



# Gora

*Rabindranath Tagore , Gisela Leiste (Translator)*

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**Gora** Rabindranath Tagore , Gisela Leiste (Translator)

Vast in its scope and rich in thought Gora has been acclaimed as a monumental work in the history of Bengali fiction. The story reflects the social, political and religious scene in Bengal at the turn of the century. The forces that were operating in Bengal at that time were one of the intense nationalism and revival of ancient spiritual values and also that of liberal western thought. What makes Gora a great prose epic is not only its social content but also its brilliant story of self-searching, of resolution, of conflicts and of self discovery.

## Gora Details

Date : Published 2004 by Albatros (first published 1910)

ISBN : 9783491961302

Author : Rabindranath Tagore , Gisela Leiste (Translator)

Format : 580 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, India, Classics, Asian Literature, Indian Literature

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## Sourav Das says

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## Chrissie says

This book is definitely worth reading. It is an Indian classic more Westerners should read. Tagore wrote the Indian anthem, short stories, poetry and novels.

Nevertheless, reading this was a challenge, particularly as an audiobook. The names are hard to grasp, so I started by looking on internet to get a character list. I had no idea how to spell the names. How could I take notes?

These are the central characters:

Gora - one of two friends

Binoy - second of two friends

Poresh Babu - father in a Brahmos family

Baradasundari - wife of Poresh Babu

Labonia, Lolita and illa are their three daughters

Sucharita - their adopted daughter

"Shutish" - their youngest son (I am guessing at the spelling)

Krishnadaya and Anandmoyi - father and mother of Gora

(Anandmoyi is almost as a mother to Binoy too)

Harimohini - Sucharita's aunt

Haran Babu (aka Panu Babu) - promised husband to Sucharita

Abinrash - Gora's disciple

Mohim - an elderly man trying to get his daughter married

Oh, and I am not giving spoilers in this character list!

I would have appreciated such a list when I started the book. That is why I am providing it. On internet I could not find it, and there are all sorts of different spellings. Lolita is spelled Lalita and Lolitha too. There are nicknames galore. When you listen you cannot quite hear which pronunciation is the closest. Honestly,

even with this list you aren't quite sure you are hearing the printed name. "P"s sound like "B"s. Did I hear a "t" or a "th"?! On internet articles have serious spoilers. I did not appreciate this! In the book you find out at the very end something extremely important about familial relationships, which might be seen as warranting an alteration of the above list.

So, to start with, just the names were a challenge! At least for me, but I was determined! I in fact enjoyed the challenge that the book posed.

So, what are the themes? What do you get from the book? Superficially, this is a book about several couples - who should marry whom? It is a love story. It is also about parents. There are several orphans, and so the book is about the roles of parents - both biological and adoptive parents. It is about friendship, selfishness and personal gain. These are all topics that speak to any human being – Westerners and Indians alike.

What made the book interesting to me, and why I am glad I read it, is what I learned about life in Bengali, India, at the turn of the Twentieth Century in the area around Kolkata (Calcutta) then under the British rule. There is police corruption. There are not only religious conflicts among the Muslim, Christian and Hindu faiths, but also serious controversies between different Hindu sects – most particularly between the more liberal "Brahmos" and the more traditional orthodox Hindus. The sects follow different beliefs and traditions. The book gives an in-depth depiction of social life in colonial India, sectarianism, religious intolerance, the changing status of women, idol-worship, the caste system and Indian patriotism. The last item is extremely important to Gora.

The book is philosophical in tone. The philosophical reasoning is "Indian" in all its essence, and not always easy for a Westerner to follow. Hindu and Indian terms are used. They are not all defined. While the context usually makes them clear, you have to be patient. Internet isn't much help either. You have to start somewhere and this is a lovely story that brings you into the heart of Hindu life.

The book is both character driven and plot oriented, albeit slow at the start. The events are so foreign to my Western outlook that it was at times hard to empathize with the characters. You have to re-think how this would roll out in the West. You can make comparisons to interracial marriages or marriages between people of different faiths. For a Westerner it is hard to imagine a society so dictated by religious restraints. Few books are able to make me understand the beauty of faith. Religion and faith are/were tightly woven in Bengali. With this understanding you better understand the political conflicts that arose during the Partition.

What about the characters? Are there good characterizations? Do the people feel real, or are they cardboard figures? Some are static, others learn and change. So the answer is that the novel offers both! There are fanatics and hypocrites but also warm loving people. Some are understanding and wise. I mentioned above that this is a novel concerned with the changing status of women. The women were for me the most intriguing of all the characters. Sucharita and Lolita did seem awfully mature for their age. They are only thirteen or fourteen years-old, prime for marriage! My favorite character was Anandamoyi. I loved her. What a marvelous person. Yeah, so maybe you can clump them into types of people..... Poresh Babu he was my masculine idol. Wise and kind and intelligent – a thinking human being. Is he the spokesperson for the author? I think so. I believe that an Indian has an easier time identifying with the characters! For me it was more of a learning experience, and I liked the book for that.

