

Anandamoyi in Rabindranath Tagore's Novel *Gora*: An Embodiment of India

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Anandamoyi is the central female character in Rabindranath Tagore's novel *Gora*. She is a childless Bengali woman "who moves beyond the confines of both Hindu orthodoxy and Brahma Samaj Modernity" and "embodies Tagore's expansive vision of India" the confluence of nations and nationalities and a mystic unity in its diversities (Singh 2). She adopts an Irish foundling during the Indian mutiny of 1857. Thereafter, she brings him up as her own son with utmost love and care. No one knows his true identity except her husband, Krishnadayal. Over the years, she takes care of Gora lovingly, sustaining him ever close to her home and heart. Even her husband Krishnadayal, who works for the British, and receives quick promotion because of his open nature, has no problem with Gora. But, soon after the retirement, Krishnadayal turns into orthodoxy that he spends most of his time with the ascetics and even the sight of Gora causes him fear of pollution and contamination. Therefore, "the white, muscular, and colossal Gora, very much like the Vundhya Range with its snowy peaks, becomes the protruding barrier between husband and wife" (3).

Anandamoyi has the earth-like qualities that through the novel, readers find her with an open mind, which clings to not a single idea or a person; there is no trace of dogmatism in her personality. She is Hindu, but welcomes a Christian maid. She never excludes, draws barriers or distinctions between or among any caste, creed, or religion. She fondly bears the burden of Gora on herself; she is mentally strong to receive any criticism that her family or society makes of her because of her openness to one and all. She is not confined to any group, society or ideology. She personifies for Tagore the comprehensive wisdom of India, the nation that transcends the boundary of any latitudes or longitudes. When Gora, her adopted son complains of her unorthodox conducts, she clarifies him how she changed the vision in life

...do you know that it was when I first took you in my arms that I said goodbye to convention? When you hold a little child to your breast then you feel certain that no one is born into this world with caste.

From that very day the understanding came to me that if I looked down upon anyone for being low caste or Christian, then God would snatch you away from me. Only stay in my arms as the light of my home, I prayed, and will accept water from the hands of anyone in the world. (17)

Anandamoyi is the one who can courageously stand “against the narrow doctrines of the Hindu religion without once finding it necessary to take refuge in any other religion or society” (Grage 187). Similarly, “Anandamoyi, in embracing the Irish orphan Gora as her foster child, loses her caste and social standing, but this ostracism liberates her and leaves her free to live by her own liberal principles” (Chakravarty 71). Though childless, she becomes the eternal mother who has been for everyone, forever. Vinoy, the orphan friend of Gora derives great physical and psychological solace from her and he almost worships her in return. As the fatherless grand-daughter of a famous Benaras pandit, she has many generations of erudite wisdom naturally ingrained in her. In the novel, Tagore traces Anandamoyi’s face with similar features: “the impress of a pure and keen intelligence” (14). Even though we may not hear the recitations or exposition of *Vedas* or *Upanishadas* from her lips, she is regarded by various characters in the novel as the true enlightener. Nikky Singh writes:

The Upanishadic paradigm of union of the individual with the supreme is a state of absolute liberation, one in which the finite experience the infinite, without being subject to space or time. Anandamoyi lives out the Upanishadic paradigm of absolute freedom (6).

Because of her enlightened and liberated status, she can stand against the rigidity and narrowness of any religion, tradition and culture. Therefore, she takes the responsibility of marriage between Binoy, a Hindu boy with Lolita, a Bramho girl, even when the whole society along with her own son Gora stands against it. Her defence of marriage indicates her liberated status that transcends religious intolerance, sectarian values and rigid traditional values. Not abided by the walls of the caste, creed, sect or religion, she seems above all kinds of divisions. She opines that marriage is a matter of hearts coming together. Therefore, if the hearts come together in the marriage ceremony, it is not important which mantras are recited or which ritual is followed. She

convicts that transcending all racial and societal barriers, true marriage and love connect people through their inner feeling of joy and togetherness.

