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Revisiting Tagore
Critical Essays on
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Revisiting Tagore:
Critical Essays on *Ghare Baire*

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and Gillian Dooley

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Revisiting Tagore: Critical Essays on *Ghare Baire*

Edited by Md Rezaul Haque and Gillian Dooley

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Foreword: Revisiting

Professor Bashabi Fraser

Rabindranath Tagore's fourth novel, *Ghare Baire* (1916, *The Home and the World,* 1919, published the same year as *Chaturanga),* has had its centenary in 2016 and still continues to remain relevant and of scholarly interest. It is his first political novel and with its scathing critique of narrow nationalism which Rabindranath saw as dangerously and easily sliding into what was to become fascism, it speaks to many people who believe in societies where social justice needs to be upheld today, faced as they are by the rising tide of right wing ideology in a world where minority communities feel vulnerable/threatened by populist divisive politics. In this novel Rabindranath, for the first time, experiments with three voices, written in the form of diaries, the intimacy of the first person narratives giving legitimacy to diverse opinions. Written in *chalit bhasha*, conversational Bengali, it has the accessibility of contemporary speech and embodies Rabindranath's modernity in its style and language. Also, for the first time in his fiction, Rabindranath gives primacy to the female voice as Bimala is given 10 chapters against Nikhilesh's 8 and Sandip's 4 chapters.

There have been chapters in several edited anthologies of essays on the novel and critical editions of *The Home and the World*, including Rama Kundu's *Critical Perspectives* (2001) and Pradip Kumar Datta's *Critical Companion* to *The Home and the World* (2005). This volume comes as a timely intervention incorporating postcolonial, feminist, postmodern and gender studies, reaffirming the novel as a classic which invites continuous interest and fresh reflections, beginning with a comprehensive Introduction by one of the editors, Rezaul Haque.

The first partition of Bengal in 1905 by Lord Curzon, ostensibly for more efficient governance of a large Province, but in reality to curb the rising aspirations of the Hindu *bhadralok* for greater political representation and divide allegiances along communal (religious) lines, saw Rabindranath putting his strength behind the Swadeshi (meaning indigenous, homegrown) Movement. He wrote 23 patriotic songs in a frenzy of composition during this period and led processions (including a historic one on Friendship Day – Rakhi Bandhan Day- signified by tying the friendship band to indicate harmony between Hindus and Muslims), singing his songs. However, as the Introduction by Reza and the essays by Debamitra Kar and Rifat Mahbub discuss, the recourse to violence that marked the Swadeshi Movement as it espoused boycott and burning of foreign cloth, drove a wedge between Hindu landlords and revolutionaries and the poor Muslim vendors and peasants, unleashing communal tensions. The spectre of communal violence made Rabindranath withdraw from this nationalistic tide and engage his energies in what he believed were more effective nation building projects in his educational institution in Shantiniketan and his cooperative and rural reconstruction projects in his family estates.

Rabindranath continued to believe in non-violence as the way forward for a sustainable future for a nation, and this is why he felt the need to make Nikhilesh his spokesperson in the novel, as he symbolises the counter-tide to Sandip's brand of unconscionable instigation to violent action in a fiery brand of nationalism that is conflagrational in its outcome. However, far from vindicating Tagore's model of constructive nation building, the novel was vilified by many critics as evidence of what they perceived as Rabindranath's unpatriotic stand. What remains significant is that the Swadeshi Movement fizzled out in time after the reunification of Bengal in 1911. It failed to include all communities and classes across the board. But Rabindranath's espousal of non-violence as the only viable way forward for India to regain her identity as a nation was what was opted for by Mahatma Gandhi when he initiated the decolonisation movement in 1920/21 adopting passive resistance rather than violent action as the path to freedom. Incidentally, Mahatma Gandhi returned to India from South Africa in March 1915, and both his Phoenix Ashram boys and he found a home in Shantiniketan on Charles Freer Andrews' advice and Rabindranath's invitation. Andrews was an English missionary who had travelled to South Africa to support Gandhi's campaign for the rights of Indian businessmen and workers. He dedicated his life to working with Rabindranath at his institution at Shantiniketan.

On the Woman Question, what *Ghare Baire* did was two-fold - on the one hand it showed how it was necessary to give freedom to the woman in purdah and bring her across the threshold from the *andarmahal* (zenana) to the *bahirmahal* (the outer house), and metaphorically to the world beyond her home, to give her scope to know and contribute to her samaj, her society, and thus be a more informed and effective individual in her household; on the other, it provided a grim warning how adverse influences which played on a woman's deluded sense of self worth could have dangerous consequence if she was put on a pedestal and worshipped as a Mother Goddess, ruled by passion rather than reason. This issue has been explored from diverse angles by Joyjit Ghosh and Paramita Mukherjee with the questions of femininity being played off against masculinity by Rifat Mahbub, and the disturbing possibilities of the body politic in a study of feminine performance within a masculine power structure by Srinjoyee Datta.

Any postcolonial/postmodern reappraisal of *Ghare Baire* will remain incomplete without a critical consideration of Satyajit Ray's 1985 film adaptation in *The Home and the World*. As Rezaul Haque establishes, Ray offers a feminist thesis which is apparent in the primacy and space given to Bimala's journey toward self-realisation as her foibles are underplayed and her determining role during the period of a nation in flux is given credibility and purpose, determining the reliability of Nikhil over Sandip, the quiet nation builder over the fiery nationalist who turns out to be a dangerous rabble rouser.

This reappraisal of the novel is given an extra dimension as it is studied alongside another colonial novel, namely, Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* by Gillian Dooley, the co-editor of this volume, giving the novel its legitimate place in the canon of World Literature. As Dooley affirms, there is no straining after similarities to establish an argument. Yet there are points of convergence in the parallels evident between triangular emotional relationships which are ultimately about the social ethics determining the honesty and integrity of the central woman protagonist's ultimate choice in the Fanny-Edmund-Mary Crawford and the Nikhil-Bimala-Sandip relationship. The tensions are played out in the precincts of the country seat of a landed family estate, which takes on the role of representing the dilemma of a society faced with ethical choices finally resolved by the female protagonist, Fanny and Bimala in the Western and Eastern novel, respectively. Austen's comedy and Rabindranath's tragedy have implications for the women and the samaj/society they adhere to in each novel, reflecting the home and the world they live in.

What these essays confirm is that the private *is* public, that individual beliefs and aspirations cannot be isolated from society at large, as the latter embodies the interests and ideals of a nation. That the home, the *ghare* is situated and is part of a wider reality, and outside it, the *baire*, that is beyond the threshold, *is* the wider world, that of a vast nation in the throes of self-expression. In this political novel, Rabindranath, through his psychological studies of his three protagonists, indicates the path to freedom for a modern nation, not through divisive communal politics but through constructive nationalist projects which thrive on social inclusion, recognising unity in diversity. The national project for liberty is strengthened by the positive participation and contribution of women, freed from a captive life within domestic walls, asserting themselves not as Mother Goddesses on a pedestal but as companions and compatriots of their countrymen. This collection, in revisiting *Ghare Baire*, thus reaffirms Rabindranath’s concerns as valid today for retaining a continuity that links the home to the nation and the global context.

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Revisiting Tagore: Critical Essays on *Ghare Baire*

Introduction: *Ghare Baire*: Then and Now

Md Rezaul Haque

Whatever else Rabindranath Tagore wrote, *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World, 1916) stands on its own merits as a work of art.[1] It is one of his best works of fiction, though not his masterpiece. In one particular respect, however, it surpasses all its siblings: it is undoubtedly the most controversial. Given its consistent presence in critical debates about Rabindranath's novels, it can in fact be safely argued that *Ghare Baire* is a provocative text, to say the least. It has generated and continues to generate admiration as well as hostility from generations of readers both *ghare* and *baire*, that is, both at home and abroad. How did the original readers of the work respond to it? And which aspects of the novel pleased them and which shocked them? I hope to address some of these issues in this brief introduction.

As several of the authors in this special issue have mentioned, *Ghare Baire* was serialised in 1915 in the literary journal called *Sabuj Patra* (The Green Leaves) edited by Pramatha Chowdhuri, Rabindranath's nephew and later son-in-law of the Tagore family. Both these details about the publication of *Ghare Baire*, apparently insignificant especially given the fact that the book's present-day readers are located more than a century away from its first appearance, deserve some retrospective attention here. The publication of *Sabuj Patra* (in April 1914) has been accepted by scholars of Bangla language and literature as heralding a new age in the history of Bangla literary culture in general and Bangla prose in particular. The reasons are basically two. First, the editor of *Sabuj Patra* believed that the aim of literature was to 'shake [...] man out of inertia'.[2] The 'inertia' in question is that of orthodoxy and prejudice. The awakening lay, according to Chowdhuri, in the performance of a two-fold task: in picking up 'the seed of [new] thought' and cultivating it in one's 'own soil'.[3] *Sabuj Patra* sought to implement this two-fold program by educating its readers about the current and emerging socio-cultural agendas of the day and by shedding fresh light on older debates. The second reason has to do with the kind of language to be used to bring about the desired change in the mental make-up of the readers. That is to say, if *Sabuj Patra*'s 'tenor' (content and perspective) was to be radical and thought-provoking, its 'vehicle' (medium of expression) could not be otherwise. Like Wordsworth, Chowdhuri was convinced that only the use of spoken language could infuse writing with (the flavour of) life. *Ghare Baire* is radical on both these fronts. It is one of those works in which Rabindranath shifted from the heavily Sanskritised *sadhu bhasha* (roughly equivalent to written language) to the one (called *chalita*) spoken in contemporary middle-class Bengali society. While this linguistic radicalism is so palpable that one can hardly fail to notice it, its conceptual and ideological counterpart requires patient decoding. Before I move on to undertake that, I think it is imperative to shed some light on the temporal setting of the novel.

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[1] Rabindranath Tagore, *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World*), trans. Surendranath Tagore (London: McMillan, 1921).

[2] Pramatha Choudhuri, 'Mukhapatra' [Preface], *Sabuj Patra* [The Green Leaves], vol. 1, no.1, 1914. 4. Translations of extracts from *Sabuj Patra* are mine, https://archive.org/details/dli.bengal.10689.1725/page/n13, accessed 12 April 2019.

[3] Choudhuri 6.

Ghare Baire is set in the early years of the twentieth century, a time when Indian nationalism for the first time began to come out of its old, genteel mode of anti-colonial resistance. The time in question has come to be known as that of the *Swadeshi* Movement, a movement most visible in colonial Bengal, with the rest of colonial India feeling its tremor as an earthquake is felt in areas far away from the epicentre of the quake. The genesis of the *Swadeshi* Movement lay in the colonial government's shrewd decision to partition (in 1905) the Presidency of Bengal into two halves on administrative grounds, though the actual goal was to weaken the nationalist fervour that was fast gaining ground in that part of India. Nationalists of all colours saw the partition of Bengal as a crude realisation of the colonial administration's divide-and-rule policy. Nationalist leadership in Bengal, mostly upper-class, upper-caste, English-educated Hindus in the western wing (now called West Bengal), saw in the partition not only a threat to the budding Indian nationalism but also a danger threatening the cultural, economic, educational, political and professional supremacy they had so far enjoyed so indisputably. It is this leadership that took up the responsibility of fighting back the colonial masters. Initially, the *Swadeshi* Movement did not go beyond boycotting foreign, specifically British, goods. (The term *swadeshi* means indigenous). Lack of support from a large portion of Bengal population (Muslims and lower-class Hindus represented in *Ghare Baire* by Mirjan and Panchu respectively) gradually led the movement towards the path of coercion and violence. As far as solidarity among Indian communities was concerned, the achievement of the *Swadeshi* Movement was next to nothing, though the colonial government eventually revoked its decision in 1908 and the two halves of Bengal were re-united.

A contextualised reading of *Ghare Baire* entails reading the novel against the historical backdrop briefly sketched above. While such a reading provides one with important information that ultimately contributes to appreciating the text in the right socio-cultural perspective, it has another critical advantage in that it sheds light on one of the major achievements of Rabindranath in *Ghare Baire*, an achievement Rabindra scholars do not appear to have taken much note of. Both as a work of fiction and as a work of historical fiction in particular, *Ghare Baire* stands out as a radical cultural product.

Sir Walter Scott is credited with both inventing and popularising the genre of the historical novel in the West (as well as in other parts of the world).[4] According to Scott scholars, Scott beautifully summed up in the subtitle of *Waverley* the ideal time gap that has to be maintained between the representation of the past in historical fiction and its actual occurrence in history: *'Tis Sixty Years Since*.[5] What does a historical novelist gain by adhering to the prescribed time gap? Objectivity. The distance in time, it has come to be believed, allows the practitioner of historical fiction look at history from a non-partisan perspective. What is the time gap between the time Rabindranath recreates in *Ghare Baire* and the time when the reconstruction in the novel takes place? Hardly a decade. As noted in the paragraph above, the *Swadeshi* Movement began in 1905, raged for a couple of years and then subsided in 1908. And Rabindranath began publishing *Ghare Baire* in *Sabuj Patra* in 1915. Judged from the point of view of the western critical tradition in question, such a close proximity of reality and its representation is likely to produce a prejudiced view of the immediate past. And Rabindranath has, indeed, been accused of *mis*representing the movement in the text, with the portrayal of Sandip deemed to be a caricature of militant nationalists. Jayanti Chattopadhyay writes:

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[4] See, for example, Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln and London: The University of Nebraska Press, 1983). A feminist reading of the genre does not subscribe to Lukács' claim that Scott is the father of the historical novel. See Diana Wallace, *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[5] Walter Scott, *Waverley or 'Tis Sixty Years Since* (Penguin Books, 1995). See Avrom Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Wolf* (Baltimore, Maryland and London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971).

> In 1916, the *Barisal Hitaishi*, a weekly magazine, had admonished Tagore in harsh terms for 'his ugly attack on the revolutionaries which included showing the hero [?] as trying to seduce another man's wife.[6]

One hundred years on and with compelling historical evidence at our disposal, we are in a position to judge who of the two parties represents the historical past more accurately – Rabindranath or his critics. In *Ghare Baire* Rabindranath is able to highlight the different strands that comprised Indian nationalism.[7] In seeing Sandip as a travesty of the more aggressive component of Indian nationalism, Rabindranath's detractors in fact impose their own prejudiced view of Rabindranath, the landlord, on Rabindranath, the artist, though Rabindranath's sympathetic depiction of Nikhilesh, the liberal-reformist landlord in *Ghare Baire*, must also have contributed to such a partisan reading of Sandip.