The translator is Radha Chakravarty. In the lines of philosophical reasoning you hear the British influence. Being a translation it is hard to judge the author's choice of words, but I appreciated the poetic tone in the descriptive metaphors. The narrator is Samrat Chakrabarti. I usually could distinguish among the different characters through the narrator's different intonations. I loved the female voices and Poresh Babu's too! No

really, the narration was very good. Perfect tempo too. It was just the names that continually threw me.

I enjoyed this book. It opened my eyes to Hindu ways of thinking and to life in Bengali at the beginning of the 1900s. I heartily recommend it.

## Aishu Rehman says

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## Angshuman Mukherjee says

Born and brought up in Bengal , I have had the privilege of reading this book in the original Bengali and since then, it has secured a very special place in my heart . This book is all that we crave to be or at least ( at the risk of sounding like a moral police ) something we should crave to be . It is gargantuan in its expanse and length while in beauty ,it surpasses almost any piece of literature anywhere in the world save a handful . And it is a great treatise on how our minds work as well as the boon and bane of ideology .

At its best it is a celebration of humans and their humanity and at worst a merciful criticism of all our narrowness and selfishness and greed that we purposefully cultivate as if we are afraid to be great and glorious . This book has by far the most memorable description of romantic love as something that sustains but does not injure with its intensity , of friendships so powerful that some might confuse it with romance itself , of the sacrifice it takes to be parents and perhaps even the greater resilience it takes a parent to set an ideal for their children . Even the flaws of the characters that populate the novel are gloriously breathtaking .

This book is where Tagore transcends his own peculiar notion of women and creates characters so powerful that they far outstrip their male counterparts. Every character in the story is the representation of an idea ; ideas which are all the more necessary in today's age . And it is here that he so beautifully demolishes the dogma of religion and ethnicity by showing if a religious injunction is against the rationality of man then it should be discarded even if it means threatening unity . Above all his characters debate of what it means to be a nation and how diversity may provide far greater strength than uniformity .

## Nour AlAlii says

## Adam says

Language Notes  
Text: English (translation)  
Original Language: Bengali

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## Anirban Nanda says

After completing this book, I feel like a huge storm has calmed down. The tumultuous point-counterpoint, the arrogant urge to follow the rules of society, its necessity and importance had been swirling in mind for days and I was learning with each debate, making my own stand and within minutes Tagore came and broke that. I have read many philosophical novels full of points and counterpoints, for example, The Idiot or Elizabeth Costello; but never have got something so close, never have immersed myself so much into anything. The reasoning, the meticulous description of every detail of human mind have simply blew my mind away. Rabindranath had never got any schooling but his understanding of human psychology is phenomenal. People say ‘Show’; not ‘Tell’. But see here; the poetic rhythm with which Tagore has portrayed the world makes his prose sublime. This is telling at its purest form. The prose feels very sacred and compassionate. After reading this, I find the use of allegory and visuals in 'showing' are very tacky. It was like a great saint was giving lessons for life slowly, calmly, in a straight-forward way. I have read the novel in original Bengali version and would love to read it again and again. This novel, I believe, is the most contextual in present India.

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## Dhara Mehta says

Tagore’s Gora is a profoundly Indian book. It questions the identity of each of its characters as the well as the Indian nation. Caste, tradition, filial piety, patriotism and marriage are all philosophical addressed in the novel. Tagore examines the difference between religion and religious fanaticism. Tagore compares and contrasts relationship between: fathers and daughters, ruler and ruled, society and individual.

Binoy is an intelligent young man who lives in the shadow of his best friend Gora. Gora is an orphan that is raised in an orthodox Brahman family but was unaware of it. He is intensely patriotic but does heed caste rules. Around this time, a reformist movement is established “Brahmo Samaj” to counteract orthodox Hinduism as well as Christian attacks against polytheism and idol worship. Although Hindus and Brahmos lived side by side they observed different traditions. Brahmo women had more liberty than Hindu women. Binoy, being a good Samaritan, helps an injured neighbor (Poreshbabu) find a doctor. Poreshbablu is a moderate Brahmo, who philosophically advocates the middle road. Thus begins his acquaintance with a Brahmo family. He becomes a frequent visitor to their household. Their two elder daughters Lalita and Sucharita captivate his intellectual curiosity. In return they get an earful about his friend Gora. Gora become acquainted with the Brahmo household. After encountering Binoy and Gora, Sucharita rejects her predetermined suitor: Haribabu. The Brahmo family is invited to an English magistrate party. Gora visits villages outside of Kolkata and rebels against English tyranny. Lalita realizing the misdeeds of the British rebels by leaving her family and escaping the party with Binoy. Her action is scandalous by any standard. Her image and her family’s image are tarnished. Binoy protects Lalita, and eventually marries her. Both of them are abandoned by their respective communities. Gora’s mother (Anandamoyi) and Lalita father supports both the bride and groom. Gora mother considers Binoy her son. Eventually Sucharita is facing



another suitor picked by her cunning aunt. Gora realizes his true identity and marries Sucharita.

