



A Realistic Approach to Sublimity in Tagore's Gora

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Abstract

This paper consists of the description of the ideal principle of the realistic sublimity in the human life that represents the quality of a notion or a way of life being extremely good, beautiful and enjoyable that provides the harmony in human life to the state of supreme perfection and appropriateness. It is based on the oneness of the source of human life and oneness of human civilization and so it encourages accepting the perfect and the most appropriate way and notion of humanity that elevates the human life to the supreme status of virtues and values of an ideal human civilization. There are two aspects of sublimity, one related to nature and other related to arts and this paper focuses mainly on the description of the nature aspects and deals with the grand thoughts and strong emotions in the typical theme of the novel Gora.

Keywords: - Sublimity, realistic, ideological controversy, experience, excellence and righteousness, conflict, restriction, Brahmo.

Gora is the most precious novel of Tagore that he writes at the height of his power in order to project his vision of a man's role in the changing India. In Krishna kripalani's words, the novel is **“the epic of India in transition at the most crucially intellectual period of its modern history It is to Indian history what Tolstoy's War and Peace is to the Russian”** and **“as something like a Mahabharata of modern India”** [1] in Sukumar Sen's view. There may be big exaggerations in their description but there is also a truth behind them and it is so for that the controversial discourses and complex thoughts on the contemporary issues maintain a great upheaval throughout the whole novel and finally end with the positive result of the peaceful and harmonious evaluation of the issues.

Gora (Gaurmohan), the protagonist is the chief character of the novel around whom the whole novel is centred. He grows as an orthodox Hindu with a fanatic religious point of view in every affair of life as he is brought up in a Hindu Brahmin family though the family deals with liberal view of life. The surface theme of the novel is the love story of two couples who, inspired by being genuinely attracted towards the girls of a Brahmo family, are unable to meet for a permanent conjugal life only because of their social and ideological differences. But the basic theme of the novel is the controversial struggle of the social, ideological and political affairs of the changing India of the day, resulting into a harmonious attitude towards contemporary life.

The ideological upheaval and discourse goes on up to the end until the secret is opened that Gora is a foundling who belongs to no identity, culture and place, a son of Irish parents whose father has been killed during the Mutiny and the mother takes shelter in the home of a Hindu family in fear of Sepoys and she also dies after giving birth to a child. The child is adopted by the house owners Krishnadayal and Anandamayi as their son and is brought up as Gora in the care of his foster – parents and grows up with an orthodox Hindu notion to the life and strictly opposes the changes and reforms in Indian society and never approves the western way of life. But when he learns the truth of the hidden secret of life he develops the liberal and harmonious view to life and finds every one equal to him and thus both the couples mingle for conjugal life.

The clash and discourse of the ideological controversy is between the old and the new, mere revivalism and blind iconoclasm and between the true and false progress, the genuine humanism of the renaissance and the mere show of western apathy and this clash and discourse give necessary edge to the novel. The reader takes the interest in the debates among the major four characters that pass through the aggressive discourse on their ideological controversy to ways of life but as the curtain of secret falls and truth emerges from the misunderstanding, and then they realize in their heart of hearts the real sublime notion in the liberal harmonious way of life. Now the chains of the evil some social barriers are demolished and vanished and they realize the equality and oneness of all the human beings, almost all living beings.

Through the aggressive discourse on the ideological controversies among the characters in several affairs of life of the day and its evolution and evaluation with the final harmonious results of the novel, the aim of the author is to establish the ideal of the realistic sublimity in life. The realistic sublimity is a notion discarding all whatever is inharmonious in life and creates division and differences by the evil some restrictions in the novel and encouraging all whatever harmonizes the human life by demolishing all evil some restrictions. Before going ahead to point out the message of realistic sublimity in the novel, first it would be proper to discuss on the practical meaning of sublimity. According to Longinus-

“Sublimity is a certain loftiness, distinction and consummation of excellence in language, expression and composition. It is the echo of great soul”. {2}

Basically the sublimity means the quality of being extremely good, beautiful and enjoyable for the humanity, an ideal principle of the grand thoughts and ideologies and strong emotions for the harmonious human life that is extremely good for the welfare and betterment of humanity, that consists of the supreme beauty of virtues and values of humanity and that maintains extreme bliss and joy in the human life. In the concern of these aspects, the sublimity enjoys the unsurpassed status that cannot be overtaken or inter-changed and that touches the zenith extreme height of harmonious idealism in the human life. It focuses on the extreme righteousness in the ways and ideals of life as an outcome of adopting the excellence from all the aspects of the controversy and then making suitable for human welfare.

