# Tagore after Lacan: The Effect of the Change of the Ending of *Gora* on the Clinical Structure of its Protagonist

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The novel *Gora*, serialised in the Bengali monthly *Prabasi* between September 1907 and March 1910, contains Rabindranath Tagore's (1861–1941) most elaborate analysis of Indian social life in its rich complexity. Tagore began the novel sometime in 1907 in order to settle a financial debt owed to the editor of *Prabasi*, Ramananda Chatterjee, which he incurred at the time of his daughter's marriage in May-June of that year.

*Gora* narrates the story of its eponymous hero. In Bengali, the word "Gora" contains an allusion to "Gauranga," the 15th century religious and social reformer and the most eminent human devotee of the Hindu god Krishna, who had many mythical devotees too. The name Gauranga means "fair bodied," while the name Krishna means dark-complexioned. Given the intensity of his devotion to Krishna, and owing to his complexion, Gauranga is often regarded as the fair-complexioned reincarnation of Lord Krishna in Bengali literature and folklore. Among other things, Lord Krishna is well known for his legendary love affair with his adoptive maternal aunt, variously named Radha, Radhika, Radharani, etc. It is true that the novel *Gora* contains several interesting echoes of some of these names. For instance, it contains a character named Krishnadayal in the form of Gora's foster-father; and a character named Radharani, Gora's lover, who however is usually referred to in the novel by her other name, Sucharita. Besides, Gora's own formal name is Gaurmohan, where Mohan itself is another name for Krishna. On top of that, Gora, who lost his biological parents at birth, is somewhat like Krishna, who was separated from his biological parents at birth. Nevertheless, I shall not develop these mythical allusions and their possible textual ramifications because they are not directly related to the question we are concerned with. Instead, it suffices for our purpose to note the two meanings of the word "Gora" in Bengali. Literally, the word "Gora" or "Gaur" mean "fair-complexioned", and as such it is used to describe Indians with a fair complexion in a positive sense. It also has a second usage as a slang, since the word "Gora" stands for white men in general in a slightly derogatory sense. The title of the novel stands for both of these, for Gora denotes the complexion of the boy thus named, and at the same time bears an ironic allusion to the protagonist's Irish identity.

The novel deals with an Irish orphan named Gora who is born during the revolution of the Sepoys against the British in 1857, and is brought up as her own child by a benign and barren Bengali Brahmin named Anandamoyee. Almost from the outset of the novel, Gora presents himself as a vehement believer and an obsessive advocate of orthodox Hindu nationalism in complete ignorance of his European ancestry. He becomes the leader of a small group of young men, though only two of them, Binoy and Abinash, figure directly in the novel. Nor are the activities of the group

explained to the readers other than cursorily. All that the reader does come across in the greater part of the first half of the novel is Gora in the act of passionately explaining to Binoy or to Anandamoyee, usually separately, the greatness of Hinduism, and more importantly, what a true Hindu must not do, such as marry outside the Hindu community, eat food cooked by a non-Hindu, and so on. In course of time Gora feels attracted towards Sucharita, but he is so distressed by his attraction that he not only reprimands himself but also departs from Calcutta, where the novel is set, in order to overcome the impulse. Subsequent events land Gora in prison, thereby excluding him from the action towards the beginning of the last third, and prompting a temporary shift in the novel's focus to Binoy and the fruition of his love with Lolita. Once out of prison, Gora decides to undergo ceremonial penance in order to undo the spiritual contamination caused by his imprisonment. But before the ceremony can take place, his foster father, Krishnadayal, breaks the news to him that he was not born a Hindu. Thus, Gora suddenly discovers towards the very end of the novel that he was of European extraction and hence an outcaste in terms of the very faith he had always proudly regarded as his own. He rushes to Sucharita's foster father Paresh Babu soon after this revelation in order to offer himself to the latter as his disciple and to seek Sucharita's hand in marriage.

Insofar as the novel depicts the story of Gora's education through his recognition of the hidden truth about himself, it is a bildungsroman. However, insofar as the truth about Gora's Irish identity is repressed from him and is meant for him to discover retroactively, that is, insofar as he is suspended in a state of ironic ignorance regarding the truth of his birth, subjectivity and identity until the very end—to which he is moreover led by his own inadvertent subjective intervention—Gora is an "Oedipal" hero. Now although its protagonist is thus clearly placed within an Oedipal situation of irony, the novel has been read in every conceivable way so far other than psychoanalytically. The aim of this essay is to begin to fill up this glaring gap in *Gora*-criticism by taking up the crucial problem of the structuring of the desire of the Mother in the paternal metaphor that the novel is predominantly concerned with.

## Problematic Desire of the Mother

In perfect consonance with the Lacanian axiom that man's desire is the desire of the Mother, the circuit of desire in the novel clearly originates from Gora's foster mother Anandamoyee.[1] In a poem written by Tagore, possibly in 1903, which he had himself translated into English under the title "The Beginning," a child ask its mother: "Where have I come from, where did you pick me up?" The mother replies:

> Half crying, half laughing,
> And clasping the baby to her breast,-
> "You were hidden in my heart as its
> Desire, my darling,
> You were in the dolls of my childhood's
> Games; and when with clay I made the
> Image of Shiva [Hindu god] every morning, I made
> And unmade you then. […]"[2]

The origin of the course of desire in *Gora* is similar to the one described in these lines insofar as Gora, too, is the outcome of Anandamoyee's desire; he was her longing, her dream. Desire in the novel originates from Anandamoyee and, as if to highlight the quality of a deep yearning about it, the narrator gave its earliest expression in the novel the form of a dream that she narrated to her husband, Krishnadayal, even before the baby Gora was in sight:

> One day in a dream I went to the prayer room with a basket of white fool foot flowers—and as I prayed I saw that the flowers had gone and in their place was a little boy, as fair as the flowers! Ah, I can never tell you what I felt at that moment. My eyes filled with tears. When I quickly moved to pick up the child, I woke up. And ten days had not passed after that when my Gora was given to me.[3]

Thus, Gora was already present as the chief component of Anandamoyee's dream or desire even before the Irish infant in question came to embody it.