Historical veracity, however, was not what Rabindranath was after in *Ghare Baire*. The novel's achievement of accuracy in representing the *Swadeshi* Movement is essentially an effect of Rabindranath's temperamental commitment to truth – a quality Rabindranath valued most both in art and life. The more radical aspect of the text in fact consists, as Tanika Sarkar puts it, in 'the refiguring of the conjugal relationship that Nikhilesh attempts'.[8] And it is this reconceptualisation of the supposedly sacred tie that, more than any other aspect of *Ghare Baire*, infuriated the original readers of the work at home and which its non-Indian readers absolutely failed to take into account. More importantly, Rabindranath chooses Nikhilesh – whom Georg Lukács in his review of the book dismisses as 'a minor Indian noble' – to translate the new concept into practice.[9] In initiating his wife Bimala's entry into the outer 'world' of modernity – which is how the novel represents the realignment of the marital relationship – Nikhilesh is launching no less than a cultural revolution, though the text remains rather ambivalent about its outcome. If at one level *Ghare Baire* revolves around a love triangle, the triangle comes into being because of Nikhilesh. It is he who organises the meeting between Bimala and his friend Sandip, the *Swadeshi* activist and leader. The unconventional relationship thus engineered eventually becomes a test case for Nikhilesh himself and all he stands for, just as the monster in *Frankenstein* becomes a testing ground for its creator in Mary Shelley's novel.[10]

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[6] Jayanti Chattopadhyay, '*Ghare Baire* and its Readings', *Rabindranath Tagore's* The Home and the World*: A Critical Companion*, ed. Pradip Kumar Datta (London: Anthem Press, 2005) 200.

[7] One of the most brilliant works on the *Swadeshi* Movement is Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973).

[8] Tanika Sarkar, 'Many Faces of Love: Country, Woman, and God in *The Home and the World*', *Rabindranath Tagore's* The Home and the World*: A Critical Companion*, ed. Pradip Kumar Dutta (London: Anthem Press, 2005) 39.

[9] Georg Lukács, 'Tagore's Gandhi Novel: A Review of Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World'*, *Reviews and Articles*, trans. Peter Palmer (London: Merlin Press, 1983) 10.

The theme of nationalism is another fraught issue in *Ghare Baire*. Even while the novel was serially appearing in *Sabuj Patra* in 1915, its critics were divided as to the stance Rabindranath appeared to have taken on the nationalist question in the text. To one group Rabindranath seemed to be serving the cause of the British Raj. In his denunciation of the use of violence in the name of nationalism and patriotism, many detected an unhealthy compromise with the colonial government. The other group read the same phenomenon in a more positive light: for them Rabindranath was finally extricating himself from the false lure of revivalism which he had so tirelessly championed during the *Swadeshi* years. To do justice to its ideological complexity, a more fruitful way of looking at the issue is to situate *Ghare Baire* in a moment of transition bridging a prior moment of revivalism and a moment of critique in the making. The critique of militant nationalism the novel constructs would eventually develop into a thorough critique of nationalism itself in a couple of years. In his lectures on nationalism during the tours of America and Japan, Rabindranath would not mince words in articulating his absolute distrust of nationalism as a political ideology.[11] Here it is important to note that in dismissing nationalism as a West-inflicted affliction Rabindranath is not rejecting, as Mahatma Gandhi did, the whole western legacy.[12] If such were the case, Nikhilesh would not invest so much in modernising his wife on western lines.

The members of the group, who have come to be known as the Kallol group or the Kalloleans, form one of the first groups of readers who collectively expressed reservations about Rabindranath's writing in the early 1930s.[13] These '[a]dolescent rebels [...] derided Rabindranath's peace' which they saw as deriving from his having little or almost no direct knowledge of the miseries and struggles of the Bangali or Indian working classes.[14] They based their claim on the upper-class status of the family Rabindranath was born into – culturally, socio-economically and educationally, one of the most prominent Bangali families in the then colonial Bengal. As a consequence, Rabindranath, his Kallolean successors complained, either distorted or romanticised working-class reality.[15] The depiction of Panchu in *Ghare Baire* tells a different story. No other character in the novel loses so much as he does. Barely surviving on the fringes of the society, Panchu is a victim of all-round exploitation: the *Swadeshi* activists burn his foreign merchandise in the name of the nation, his landlord Harish Kundu tries all means to evict him from his small hut, and on the death of his wife the Brahmin pundits impose on him a post-funeral feast he can hardly afford. One would be hard put to detect, let alone establish, any romantic element in the portrayal of Panchu. In fact, it is Panchu whose subaltern presence in the text works to expose the limits of Sandip's *Swadeshi* program as well as his friend's liberal-reformist project. The subaltern status of Panchu in *Ghare Baire* should not, however, blind one to the important narrative function Rabindranath intends him to fulfill in the novel. Just as Amulya helps Bimala see through the hollowness of the *Swadeshi* rhetoric by revealing the kind of person Sandip actually is, it is Panchu whose utter destitution makes Nikhilesh realise how insignificant his personal suffering is in comparison to the manifold miseries of millions of Panchus. With the touch of his working-class reality, Panchu finally dispels the genteel fog of melancholy enfolding Nikhilesh.

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[10] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. Maurice Hindle, revised edition (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

[11] Complete works of Rabindranath can be found at https://archive.org/details/RABINDRARACHANABALI, accessed 12 Nov 2019. For an insightful discussion of Rabindranath's and Gandhi's attitude to nationalism, see Ashis Nandy, 'Nationalism, Genuine and Spurious: A Very Late Obituary of Two Early Postnationalist Strains in India', https://arcade.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/article_pdfs/OCCASION_v03_Nandy_031512_0.pdf, accessed 5 Nov 2019.

[12] For a nuanced reading of Rabindranath's attitude to western modernity and nationalism, see Michael Collins, 'Rabindranath Tagore and Nationalism: An Interpretation', https://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/8844/, accessed 14 Nov 2019.

[13] The name derives from the name of the magazine (*Kallol* established in 1923) they were closely associated with.

[14] Buddhadeva Bose, *An Acre of Green Grass: A Review of Modern Bengali Literature* (Calcutta: Papyrus, 1948), https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.125419/page/n3, accessed 12 Nov 2019. It was, however, Bhabani Bhattacharya who initiated the trend in an article published in 1927.

[15] After the Second World War, Rabindranath's left-leaning critics in India would take up the same line of argument.

The beauty as well as strength of a literary text is that every age reads it from a fresh perspective and thus validates its contemporary relevance. The case of *Ghare Baire* has not been otherwise. Ever since its publication in 1916, it has been read and re-read over and over again.[16] In that sense *Ghare Baire* is a culturally significant text. If there is any notable difference between the readings of the novel immediately after it was published and the ones of more recent times, it is that present-day critics appear to be more aware of its multi-layered nature. They also evince a sharper sense of the critical framework they deploy in reading the novel. As Debamitra Kar aptly puts it in her essay (the first piece of the present issue) on '*The Home and the World*: A Critique of Violence', 'Criticism of Tagore is more a reflection of his readers' viewpoint than his own'.[17]

As should be obvious from the title of her essay, Debamitra reads *Ghare Baire* as critiquing the use of violence in (*Swadeshi*) politics. This is one reason why Rabindranath gradually dissociated himself from the nationalist agenda in the years following the *Swadeshi* Movement in the first decade of the last century and eventually came out as a staunch critic of the ideology of nationalism. There is, however, another dimension of nationalist ideology that Rabindranath could not be comfortable with: its inherent tendency to forge 'a forced union and homogenisation', as Debamitra puts it, because community thus formed fails to work 'once the external force of domination is removed'.[18] A notable Rabindra scholar interprets this rejection of nationalism and its inevitable recourse to violence as suggestive of Rabindranath's definitive rejection of everything the West has to offer, which is not exactly the case.[19] As far as Rabindranath is concerned, nationalism is harmful not because it is a western import, but because by resorting to violence it gives the colonised a false sense of power while hindering the realisation of a much worthier kind of decolonisation – the decolonisation of the colonised mind. Further, in so far as imagining the community of nation entails some form of homogenisation or other, it tends to render a whole range of intra-community violences invisible. Thus 'the Sandip-Nikhilesh debate', one of the core components of the narrative in *Ghare Baire*, allows Rabindranath, according to Debamitra, to question 'not only the physical manifestation of violence' but also 'the structural violence [...] inherent in Indian society on the brink of modernity', a questioning that one finds in some of his earlier 'polemical writings, especially *Path o Patheyo*' (1908).[20]

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[16] See Tanika Sarkar above.

[17] Debamitra Kar '*The Home and the World*: A Critique of Violence', *The Present Issue on* Ghare Baire, ed. Md Rezaul Haque and Gillian Dooley.

[18] Kar.

[19] See Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1994).

The *Swadeshi* Movement is not just a historical backdrop against which the narrative of *Ghare Baire* unfolds. Like Thomas Hardy's settings, it shapes the mental makeup of the three protagonists as well as the different destinies each ends up with. In her piece titled 'Cultural Hybridity and (Dis)location of Female Agency in Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare Baire* or *The Home and the World*', Umme Salma draws on Homi Bhabha to read the novel in terms of its historical setting which she sees as a 'zone of *occult instability*'.[21] Both Nikhilesh's and Sandip's modernising projects aimed at empowering women are products of this 'zone of *occult instability*', just as they themselves are the hybrid products of the colonial encounter. In negotiating 'the Third Space' thus created, both Nikhilesh and Sandip ultimately render Bimala powerless at home as well as in the world. Ideally Bimala who for Salma represents *shakti*, the Hindu notion of female agency, should have found in her husband and lover carriers of her agency. But the paradox is that, instead of empowering Bimala, both the male protagonists divest her of whatever power she might have enjoyed as daughter, sister and wife in a Hindu household. No wonder, Salma concludes, *Ghare Baire* ends with Bimala trapped in 'a harrowing statis and melancholy'.[22]

The Nikhilesh-Sandip debate around which *Ghare Baire* revolves is actually one means Rabindranath uses to 'write back' to his precursor Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay who is credited with first imagining the nation in India.[23] It is this line of argument that Joyjit Ghosh pursues in his essay on the novel. In his 1882 novel, Bankim Chandra imagines an essentially Hindu India by way of constructing the motherland in the image of a Hindu goddess. In Rabindranath's text Sandip repeatedly chants the 'hymn "Vande Mataram" which is at the centre of nationalist discourse in [Bankim's] novel' to inspire his *Swadeshi* followers.[24] Around the years *Ghare Baire* came to be produced, Rabindranath increasingly felt uncomfortable with the idea of a Hindu India and thus could not bring himself, according to Ghosh, to 'subscribe to Bankim's [communal-nationalist] ideology'.[25] Discreetly using Rabindranath's letters to his friends both in India and abroad, Ghosh's intertextual reading of *Ghare Baire* posits the novel as unequivocally 'critiquing nation as a goddess', an unhealthy legacy Rabindranath felt he must distance himself from.[26] Though largely ineffectual at the end of the day, Nikhilesh's liberal-humanist project as manifested in his 'colourless brand of swadeshi' is greatly preferable to Sandip's instrumental, communal and ultra-masculinist form of *swadeshi*.

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[20] Kar.

[21] Umme Salma 'Cultural Hybridity and (Dis)location of Female Agency in Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare Baire* or *The Home and the World*', *The Present Issue on* Ghare Baire, ed. Md Rezaul Haque and Gillian Dooley. Salma also draws on Laura Ahearn to conceptualise the Hindi notion of female agency.

[22] Salma.

[23] The term 'write back' is from Salman Rushdie, 'The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance', *The Times* [UK], 3 July 1982, 8.

[24] Joyjit Ghosh, 'Critiquing Nation as a Goddess: A Study of the Representation of Nationalism in *The Home and the World*', *The Present Issue on* Ghare Baire, ed. Md Rezaul Haque and Gillian Dooley.

[25] Ghosh.

One of the lasting legacies of colonialism in India as elsewhere is the emergence of a new middle class. This middle class occupies a middle space in terms of both its socioeconomic and cultural position. In the Indian context this class is perhaps more truly 'middle' in terms of its cultural location than in terms of its socioeconomic standing (hence its conspicuous ambivalence in negotiating 'the woman question'). Caught in between tradition (mostly its own 'invention') and modernity, the new middle class in India spawned a nationalist movement that welcomed participation of women in the movement but on a set of tacit conditions. One of the paradoxical conditions was that in challenging the colonial power they must not challenge the new patriarchal power. In her piece on 'The Woman Question: Politics of Gender and Space in Rabindranath Tagore's *Home and the World* (*Ghare Baire*, 1916)', Paromita Mukherjee situates *Ghare Baire* at the intersection of the evolving discourses of Indian nationalism and the new Indian patriarchy. Heavily drawing on Michel Foucault's seminal work on discursive formation and Partha Chatterjee's ground-breaking work on the nationalist appropriation of 'the woman question' in India, Paromita regards Rabindranath's novel as belonging to the phase in his literary career when Rabindranath was crafting the image of the 'new' or 'modern' woman. It is because Indian nationalism has hijacked the female agenda that Bimala, 'trapped within the power structure of the patriarchal nationalistic discourse', according to Paromita, may participate 'in the process of "becoming" the new woman but never quite becomes such'.[27] As Paromita reads it, *Ghare Baire* seems to suggest that for her 'emancipation' the Indian woman 'needs a different channel'.[28] The one provided by the new patriarchy is self-defeating.

To a large extent, Srinjoyee Dutta is right in maintaining that '*Ghare Baire* has often been viewed and analysed via the lens of nationalism or nationalist politics, its variegations and its impact on the world and of course, the home'.[29] A direct result of such readings is that the female protagonist Bimala comes to be treated as an embodiment or symbol of something larger than herself, be it motherland or nation or the Hindu notion of *shakti*. Going against this critical tendency, Dutta argues that it is of crucial importance 'to explore the notion of the "body" in *Ghare Baire*, in its more immediate aspect, that is, the body as the physical body and the ramifications of its tangible (im)mobility from *Ghare* to *Baire*'.[30] Dutta's 'contrapuntal' reading reveals that in trying to empower Bimala both Nikhilesh and Sandip ultimately turn her 'into an idealised figure, which till the very end is never attained'.[31] Both projects fail because at the end of the day both the male protagonists shy away from facing Bimala 'in her naked ferocity, in naked agency'.[32] It may remain debatable as to what price Nikhilesh or Sandip pays for the experiments they try on Bimala, but there remains not the least doubt that it is Bimala who pays the heaviest price for her participation in those experiments: she ends up 'on a pedestal', divested of 'her desires and discontent', no more than 'an abstraction'.[33] Umme Salma and Paromita Mukherjee, two of our contributors, might have remarked: what else might one expect from male-initiated women's emancipation projects?

