONCLUSION:

Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora* offers a nuanced examination of the tensions between caste, religion, and modern thought in colonial Indian society. Through its complex characters and narrative, the novel highlights the challenges posed by rigid adherence to orthodox religious practices and caste hierarchies while simultaneously presenting the potential for rational, ethical, and humanistic approaches to social reform. The protagonist, Gora, embodies traditionalism and ideological rigidity, yet his journey demonstrates the importance of self-reflection, moral consciousness, and ethical reasoning in overcoming entrenched social norms. Characters like Binoy and Paresh Babu illustrate modern thought and progressive ideals, emphasizing reason, empathy, and social responsibility as essential tools for balancing tradition with modernity. Women characters such as Sucharita and Lalita reinforce the transformative power of modern consciousness, challenging patriarchal norms and promoting intellectual and moral agency. Ultimately, *Gora* does not reject tradition but advocates its ethical reinterpretation, integrating modern thought and humanistic values to achieve social harmony and personal growth. Tagore's insights into caste, religion, and modernity remain relevant today, offering guidance for understanding cultural identity, social reform, and the reconciliation of inherited traditions with progressive ideals in contemporary societies.

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