In the view of the theological thinkers, its origin is from the mystic spiritualism rooted in the ethical ideology. According to it there is only one Almighty God or Supreme Divine soul who is the creator of the whole universe and all the living beings and he is omnipresent and exists in all the living being in the form of living soul. So being the creation of the same Divine power and having the same Divine soul within them, all the human beings are the same and similar to one another and they must be treated equally without caring about the differences, controversy and the hostility. Thus, demolishing the social differences and restriction, ideological controversy hatred and hostility, and adopting the excellence and righteousness in order to follow the laws of divinity, becomes the ideal principle of the sublimity in human life.

But in practically realistic point of view, the sublimity is originated from the noble values, virtues and behaviour, established for the welfare and betterment of human civilization. In original reality all the living beings are the creation and origin of the same one God (the creative vitality of the natural environment of the earth) consisting of all those atoms and elements which are the embodiment of the living being's body. All the living being have the same consciousness that is maintained in the body till the body organs keep on working properly and disappears from the body when it gets some incurable damage or all its cells are dead. The human beings differ from other living beings only because they

have developed the power of thinking and with the power of thinking they have developed their civilization based on the disciplined rules and regulations and these rules and regulations have been formed to establish and to maintain the moral values, noble virtues and harmonious behaviour. When the values, virtues and behaviour of the human being maintain the ideal of the righteousness and excellent welfare of human civilization that is uplifted to the supreme quality of being extremely good, beautiful and enjoyable and of having the grandness of thoughts and emotions, it becomes the ideal principle of the real Sublimity. As -

“Sublimiy is not contained in anything nature, but only in our mind, insofar as we can become conscious of being superior to nature within us and thus also to nature outside us”. [3]

Tagore is a great exponent of sublimity in his writings who advocates and encourages the liberal ideal notion to life that is away from evil some restriction and controversy and that enables man to enjoy the wish and dignity of human life by judging what is right, just and appropriate for him. One of the most popular songs of the Gitanjali describes Tagore’s idea of sublimity –

“Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by these into ever – widening thought and action –

Into that heaven of freedom, my father, let my country awake”. [4]

Thus through this song, Tagore has described the realistic ideal of the sublimity in the human life. According to him, if human life is the creation and origin from the same God and the embodiment of the atoms and elements what the God consists of and have to mingle with the same God in the end, then why the social restrictions and barriers and the ideological differences and controversies are so prominent and what their use and importance is in human life. So in the song he advocates for the free thinking, freedom for acquiring knowledge and the personal dignity for every human being. He appeals men not to be divided by narrow minded restrictions, to follow the truth of their righteous conscience and to strive for achieving the perfection in life. He inspires man to use the reason for giving up the practices of dead customs and traditions and to have the progressive mind for ever – widening thinking and action. Thus the human life will achieve the real sublimity of so called heaven on the earth.

As far as Tagore's novel Gora is concerned, it is set in a certain class and presents its life and mind set yet it is timeless and achieves the universal appeal. The most prominent questions in the thoughts of intellectual citizens of Bengal of that time are the controversy between the Hinduism and Brahma Samajist and the need for the political freedom. Through the description of thoughts of characters, Tagore wants to expose whatever is false and ridiculous in both, the old religious system and the orthodoxy of the new the enlightened. It has been seen that both the groups have been in the bitter opposition to each other by neglecting their true insights and values of life.

The plot of the novel moves around the love theme of four major characters, Gora , Suchorita , Lolita and Binoy and reveals the conflict of love and religion ; and patriotism and religion caused by the movement of Brahma – Hindu conflict. A crisis begins in the life of Anandamoyi when she adopts a child as her son Gora; she is strangled in conflict between the child's love and loyalty to religion. Being childless, the mother's instinct rejects that part of the religion which raises the barriers of narrow domestic walls and restriction of caste, race, nation and religion between the human beings. This reflects the sublime notion of the mother Anandamoyi who does an act of extreme righteousness.