For the greater part of the novel, Gora is barred from knowing the truth about his birth. For all we know, Krishnadayal, while agreeing to allow Anandamoyee

1 J. Lacan, 2017, 175 and Lacan: 2013/2019, 269–290.

2 R. Tagore, 1913/1988, 14.

3 R. Tagore, 1910/1997, 30. Translation modified. Unless otherwise mentioned, 'Translation modified' means that the Bengali expressions left untranslated in the original translation have been translated into English by me.

to keep the Irish baby, had, owing to professional constraints, imposed on her the condition that she shall not reveal Gora's identity to him until Krishnadayal died; and Anandamoyee had agreed to abide by the condition owing to her intense longing to have a baby of her own, at any cost. As a result of this arrangement, there is at the heart of Anandamoyee's character, a problematic desire for Gora. Anandamoyee's desire for Gora must be regarded as problematic because the suppressed truth underlying its fulfilment compelled her to crave the censure of others, while also compulsively equivocating on matters regarding Gora's birth and identity:

> From the day she had picked up the infant Gora and cradled him in her arms, she had become independent of the practices and judgement of other people. From that day she had followed a course of conduct which only earned her the censure of others. A suppression of truth at the core of her life pained her endlessly, but being criticized by other people relieved her pain to some extent. When others accused her of having become a Christian [implying, an outcaste], she used to clutch Gora to her bosom and say, "God knows it is no condemnation to be called a Christian" (221, trans. modified).

**Being the Maternal Phallus versus Having the Phallus**

If Anandamoyee's desire is to *have* Gora as the object of her desire, Gora's desire was to *be* that object for Anandamoyee. There are several indications of this in the text. Let us study them in turn, beginning with Gora's strong resistance to hearing the half-truth equivocally articulated by Anandamoyee.

On one occasion early in the novel, in reply to Gora's incomplete allegation that she was guilty of not abiding by the Hindu customs despite hailing from a renowned Hindu family, Anandamoyee first explained that she had been forced by her husband to give up her customs one by one. Then, later in the same chapter, she produced a second justification, which goes as follows:

> Yet it was only when I first took you in my arms that I gave up all customs. Only when you hold a little child to your breast do you realize that nobody is born on earth with a caste. The moment I realised this, from that moment I have been sure that if I were to look down upon somebody else because he was of low caste or a Christian, then God would snatch you away from me. May you always fill my arms and light up my home, I prayed, and I would drink water from the hands of every caste in the world (15).

Gora's somewhat obstinate deafness to the half-truth contained in this piece of equivocation is extremely significant. It suggests that he did not want to risk his desired status of being the object of his mother's desire by listening to her destructive half-truths. Simply put, Gora preferred to be deaf to the hint of the half-truth equivocally conveyed by Anandamoyee because he stubbornly wanted to remain the maternal phallus that he was. The following example shows how Gora continued to remain resistant to the half-truth in spite of Binoy's best attempts to draw his attention to it:

> Binoy said hesitantly, "You know, Gora, something Ma said today makes me feel disturbed. It seems to me there is something on her mind which she cannot convey to us, and that is troubling her."
> Gora said impatiently, "Ah, Binoy, must you always imagine things! That leads nowhere and only wastes time."
> Binoy: You never look properly at things around you in this world, so you can dismiss as imaginary whatever you haven't seen. But I tell you I have noticed quite often that Ma is nursing some anxiety within her—something that doesn't fit into things around her—and this causes some sorrow in her everyday life at home. Gora, do listen more carefully to what she says.
> Gora: I do listen with enough care to what my ears can catch. Trying to hear more may run the risk of hearing wrongly (16–17).

Gora's desire to remain the maternal phallus is also brought out by his reactions to his awareness of his desire for Sucharita. In the beginning, woman was the same as mother to Gora. He said to Binoy in chapter 2:

> The scriptures say about women *pujarha grihadeeptayah*—that is, they are worthy of worship because they light up the house. Whereas when they light up the hearts of men

> and are honoured for this by western custom, it is better not to call it by the name of worship […]. The proper place to worship women is where they are installed as Mother (10–11, trans. modified).