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[26] Ghosh.

[27] Paromita Mukherjee, 'The Woman Question: Politics of Gender and Space in Rabindranath Tagore's *Home and the World* (*Ghare Baire*, 1916)', *The Present Issue on* Ghare Baire, ed. Md Rezaul Haque and Gillian Dooley.

[28] Mukherjee.

[29] Srinjoyee Dutta, 'Sexual/Textual Insurgence: The Politics of the Body in *Ghare Baire*', *The Present Issue on* Ghare Baire, ed. Md Rezaul Haque and Gillian Dooley.

[30] Dutta.

In her essay on 'Cultural Hybridity and (Dis)location of Female Agency in Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare Baire* or *The Home and the World*', Umme Salma explains why both Nikhilesh's and Sandip's modernising projects fail. The main reason has to do with the fact that the male protagonists are both products of the colonial encounter. Rifat Mahbub's piece on Rabindranath's 'portrayal of intersectional masculinity in *The Home and the World*' seems to have a similar discursive-ideological trajectory.[34] As socio-cultural constructs, the self-fashionings of Nikhilesh and Sandip might appear to have nothing in common. But in so far as the notion of masculinity is concerned, they both originate from the same source: the colonial encounter. Though apparently poles apart as socio-cultural practices, both Nikhilesh's 'gentle yet discreet' masculinity and Sandip's 'heroic masculinity' are attempts 'to break away from the stereotype of effeminate Babu or the class produced to be loyal to the British Raj'.[35] Both these masculinities, minted in the smithy of colonial encounter, anti-colonial nationalism and new Indian patriarchy, however, get 'ruptured' coming in contact with Bimala, who shocks Nikhilesh and Sandip both by proving 'that she is a flesh-and-blood human being, whose identity is a making in progress, subject to unpredicted changes'.[36]

Set against Indian nationalism, Sandip's masculinity reveals another shortcoming: it is not only vulnerable but also 'reactionary' and hence 'particularly dangerous because it is based on false premises of religious extremism and ideological brain washing, and its damaging impact could linger long after decolonisation'.[37] Sadly, most South Asian nations have already tasted the bitter reality of religious fanaticism in one form or other.

In a sense, the last two essays can be seen as highlighting the *baire*, that is, the outward-looking dimensions of *Ghare Baire*. Both perform a crossing: the one by Md Rezaul Haque, a formal one in considering one of the most prominent adaptations of the text, that is, the cinematic re-creation of the work by Satyajit Ray in 1984; the other by Gillian Dooley accomplishes a geographical crossing in comparing the novel with *Mansfield Park* by Jane Austen.

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[31] Dutta. The term 'contrapuntal' is from Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

[32] Dutta.

[33] Dutta.

[34] Rifat Mahbub, 'Changes and Challenges of Masculinity in Tagore's *Ghare Baire*', *The Present Issue on* Ghare Baire, ed. Md Rezaul Haque and Gillian Dooley.

[35] Mahbub.

[36] Mahbub.

[37] Mahbub.

More than anything else, Reza's piece on Ray's adaptation of *Ghare Baire* highlights the continued relevance of the novel. It is common knowledge now that Ray had wanted to recreate the text on the silver screen for a long time. He was finally able to translate his long-cherished desire into reality in the year 1984 with the help of his son Sandip Ray. How does Ray reconstruct *Ghare Baire*? And what shapes his reading of the work in question? Reza's essay essentially attempts to answer these two questions. Locating Ray's adaptation within that phase in his career (1960-1985) when Ray produced a series of films focused on women, Reza contends that the Oscar-winning director 'reads the text predominantly, though subtly, from a feminist perspective'.[38] Ray's departures from Rabindranath's text are all meant, according to Reza, to inflect his translation 'with a robust feminism'.[39]

Compared to the time when Ray first adapted a work by Rabindranath, the one in which he reconstructed *Ghare Baire* was rather conservative, as far as Indian politics was concerned. Another factor that shaped Ray's reading of the text is the censorship laws prevailing at the time in India. These two factors explain 'why Ray chose to read Tagore's novel the way he did', that is, primarily from a feminist point of view.[40] Fully aware that in recreating one of Rabindranath's most controversial works he was embarking on a risky venture, Ray could not help being subtle and tactful.

Gillian finds both novels revolving around a love triangle: *Ghare Baire* around Nikhilesh-Bimala-Sandip, while *Mansfield Park* around Fanny-Edmund-Mary. Although both texts 'deal with a dramatic situation which in its basic essence is similar', Gillian is as interested in the 'differences' between the two works as in the 'similarities'.[41] One obvious difference between the two novels is the way the two novelists use perspective in them. Rabindranath enables his readers enter the minds of his three protagonists by allowing each narrate his or her story. In contrast, Austen uses a third-person omniscient narrator in her text, though mostly focalising through Fanny.

A subtler difference has to do with what the two authors choose to do with the realist tradition. *Mansfield Park* ends on a happy note and thus appears to align itself with the comedic mode whereas *Ghare Baire* ends in tragedy. However, 'as in Shakespeare's darker comedies', Gillian notes, 'the comedic formula is grafted onto a far more troubling narrative material' in *Mansfield Park*.[42] Austen succeeds in giving *Mansfield Park* a happy ending, Gillian suggests, only by keeping the future of the 'domestic sphere' more or less obscure.[43]

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The idea for this issue originated in 2016, the year that marked the first centenary of the publication of *Ghare Baire*. To bring out a special issue dealing with the different aspects of the novel presented itself to be a most proper way to mark that occasion. We were pleased and impressed by the response to our call for papers, but the inevitable delays in preparing the publication have unfortunately taken us well beyond the centenary year. However, as the saying goes: better late than never. Like all publications, this issue too has its share of shortcomings. Editing this issue has brought to mind two important areas for future research. *Ghare Baire* was translated immediately after it came out in book form. Several other translations have appeared since. A comparison of the first translation with the later ones would be of immense critical interest. Similarly, a comparative analysis of Ray's adaptation of the novel and its successors would be most worthwhile. Nevertheless, we hope that the issue goes some way towards satisfying the curiosity of students and scholars of Bangla culture in general and Rabindranath in particular. If so, it will be deemed to have achieved its primary objective.

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[38] Md Rezaul Haque, 'Feminist Appropriation of a Tagore Classic on the Screen: The Case of *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World)', *The Present Issue on* Ghare Baire, ed. Md Rezaul Haque and Gillian Dooley.

[39] Haque.

[40] Haque.

[41] Gillian Dooley, 'The Home and the World in *Mansfield Park* and *Ghare Baire*', *The Present Issue on* Ghare Baire, ed. Md Rezaul Haque and Gillian Dooley.

[42] Dooley.

[43] Dooley.

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Ghare Baire: A Critique of Violence

Debamitra Kar

Abstract

In *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World), Tagore's representation of the revolutionary movement of Bengal has made many scholars suspect a hidden loyalist and classist agenda. The present essay will show that the debate itself arises from attempts in these readings to dissociate the personal (the home) from the public (the world) and has neglected the fact that both the home and the world are ultimately political. Tagore questions not only the physical manifestation of violence through the Sandip-Nikhlesh debate but has also pointed out the structural violence that was inherent in Indian society on the brink of modernity.

This essay sets Tagore's philosophical query against current theories in peace and conflict studies. Tagore wrote that a peaceful resolution could not be based on the vulnerability of the marginalised but is achieved when the greed of the powerful is controlled. In his essay titled 'Path o Patheyo' (1908) Tagore has shown how the violence of the anti-colonial struggle would not go unaccounted for but would seep into the very fabric of the society it tries to liberate. A similar view is also presented in the novel. Tagore suggests that conflict proposes a forced union and homogenisation which no longer works to keep the society together once the external source of domination is removed. Belonging to the pacifist tradition in thought, though not strictly adhering to the Gandhian notion of non-violence, Tagore proposed that the struggle for liberation should not limit itself to a specific historical instance but should continue as a movement towards the assimilation and realisation of a greater truth that is enshrined in the philosophy of dissensus.

Introduction

'It is a part of morality not to be at home in one's home', Theodor Adorno writes in his *Minima Moralia*,[1] speaking against the self-complacency that personal property could generate. Read in a different context, the quotation is a fitting summary of Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare Baire*, which advocates a similar moral responsibility to question and resist, if not oppose, the claims of one's 'home'. The crux of the argument lies in the multiple reading of the word 'home', which may mean a zone of familiarity and comfort, or the set paradigms that are usually accepted uncritically. It could be Bimala's *andarmahal*, the family and the responsibilities of a dutiful wife; it could be the evolving concepts of nationhood, endorsed by the conflicting viewpoints of Sandeep and Nikhilesh. The home, in this context, functions as a 'floating signifier'[2] that can simultaneously attach itself to various significatory practices. Thus, neither the home nor its opposite is unilateral or monolithic in its meanings or operations.

In the context of the novel, Tagore, however, posits a clear indication of his interpretation of the word 'home', which he reads against its dialectical opposite, 'the world'. It is a translation or rather a trans-creation of the original Bengali word, *baire*, which loosely refers to the outside—that could be extended to mean beyond the self, a philosophical extension, and beyond the home or the nation, a geopolitical space. Anyone familiar with Tagore's oeuvre would be able to argue in favour of the philosophical reading of the terms *ghare* and *baire*, arriving at the proposition that both the home and the world are philosophical ideas, where the concept of nationhood is extended from a mere political action to a spiritual exercise.

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[1] Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (London and New York: Verso, 2005) 39.

[2] Ernesto Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society* (London and New York: Verso, 2014) 20.

Ghare Baire was serialised in *Sabuj Patra*, edited by Pramatha Choudhury, in 1915, and published later in 1916. Along with *Gora* (1910) and *Char Adhyay* (*Four Chapters*, 1934), it is one of the three major fictional works on the theme of nationalism. In the present article, the attempt would be to re-read the novel along with Tagore's essay *Path o Patheyo*, 'The Way and the Wherewithal', to show how the poet's nuanced reading of nationalism is still relevant in the present global political situation. I shall argue that Tagore's opposition to the concept of nation arose from its exclusivist nature and its tendency to homogenise, both of which are inherently violent processes that enrage a section of the society and ultimately break the unity of the country. Nation, though Tagore criticised the western ideas associated with it, is largely an organic and spontaneous whole, which should be able to contain differences and dissents. Such a socio-political device would be instrumental not only in creating the ideal society, but would be able to establish the practical parameters under which greater humane principles would flourish. This essay attempts to show how Tagore joins private ethical choices with political decisions. Arguably, his rejection of violence and adherence to the notion of *dharma* proposes the concept of a 'positive peace', an idea that I borrow from the political philosopher, Johan Galtung, who also shows how inclusive national policies could redress the issues of 'structural violence' and its manifestations in national and global politics and ensure a lasting peace.

Political Unrest and Tagore's Reactions: A Few Historical Facts

The year 1905 was an important landmark in Indian history. British rule had already been officially initiated after the revolt of 1857. The consolidation of British power and the formation of a larger geographical boundary necessitated as well as facilitated the growth of nationalistic feeling among the educated urban middle class. Under such circumstances, the partition of Bengal in 1905 created the scope for intense anti-colonial strife which mobilised the middle class and intellectuals. The country was already experimenting with the methods of its anti-colonial movement, which included both moderate demands of self-government and violent expressions of freedom, creating a cultural condition that favoured the rise of a nationalist agenda. The division within the Congress was becoming more apparent, culminating in the internal split in 1907.

Tagore, already a national figure by this time, reacted to the emerging concept of nationalism that was going to shape the future anti-British struggle in India. In January 1894, in his essay 'Ingrajer Atanka' ('The Englishman's Fear'), he expressed his concern over the lack of representation of the Muslim community in the Congress-led anti-colonial struggle. He also showed keen interest in the problem of cow-slaughter which was then claiming attention due to the intense agitation organised by Bal Gangadhar Tilak. In August 1905, in a meeting organised by the editors of *New India*, the English daily published by Bipin Chandra Pal, Tagore read a paper called 'Abostha o Bebostha' ('The Situation and the Solution'), in which he underscored the need to organise the villages, indicating a programme of constructive non-cooperation. In 1908, in his presidential address at the Bengal Provincial (Political) Conference, held in Pabna, he lamented the sad split of Congress. He called upon the young men to form groups of workers who would go around to the villages and bring the estranged communities of Hindus and Muslims together, by engaging in welfare politics, starting schools, making roads and supplying drinking water and so on. His polemical writings published during this period include anthologies like *Raja o Proja* (1908), *Swadesh* (1908), *Samaj* (1908), which dealt with various themes of nationalist politics and clarified Tagore's standpoint.

Interestingly, this was also the period which is regarded as the anti-West phase in Tagore's life. In his articles written for *Bangadarshan*, published around 1900, he had opposed the blind imitation of the West. Along with Okakura, the Japanese scholar of international repute and one of the principal founders of Tokyo School of Fine Arts, who visited India during the years 1901-1902 and spent some time with the Tagore family, he was examining the possibility of forming a Pan-Asian identity as opposed to the identity that West was trying to thrust on the colonies. He had argued in his essay 'Swadeshi Samaj' (which he first read at the Minerva Theatre in 1904) that the Swadeshi movement must cultivate the practices of the common people; their songs and customs and their innate goodwill. He argued that the history of the country had seen many tyrants but the life force has never stopped flowing because of the innate goodness of man. He detested the fact that the British were trying to improve the condition of the countryside and participating in the decisions of local governments. The essay referred to the on-going water crisis, which was deftly solved by the British. But the fact that Indians depended on the foreign rulers and their money disturbed him. He searched for a hero whom the common people could look up to. Tagore emphasised the need for self-government, as well as the cultivation of self-esteem generated by an active cultural life, and an indigenous education system.

No matter how critical Tagore was of western imperialism and British colonial policies, he never considered the possibility of turning the East into a merely religious-political solution. In the essay 'Purbo o Paschim' written in 1908 and interestingly delivered to the meeting of Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, Tagore raises his cautionary finger:

> if we do not come in contact with what is best in the Englishman, seeking in him only a soldier or a merchant or bureaucrat; if he will not stand on the place where man may communicate with man; if, in short, the Indian and the Englishmen must stand apart they will simply be objects of mutual repugnance.[3]

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[3] Quoted in David Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton: University Press, 1979) 139.