Anandamoyi is Tagore's real embodiment of India which is One, infinite, without boundaries, walls, and fences. She lives as per her conscience. Stepping out of barriers, this Brahmin Bengali woman expels herself from all her finite social and cultural boundaries into a transcendent mode of being. She is always in joy. There is balance and harmony in her life. Her actions are free and courageous. No one and nothing can bar her entry anywhere. She blissfully walks over to and visits anyone she wishes. Intellectually, she is not burdened by prohibitions and conventions. Her openness of heart and mind and transcendent status is further expressed by Nikky Singh:

Anandamoyi recognizes and acknowledges the full humanity of her fellow beings and is determined to doing good for them. At the spiritual level, she feels an affinity with everyone around her. The fundamental Oneness of her vision lifts her out of provincialism and narrowness into a vaster and more profound cosmos. (10-11)

She further writes:

She is committed to her ancient Indian tradition, which respects the varied approaches to the infinite reality. She accepts all, and she savours every particularity. She possesses a multifaceted vision of Reality, which provides her with a multi-dimensional approach to life and living. Mutuality and understanding mark her relationship with others. (14)

Anandamoyi believes that religions, customs and rituals are all meaningless if they divide people and do not let them get united with the bond of love and feeling of oneness. For her, love and sense of brotherhood, togetherness that unites people is more important than religions, customs and traditions. The Oneness of her Indian imagination is inclusive of diversity and multiplicity. It can be argued in this regard that she is the one who does not preach religion but lives as a harmonious whole that embodies the nation which is inclusive of all religions, sects and castes. As an embodiment of India, her vision of Oneness is an integral part of her personality and social reality. What is even more praiseworthy in her is that "without theorizing or philosophizing, her simple actions tellingly illustrate the concept of Upanishadic unity" (Singh

17). She seems to be actively putting the ideal of Oneness into practice, whether she is cooking, stitching, chatting or in her day-to-day activities.

Anandamoyi never worships idols. Neither does she preach or recite religious scriptures. But she accepts all character in the novel as they are and loves them heartily. Gora, Binoy, Lolita, Suchitra all feel comfortable with her and call her mother. She is so motherly that she soothes them all when they are tormented by any idea regarding marriage, religion, orthodoxy etc. She is the one who never imposes her will upon others. She listens to all with empathy and understands them from various perspectives. Moreover, she recognizes all the characters for who they are and affirms their particularities and differences in terms of thought and action. With her thought and actions, she inspires all to love their nation India with intensity “without narrowness or nationalism...Anandamoyi represents Tagore’s deep love for his country, which extends to all her inhabitants, native and foreign” (22). It is Anandamoyi who transforms Gora. Gora identifies her with India that is the confluence of religions, races, languages and diverse beliefs. He perceives her as the epitome of the India that is inclusive to all people irrespective of their diverse background. Overcoming all the contradictions, he becomes one with her. He takes refuge in her lap. Anandamoyi accepts him wholeheartedly as her own son. She asserts, “I am a childless woman, but you are more truly my son than a child born from my own body could have been” (562). In this instance, “an Indian and an Anglo Irish are wedded together. Anandamoyi becomes a fictional context for Tagore’s political aim, which is to transcend nationalism and move towards internationalism” (18).

When ailing Krishnadayal, Gora’s foster father, discloses the secrets about Gora’s birth and parentage, being terrified at the thought of Gora taking part in his funeral ceremony, Gora sinks deeper and deeper into the abyss of nothingness. Stripped off his mother, father, caste, country, nationality, lineage, and God, he has nothing to hold on to. But this discovery comes to him as blessing in disguise. He gets enlightened then. He realizes the fact that the India he was searching for was a fortress, one that he was shaping with his unchanging and uncritical thought. He was shutting himself off from his mother’s quarters, trying to erect artificial barriers. Along with the revelations of the truth, the fortress he was erecting crumbles down in front of him. He begins to rise in absolute freedom. Segregations and prohibitions are dispelled, and Gora encounters an expansive India- the very figure of Anandamoyi.

The novel ends with Gora going to Anandamoyi, laying his head at her feet. He finds his mother standing in front of him; all compassionate and

accepting heartily, the mother who has no caste, the mother who makes no distinctions and the mother who has no sense of hatred- the true image of India. The real India is Anandamoyi, the mother- total, unified, and inclusive in whom all the blind faiths disappear. With the disappearance of segregation, division and separation created by blind faith, orthodoxy, and political ideology, there appears Anandamoyi, the embodiment of mother India. Hence, Anandamoyi “represents Tagore’s concept of the motherland- gracious, compassionate forgiving and ultimately transcendent” (Sattar 259).

References

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