Perhaps owing to this idea that woman and mother were identical as objects of worship, Gora's reaction to the thoughts that expressed to him his own desire, in the form of his sexual desire for Sucharita, was to attempt to *escape* from it. The first indication of this appears in chapter 6. Krishnadayal, who had become a God-fearing person since his retirement, did not want the Christian Gora to marry a Hindu girl. For that reason, he asked Gora to meet his Brahmo (i.e., non-Hindu) friend Paresh Babu to find out how he was faring, with the hope that it might eventually lead to a relationship between Gora and one of Paresh Babu's daughters. Gora promised to oblige but immediately altered his promise stating that he could not visit Paresh Babu's house because he must go on a pilgrimage to Tribeni. It was only after Binoy appeared to have become quite knowledgeable about women that Gora started to sense a curiosity on that matter. Accordingly, in chapter 20, when Binoy requested Gora to accompany him to Paresh Babu's house where the former had been regularly interacting with Sucharita and Lolita, we are told the following by the narrator:

> Gora agreed without any demur. Not only did he agree, there was no longer the lack of enthusiasm that he harboured in his mind earlier. At first Gora used to be totally indifferent to the existence of Sucharita and Paresh Babu's other daughters, then a kind of hostile contempt towards them had grown in his mind but now that was replaced by a curiosity about them. He was particularly keen to know what it was that had drawn Binoy's interest so strongly (128).

And yet again, in the very next chapter, when Gora sensed tender feelings for Sucharita, he forcefully denied them: "No, all this is nothing, this will never do" (141), and instead of abiding by his decision to go to Sucharita's house with Binoy, he went on a trek along the Grand Trunk Road with his friends. On both these occasions, Gora tried to distance himself from Sucharita and his desire for her, literally, by physically departing from Calcutta. Gora's hesitation concerning his desire for Sucharita is the hesitation of someone who has not made the transition from the dialectic of being to the dialectic of having, as Lacan puts it. It is clear from these indications in the novel that Gora strongly wanted to *be* the subject of his mother's desire, which is what made him so apprehensive about *having* his own object of desire.[4]

It is important to note in this context that Binoy was able to make the same transition, from *being* to *having*, relatively easily, albeit with some smart assistance from his beloved Lolita. Binoy is in many ways Gora's double. Like Gora, Binoy had lost his parents. Both Gora and Binoy were of the same age, and they had studied and passed their examinations at the school and college together. For a considerable period of time, they had grown up together as friends under the caring supervision of Anandamoyee, whom both addressed as "Ma" or mother. Besides, Binoy fell in love with Lolita, who was a sister-figure to Sucharita, the two adorable "daughters" of Paresh Babu. This makes the contrast between Binoy and Gora on the question of assuming their respective desires so striking. Since Binoy had a far less problematic desire of the Mother to reckon with, he could make the transition from being to having with greater ease than Gora. Gora on the other hand is clearly crippled by the dread of assuming the position of the desiring subject. In short, Binoy could easily assume the role of a desiring *subject* at a time when Gora could not think of being anything other than a desired *object*.[5]

### The Imaginary Mother qua her Enemy

The most important indication in the novel of Gora's wish to remain the maternal phallus, however, is to be found in his concept of the motherland. It is a concept that he consistently wields to prove to

4 Gora came to recognize his ignorance of womankind as a defect as late as in chapter 54 when Sucharita said to Binoy while taking leave of Anandamoyee after a visit: 'Won't you come to visit us one of these days?' Gora, unable to understand why she had not requested him as well, felt a little hurt. The narrator reports: 'Never before had it been a matter of regret to Gora that while Binoy could easily mix with everybody, Gora could not. Today he recognized this inability of his nature as a failing and felt deprived' (332).

5 For more details of the three times of the Oedipus complex—namely, to be or not to be the maternal phallus as the first time, to have or not to have the phallus as the second time, and to have the phallus by not having it as the third time—including the idea of the structuring of the desire of the Mother in the paternal metaphor, see J. Lacan, 1998/2017, 163–196, as well as J. Lacan, 2013/2019 and 1994/2021.

himself that he was nothing if not a faithful object of his mother's desire. In order to prove this, however, he had to invent an imaginary mother in the form of Mother-India. Let us examine Gora's Mother-India and his relationship with this concept, beginning with the following excerpt from chapter 4 in which Binoy had placed the question categorically before Gora:

> Binoy: Where is this India of yours?
> Gora placed a hand on his chest and said, "Where the compass I have here points day and night, here I have it— not in your Marshman's *History of India*."
> Binoy: Does something really exist at the place to which your compass points?
> Gora replied excitedly, "Of course there is. I can lose my way, I may drown, but that port of Laxmi is always there. That is my fully formed India— full in health, full in knowledge, full in justice. Do you think India is nowhere? That only falsehood is around us everywhere? This Calcutta of yours, these offices, these law courts, and these few bubbles of brick and wood! […]. [T]hrow all this away and launch our ship towards that very same port. We shall drown if we must, we shall die if we must. Until then I cannot set aside my image of a real India, a complete India" (21, trans. modified).

The passage indicates that this concept of Mother-India to which Gora was affectively attached was almost like a living entity to him. He felt its existence within him every moment. He calls it "real India" even though it was evidently a mental image. This image, moreover, is described in terms of Laxmi, the Hindu household goddess of abundance, and is thus clearly reminiscent of the character of Anandamoyee. On the other hand, figures like Marshman or, in this instance, Binoy, who did not perceive this concept in the same way, were as far from the truth as was the observable reality that appeared to represent it. Thus, it is in terms of a combination of a strong and subjective faith in an image of the motherland on the one hand, and an aggressive dismissal of a real or imaginary other who appeared to disregard any aspect of such an image on the other hand, that Gora at once symptomatically sustained his faith in the image and himself in his faith.