Tagore rejects the simplistic analysis of the East-West divide, unwilling to yield to the claims of one side over those of the other. In all his works, he was critical of such binaries, for he almost instinctively understood how they conceal hegemonic agendas in their functions.

It is the apprehension of the simplistic nature of binaries that compelled Tagore to consider the rising nationalism with a cautious eye. It however must be pointed out that in spite of his reservations regarding the nature and effects of nationalism, which had earned him adverse criticism, Tagore did exhibit a deep admiration towards the self-less sacrifice of the young revolutionaries of Bengal. The character of Amulya, in *Ghare Baire* is a case in point. In fact, in the beginning of the revolutionary movement in Bengal, Tagore felt closer to the philosophy of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Arobindo Ghosh and Bipin Chandra Pal. He did not show much enthusiasm for the moderate politics of the National Congress which he found to be ‘anglicized’. His personal engagement with rural Bengal through the works of his Zamindari (1890-1900) also made him suspicious of their politics. Rathindranath recounts, ‘my father had little faith in their politics, for he realized the futility of holding meetings and passing pious resolutions’.[4] However, the extent of his participation in the revolutionary struggle has led to many conjectures. Chinmohan Sehanobis in his well-known book, entitled *Rabindranath-o-Biplobisamaj* (*Tagore and the Revolutionaries*) mentions many such instances which show the poet’s sympathy towards the revolutionaries. For instance, in 1901 Tagore invited Brahmobandhab Upadhyay, a person renowned for his Hindu nationalist feelings, to be the headmaster of his school at Shantiniketan. In 1910 he appointed Hiralal Sen of Khulna a teacher in his ashrama, even though he was once incarcerated on the charge of sedition for publishing an anthology of poems called ‘Hunkar’ (‘The Howl’). Sen was later given another job in Tagore’s estate, when the police started to show keen interest in his activities as they believed that he was a member of the Anushilan Samiti, a political outfit. There are several other such instances which show that Tagore has given shelter and jobs to such revolutionaries in need. Matters worsened to such a great extent that in a government circular the activities of the ashram in Shantiniketan were put under serious scrutiny. Government officials were advised against sending their children to the school, and were threatened that the students of the school would be denied jobs in the government sector in future. [5]

It was thus a shock to the revolutionaries when Tagore, in both his fictional and non-fictional works, started to criticise revolutionary politics. In 1915, Tagore was knighted, and incidentally, the change in his political standpoint was most conspicuous in his post-1915 works. The enraged revolutionary leaders questioned whether Tagore’s recent elevation to imperial honours was behind such transformation. Sehanobis notes that Pundit Ramachandra Bharadwaj, the leader of the Gadar party, was already making scathing criticisms of Tagore and his politics while the poet was visiting America:

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[4] Quoted in Kopf 293.

[5] Chinmohan Sehanobis, *Rabindranath o Biplobisamaj* (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1986) 28-29.

> When the title was offered him many eminent Hindus of his principles believed he would refuse the lure but Tagore set aside his nationalistic principles and accepted the gift of the King. Since then he has been on the other side of the fence.[6]

Another revolutionary of the same party, writes, ‘The heart of India is in the anti-British revolutionary movement, which is rapidly transforming India along modern lines. But Mr. Tagore stands aloof from this movement.’[7]

The works that received the most adverse criticism include both the novel under discussion and his essays on *Nationalism* that were published in 1917. The latter publication contains three of Tagore’s essays written during his travels to America and Japan over a period of one year. He had openly criticised the concept of the nation, associating it with western imperialism, and advised that India should move away from such homogenising principles. Naturally, such arguments had enraged his readers, both within and without the country. I have already mentioned the ire of the leaders of the Gadar party; the American dailies also made adverse comments on Tagore’s ideas. The *Detroit Journal* warned the people against ‘such sickly saccharine mental poison with which Tagore would corrupt the mind of the youth of our great United States’.[8] Commenting on the reactions of the Indians and Americans in the US against *Nationalism*, Kripalini writes:

> His lectures on Nationalism were also ill-timed [...] Europe was in the throes of a great calamity and thousands of young men were dying on its battle-fields believing, right or wrong, that they were giving their lives for their hearths and homes; the tide of sympathy for Britain was rising fast in the United States and very soon American lives would be sacrificed. It was hardly the time to condemn what seemed holy and heroic as a vast delusion caused by ‘Evil incarnate’. What would today find an echo in the minds of millions of men and women all over the world who have known the horrors of two wars was then a voice in the wilderness.[9]

In spite of the scathing criticism that Tagore suffered, his political views cannot be altogether rejected. Arguably, in the present post-global period, 100 years after the publication of *Ghare Baire* and *Nationalism,* the horrors of nationhood have become more evident than ever. It has been argued, and argued well, that the solutions he offered for the raging debate on nationalism—for instance the coming of a greater man, or the surge of empathy in man for seeking universal brotherhood—are laced with romantic yearnings. The aim of the present paper is not to comment on the political sagacity of Tagore or his lack thereof, but to see the method of his reading of the complex political movement of nationalism and to examine whether this method of reading could be applied to understand the contemporary political situation existing both at home and in the world.

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[6] Quoted in Sehanobis 97.
[7] Krishna Kripalani, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1980) 270.
[8] Kripalani, 269.
[9] Kripalani 271-72.

Tagore on Nation and Violence

The central argument of *Nationalism* lies in Tagore's rejection of the models of nation which he believed to be a Western import and entirely unfit to address the Indian political experience. The use of the word 'Western' is complicated, for it has to take into account the changing parameters with which the nation has been perceived in the West during its evolution from the pre-national to the post-Westphalian era. Arguably, Tagore's claim, that at every point of its development the nation has maintained an essentially homogenous and exclusivist principle, can be justified if one takes into account both the etymological root of the word and the primordialist and modernist debate on the nature of nationhood. Etymologically, the word nation is derived from the Latin word *natio* that meant birth or place of birth. It was once used in a derogatory sense to refer to the groups of foreigners from the same place whose status was below that of the Roman citizens. During the Middle Ages, the word was used to designate groups of students from the same geographical locations attending Europe's medieval universities. As the students from the same regions took sides as a group against students from other regions in scholastic debates, the word nation came to mean an elite community of scholars who shared an opinion or had a common purpose. One can safely infer that the concept of nation has always prioritised the formation of a group to survive the threats of extinction. Such group formation takes place only when there is a competition with another such group. Thus, nation in its very essence entails both inclusive and exclusive principles: it includes the similar and excludes the different.

From the primordialist standpoint, the principle of exclusion seems to be more central to the concept of the nation. In such reading, nationalism is a late development of a much older process of ethnicity. The theory underscores the importance of common descent, territorial belonging, shared language and emotional bonds which combined together make the nation evolve from an older ethnic group. This is an organic process.

Contrary to the primordialist claim, the modernists argue that nations and nationalism arose between sixteenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe due to some social and structural transformations, such as the development of industrial and capitalist society, the spread of literacy and the evolution of the modern State and citizenship. However, the implication of the word modernism varies according to the standpoint of the individual philosopher. For instance, it can be identified as a historical process, or a philosophical process with a strong cultural bent, or a sociological process dependent on the evolution of certain institutions. It can be read either as a chronological or an ideological issue. From the former perspective, modernity is concomitant with certain historical events (the Renaissance or the French Revolution), from the latter, to the growth of certain other institutions and ideologies (parliamentary democracy, nationhood, and so on). In this context, Tagore's rejection of the nation becomes more complex. He associates modernity in the Indian context with English rule. He does not reject all the institutions, such as secularisation, mass education, and distribution of power to the grass roots level, but he definitely rejects the capitalist and imperialist tendency of the nation which arguably are important aspects that determine both modernity and nationhood, and many other social institutions associated with the process. It is to be noted that in a marginal note on Tagore's speech in Japan, Bhagat Singh commented that it was a critique of capitalism and commercialism.[10]

Hence, Tagore's concept of the nation has two implications: it rejects homogeneity and the necessarily coercive identity formation; it is also a rejection of untrammelled capitalism which, as a citizen of a colonised country, he had experienced personally. Thus, Tagore's view of India is an alternative to both the principles of nationalism. He argues that, contrary to the method of nation formation in the West, which is based on the development of the *ethnies*[11] into geopolitical boundaries, India, as a geopolitical entity was a result of the colonisation process, where people of different races, cultures and ethnicities were put together within a geographical space for administrative reasons. Hence, any political realisation of India must take into consideration the basic feature of diversity. For India, the crisis is social and not political, and thus western nationhood, which is a fundamentally homogenising process, is a 'great menace', and is 'at the bottom of India's trouble'.[12]

Tagore's resistance towards capitalism is a more complicated matter. He launched most virulent attack against imperialism, which he associated with the West. In his lecture on nationalism in Japan, he said: '[the West] is like a glutton, who has not the heart to give up his intemperance in eating, and fondly clings to the hope of curing indigestion by medicine'.[13] He has also critiqued the commercialisation and greed of Western policies and always projected that the answer should come from the East which would be able to 'instinctively' feel the need to blend spirituality with statecraft: 'We must not vitiate our children's mind with the superstition that business is business, war is war, politics is politics. We must know that man's business has to be more than business, and so should be his war and politics'[14]. It seems apparent from the above argument that Tagore was not seeking the answer to capitalism through the accepted path of communism, or a socialistic revolution. Though in his later life he was influenced by the experiments in Russia, he has maintained a critical distance from class politics. The reason for this reservation is twofold: first, he was always wary of any form of violence and secondly, he believed that the ultimate change must come from the individual's heart—greed must be eliminated if peace is to be restored. His argument has failed to appease the leftist revolutionaries and thinkers. M. N. Roy, in his essay on 'The Philosophy of Property', criticises Tagore, claiming that his impractical and imperfect understanding of capitalism and imperialism was ultimately a result of his own class position. He writes:

> comfortable living, normal enjoyment, even debauchery can be tolerated in the fortunate few, who throws alms out of their bounty to the needy; but the desire of the multitude who have toiled from time immemorial to produce the wealth appropriated

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[10] Sehanobis 176-77. Tagore's speech in Japan was later published as 'Nationalism in Japan' and included in *Nationalism*.

[11] Anthony D Smith, *Nationalism*: *Theory, Ideology, History* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005) 12-15.

[12] Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (Gurgaon: Penguin, 2009) 74.

[13] Tagore, Nationalism 26.

[14] Tagore, Nationalism 26.

> by the few, to share in the enjoyment of that wealth, is deemed to be damnable greed which makes for the collapse of civilisation!
>
> The class character of this philosophy is unmistakable.[15]

A rather similar criticism is levelled by Lukacs, who reads *Ghare Baire* as a novel of bourgeois sentiment, where 'wisdom was put at the intellectual service of the British police.'[16] The problems of Lukacs' reading have been amply pointed out by Ashis Nandy who showed that Tagore's treatment of the theme of nationalism was much subtler and nuanced than could be gauged by such simplistic renderings.[17] Tagore himself has ruefully commented how the epithet of 'unpractical' has been attached to him: he tries to counter the falsehoods 'that stalk abroad with proud steps in the name of trade, politics and patriotism,' but he finds that 'any protest against their perpetual intrusion into our lives is considered to be sentimentalism, unworthy of true manliness'.[18] By extending the argument to my present thesis, it can be asserted that rejection of a specific political agenda does not prove that the poet lacked in political wisdom. His arguments were not tailored according to the dictates of any specific ideology, for he was able to identify the strains of violence that lie beneath such assumptions and practices.

Tagore's mistrust of violence has also been interpreted as a result of his spiritual realisation. Since his spirituality is derived from the teachings of Upanishad, an assumption seems to come automatically, that the rejection of violence is a religious stance. This reading gains more credibility since Tagore rejected the West on the grounds of its materialism and greed. In fact, in his book entitled *The Idea of the West,* Alastair Bonnett has read Tagore along with philosophers like Sayyid Qutb, arguing that Tagore's vision of the nation is 'transcendental-cultural'.[19] However, Tagore had already cautioned that the rejection of West should not mean an uncritical acceptance of the East:

> But while trying to free our minds from the arrogant claims of Europe and to help ourselves out of the quicksands of our infatuation, we may go to the other extreme and bind ourselves with a wholesale suspicion of the West [...] And at this point on which we are in the East have to acknowledge our guilt and own that our sin has been as great, if not greater, when we insulted humanity by treating with utter disdain and cruelty men who belonged to a particular creed, colour or caste. [20]

Hence, the argument follows that the East is not a mere spiritual solution and religion is not beyond politics. Tagore's rejection of violence is more political, where 'political' means 'contingent construction of social links.'[21]

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[15] Quoted in Kripalini 190-91.

[16] Quoted in Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994) 15-16

[17] Nandy 15-19.

[18] Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (Gurgaon: Penguin, 2009) 31, 27.

[19] Alaistair Bonnett, *The Idea of the West: Culture, Politics and History* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004) 82

[20] Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (Gurgaon: Penguin, 2009) 27-28

[21] Laclau 169.

Path o Patheyo

Tagore's mistrust of violence appears to be the central problem in his essay 'Path o Patheyo'. It is interesting to note that the essay was written in 1908, much before Tagore has theorised on the nation and its problems. The paper was read at first at Chaitanya library, touching upon the tragic incident at Muzaffarpore, which witnessed the first incident of bombing in Bengal and the discovery of the bomb factory at Manicktolla, Kolkata, which led to the arrest of Barindra Kumar Ghosh and his associates.[22] I have already mentioned that Tagore had deep admiration for the young freedom fighters, but in this specific context he comments on the predilection of the nationalist movement to become unnecessarily violent.