Gora grows as a fanatic Hindu with a view of Indian nationalism and in order to acquire political freedom from the British rule, he wants to unite the Indians on the basis of religion and regarding the Hinduism as the basic identity of Indian nationalism he wants all to follow the religion strictly. The Brahma Samajists bring several reforms to demolish the bad customs and traditions of the society, but Gora opposes the Brahmos strictly thinking that they are under the influence of the western Christianity and work against the national movement of political freedom. A great controversy appears in this concern that Gora and his friend and ideological supporter Binoy, both feel attracted in love towards the girls of opposite faith Suchorita and Lolita whose families belong to the Brahmos and the girls also advocate in favour of reforms of Brahmos and want to Gora and Binoy to accept the reformist's faith. Thus the love story reveals the fanatic attitude of both the Hindus and Brahmas. Anandamoyi, a representative of Hindus and Paresh Babu, a representative of Brahmas, both stand above the narrow conflicts and barriers and present an example of the ideal way of life.

Dark skinned Anandmoyi, the mother of fair skinned Gora counterpoises the conflict in the mind and heart of both the friends Gora and Binoy and compels to think if there is anything in skin that makes the change of religious view. If there is no opposition or toll in form of punishment, then why people raise the whole intelligence in accepting and charging the social religious opinions. The truth can be found out through the description of some text of novel when Binoy becomes ready to leave his faith and view and to marry a Brahma girl, Lolita. Paresh Babu gives them his consent and blessing neglecting all oppositions for its consequences and Anandmoyi arranges all the preparations for the marriage. Gora tries to prevent his friend to marry her, refuses to attend the marriage and forbids his mother to arrange the marriage but he is disobeyed by Binoy, Anandmoyi and Sucharita. Thus the author tries to minimise the struggle and intensity of their dilemmas.

Everyone knows the meaninglessness of the bonds and barriers of the society in the matter of eating, touching and sitting in the atmosphere of natural freedom for all human beings, but this high-handedness can be accepted by being high-handed oneself in the concern of social relations and a man may admit the claims of the society on him only when the society admits his claims on it. When Gora visits the village people and sees the condition of the society, he develops a realistic understanding of the social bonds of the community, as they cannot provide a least bit of strength for the work of daily life of people but instead the customs and traditions suck the blood of ordinary humanity and reduce them to poverty and thus the society fails to provide the help to the man during his misfortune and weakens him to dust. Yet he thinks that the entire destruction of the settled social pattern may demolish the sense of unity of the community needed for freedom struggle, so he refuses Sucharita's plea for social reform regarding them having the western influence and commits many blunders and is kept away from whom he loves.

The characters are adults, mature and fully developed and in the process of growth of "becoming" the final beings they are striving to be through the experiences of incidents and the story presents a process of reconciliation and adjustment in the opposites in order to search the truth as the true way of life. Binoy and Lolita get married, Anandmoyi goes to live with them and Sucharita returns back to Paresh Babu while Gora keeps on his journey towards of his life. The novel is brought to an appropriate ending when Gora gets the realisation of the truth from the secrets of his life, as he says to his mother-

"Mother; you are my mother! The mother whom I have been wandering about in search of was all the time sitting in my room at home. You have no caste, you have no distinctions, and you have no hatred- you are only the image of our welfare! It is you who are mother India". [5]

Gora is neither a social document nor a tale of conflict between Hindus and Brahmos nor a tale of British tyranny in India but a study of the realities of life with necessary discipline of novel form. The best thing in Gora is the balance between the events and characters and between evaluations and their perceptions and the process of becoming full beings. When Gora and Binoy are introduced to Paresh Babu's family, a Brahma Samajist and are attracted towards the family girls Sucharita and Lolita, Gora is not ready to admit his attraction to Sucharita because of having the spirit of orthodox Brahmin and so cannot entertain and alliance with a Brahma family. Even after realising his deep love to Sucharita, he refuses to sacrifice his religious principals and faith and so the problem looks unsolved until he acknowledges the secret of truth.