This is the form in which we encounter Gora's relationship with Mother-India at the outset; and the relationship is sustained in this very form until the beginning of the last quarter of the novel. Let us look at another example of the same aggressive play of identification with an image of the mother and opposition to its detractors from a later stage of the text, so as to appreciate the consistency in Gora's attitude on this matter. In chapter 53, in course of debating Binoy's decision to marry Lolita, Gora said to Binoy:

> [T]here is need to understand with one's heart. It is a matter of great sorrow to me that you are bent upon cutting yourself off from the people of your own country by marrying a Brahmo girl. You can do such a thing, I never could. That is the difference between us—not in wisdom or in intelligence. I have an emotional attachment which you lack. If you can use a knife to set yourself free, obviously you do not feel the same way about the pull of the umbilical cord. I want the India that I know. You may blame it, abuse it, but I want that and no other (324, trans. modified).[6]

These passages also indicate Gora's singular inability to apprehend this image *as* an image and thereby find a stable footing in the symbolic register beyond the imaginary.

Perhaps we can pace Gora's mind on this matter slightly better by asking the question: Who, really, is Gora's imaginary adversary? Gora's imaginary adversary was clearly the one who appeared to be contemptuous of, or indifferent to, the image of the mother to which he was dyadically and compulsively tied. Now, is that not exactly what Anandamoyee feared the revelation of the truth of his birth might turn Gora into? Anandamoyee was conscious of her desire and of how it had been fulfilled; hence she was merely apprehensive of its possibility. Gora on the other hand was unconscious; hence he zealously opposed this imaginary construct—which was but an image of Gora himself in Anandamoyee's nightmares—as an enemy of the motherland, its religion and its rituals.

In chapter 53, Gora himself felt for a moment that his desire to serve his motherland was rooted in his desire for Anandamoyee. Owing to what Gora

6 In the original translation into English, the Bengali expression for 'the pull of the umbilical cord' is rendered as 'the bond of birth'.

considered acts that reflected Binoy's indifference and Abinash's idiocy, he was wondering if India was not "a reality only to [him]" (326), when a servant came to inform Gora that his mother was calling him. The narrator reports:

> Gora was startled, and repeated to himself "Mother is calling!" It seemed that this message bore some new significance for him. He said to himself, "Whatever else happens, I have my mother. It is she who is calling me […]. Mother had called me when I was in jail, and I had seen her there. She is calling me now that I am out of jail and I must make this journey to go and see her" (327).

And in chapter 69, Gora had separately realised that his desire was not his *own* desire but the desire *of* the Mother: "There was a firm conviction in Gora's mind that most events in his life were neither accidental, nor did he make them happen out of his volition. He believed that he was born to fulfil some particular purpose of his own country's destiny" (443). However, Gora himself was never in a position to combine the two and thereby recognise, name and thus release the occult equation motherland=mother until we arrive at And in chapter 69, Gora had separately realised that his desire was not his own desire but the desire of the Mother: "There was a firm conviction in Gora's mind that most events in his life were neither accidental, nor did he make them happen out of his volition. He believed that he was born to fulfil some particular purpose of his own country's destiny" (443). However, Gora himself was never in a position to combine the two and thereby recognise, name and thus release the occult equation motherland=mother until we arrive at the epilogue to the novel.

**Distantiation of the Imaginary Mother**

Gora's inner preparation to encounter the truth about himself that he knew not began when he was in prison. But his preparation took the most decisive turn when his own desire was badly shaken up from within by his feelings for Sucharita. It forced Gora to take to worshipping the idol of the goddess in the household temple, as well as to establish a radically new relationship with his imaginary mother in course of doing so:

> Gora had not previously engaged himself in the worship of gods. But ever since his heart was troubled, when he could not tie himself down to anything, when work felt like a void and half of life seemed to be crying in despair—from such a time he had tried to apply his mind to worship. He sat still before the idol of the goddess and tried to concentrate on it (453).

The first sentence of the excerpt, "Gora had not previously engaged himself in the worship of gods" is a rare slip of the pen in Tagore's writings. It certainly is a slip because the narrator had very briefly mentioned in chapter 5 of the novel that Gora had developed the habit of "performing ceremonial worship every evening"! (28) The practical explanation of this slip would probably have to do with Tagore's oblivion of that brief remark made in chapter 5 while he was writing chapter 71 at a much later date, and the repetition of the same error while revising his drafts. I would prefer, however, to give full force to this slip and suggest that this piece of factual incongruity in the narration in fact dialectically implies that this particular session of idol-worship was radically unlike any other to have preceded it.

A closer look at the textual details would suggest that Gora indeed had never previously engaged himself in a worship of this kind, for, in this very unique instance of worship, it is clearly not the expression of devotion but the formalisation of a division between the devotee and the divinity that is at stake:

> After some time Gora began to think that a Brahmin does not need to feel devotion. Devotion was the peculiar possession of the masses. The bridge which connected the devotee to the object of devotion must be the bridge of knowledge. Such a bridge not only maintained the connection, it also marked the boundary on both sides. If there were no intervening space of unadulterated knowledge between the devotee and divinity, everything would get distorted …
> Briefly, his heart had defeated Gora; because of that transgression, he sentenced his heart to exile (454).

The accent on "knowledge" together with the act of subordination of "devotion," of the "masses" and of the "heart" in Gora's prayer in this special instance of worship, appear to represent a symbolic act on Gora's part of externalising the imaginary mother by dissoci-

ating and distancing her from himself in reality. That he did so at a time perilously close to the time of his recognition of the truth seems to indicate moreover that the hour of the truth was more important to the narrator than the truth itself. The narrator wonders at this point: "Who will escort the culprit to banishment! Where was the band of soldiers to enforce the sentence!" (454). The answers to these questions, in that order, are: Sucharita and in Krishnadayal.