Violence, as Tagore sees it, is associated with both the process of nation formation and the colonial experience. The very first analogy that he draws is between violence and fever, suggesting that just as fever is the affliction of the disease within, though the high temperature is only felt in certain parts of the body, violence is also a reflection of the deeper disease of the society, though it is exhibited only by the activities of a group of young men. Thus the society must not believe that these incidents of violence are separate incidents and have no bearing on the future of the society; rather all should own the responsibility of such acts, for these instances of violence are a reflection of a disease that has already affected the society at large.[23] He further adds that the violence of these youths is not unjustified: it arises from anger and pain caused by State atrocities. He also realises that in such moments of anger, any advice to refrain from violence must sound cowardly.[24] Yet, he cautions his readers that the violence exhibited by the State is wrong, and by following the paths of violence, society is imitating principles that are wrong. Thus, in the ultimate instance, the fight is not between good and evil but between two wrong principles, where hatred is posited against animosities, conspiratorial politics against unlawful policies.[25]

If translated to modern terminologies, Tagore's opposition to violence comes from two distinct sources. First, Tagore rejects the distinction between the law-making and law-breaking violence – violence used by the State to preserve its law; and, in a country under colonial rule, violence used to break those laws. The poet has shown that the law of the State is already violent and the ire of the youth is not unjustified. The problem does not lie in the intention of the actors, but their method of using violence, for when violence is countered with more violence it vitiates the entire social structure. Years later Charles Webel writes:

> in the long run, the chronic use of violence for political and/or criminal means turns back on those who deploy it [...] and ultimately decreases both the psychological and political security of those who use violence ostensibly to protect themselves from real

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[22] 'Rabindranath Tagore: A Chronicle of Eighty Years 1861-1941,' *The Calcutta Municipal Gazette: Tagore Memorial Special Supplement* ed. Amal Home (Calcutta: The Municipal Corporation, 1986) 74.

[23] Rabindranath Tagore, 'Path o Patheyo', *Rabindra Rachanaboli*. Vol 13 (Kolkata: Government of West Bengal, 1990) 231.

[24] Tagore, Path o Patheyo 17.

[25] Tagore, Path o Patheyo 233.

> and/or perceived antagonists or as a means of retaliation to avenge attacks on them, their families and/or their property.[26]

To analyse the argument further, it may be pointed out that Tagore distinguishes between physical violence, which is easily visible to the naked eye, and structural violence, which is already rooted within social institutions and naturalised and normalised by our regular practices. The term structural violence was used by Johan Galtung in 1969, in his essay on ‘Violence, Peace and Peace Research’. He elaborated the term by saying that structures are settings within which individuals may do tremendous amount of harm to other human beings in spite of their best intentions. [27] The problem of violence is that physical or visible violence has such an impact on our psyche that we tend to overlook its structural implications. Hence, violence could also be subtle and implicit, requiring no immediate actor or actee (perpetrator or victim), as it is built into the ‘patterned relationship among the components of a social system.’[28] In the present context, Tagore’s argument could be extended to show that once such violent methodology is followed it would become a part of our psyche and gradually be rationalised in our State policies and finally become a part of our social structures. Hence, the violence inflicted at the British is a reflection of the deep-seated violence against the members of other communities. And once any violent means is justified it would cause further instances of violence against the other communities. This problematic aspect of violence is brought forth in *Ghare Baire* in the first Nikilesh-Sandip debate.[29] In ‘Path o Patheyo’, Tagore thus digresses into the discussion of the heterogeneous structure of Indian society, just to ensure that his readers understand that India should remain ‘a land without a centre’.[30]

In spite of his rejection of violence, Tagore does not reject the notion of patriotism or revolution. In this context, it would be interesting to note what Tagore told Bhupendrakishore Rakshit and his friends in a personal meeting. Rakshit writes:

> Whether it is violence or non-violence that is not important. What is important is gaining independence – independence that would bring out the greatness and truthfulness in every man, or help men and women of all sections of the society to experience freedom in every sphere of their lives [...] if you tread the difficult path the price would be high [...] I am not anxious whether the revolution is violent or non-violent. But in either of the way it must not be cowardly in its implications, or harbour degrading ideas, for in that case, the result would be suicidal.[31]

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[26] Charles Webel, ‘Toward a Philosophy and Metapsychology of Peace’, *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies* ed. Charles Webel and Johan Galtung (London and New York: Routledge, 2007) 9.

[27] Johan Galtung, 'Violence, Peace and Peace Research,’ *Journal of Peace Research* 6.3 (1969): 167-91.

[28] Kathleen Maas Weigert, ‘Structural Violence,’ *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace and Conflict* ed. Lester Kurtz. Vol 3. (San Diego, London and Boston: Academic Press, 1999) 126.

[29] Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World* trans. Surendranath Tagore, ed. Dilip Kumar Basu and Debjani Sengupta (Kolkata: Worldview, 2011) 25-29. Subsequent references to this work will be included in parentheses in the text. I have however used the original Bengali title of the novel and chosen ‘Nikhilesh’ over ‘Nikhil’ in my discussion.

[30] Ramachandra Guha, Introduction, *Nationalism* (Gurgaon: Penguin, 2009) 1.

[31] Sehanobis 123-24, translation mine.

In the essay, Tagore delves deeper into the problem by suggesting that revolution itself would not cause any change in society, unless society has the necessary inner qualities to cope with the aftermath of this revolution and internalise its teachings within its structure and move towards a more egalitarian goal. He also suggests that revolution is emotive. Its tremendous energy must be tempered and controlled by wisdom, knowledge and experience. He gives a fantastic analogy of a storm-tossed ship. Only if the ship is properly made it can use the stormy wind to proceed in its course; otherwise the storm would break its loosely-bound structures. The country, he rues, is already suffering from communal disharmony, and under such circumstances whether the gusty winds of *Swaraj* could lead it to the shore of greater humanity is a matter of debate.[32]

Tagore concludes his essay by pointing out that simple external opposition would not bring the people together. He has raised this point time and again in many of his writings, *Ghare Baire* being one of them. He believes that once the opposition is removed the people will have no clue as to how to address the inner turmoil which has already afflicted the society and hence end in fighting among themselves. This argument draws its impetus from his concept of violence which, he believes, if left unchecked, will be internalised and systematised. He offers two solutions: structural and developmental work at the grassroot level, and ensuring of communal harmony, so that the systemic discrimination of minority and marginal communities abates, and everyone gets an equal chance to participate in any progressive function undertaken by the country.

Nikhilesh opposes Sandip and his policy of boycott because it would enrage and alienate the Muslim community. For Tagore, boycott is a negative discourse that does not conform to his notion of a progressive revolution that ultimately aims at removing the evils of the mind. Colonisation under the British is ultimately the reflection of the colonisation of the Indian mind. Tagore’s position is slightly different from the postcolonial critique which believes that colonisation ultimately affects the mind. Tagore believes in the opposite process: colonisation (read it as the subjugation of the weaker to the powerful) was already a reality in India, even before the British came, for India had never addressed its social issues. Thus, simply removing the external power from the country would not achieve independence; an extensive examination and re-fashioning of the self would be mandatory if the effects of freedom were to be realised in the political scenario of the country.

Bimala’s Realisation

Coming out of the boundaries of the home and experiencing the world is not a matter of choice; it is a compulsion for Bimala, because she is the allegorical representation of the unconscious of the country. Her experimentation with her own self, which culminates in her hero-worship of Sandip and her love for Nikhilesh, being torn between the simultaneous contrary expectations, projects the ultimate dilemma of the Indian mind. In this context, both Nikhilesh and Sandip are the two contradictory truths of India’s experiment with the nationalist movement.

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[32] Rabindranath Tagore, ‘Path o Patheyo’ 235-36.

In spite of such political readings, it can never be denied that *Ghare Baire* is also a story of three human beings and their thwarted love, a kind of argument that Tagore favoured and wrote in his prefatorial comments of *Raktakarabi* (*Red Oleanders*): ‘the play is about a girl called Nandini. She reveals herself through suffering and pain’ (translation mine).[33] Arguably then the question arises as to why a novelist would choose a story of love and despair to express his political opinion about an anti-colonial struggle. In this context, a brief study of criticism contemporary with the novel’s publication is revealing.

The critical views can be positioned into broader categories. For the revolutionaries the character of Sandip was a blemish. It is claimed that none of Tagore’s novel has a ‘villain’, except *Ghare Baire*, where Sandip fits the role.[34] The argument was whether Tagore was criticising revolutionary politics. I have already referred to various sources that suggest that Tagore might have had issues with the concept of violence, but he was never insensitive towards the honest self-sacrifice of the young. The other criticism of the novel was that Tagore has shown the female protagonist in a poor light: she is not Hindu enough. In his ‘Teeka-tippani’ (Notes and Comments), published in *Sabuj Patra*, in Aghrayan 1322 (November-December 1915), Tagore refers to a letter written by a reader who questioned Tagore’s intention of writing a novel portraying an event which usually does not occur in traditional Hindu families, but only in Western-educated upper class households.[35] Interestingly, Nikhilesh’s attempt to educate his wife and introduce her to Western principles (Bimala’s piano lessons, her sartorial choices and sense of beauty) could be interpreted as the root cause of Bimala’s fall. Tagore’s reaction need not be mentioned in detail in the present article,[36] but I would like to point out two important aspects: first, how seamlessly Tagore has joined two different subject-positions related to the personal (Bimala’s experience as a woman) and the political (the experience of nationalism) in his text; secondly how he has resisted ideological dominance in both the cases.

Given that literature as its basis draws material from historical reality and follows established linguistic paradigms, it cannot be reduced to ideological simplicity. In his study on the ‘Categories of Materialist Criticism’ Terry Eagleton identifies the six constituents of a literary production.[37] Including the text, the other five elements are: General Mode of Production (GMP), or the materialist mode of production which forms the basis of every other ideology in a society at a particular historical instance; Literary Mode of Production

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[33] Tagore, Preface. Raktakorobi. *Rabindra Rachanaboli*. Vol 6. (Kolkata: Government of West Bengal, 1985) 195.

[34] Sehanobis, 96.

[35] Rabindranath Tagore, ‘Grantha porichoy’, *Ghare Baire* (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 2015): 214-16.

[36] Tagore’s reaction is best summarised in the ‘Notes and Comments’ that I have earlier referred to. It is not easy to follow the path of truth, he wrote, and because he loved his country more he could not make his readers happy enough. However, the criticism of *Ghare Baire* went on for quite some time. Tagore once again wrote an article in defence, titled, ‘Sahityabichar’ in *Probashi* in March-April 1919. Here he argued that a work of art should be given an aesthetic space, where a good and a bad character can be portrayed with equal veracity. Both the articles and a few letters relevant to the discussion can be found in *Rabindra Rachanavali*, vol 16, 881-90.

[37] Terry Eagleton, ‘Categories of Materialist Criticism,’ *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2012) 44-63.

(LMP), which refers to ‘a unity of certain forces and social relations of literary production in a particular social formation’;[38] General Ideology (GI), which relates to the general ideological understanding which is related to the GMP; Authorial Ideology (AuI), which is not simply a writer’s personal ideological make-up but is determined by his or her specific relation to the contemporary production system and ideologies; and Aesthetic Ideology (AI), which is related to the GI and is articulated in various forms such as religious or ethnic ideologies which in their last instance are determined by the GMP. The text is a linguistic space where all these various ideological forces enter into a new equation of power. The text draws its meaning from these other factors, many of which are non-literary, yet once formed the text cannot be reduced to any one of them. Unlike the production of a cloth in a mill, where the production is dependent on all the ingredients and their internal relations of production, the text once produced will always go beyond these ideological specifics. Moreover, it will have the ability to question the very ideological parameters that have formed it. Though Tagore does not use this kind of theoretical language, he makes an interesting comment when he says that if literature yields to the practice of classification of the heroes and heroines into categories as simple as good and bad, then the practice of literature would resemble puppetry; it would no longer remain the story of life.[39]

Hence, though Tagore has placed Nikhilesh and Sandip at two extreme poles of political practices, the former suggesting a more temperate and non-violent method of protest and the latter an extremely violent one, there are scopes to argue that though their beliefs are different, their method of operation remains the same. In the fourth chapter of the novel, in Nikhilesh’s autobiography, there is mention of this curious aspect of their relationship. After a heated discussion between the two regarding the necessity of burning the foreign merchandise of Panchu in the market, an act which Sandip justifies by saying that ‘man’s goal is not truth but success’, *master-moshai* (translated as master) observes:

> ‘I believe that Sandip is not irreligious—his religion is obverse side of truth, like the dark moon, which is still moon, for all that its light has gone over to the wrong side.’
>
> ‘That is why’, I [Nikhilesh] assented, ‘I have always had an affection for him, though we never been able to agree. I cannot condemn him, even now; though he has hurt me sorely [...]
>
> ‘I have begun to realise that,’ said my master. ‘I have long wondered how you could go on putting up with him. I have, at times, suspected you of weakness. I now see that though you two do not rhyme, your rhythm is the same.’ (112-113)

Ashis Nandy observes that Bimala symbolises Bengal: ‘her personality incorporates the contesting selves of the two protagonists and become the battleground on which two forms of patriotism fight for supremacy.’[40] Extending the argument, the proposition is that both Nikhilesh’s more humble and low-key version of nationalism and Sandeep’s high-strung physical form of nationalism have a great amount of hidden cost to bear. It is Bimala who realises it. In her love for both of them, she has loved the best; she has loved the powerful and flamboyant nature of Sandip and the quiet, unheroic demeanour of her husband. Hence, she could also criticise the physicality in Sandip's love, his hidden greed for both her and his patriotic programmes, and the lack of practicality in Nikhilesh's Swadeshi ventures.

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[38] Eagleton 45.
[39] Tagore, Grantha porichoy, 216.
[40] Nandy 14.

Criticism of Tagore is more a reflection of his readers' viewpoint than his own. If one believes that either Sandip or Nikhilesh must emerge as the winner and get the booty of the country and the woman, it will reflect the fact that human mind always seeks the comfort of nomological certainty. But conflict is a reality which must be given scope to perform if peace is to be realised. George Simmel argues that no society could be completely peaceful, the elements of conflicts would always remain within it.[41] In his defence of his novel Tagore has said that Valmiki needed to create a Ravan as much as he needed to create a Rama;[42] similarly both Sandip and Nikhilesh are necessary in society and their presence must therefore be acknowledged in the fictional space.

This argument of course goes against the general assumption that Nikhilesh is Tagore's spokesperson, that his beliefs bear close resemblance to those of Mahatma Gandhi and that Tagore was immensely influenced by him. It is a fact that Mahatma Gandhi visited Shantiniketan in 1915, but it must also be remembered that he was at that time not a very significant figure in Indian politics. Hence, contrary to popular belief, Tagore's idea of non-violence is not borrowed from Gandhi, it is formed from his own judgement and discretion.