But as soon as he discovers the truth that he is not a real Hindu, but a child of the Irish parents killed in the Spoy mutiny and is brought up by foster parents as their son, he realizes a sudden revolution in his views and feels himself free from the bondages of fanatical religious orthodoxy and dogmas. He expresses the free spirit of his heart –

“Today I am free, Paresh Babu! I need no longer fear being contaminated of becoming an out caste.....”

“Today I am really an Indian! In me there is no longer opposition between Hindu, Muslim and Christian. Today every caste in India, is my caste, the food of all is my food! Today I have become so pure that I can never be afraid of contamination even in the house of the lowest of castes”. [6]

The character of the novel are important not for themselves only but for the ideals and thoughts they uphold and for the truth they try to establish. The central theme of the novel is not just the conflict of caste or of Brahmin and brahmo, but a want of something better as the answer of the principal problems of philosophical nature the novel presents the realization of the truth to raise the humanity above the petty complexities. Paresh Babu, who is a brahmo reformist, yet is not certain about his ideas of the truth, but accidentally while his conversation with Sucharita, he hints his realization of truth –

“Sectarianism is a thing which makes people entirely forget the simple obvious truth that man is man – it creates a kind of whirlpool in which the society - made distinction between Hindu and Brahmo assumes greater importance than the universal truth” [7].

Through Gora Tagore tries to justify that inspite of several practices and superstitions, people have faith in the religion out of respect for society. When Gora comes to know that he is not an Indian originally and belongs to no nation, religion or social identity, Tagore wishes to say that a religion is not a uniting factor of society and mankind is above the nation, religion or society in the concern of righteousness. Tagore is neutral to the Brahmo Samajist society and orthodox traditions and customs and regards people staying faithful to religion due to the society. The marriage of Binoy and Lolita, though unwelcoming to society yet shows the union of Brahmo and Hindu sects and it points out the author’s purpose to show man’s liberation above the bonds of society and to suggest man to rise above the society, nation and religion. Perhaps with this typical end of novel Tagore wants to emphasise that the religion and love for nation are not the same thing and for attaining the political freedom, a man must have belief of being Indian only because he wishes to be so willingly and not because he is born to be so.

All these events are presented in the philosophical study of human emotions. It points out the shallowness of beliefs in the purity of body and the ignorance of true agenda of this life. It shows the path of self discovery to understand true purpose inclination in its various matters. Gora is relevant even today for its universal approach of an eternal curiosity of human mind to find its truth even in today life of independent countries, people face all those problems inscribed in the novel which are continuous to mar the real purpose of life and they may seek guidance from this novel in this concern and may have an

experience of excellence and righteousness. In this way the novel explores the sublime through the life altering experiences of Gora

To conclude, it would be proper to say that Tagore may be acknowledged as a great champion of the ideal principle of sublimity in his writings and presents the spirit of sublime notion in most of his works including Gora. As prescribed before in this paper, the sublimity is the quality of being extremely good, beautiful and enjoyable and the spirit of this quality is reflected at the concluding phase of this novel through the effort to find out the ultimate outcome of the novel as extremely good beautiful and enjoyable as far as possible for the author. He introduces several problems of conflict in the novel and through the result of discourse on the conflicts and controversies of life as the final outcome of the novel; the author tries to establish a sublime solution of those problems that may prove to be the most perfect and appropriate for human welfare. The purpose that the author aims in the novel as the final outcome, shows the grandness of thoughts of the novel for an ideal human life and for acquiring this purpose the novel passes through the strong emotions of its various characters

The ideal principle of the real sublimity is brought out in the novel in this concern that when the source of the origin and existence of human life is one and the same and all the human beings are the similar parts of the one human civilization, then what is the use and importance of all the evilsome notions of restrictions and barriers in creed, caste, region and ideology in human life. So the novel shows an effort to neglect and demolish the evilsome notions of restrictions and barriers from human life and encourages the human beings to accept the virtuous and valuable ways and ideas of life extremely good, beautiful and enjoyable that may harmonise the human life to its perfect and most appropriate status and to raise it to the height of excellence.

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