**Structuring of the Desire of the Mother by the Castrating Father**

Krishnadayal represents the paternal "No" for Gora. It is clear from the narrative that the two men were never fond of each other. When Krishnadayal was in service with the Commissariat, he was an arrogant atheist, which is why he had not objected to Anandamoyee keeping Gora to herself despite his not being of Hindu origin. After his retirement, however, Krishnadayal became a God-fearing puritanical and ritualistic Hindu Brahmin who was anxious about Gora's aggressive practise of Hinduism from the points of view of the laws of his faith and the laws of the land. On one occasion in chapter 5, a situation emerged when he could have divulged the truth of his birth to Gora, but chose to be equivocal instead:

> Krishnadayal kept shaking his head as he said, "No, my son, you can't become a Hindu by claiming to be one… [B]ecoming a Hindu? No, that's very difficult."
> Gora: True enough. But since I have been born as a Hindu I have already entered through the main door. If I can apply myself correctly I shall gradually make progress.
> Krishnadayal: Son, […] what you are saying is also quite right. Whatever is the result of your actions, whatever faith has been ordained for you, you will return sooner or later to the path of that faith—nobody can stand in your way (29).

Toward the end of the novel however, when Krishnadayal felt severely constrained by his own obsession with ritual purity, he came tantalisingly close to being forced by an unsuspecting Gora to reveal the truth of his birth to him; and on this occasion he spoke as though he was no longer keen to protect Gora from the truth:

> "Let me tell you again— you think you have found entry into the religion of Hindus, but you are incapable of it. Every drop of your blood, every part of your body from head to foot, is opposed to it. You cannot suddenly become a Hindu, however much you may want to be one. For that the good deeds have to be done for many births". When Gora asked if he had not inherited it from his family, Krishnadayal retorted: "Have you no hesitation about contradicting me to my face? And still you call yourself a Hindu! How will you hide this foreign temper of yours?" (458).

Even a remark as categorical as this may not have sufficed to capture Gora's attention had he not started to prepare himself from within by severing his ties with the imaginary mother and by deciding to devote himself to knowledge in the household temple. Owing to his inner preparation however, unlike his characteristic dismissal of half-truths, Gora, on this occasion, took the risk of paying attention to it. While reflecting on Krishnadayal's words a little later, Gora started to feel uneasy about the insistence of something in his mind. The narrator reports: "An indistinct notion began growing in his mind about some hidden truth that underlay all that Krishnadayal had said. It was like a formless nightmare oppressing him and he was not able to dispel it" (459). In the final analysis, Anandamoyee's dream had started to become Gora's nightmare!

Finally, in chapter 75, Krishnadayal, performing his part in structuring Gora's desire of the Mother, produced the brutal yet vital blow by pointing to the truth so long withheld from Gora. Krishnadayal, who now thought he had made a blunder by attributing the sacred thread [meant only for the Brahmins] to Gora and thus publicly formalising the latter's Hindu identity, decided that he must prevent the same mistake from being repeated when Gora was about to undergo Hindu ceremonial penance following his release from prison. Therefore, he summoned Gora from the site of the ceremony and revealed the following to him from his sickbed:

> "It was during the Mutiny. We were in Etawa then. Your mother fled from the Indian revolutionaries and sought refuge one night in our house. Your father was killed in the previous

> day's fighting. […]".[7] After a pause he said, "He was an Irishman. That very night your mother died after giving birth to you. Ever since then you have been brought up in our house" (471).

Thus, with the help of a single blow, Krishnadayal completely severed Gora's ties with his beloved motherland and his adored mother, as well as Anandamoyee's ties with the most desired object of her life.

**Identification with the Name-of-the-Father**

Gora had estranged himself from his imaginary mother in the household temple, as we have seen. He had moreover managed to partially acknowledge his subjective desire for Sucharita in the meantime. Perhaps, he had also internally started to identify with what Lacan called the speech [*parole*] of the Father in terms of the ideology of Paresh Babu.[8] In a word, Gora was so well prepared for the truth, albeit unknowingly, that he even managed to surmise shortly prior to the castrating revelation of the truth of his birth that his "new life will take birth only when the umbilical cord is slashed" (Tagore: 1910/1997, 464). Gora's knowledge of the truth of his birth, perhaps because it brought about the establishment of his Name-of-the-Father, instead of shattering him led him to believe what would otherwise have seemed completely paradoxical, namely, that he had obtained freedom and was "alive again!".[9] Therefore, the facts that, radically unlike Oedipus, Gora had reconciled himself to the shocking truth almost as soon as he was exposed to it, and that he had left almost immediately to meet none other than Paresh Babu are, as acts, not puzzling but significantly appropriate, insofar as they reflect upon the precise course of structuring of his desire of the Mother by the paternal law.