Thus, Nikhilesh's opposition to the boycott is not adherence to Gandhi's version of non-violence, it a decision based on his creator's hands-on experience of working at the grassroot levels, which he also shares in his essay 'Ryot-er Katha' (About Ryots) published in 1926. In the novel, this idea of the downtrodden class (though Tagore never uses the word) is brought forth by his sympathetic portrayal of Panchu. When Harish Kundu, Panchu's Zaminder, decrees that he must burn all his foreign cloth, he blurts out in helpless defiance: 'I can't afford it! You are rich; why not buy it up and burn it?' (110). Sandip, who was present at the time, used the incident as an excuse to indulge his rhetoric on the importance of self-sacrifice of the millions for the cause of *Swadeshi*. Thus, the actions of Sandip and his followers actually create an atmosphere of anger and discontent among the very people, whom they supposedly represent. Their decision is essentially violent, and it is not simply a manifested physical violence but it is an attempt to embed and systemise violence within the structures of society. Nandy writes,

> this form of populism combines mob politics with realpolitick. It is this combination that Tagore holds to be responsible for the growth of communalism [...] Sandip precipitates a communal conflagration [...] by imposing on [...] [the Muslims] glaringly unequal suffering and unequal sacrifice for nationalist cause [...] by depending on a

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[41] George Simmel, *Conflict and the Web of Group Affiliations* trans. K. H. Wolff and E. C. Hughes (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1955) 107.

[42] Tagore, Grantha porichoy 219.

> form of political stridency which requires primeval sentiments to be mobilized and acted out.[43]

In contradiction to Sandip, Nikhilesh's version of the *Swadeshi* is not only quieter and more subdued, it is also an individual enterprise. He promotes the indigenous goods as an alternative, creates situations which would help them to survive the competition in the market. His loneliness proves his difference from Gandhi's policy of non-violence, which is a collective decision. Herbert Marcuse, in his study on 'Repressive Tolerance', observes that 'Non-violence is normally not only preached but extracted from the weak—it is a necessity rather than a virtue, and normally it does not seriously harm the case of the strong.'[44] However, the case of India must be studied as an exception for here

> passive resistance was carried through on a massive scale, which disrupted, or threatened to disrupt, the economic life of the country. Quantity turns into quality: on such a scale, passive resistance is no longer passive—it ceases to be non-violent. [45]

Marcuse was referring to Gandhi's use of non-violence as a political weapon. But for Tagore it is a philosophical solution. Perhaps Nikhilesh's failure lies not in his impractical business ventures, but in his inability to mobilise people and make them understand the necessity of the alternative rhetoric. This also adds to the debate about whether a single individual like Nikhilesh could address such a social issue. He was truly a benevolent zamindar, but Tagore also shows that there are zamindars like Harish Kundu, and Nikhilesh's magnanimous gestures were not successful in saving either Panchu's or his own land from being embroiled in a communal riot.

Conclusion

Arguably, *Ghare Baire* raises more questions than it answers. Like the fate of Bimala which remains largely undecided at the end of the novel, the fate of the land is also kept open to interpretation. Bimala loses her home, she is rudely shocked by the external world, and even when she decides to come back, the home has changed its meaning to her. However, Bimala's success lies in her courage to experiment with herself. Likewise, Tagore knew that the country has left its zone of comfort and come into contact with a foreign power which it must resist in a way most suitable to it. He could not predict which would be the most effective method of resistance. Rather, he chose to show what should be resisted, for resistance is not apolitical; it may compromise the quality of freedom that liberates all minds from every instance of slavery. Till such time as his compatriots discovered the right path, he simply asked them to be brave enough to remain in uncertainties, miseries and doubts, without yearning for an easy, simplistic solution. Perhaps that is what he meant when he wrote to his friend in a letter: 'I will not buy glass for the price of diamonds, and I will never allow patriotism to triumph over humanity as long as I live.'[46]

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[43] Nandy 14.

[44] Herbert Marcuse, 'Repressive Tolerance', *A Critique of Pure Tolerance,* ed. Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore, Jr and Herbert Marcuse (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) 102.

[45] Marcuse 103.

[46] Guha, Introduction xii.

Tagore’s notion of humanity is inextricably bound with his concept of ‘positive peace’ which can only be effective when the structural violence and traces of exploitation are removed from the social institutions. He writes in a different context:

> Just bringing the war to an end would not ensure peace. If peace is to be realised in its greatness then it must be based on truthfulness, not on the vulnerability of the weak. If we are to prove our competence to be at peace then the powerful must let go of their ego and greed, and the weak must learn to be fearless.[47]

Thus peace is not an idealistic notion for Tagore; it is rather a culmination of his philosophy of praxis. It is a *dharma*, which is far removed from the parochial politics of religion. *Dharma* is a concept that stands in the undetermined zone, between duty and belief; it is neither as compulsory as duty nor as restrictive as belief; it is an ethical choice that comes from within and joins man with man and the home with the world. It is a practice and a way of life.

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Critiquing Nation as a Goddess: A Study of the Representation of Nationalism in *The Home and the World*

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Abstract

In Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Anandamath* (1882) one sees the emergence of a new goddess – a goddess with a political identity. The hymn 'Vande Mataram' which is at the centre of nationalist discourse in the novel became a rallying cry of the patriots during the freedom movement. Rabindranath Tagore did not subscribe to Bankim's ideology. In *Ghare Baire* (1916), translated as *The Home and the World*, Tagore interrogates the dominant Hindu Nationalism embodied in *Anandamath* through the lively debate between Nikhilesh and Sandip. Nikhil, the liberal-minded zamindar, never imagines the nation as a goddess, and he believes that only by disinterested work one can achieve the welfare of the nation. Sandip, the demagogue, however, believes in an eloquent idolatry, and in his magical vision, Bimala is at the same time a goddess and the nation. Through the worship of Bimala, Sandip wants to spread the word of her homage all over the country, and he is initially successful in casting a spell over Bimala. But his hypocrisy becomes palpable when he engages in a sexual politics, and changes his mantra from 'Vande Mataram' to 'Vande Mohinim'.

The Home and the World critiques the dominant nationalist ideology which strategically combines the elements of politics and religion and thereby propagates the idolatry of the nation. The country was never greater than the humanitarian cause to Tagore, and being a champion of truth and idealism he always resisted that form of patriotism which trampled on the ideals of humanity. This essay explores Tagore's views on nation, nationalism and patriotism as reflected in the novel, and discusses their relevance in the socio-political context of the present day.

'I am the Infinite Energy which streams forth from the Eternal in the world and the Eternal in yourselves. I am the Mother of the Universe, the Mother of the Worlds, and for you who are children of the Sacred Land, Aryabhumi, made of her clay and reared by her sun and winds, I am Bhawani Bharati, Mother of India.'

Sri Aurobindo, 'Bhawani Mandir'[1]

In the nationalist imagination the country was always a mother. The idea of worshipping the nation in the form of a goddess was to impart a spiritual dimension to the freedom movement. During the struggle for independence the patriots, therefore, were greatly inspired by 'Vande Mataram', the hymn which is at the heart of nationalist discourse in Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya's *Anandamath* (1882). In Bankim Chandra's novel one sees the emergence of a new goddess who is identified with the nation. The worshippers of this new goddess are called *Santans*, and they are dedicated to free their mother (the country) from the clutches of her enemies. In *Ghare Baire* (1916) Tagore interrogates the dominant Hindu Nationalism embodied in *Anandamath* largely through the debate between Nikhilesh and Sandip. To Nikhil (who to a fair extent voices Tagore's ideology), 'the nation is not a goddess,' and he staunchly believes, 'The day we will work for the welfare of the nation, is the day we will get our reward from the true deity.'[2] Sandip, 'the magician of Ideas' (168), however, differs from Nikhil by visualising a goddess with a political identity. And he believes that the Bengali will win the world by chanting the mesmerising hymn of 'Vande Mataram' to this goddess. In the vision of Sandip, Bimala is a goddess as well as the nation. It is a point of irony that towards the end of the narrative the rhetoric of Sandip undergoes a paradigm shift as he engages in a sexual politics and changes his mantra from 'Vande Mataram' (Hail Motherland) to 'Vande Mohinim' (Hail Temptress).The relation between Sandip and Bimala thus becomes the site where the issues of love, religion and politics are conflated. With the help of certain theoretical perspectives, I will explore how *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World*) critiques the dominant nationalist ideology which deliberately combines the elements of politics and religion and thereby represents the nation in the form of a goddess.

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[1] Sri Aurobindo, 'Bhawani Mandir', *Nineteenth Century Indian English Prose: A Selection*, edited with an Introduction by Mohan Ramanan (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2010) 246.

In an influential essay titled 'The Birth of a Goddess: Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya's *Anandamath*', Tanika Sarkar writes,

> The goddess was produced and publicised through entirely modern means: prose. Prose had never earlier been deployed as the medium for sacred literature. Now, the novel, the medium of print, and the market for literature were being used in the service of a goddess.[3]

Tanika Sarkar thus brings home the point how prose, particularly novel as a literary form, helped in producing and publicising a new goddess. The argument of Sarkar has an obvious reference to Bankim Chandra's *Anandamath.* But it is worthwhile to note that non-fictional prose as well was used in 'the service of a goddess' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. One may in this context refer to Sri Aurobindo's 'Bhawani Mandir' written in 1903. The essay begins in the following way:

> Om Namas Chandikayai
>
> A temple is to be erected and consecrated to Bhawani, the Mother, among the hills. to all the children of the Mother the call is sent forth to help in the sacred work.
>
> Who is *Bhawani*?
>
> Who is Bhawani, the Mother, and why should we erect a temple to her?

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[2] Rabindranath Tagore, *Home and the World: Ghare Baire*, translated from the Bengali by Sreejata Guha, Introduction and Notes by Swagato Ganguly (Penguin Books India, 2005) 130. Subsequent references to this work will be included in parentheses in the text.

[3] Tanika Sarkar, 'The Birth of a Goddess: Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya's *Anandamath*', *Rebels, Wives, Saints: Designing Selves and Nations in Colonial Times* (New Delhi: permanent black, 2009) 193.

As we proceed through the essay we see how Sri Aurobindo clarifies the concept of Bhawani. ‘Bhawani is the Infinite Energy’. She is Durga. She is Kali. She is Radha the Beloved. She is Lakshmi. She is our Mother. And in the present age, ‘the Mother is manifested as the mother of strength. She is pure Shakti’. In the imagination of Sri Aurobindo the nation and the mother become one: ‘The Shakti we call India, Bhawani Bharati, is the living unity of the Shaktis of three hundred million people’. The Shakti, however, is ‘inactive’. She is ‘imprisoned in the magic circle of Tamas’. To get rid of Tamas the self-indulgent sons must wake the Brahma within. The Mother ‘demands that men shall arise to institute Her worship and make it universal’. They should build a temple to ‘the white Bhawani, the Mother of Strength, the Mother of India’.[4]

Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy is charged with a spiritual fervour. But it has a political dimension as well. In ‘Whose Imagined Community?’ Partha Chatterjee succinctly argues that ‘anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power’. In this context, Chatterjee draws our attention to two domains – the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the ‘outside’ including economy, statecraft, science and technology; and the spiritual is an ‘inner’ domain bearing the ‘essential’ marks of cultural identity including language, literature and other things. According to Chatterjee, nationalism refuses to allow the colonial power to intervene in the spiritual domain.[5] In my view, the temple of ‘Bhawani Bharati’ – the ‘Mother of Strength’, at one level of interpretation, represents the inner domain of sovereignty. For in the vision of Aurobindo, the temple would be built ‘in a place far from the contamination of modern cities’ and will act as a centre ‘from which Her worship is to flow over the whole country’. The expression ‘the contamination of modern cities’ is highly suggestive: it suggests that the temple would be a symbol of cultural resistance to the baneful influence of western civilisation. Aurobindo’s essay ‘Bhawani Mandir’ speaks volumes about his mythopoeic imagination which is at the centre of his nationalist discourse.

In ‘Representing Nationalism: Ideology of Motherhood in Colonial Bengal’ Jasodhara Bagchi writes, ‘It was the political need of the hour that made the nationalists take up the myth. It was the compulsions of that brand of politics again that helped to unify the religious, the social and the aesthetic domain.’[6] The observation compels conviction. Thus when Sandip in *The Home and the World* gives his formulation, ‘The people of our land won’t wake up to her [the country] unless they can actually see her. They need a goddess with a form to denote the country’ (128), we understand ‘the political need of the hour’. In Sandip’s ‘miraculous vision’ Bimala is the Mother of India. Sandip is determined to spread ‘the word of her homage to the entire land’ and he even takes an oath, ‘It is your form that I build in every temple’ (131). Sandip thus consciously blends politics with religion but mostly for personal and parochial gains. In a review of the novel in the *Times Literary Supplement*, the reviewer comments, ‘European teaching has robbed Sandip of formal belief in his country’s gods’, and it is ‘no longer gods or goddesses that he worships but instincts and passions, and these he worships entirely for their strength.’[7] The comment is partially true. While it is difficult to agree with the first part of the observation that European teaching has robbed Sandip of formal belief in his country’s gods it is largely true that he worships gods and goddesses in order to fulfil his own agenda. Sandip wanted to ‘give the old gods new colours’, and not only that, he believed, ‘he was the salvation for the gods’ (168).[8]

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[4] Sri Aurobindo, ‘Bhawani Mandir’, 236-245.

[5] Partha Chatterjee, ‘Whose Imagined Community? The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories,’ *The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1999) 6-7.

[6] Jasodhara Bagchi, ‘Representing Nationalism: Ideology of Motherhood in Colonial Bengal,’ *Economic and Political Weekly* 25.42/43 (20-27 October 1990) WS71.

Idolatry of the nation was an anathema to Tagore. In ‘Nationalism in India’ (a chapter in his book *Nationalism*), Tagore wrote, ‘Even though from childhood I had been taught that idolatry of the Nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity, I believe I have outgrown that teaching, and it is my conviction that my countrymen will truly gain their India by fighting against the education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity.’[9] In the novel it is Chandranath Babu, the teacher of Nikhil, who upholds ‘the ideals of humanity’ above everything whether it is politics or religion or anything that may make a man prejudiced and distract him from the path of Truth. About his teacher Nikhil’s assessment is that he is an amazing human being: ‘I call him amazing because there is a great difference between him and the age and the times in which we live’ (92). *The Home and the World* is set against the backdrop of anti-partition movement. By ‘the age and the times’ Nikhil obviously refers to the excitement of *Swadeshi* which reached its peak in 1905 when the British rulers divided Bengal in separate provinces. In a letter to Rothenstein dated 26 October 1917 Tagore described how he was caught in ‘a dust storm of our politics’ alluding to the aforementioned excitement and eventually came out of it ‘nearly choked to death’.[10] We read in the novel that nothing on earth distracts Chandranath Babu for he believes that ‘the great Truth within us all is the root of everything’ (111). To a fair extent, this is true of Nikhil. Being a champion of truth and idealism he always resists that form of patriotism ‘which can ride roughshod over the higher ideals of humanity’.[11] Nikhil staunchly believes, ‘Those who sacrificed for the country, are the great souls. But those who troubled others in the name of the nation, are the enemies’ (99). Michael Sprinker in ‘Homeboys: Nationalism, Colonialism and Gender in *The Home and the World*’ comments:

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[7] ‘Idolatry, Old and New’[A Review in *The Times Literary Supplement* 29 May 1919], reprinted in Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World*, translated by Surendranath Tagore, ed. Ajanta Dutt (Delhi: Doaba Publications, 2002) 269.