If Dickens is the master of plot then Tagore is the master of character. Although Gora is slow in the beginning, plot thickens in the middle. The writing is lyrical and almost poetic in nature. Gora represents nationalism, Binoy intellectualism, Lalita feminism, Poreshbabu wisdom, Anadamoyi motherhood, and Borodasundari orthodoxy. Tagore speaks through Poreshbabu. Overall a five star read.

#### Favorite Quotes

1. It is lack of respect that presents us for a unified vision of our country (p 77)
2. The fact is man cannot function unless he belittles all things outside his own field of action as trivial.
3. Man's real relationship with truth is based on deviation: it makes man naturally humble (97)
4. We see Bharatavasha only as a land of men (110)
5. If we could view our nation's women outside domestic work, we could perceive our nation in its beauty and wholeness (111)
6. Tempted by the present one loses the future (277)
7. Dispelling all the falsehood of this world, let the pure image of perfect truth manifest itself in our lives (283)
8. The community makes us completely forget the simplest thing: our humanity (316)
9. Liberation from assaults of looseness and enslavement to falsehood. That is what I mean by liberation (320)
10. Gone are the night of sorrow, the day has dawned. Broken, broken are the chains of bondage (336)
11. When a person comes to conflict with a society two things must be considered of the two sides who is more powerful, who is more just. It is the society that must grow and extend itself for the human being (403)

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### Indrani Sen says

What can I say about this that has not already been said? Still let me try recording my impressions.

This is the story of two Hindu Bengali friends - Gora and Binoy, and two Brahmo Bengali sisters - Sucharita and Lalita. Gora is the leader with strict principles which he is ready to defend at any cost. Binoy while intelligent and educated, still is very heavily influenced by Gora. There is Anandamoyee, Gora's mother, who is mother to both these friends and is very very refreshingly completely modern in her outlook and actions. As her counterpoint, there is Pareshbabu, the girls' guardian/father, who while being Brahmo is not bound by any dogma and promotes independent thinking to great cost. Sucharita and Lalita are educated girls who have their own independent thoughts and principles. When Binoy accidentally befriends Sucharita and slowly becomes their family friend, a whole chain of events unfold that changes everyone's lives. People, principles, plans clash mightily and the existing order is shaken up. Does Binoy ever listen to Gora, can Gora stay true to his principles and how does the society all around react, forms the crux of the novel.

Apart from the plot, there is much more to this book. The philosophies of religion and country (swadesh) have been debated beautifully. And I could not get over how beautiful the language is, as I read this in Bengali. I need to read/re-read more of him.

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**Evelina | AvalinahsBooks says**

So it turns out Tagore is really all he's cracked out to be! This is a wonderful work of fiction (and philosophy). It was like a breath of fresh air for me, because when I read enough petty books and start wondering if maybe reading just got boring or maybe I can't quite feel like books are so grand anymore, or maybe I'm just not as impressionable, I stumble upon something like this and realise that everything is still fine with the world of books, and all I've been longing for is simply just a really good, deep read. This is precisely that kind of book, and it really impressed me how Tagore transported me into the whirlwind of thoughts and ideas that shaped the 19-20th centuries in India. It was also extremely well timed for me, as the previous book I read was Gissing's *Odd women* which also addressed a lot of the problems that this book did.

What will you find in this book? Discussions about the love for your nation, your community and family, spirituality and religion, as well as religious freedom and freedom to act as an individual, as opposed to the restrictions society puts on you and the prejudice free thinkers have to face, but that's not all. This book also talks about coming of age, finding yourself, a young person's place in the world and in the spiritual realm, also about what it truly means to be a highly evolved human being, not just by intelligence but through your deeds and understanding. If you are someone who often ponders these questions, you will greatly enjoy this book.

## Gorab Jain says

Perfect 5!

It is books like these which makes you think twice before rating 5 stars to any other book! Even in the Hindi translation the language was so beautiful, too bad I can't read Bengali :(

Hindu Samaj and Brahmo Samaj are two sides of a coin, which is flipped hard... and what you see are clashing beliefs from both perspectives in terms of some very intense arguments.

Add to it elements of love and sacrifice which spurns a dilemma on prioritising your religion, friend, patriotism, lover, and self respect.

Just brilliant!

P.S.: The pure Hindi discussions added much more fun to the reading. - Gora Discussion Thread

## Nusrat Mahmood says

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### Hasibul Shanto says

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**?Eryn says**

***\*\*Read for class.\*\****