In terms of his ideology especially, Paresh Babu represents the Name-of-the-Father for Gora. Somewhat like Tagore and Tagore's father Debendra Nath, Paresh Babu is a liberal humanist and a follower of the Brahmo faith. Also like Tagore and his father, Paresh Babu, too, sat in a silent meditation whenever he was deeply disturbed or pained. As an inclusionist he never discriminated against anyone whatsoever. He regarded everything, including the self, the nation and one's religious beliefs, to be secondary to the Almighty whom he moreover regarded as completely formless and yet completely pervasive. In the world of the novel where most of the characters are fiercely opinionated and are perpetually debating or disputing every single issue, Paresh Babu, though he is not devoid of ideals, is astonishingly calm and detached. His sagacity and tolerance had ironically led to his exclusion from all social groups, but he does not seem to have any complaint against anyone, owing probably to his broad overview about mankind and his unflagging faith in his God. He thus validates in his own way Lacan's ethical proposition that the "hero […] may be betrayed with impunity".[10] In chapter 76, Gora met Paresh Babu and spoke to him about his newfound freedom thus:

> I have retreated again and again out of fear. How much I have struggled against forces all around me in order to build in my mind an India that was without problems or distortions, and hold my devotion safely within that impregnable fort. Today in a matter of moments that imagined fort has vanished like a dream. I have been released completely and find myself in the midst of a vast truth (475, trans. modified).

Gora was at last able to view Mother-India as an "imagined" fort, and his relationship with it as a form of bondage. He also explained why the first thing he did after obtaining freedom was to come to Paresh Babu: "Only you have the clue to such freedom. That is why you find no place in any community. Please make me your disciple" (476). Thus, Gora's Oedipus complex that kept him tied to his mother is finally resolved in terms of his identification with Paresh Babu as the Name-of-the-Father. In Lacan's words: "It's insofar as the father is loved that the subject identifies with him and discovers the final solution to the Oedipus complex".[11]

As for Sucharita, Gora was initially afraid of his attraction toward her. Later, however, he managed to acknowledge his liking for her albeit from *within* the delimiting framework of his desire of the Mother. This may be understood from the fact that while Sucharita

7 I have deliberately expunged four sentences here to which I will return at an appropriate time later.
8 J. Lacan, 1998/2017, 176.
9 R. Tagore, 1910/1924, 406.
10 J. Lacan, 1986/1992, 321.
11 J. Lacan, 1998/2017, 155.

herself found Gora attractive precisely due to the passion with which he pursued his ideas concerning Mother-India, Gora only expressed his desire for her for the first time in the novel in chapter 60 by saying to her, "I am nearly burned by the desire that you and I should be able to see my country together" (375). In other words, the desire of Gora and Sucharita for each other is completely conditioned and mediated by Gora's omnipotent desire of the Mother. The detail of "seeing" is the second indicator of the influence of Gora's desire of the Mother on his desire for Sucharita here. The readers are repeatedly informed that Anandamoyee's primary wish was to be able to continue to see Gora. She was not worried that Gora refused to eat food cooked by her due to her association with her maid, Lachhmiya, who was a Christian. She was happy so long as she lived in the same house as Gora and was thus able to see him every day. Conversely, her greatest fear was that Gora might leave her and she would not be able to see him anymore. Thus, Gora's invitation to Sucharita to *see* the motherland together, although it is an acknowledgement of his own desire on Gora's part, is clearly *not* situated outside the trajectory of his desire of the Mother. The entire episode in which Gora expresses his desire to Sucharita is replete with references to seeing, the gaze, the eyes, looking at the eyes, seeing each other seeing each other, as though in a mirror, and so on. In chapter 76, however, following the structuring of his desire of the Mother in the paternal metaphor, Gora speaks to Sucharita in a very different language— one that refers to a symbolic gesture and deals with the formalisation of their relationship from the place of the symbolic Father:

> Gora turned towards Sucharita who was sitting still in her chair. He smiled and said, "Sucharita, I am not your guru any more. I address this prayer to you—take my hand and lead me to your true guru [i.e., Paresh Babu]" (476).

**Having by Not Having**

*Gora* is the only novel by Tagore that contains an epilogue. In this short epilogue, Gora speaks to Anandamoyee with the knowledge that she is not his biological mother. He tells her that although he was not conscious of it earlier, it was she who best represented his Mother-India to him. Gora explains to her how he had rediscovered her after having lost her, as follows: "Ma, you are my only mother. The mother for whom I have looked everywhere— all this time she was sitting in my house. You have no caste, you do not discriminate against people, you do not hate— you are the image of benediction. You are my India" (477, trans. modified). The time of the remark clearly reveals the fact that Gora could recognise and name the identification he had always made without being conscious of it only after he had renounced, and later lost, the object; that is to say, after the desire of the Mother had been alienated in the process of symbolisation by the law. Moreover, in terms of his very ability to designate it symbolically, the passage points to Gora's evident mastery of the loss of the desired object. Finally, Gora's symbolic designation of desire is also a matter of looking at the *other* side of his own discourse, insofar as his predominant idea concerning his mother and his motherland is chiastically transposed in the epilogue: after having thought of India as his mother, he now thinks of his mother as India. This, then, that in order to possess it the first step is to acknowledge that it cannot be possessed, is the unambiguous psychoanalytical story that *Gora*, apart from being a historical novel on burning social, political, racial and religious issues, begins to reveal itself to be.