[8] Swagato Ganguly in his Introduction to *The Home and the World* writes in this connection: ‘When Sandip conceives a new political goddess, along the lines of the one worshipped by santans in *Anandamath*, the idea amounts to the creation of a Frankenstein’s monster and carries the force of blasphemy for Nikhilesh and Chandranath as Sandip, in post-modern fashion, “creates the deity” and claims to be “salvation for the gods”’ (xi).

[9] Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1976) 106-107.

[10] See the letter in *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore,* edited by Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson with a foreword by Amartya Sen (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 188-189.

[11] See Tagore’s letter to Woodrow Wilson in *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*, 199.

> By 1915, when *The Home and the World* was first published, Rabindranath Tagore had become a staunch opponent of the Indian nationalist movement. Only two years later, he would denounce nationalism globally in a famous series of lectures, arguing that only a universal humanism could possibly solve the social problems that lay at the heart of his country's misery, or indeed any political problem pitting one group of people against another.[12]

Sprinker is indeed right in his observation. In 'Nationalism in India' Tagore emphatically argues, 'Our social ideals create the human world, but when our mind is diverted from them to greed of power then in that state of intoxication we live in a world of abnormality where our strength is not health and our liberty is not freedom.'[13]

The path of Sandip is that of 'intoxication' and 'abnormality'. His rhetoric is: 'Who said Truth wins the day? Victory to illusion!' (132). Sandip's words are full of allusions to Hindu gods and goddesses, particularly goddesses including Durga, Kali, Jagaddhatri. He candidly confesses, 'I have been born in India; the toxin of religiosity permeates my blood' (80). By appealing to their religious sentiments he wants to captivate the masses. And in the private sphere, his worship of the country wonderfully mingles with his adulation for Bimala, 'Geography is not a Truth. One can't lay down one's life for a map. Only when I see you before me I realize how beautiful the country is [...] I will know that I have received my country's command only when you anoint my brow yourself and wish me luck' (71). But a careful reader cannot afford to miss the point that these are all the strategies on the part of a perfect lady-killer to hypnotise a woman and use her for his selfish ends. Sandip's address to Bimala, 'You are the Queen Bee of our beehive' (35), at the initial stage of their relation, speaks volumes about the sexual politics to which the latter unknowingly falls a victim. This sexual politics reaches a climax when Sandip's mantra changes from 'Vande Mataram' to 'Vande Priyam, Vande Mohinim' (185). In 'Many faces of Love: Country, Woman, and God in *The Home and the World*' Tanika Sarkar aptly comments that this transgressive eroticising of the nationalist impulse was perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the novel for contemporary Bengalis.[14] Sandip's words, 'The mother protects us, the lover destroys – and there is beauty in this destruction' (185) evoke an image of a morally corrupt *Swadeshi* leader with whom the contemporary readers could scarcely identify, and they were obviously scandalised. Even when we read the novel more than one hundred years after its publication, the image of Sandip, as drawn by the author, creates in us unpleasant sensations.

In 'Nation, Politics and Gender in Colonial India: *Ghare Baire, Char Adhyay* and *Gora*' Sanjukta Dasgupta et al draw our attention to the fact that like Sandip, Indranath, the revolutionary leader of *Char Adhyay* (*Four Chapters*) is also painted in negative colours. Interestingly, here we have the picture of the nation as *Ardhanariswar*, the Hindu concept of divinity, half masculine, half feminine.[15] One may in this context quote the words of Indranath, 'Only the incurably immature revel in calling their country Mother. Our country is not the Mother of senile infants. She is half God and half Goddess.'[16] The question may rise: Who are the 'senile infants'? Are they *Santans* of Bankim's novel? Is Tagore critiquing Bankim's revolutionary doctrines through the portrayal of Indranath? We have no easy answer to this question. From the 'Author's Note' to *Four Chapters* we come to know, that in the course of the story, the different characters have voiced their views about the revolutionary movement but these views and opinions serve only to support the characterisation of the speakers and nobody should suspect that they tally with the author's own views.[17] Whatever be the case, like Sandip, Indranath consciously mixes up Hindu myths and politics and thereby offers a gendered discourse on nation.

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[12] Michael Sprinker, 'Homeboys: Nationalism, Colonialism and Gender in *The Home and the World*', *Rabindranath Tagore's The Home and the World: A Critical Companion* edited by P. K. Datta (New Delhi: permanent black, 2002) 110.
[13] Tagore, *Nationalism*, 120-121.
[14] Tanika Sarkar, 'Many faces of Love: Country, Woman, and God in *The Home and the* World', *Rabindranath Tagore's The Home and the World: A Critical Companion,* edited by P. K. Datta (New Delhi: permanent black, 2008) 35.

Carole Boyce Davies in *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (1994) insightfully observes that the concept of nation is largely 'a male formulation' and continues,

> nationalism [...] seems to exist primarily as a male activity with women distinctly left out or peripheralized in the various national constructs. Thus, the feminine was deployed at the symbolic level, as in 'Mother Africa' or 'Mother India' and women functioned as primary workers for a number of nationalist struggles but ended up not being empowered political figures or equal partners.[18]

To a fair extent, this is true of the representation of nationalism in *The Home and the World.* Nationalism is largely 'a male formulation' here. Being deployed by Sandip at a symbolic level, Bimala imagines herself as a tangible form of the goddess of India. Bimala is not merely convinced but swayed by the rhetoric of Sandip, and she starts believing that she is the motherland's message to Sandip and his followers. We listen to her intimate words:

> Did God create me anew today? Did He make up for his neglect of so many years? The one who was plain suddenly blossomed into a beauty. The one who was ordinary suddenly perceived the glory of the entire land within herself. Sandip Babu wasn't just one man. He alone embodied the overflowing hearts of millions in the nation. (42)

Bimala thus is moulded in the cast of a goddess at the hands of Sandip. She is led to believe by the latter's 'excellent histrionics' (29) that the entire nation needs her. At the core of her heart she feels that she is blessed by a divine strength, and she can do everything for the country if the country summons her to do so. But one may raise a question: Does she emerge as an empowered political figure like Sandip? The answer is in the negative. The fact is, Bimala's concept of *Swadeshi* remains largely confined within the domestic sphere and does not reach the masses. Moreover, Bimala is not aware of her lover's political strategy, and so she readily accepts the role of 'mokshirani' given to her by Sandip. At an early stage of the narrative Bimala even honestly confesses, 'My husband had no place in all these discussions that we had' (43). The use of the word 'we' suggests that she puts herself in the same bracket with Sandip while consciously excluding her husband from the realm of discussion on nationalism because Nikhilesh's 'colourless brand of swadeshi' never inspires them (100).

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[15] Sanjukta Dasgupta, Sudeshna Chakravarti, and Mary Mathew, 'Nation, Politics and Gender in Colonial India: *Ghare Baire, Char Adhyay* and *Gora*', *Radical Rabindranath: Nation, Family and Gender in Tagore's Fiction and Films* (Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2013) 152.

[16] See *Four Chapters* (translated by Surendranath Tagore) in *The Oxford India Tagore: Selected Writings on Education and Nationalism*, edited by Uma Dasgupta, (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2009) 370.

[17] The 'Author's Note' (translated by Somnath Maitra and Kanti Chandra Sen) is available in *The Oxford India Tagore*, 362-363.

[18] Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994; Taylor & Francis e-Library 2003) 12.

But we have to remember that the issue regarding nation as a goddess forms an important part of the debate/discussion between Nikhil and Sandip and the debate continues throughout the narrative. The debate starts when Sandip by alluding to 'Vande Mataram' throws a question to Nikhil whether 'there is a space for the imagination in the act of serving the country'. Let us quote a relevant portion from the debate in this context:

> 'I agree there is a space, but it isn't all of it. I intend to know that thing called "my country" in a more heartfelt, genuine fashion and that's how I'd like to have others know it. I feel quite nervous and ashamed to use some kind of entertaining hocus-pocus mantra in relation to such a profound concept.'
>
> 'That thing which you call an entertaining mantra is precisely what I call the Truth. I truly believe my country is my God. I believe God resides in man – He truly reveals Himself through men and their land.'
>
> 'If you truly believe this, then you wouldn't discriminate between two men or between two countries.'
>
> 'That's true. But I am a man of limited strengths and so I fulfil my duties towards God through the worship of my *own* land.' (25-26)

The passage quoted above is loaded with significance. It reveals that in spite of powerful rhetoric, Sandip's ideas and beliefs are narrow and even sectarian. In a letter to Woodrow Wilson on 9 May 1918 Tagore wrote, 'I consider it to be an act of impiety against one's own country when any service is offered to her which is loaded with secret lies and dishonest deeds of violence'.[19] Sandip calls 'Vande Mataram' the Truth and desires to fulfil his duties towards God 'through the worship of my *own* land'. But the land of his vision never represents the entire nation, and he is aggressive towards the Muslims when they refuse to take part in the *Swadeshi* movement: 'They'd have to be subdued and shown who was the boss in no uncertain terms. Today they bare their fangs at us; but one day we'll make them dance to our tune.' Sandip thus speaks for the Hindu nationalism, and Nikhil's utterance, 'If India is a true entity, then Muslims are a part of it' (127) has no relevance to his political ideology.

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[19] See Tagore's letter to Woodrow Wilson in *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*, 199.

The passage quoted above is significant for another reason. It subtly critiques the hymn which became the rallying cry of nationalists during the freedom movement. Tagore in a letter (dated 19 October 1937) to Subhas Chandra Bose (when the latter consulted the former regarding his opinion on 'Vande Mataram') gave his views on the subject in unequivocal terms:

> The core of 'Bande Mataram' is a hymn to the goddess Durga; this is so plain that there can be no debate about it. Of course Bankim does show Durga to be inseparably united with Bengal in the song, but no Mussulman can be expected patriotically to worship the ten-handed deity as 'Swadesh'. [...]The novel *Anandamath* is a work of literature, and so the song is appropriate in it. But parliament is a place of union for all religious groups, and there the song cannot be appropriate.[20]

Tagore, therefore, did not subscribe to a dominant Hindu myth of 'the ten-handed deity' in terms of imagining the nation. The background of his family certainly played a vital role in this regard because Tagore's father Maharshi Debendranath was one of the founding members of the Brahmo Samaj that believed in monotheism. In response to Jawaharlal Nehru's request regarding the controversy over 'Vande Mataram' as a national song, Tagore made a statement (dated 26 October 1937) which is worth quoting at this point:

> To me, the spirit of tenderness and devotion expressed in its first portion and the emphasis it gave to the beautiful and beneficent aspects of our Motherland made a special appeal, so much so that I found no difficulty in dissociating it from the rest of the poem and from those portions of the book of which it is part, with all the sentiments of which, brought up as I was in this monotheistic ideals of my father, I could have no sympathy.

Tagore, in fact, had no problem with the first two stanzas of Bankim's poem, and in his statement he laid emphasis on the significance of 'Vande Mataram' as a National Anthem. But he was categorical in stating that 'the whole of Bankim's Vande Mataram poem, read together with its context, is liable to be interpreted in ways that might wound Muslim susceptibilities'.[21] Tagore's concern for the Muslims was not unfounded. A majority of the Muslims of the Working Committee of the Congress found the song idolatrous, and a group of Hindus also shared their perception.[22]

Sandip, as our reading of the novel shows, never attaches importance to 'Muslim susceptibilities'. For he only passionately believes in a Hindu iconography of the nation. In his vision, the Bengalis who worship the goddess with ten hands 'will build another goddess today and win the world with mesmerism' (132). This 'another goddess' is obviously a political construct that fired the imagination of the nationalist leaders (particularly those who treaded the path of militant nationalism) during the anticolonial movement.

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[20] See Tagore's letter to Subhas Chandra Bose in *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*, 487.

[21] See 'Vande Mataram' in *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume Three, A Miscellany*, ed. Sisir Kumar Das (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996) 824-825.

[22] See the Notes to 'Vande Mataram' in *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume Three, A Miscellany*, 1004.

In a letter to C. F. Andrews dated 7 July 1915 Tagore wrote, 'Only a moral tyrant can think that he has the dreadful power to make his thoughts prevail by means of subjection'.[23] Sandip makes idols of his ideas and like 'a moral tyrant' believes that others irrespective of caste and creed would accept his doctrines without question. Ironically, Bimala, in the early pages of the novel, comes under the spell of Sandip and extends a moral support to Sandip's ideas of nation as a goddess stating, 'I have illusions and I shall be bewitched by my country: I need a tangible form for her – which shall be Mother, a goddess or Durga to me – for whom I'll sacrifice an animal and let loose a bloodbath. I am human. I am not a god' (27-28). A close examination of Bimala's words reveals that idolatry of the nation and self-idolatry become one in her ideology. Inspired by Sandip's rhetoric that the nation's blessings are best received from the lips of its goddess, Bimala starts believing that she is the 'tangible form' of the Mother-goddess (23). Only when she comes to experience a maternal tenderness for Amulya, Bimala renounces the politics of passion.[24] Nikhil in his retort to Bimala's statement observes, 'Neither am I a god; I too am human and that's why I will not, at any cost thrust all my imperfections upon the country' (28). One may ask what Nikhil suggests by 'imperfections' here. I think Nikhil at this point critiques the strange blend of politics and religion in the imagination of a nation, thereby decrying the political fanaticism of Sandip. Nikhil can very well sense that a kind of arrant addiction in Sandip's nature makes him weave myths around religion and go into a frenzy over serving the country (34). And this is what he staunchly resists. Tagore once wrote, 'We must firmly remember that our country is not a god and therefore we cannot substitute it for God'.[25] Nikhil does not substitute his country for God. And he has no political purpose to deify his country. He only wants to 'bring together the entire human community to find God', to echo the words of Mohammad A. Quayum.[26] Nikhil, therefore, vehemently opposes Sandip's brand of nationalism which is not only chauvinistic but suicidal as well.