**Dominance of Mother's Wish-fulfilment**

The ending of *Gora* disappointed many readers, owing to Gora's supposedly anticlimactic reaction to the castrating truth. Since the readers are informed about the truth of Gora's Irish identity as early as in chapter 6 of the novel, much of their interest is sustained by the curiosity regarding how this firebrand Hindu nationalist will react to the discovery that he is in fact not a Hindu. Every blazing proclamation by Gora in support of Hinduism thereafter only served to cumulatively intensify that curiosity. The feeling evoked by the published ending of the novel, therefore, resembles the feeling that the Athenians would probably have had if Jocasta and Oedipus were to have jointly declared at the end of *Oedipus Rex*: "So we know the truth at last, and it is good that we know the truth, for we will not be indulging in incest henceforth". The problem, in a word, is that Gora's castration does not make him bleed, which leaves the sadist strain in the readers dissatisfied. Although my reading of the novel largely forecloses this objection in terms of the contention that Gora was already internally prepared for his castration, albeit without knowing it, it fails to explain why, in

spite of being consciously unprepared for the truth to the extent that he consciously regarded it as a "nightmare" shortly before its revelation, he was not consciously shocked by the truth at the moment of its revelation, nor surprised that he was not shocked. This problem can be resolved in terms of a radically different interpretation of the novel based on reading the text in reverse.

What was the deepest desire of Anandamoyee? Since she was a barren woman, her deepest desire was to have a baby. This has textual support. She not only desired to have a baby of her own but actually desired to have a son, and a son as fair as a white flower. Thus, as Lacan consistently pointed out about desire, Anandamoyee's desire clearly stemmed from her lack. Anandamoyee's desire was fulfilled under somewhat exceptional circumstances. Gora's father had died the day before his birth, Gora's mother gave birth to the baby at the house of this childless woman and died immediately thereafter and, we must assume, that the Irish couple had no relations or acquaintances in India or elsewhere to investigate the matter further. Not only that, no one from Etawa or elsewhere wanted to know how Anandamoyee could have given birth to a white baby, and that too without ever revealing any sign of pregnancy! There were no questions, no doubts because Anandamoyee did not wish to be questioned or doubted on whether Gora was her own child or not. But was she happy to have had her wish fulfilled without anyone suspecting anything at all? No. After she had thus received Gora as a fortuitous gift, she was troubled by the thought of Gora's potential reaction to the revelation of his true identity, indicating that she doubted whether Gora would continue to regard her as his mother as and when he came to know the truth that she was not his biological mother. She thus had a new wish. Now, she wanted to be certain that Gora was really as loyal to her as what her own son would have been; that is to say, that Gora indeed desired her as strongly as her biological son would have. In order to establish this, the narrator created the charged dramatic context for the revelation of the truth, so that Gora had to be more faithful than even her biological son in order to be able to regard Anandamoyee as his mother thereafter. Gora's nationalism in this sense is the dramatic backdrop against which he was to confront the truth of his birth and decide the fate of his relationship with Anandamoyee. Quite clearly, the revelation of the truth in such a context is more than an ordeal by fire. And Gora came out of it to say to Anandamoyee that she was his real mother, exactly as Anandamoyee had wished him to say. This is the point in the novel where, eventually, Anandamoyee's wish to have a son of her own is well and truly fulfilled, for she was at last fully convinced that, despite Gora not being her own son, and notwithstanding the fortuitous manner in which she had received him, Gora was as faithful to her as what her biological son might have been. Was Anandamoyee fully contented with that? Not quite, for she still had two residual wishes left to be fulfilled, concerning Lachhmiya and Binoy. While Gora wanted Anandamoyee to drive her maid Lachhmiya away from the house because she was a Christian, Anandamoyee wanted Lachhmiya, who loved Gora almost as much as Anandamoyee herself did, to stay with them; and, since Binoy had been estranged from her following Gora's demand to that effect ever since he had married the Brahmo girl Lolita, Anandamoyee wanted to be reunited with this other son of hers too. In the epilogue consisting of ten lines, the first seven lines are devoted to Gora's declaration that she was his true mother. In the eighth line he said, "Ma, will you call Lachhmiya and tell her to get me now a glass of water?" (477) The last two lines of the novel consist of Anandamoyee's request, "Gora, let me send for Binoy" (477). The narrator had not handled the ending in a different manner because, from this point of view, *Gora* is not a bildungsroman; it is not a novel about Gora's education but a novel about Anandamoyee's wish-fulfilment. Hence, the narrator may have left Gora's reaction to the castrating truth somewhat under-explored but, notably, had not left a single wish of Anandamoyee unfulfilled. In other words, the most significant function of Gora in the plot is to strive to fulfil the wishes of Anandamoyee; and once Anandamoyee's wishes are taken care of, Gora utility as a literary construct is well and truly exhausted. This is the *other* story that the novel *Gora* narrates about itself, and in spite of Tagore, for the title of the novel contains no mention of either Anandamoyee or her desire.

**Perversion Sub-situates Neurosis**

Does Gora, then, depict a subject of "neurosis" whose desire of the Mother is structured in and by the Name-of-the-Father qua Paresh Babu's ideals following Krishnadayal's No-of-the-Father? Although it appears to be so up to a point, the following indicators would provide us a better idea of the true clinical structure portrayed by Gora's character in the final analysis:

To begin with, as far as his submission to Paresh Babu's ideals is concerned, it is noteworthy that Gora had not become a universal humanist like his guru. The epilogue indicates that Gora had improved from being an exclusionist Hindu nationalist by becoming an inclusionist nationalist, for he was now ready to drink water from the hands of Lachhmiya despite her being a Christian. However, till the very end, he continued to remain completely fixated on his notion of the nation instead of showing signs of having embraced the principles of universal humanism that his newfound mentor stood for. In other words, the structuration of his desire of the Mother by his Name-of-the-Father was, in the final analysis, an incomplete one. Moreover, Gora's *final* identification following the structuration of his desire is with his desire of the Mother, and not with his Name-of-the-Father, which enabled him and Anandamoyee to retain the maternal phallus, not by continuing to resist castration as they both used to do earlier, but by disavowing it. Gora was able to circumvent the effect of distress that his separation from Anandamoyee and India ought to have produced precisely owing to this disavowal of castration. In addition, Gora's desire is to be able to respond to the demand of the maternal phallus, which is the desire of the pervert according to Lacan: "One could say that the desire of the pervert is to respond to the demand of the [maternal] phallus".[12] All of these constitute fairly strong signs of "perversion". But above all, it is remarkable that several decades before Lacan had described the clinical structure of perversion in terms of the disavowal of the Name-of-the-Father, Tagore was able to produce an illustration of the same, albeit without any reference to the structure of perversion as such, in stunningly precise Lacanian terms! Here is the complete passage where Krishnadayal revealed the truth about his birth to Gora, including the four sentences I had deliberately excluded in the earlier quoted instance:

> "It was during the Mutiny. We were in Etawa then. Your mother fled from the Indian revolutionaries and sought refuge one night in our house. Your father was killed in the previous day's fighting. His name was—"
> Gora interrupted loudly: "His name is not necessary. I don't wish to know the name."
> Krishnadayal stopped, taken by surprise at Gora's vehemence. After a pause he said, "He was an Irishman. That very night your mother died after giving birth to you. Ever since then you have been brought up in our house" (471).

Gora's forceful disavowal of the Name-of-the-Father here is tantamount to his disavowal of castration— both his own castration and the castration of his mother. How can an Irish Christian man, biologically born of Irish Christian parents, knowingly regard himself first and foremost as the son of an Indian Hindu woman incapable of bearing children, other than by disavowing the Name-of-the-Father, the procreative function of the father, and castration in absolute terms?[13] Gora was aware that the knowledge of his father's name would expose him to its insistence in his mind. Therefore, he chose to disavow it completely and vehemently. As we have already seen, Tagore, intending to write a novel on Gora's education, ended up writing a novel on the wish-fulfilment of his foster mother. The important psychoanalytic point here is that it would not have been possible for Tagore to privilege and fulfil the desire or demand of the Mother to such an extraordinary extent without having incongruously rendered Gora a subject of perversion in the ending.

The question as to how Gora might have reacted to the castrating truth if he depicted a subject of neurosis is, fortunately, possible to answer. Unknown to many readers of Tagore, the original ending of *Gora*, one that was never published, was radically different from the version that was published. We get to know about the original ending from the Bengali author Balai Chand Mukhopadhyay's 1966 Tagore biography, *Rabindrasmriti* (Reminiscences on Tagore). Apparently, Tagore had shared the original ending of

12 J. Lacan, 2002, 233.

13 Unlike a living subject who tends to be a neurotic (a hysteric or an obsessional) or a psychotic or a pervert, never two of these together, a literary construct can bear traces of more than one clinical structure, as Lacan indicated when he said that Hamlet was at once an obsessional and a hysteric:

People have said that Hamlet's desire is an hysteric's desire. This is perhaps quite true. Other people have said that it is an obsessive's desire. That, too, might be argued, for it is a fact that he is full of psychasthenic symptoms, even severe ones. But that is not the point. In truth, Hamlet is both. […] Hamlet, as I told you, is not this or that, is neither an obsessive nor an hysteric (Lacan: 2013/2019, 289–295).

the novel with Margaret Elizabeth Noble, an eminent social activist in India of Irish origin popularly known as Sister Nivedita. She was intently following the story in *Prabasi* and was curious to know the ending from the author ahead of its publication. Tagore is reported to have told Mukhopadhyay that Nivedita was deeply disappointed to discover that the novel had a sad ending— sad in the sense that Gora was not united with Sucharita in that version. Nivedita is supposed to have persistently pleaded to Tagore to change the ending, imploring that what did not happen in reality ought to happen at least in fiction. Nivedita's insistence that fiction ought to depict as possible that which is impossible in reality may well have had a relation to the fact that her own love for the renowned Indian sage, Swami Vivekananda, did not attain fruition in marriage as the latter wanted to remain an ascetic. According to Tagore, she was so unrelenting that he was forced to alter the ending. In other words, the story of Anandamoyee's wish-fulfilment was at least partly catalysed by Tagore's attempt to vicariously fulfil Nivedita's unfulfilled wish in reality. What, then, was the original ending of *Gora*? The following passage from Mukhopadhyay's text would give us an idea:

> Yes, I had attributed a sad ending to the story. After the marriage of Sucharita and Gora had been finalised, the truth that Gora was an Irishman came to be known. Whatever Gora may have been by birth, he was a proud flag-bearer of Hinduism by faith. Faced with this insurmountable truth, Gora was completely dumbfounded. At that moment Sucharita entered the room. She looked at Gora and said— "I have accepted you as my guru; please tell me what to do in this situation. I shall do whatever you would want me to." Gora could not reply to this. He remained seated as he was. Sucharita waited in silence; then, not getting a reply, she touched his feet in pranam [a gesture of respect] and left the room.[14]

*Gora*, thus, describes the blossoming of the protagonist's neurosis which culminates not in a neurotic resolution but in a perverse one. This structural mismatch, which is the price Tagore had to pay for his decision to radically change the course of the ending of the novel from the originally intended tragic one at the very last minute, is properly discernible only when the novel is ruthlessly probed with the support of Lacan's teaching on the clinical structures.

14 B. Mukhopadhyay, 1966, 74. My translation.

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