The debate between Nikhil and Sandip on the issue of nation as a goddess has some other interesting dimensions. At one level, the debate is between Truth and Illusion. According to Nikhil, illusion has no place in the service to a nation. Only one has to ensure that his/her task is 'true' and 'genuine'. Sandip contradicts his friend arguing, 'the common man has to have his illusions and three-fourths of this world is made up of common men. It is to keep these illusions alive that every country has formulated its own gods'. Nikhil gives a sharp retort to Sandip's argument, emphasising that since he has lost 'the capacity to strive for the Truth' he wants 'an instant reward'. Nikhil sounds caustic as he argues, 'when all the work is left undone, you have turned the nation into a goddess and sat in front of her praying for a boon'. Sandip, however, remains rigid to his point and continues to claim that 'this is the truth'. In Sandip's words, 'Millions of people all over the country are waiting to hear these words from my lips and that is why it is the truth. If I can successfully spread my own message, you'll see the miraculous results for yourself' (128-130).

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[23] See *Letters to a Friend: Rabindranath Tagore's Letters to C.F. Andrews*, (New Delhi: Rupa, 2002) 40

[24] I am in this context indebted to Tanika Sarkar's observation in 'Many faces of Love: Country, Woman, and God in *The Home and the World*', in *Rabindranath Tagore's The Home and the World*: *A Critical Companion,* ed. P. K. Datta, (New Delhi: permanent black, 2008) 35.

[25] See Tagore's letter to Aurobindo Mohan Bose on 19 November, 1908 in *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*, 72.

[26] Mohammad A. Quayum, 'Tagore's Political Imagination in *The Home and the World:* A Textual and Contextual Reading', *The Poet and His World* edited by Mohammad A. Quayum (Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2011) 241-242.

Through the portrayal of Sandip, Tagore warns us against the demagogues who by following the path of rhetoric and passion mislead the masses. Sandip being a crafty politician believes that 'the common man has to have his illusions'. He staunchly believes that Durga or Jagardhatri is 'a political being' (130). He, therefore, joins up with Harish Kundu, an influential zamindar and a *Swadeshi* leader, to host a puja of Mahishasurmardini Durga (who is an embodiment of Shakti) with pomp and grandeur, thereby encouraging the Hindus to tread the path of militant nationalism and alienating the Muslim community of the locality.

While speaking about the Extremists of the Indian Congress Party Tagore wrote in 'Nationalism in India' that 'their ideals were based on Western history' and they 'had no sympathy with the special problems of India'.[27] Tagore always believed, 'Our real problem in India is not political. It is social'(97).[28] Sandip has little sympathy with the country's 'special problems'. He, being a representative of the upper-caste Hindu *Bhadralok,* never thinks of the welfare of the common men – the lower caste Hindus and Muslims.[29] Apart from this, Sandip is a hard-boiled politician, and possessed by 'the lure of lucre' (161). Nikhil's idealistic argument that by working for the welfare of the nation one will get reward from the true deity, therefore, never appeals to his sensibility. He encourages his followers to resort to extremist methods like boycotting/picketing foreign goods, and thereby creates a tension among the subjects of Nikhil. Tagore was opposed to boycotting through 'unjust, untruthful and unrighteous methods'. In an early letter (19 November 1908) Tagore wrote, 'Patriotism cannot be our final spiritual shelter, my refuge is humanity. I will not buy glass for the price of diamonds'.[30] These words seem to constitute the philosophy of Nikhil, a liberal-minded zamindar, who draws the attention of the readers to the menace of Nationalism throughout the novel. In *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self* (1994) Ashis Nandy observes:

> The novel suggests that a nationalism which steam-rollers society into making a uniform stand against colonialism, ignoring the unequal sacrifices imposed thereby on the poorer and the weaker, will tear apart the social fabric of the country, even if it helps to formally decolonize the country.[31]

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[27] Tagore, *Nationalism* 113.

[28] Tagore, *Nationalism* 97.

[29] The idea is partly borrowed from Sumit Sarkar, '*Ghare Baire* in its Times', *in Rabindranath Tagore's The Home and the World: A Critical Companion*, edited by P. K. Datta (New Delhi: permanent black, 2002) 146.

[30] See Tagore's letter to Aurobindo Mohan Bose in *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*, 72.

[31] Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1994) 19.

Nandy is absolutely right because the domination of the upper-caste *Swadeshi* leaders like Sandip and Harish Kundu over the subaltern group of the society shatters 'the social fabric' causing a riot at the end of the novel. Sandip is able to escape but Amulya dies. And Nikhil receives a fatal head injury.

The critique of nationalism in *The Home and the World* and in other pieces of writing by Tagore alienated him and made him unpopular with the national enthusiasts. It is important to note that Tagore was aware of the aversion of his countrymen to the ideas and beliefs he cherished. In 1921 we see him write to Andrews from New York,

> I am afraid I shall be rejected by my own people when I go back to India. My solitary cell is awaiting me in my motherland. In their present state of mind, my countrymen will have no patience with me, who believe God to be higher than my country.[32]

Tagore knew that *Swadeshi* produced intense excitement in the minds of his countrymen. He confessed that even he was touched by the heat of the movement. But he never accepted the heat and passion as final objects.[33]

Tagore, among other things, was sensitive to the dangers of Hinduising the *Swadeshi* movement. It is true that his patriotic songs composed during the *Swadeshi* movement sometimes image Bengal even India as a mother-goddess. One may refer to his song *Aji Bangla deserhriday hate* ('Suddenly out of the heart of Bengal') and quote the opening lines of it in this context:

Suddenly out of the heart of Bengal
You stepped out, amazingly beautiful, Mother
O Mother, I can't turn my eyes away from you
Your open doors lead today to the golden temple.[34]

But this 'amazingly beautiful' goddess is not imagined to be a political entity. Tagore's patriotic songs do not reflect a nationalist obsession with the image of a goddess. This is because he never accepted an idol or a deity as the symbol of the country. The song 'O Alluring Universal Mother' (*Ai Bhuvanamanomohini*) thus does not depict a goddess but the Universal Mother who, in the artist's imagination, becomes one with 'the blue sea waters', 'the blue skies' and 'the shimmering green'. There are references to 'vedic hymns' and 'dharma' that serve as cultural markers of the nation but finally the devotee in the song hails the Universal Mother and prays to her to scatter her 'alms to lands at home and the world'.[35]

Tagore believed, 'If a body – be it an individual or a whole race – defiles its own character in pursuit of short-term goals, it thereby consumes its capital and puts itself on the path to bankruptcy.’[36] Worshipping the nation as a goddess, in Tagore’s vision, is never a path of truth, but a path of achieving a ‘short-term’ goal that involves sectarianism, intolerance and violence. In the socio-political context of the present day, the message of *The Home and the World* seems to be that religious bigotry and fanaticism should have no place in nationalist imagination for they lead a nation to the brink of spiritual bankruptcy.

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[32] See Tagore's letter to C. F. Andrews in *Letters to a Friend*, 98.

[33] See Tagore's letter to C. F. Andrews in *Letters to a Friend*, p. 91. Tagore in this letter sharply critiques the concept of *Swadeshi*: 'Swadeshi, Swarajism, ordinarily produce intense excitement in the minds of my countrymen, because they carry in them some fervour of passion generated by the exclusiveness of their range.'

[34] *Swades: Rabindranath Tagore's Patriotic Songs*, translated by Sanjukta Dasgupta, (Kolkata: Visva Bharati, 2013) 51.

[35] *Swades*, 54.

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[36] See Tagore’s letter to Aurobindo Mohan Bose in *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore,* 72.

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Sexual/Textual Insurgence: The Politics of the Body in *Ghare Baire*

Srinjoyee Dutta

Abstract

The novel *Ghare Baire* by Rabindranath Tagore, given its political context vis-à-vis the Swadeshi movement has largely been analysed and critiqued through notions of nationalism and nationalist politics. Within the plethora of criticism, the idea or embodiment of Bimala as 'Shakti' has been fairly significant in understanding the gendered aspect of said politics.

In an attempt to explore the notion of the 'body' in the novel, this paper will concentrate on the physicality of the body as the discursive pivot, which informs the sexual/textual politics in the novel. Further, it will investigate the negotiation of spaces and experiences through a 'performative' politics of the body, especially in its changing configurations within the public and the private. The *fleshing* out of the semiotic and the performance of a theoretical *ecriture* will lay the scaffolding with which to analyse the complexities of conceptual and physical contact that is central to the thematic concerns of the novel. The paper will explore in nuance the gendered implications of the same, vis-à-vis the politics of occupying physical space in the home, the world, and the threshold.

I

I can change my-
self more easily
than I can change you

I could grow bark and
become a shrub

or switch back in time
to the woman image left
in cave rubble, the drowned
stomach bulbed with fertility,
face a tiny bead, a
lump, queen of the termites

or (better) speed myself up,
disguise myself in the knuckles
and purple- veined veils of old ladies,
become arthritic and genteel

or one twist further:
collapse across your
bed clutching my heart

> and pull the nostalgic sheet up over
> my waxed farewell smile
>
> which would be inconvenient
> but final.
>
> – Margaret Atwood, ‘She Considers Evading Him’[1]

Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price, in their formulation of a feminist theory of the body, write that ‘whilst all [...] marginalized bodies are potentially unsettling, what is at issue for women specifically is that, supposedly, the female body is intrinsically unpredictable, leaky and disruptive.’[2] In the novel *Ghare Baire* by Rabindranath Tagore, the protagonist Bimala becomes the ‘disruptive’, ‘leaky’ pivot around which the action unfolds, although considerable space is given to the three main characters to define and delineate themselves through the confessional mode, especially in their ideological ambivalence. Bimala occupies more space in the textual figuration of the novel; the reader begins with her and ends with her as she deals with herself and her many images. Along with this, what legitimises her status as the protagonist is perhaps succinctly described by Ajanta Dutt in her introduction to the novel: she writes that ‘*Ghare Baire* is not Nikhil’s tragedy and neither is it Sandip’s. However, it is certainly Bimala’s’ (10).[3]

Set against the backdrop of the *Swadeshi* Movement, *Ghare Baire* has often been viewed and analysed via the lens of nationalism or nationalist politics, its variegations and its impact on the world and of course, the home. The embodiment of Bimala as ‘Shakti’, as the ‘Goddess’ is perhaps central to this narrative. This notion forms and informs a lot of critical or analytical stratagems that surround this novel: the national or feminine body as a repository of sorts for the panning out of political ploys. This paper will explore the notion of the ‘body’ in *Ghare Baire*, in its more immediate aspect, that is, the body as the physical body and the ramifications of its tangible mobility from *Ghare* to *Baire* and back. It will look at the sexual and textual politics played out amongst the characters as the foundation for a theory of the body to emerge in the novel. Be it in the joyous or sordid introspective reflections of the characters or the tense moments of rendezvous, whether ‘allowed’ or not, the body and especially the *female body* occupies a space that is both vulnerable and defiant. The positioning of the female body and its continual recasting in public and private spaces, or in the presence of other such ‘bodies’, then becomes significant in understanding the complexities of each character and the way in which they physically and thus conceptually negotiate with different spaces, people, and situations. Essentially, the female body performs in more than one way and continually remoulds itself as the novel progresses to a climax. Each remoulding becomes the site for the nuances of contact or conversation to be *fleshed* out, for an *ecriture*[4] to be able to perform itself. The paper will analyse this *ecriture* in the context of *Ghare Baire* and delve into the notion of socio-political, bodily 'performativity' in the home, the world, and the threshold.

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[1] Margaret Atwood, *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago Press, 2010) 105.

[2] Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price, ‘Openings on the Body: A Critical Introduction’, *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader* edited by Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick (New York: Routledge, 1999) 2.

[3] Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World* translated by Surendranath Tagore, edited by Ajanta Dutt (New Delhi: Doaba Publications, 2002) 31. Subsequent references to this work will be included in parentheses in the text.

II

[...] And carved in Ivory such a Maid, so fair,
As Nature could not with his Art compare,
Were she to work; but in her own Defence,
Must take her Pattern here, and copy hence.
Pleased with his Idol, he commends, admires,
Adores; and last, the Thing adored, desires.

– Ovid, 'Pygmalion and the Statue'[5]

Bimala's relations with the two men suggest, on the surface, a battle of ideologies woven within a plethora of words, symbols and metaphors. As Nikhil and Sandip continually accuse each other of theoretical 'abstractions', Bimala's reactions to these moments of 'cerebral' debates and discussions are primarily bodily, although her relationship with both remains unconsummated: with Sandip, the physical aspect is most manifest but never reaches a conclusion or climax, while with Nikhil, there is a deep sense of discontentment for both of them, even though it has been hinted at that the marriage might have been physically consummated. This occurs because both men try unsuccessfully to fashion her into an idealised figure. While critics of the novel have focused on these images that Nikhil and Sandip idolise, the focus has primarily been on the *idea* of Shakti or Goddess or enlightened wife or companion. The undercurrent of the novel, however, suggests that Bimala's fantasies are fundamentally physical and performative, veiled under the flurry of metaphors and the lexical expounding of the Cause,[6] that is, *Swadeshi* for Sandip and its shortcomings for Nikhil. Nikhil's attempts at creating an 'enlightened' wife are fraught with issues; in his distaste for rituals like Bimala touching his feet, Nikhil often evades Bimala qua Bimala. She describes the preparation of her encounters with her husband in the language of her sari, vermillion, hair etc. that is, in the more immediate material and bodily aspects. Nikhil, on the other hand, invests himself in finding her beyond the *antahpur*. Thus, while he attempts to make Bimala traverse the threshold from *Ghare* to *Baire*, he himself gets excluded from the interiority of her experience: the floundering Bimala of the sitting room has almost no time for devotion to the husband, something that Nikhil comes to accept, even if a little patronisingly. In the very beginning, Bimala reminisces that Nikhil 'loved my [her] body as if it were a flower from paradise' (6), thereby, ensuring that much like the reflections of each character that are cloaked in metaphors and symbols, the body qua body, especially Bimala's body, remains inaccessible in its nakedness. He confesses that Bimala's choices beyond the threshold had been unanticipated and disturbing. It is yet again, the stark nudity of that very choice that Nikhil can't tolerate. He reflects that he was 'vain enough to think that I had the power in me to bear the sight of truth in its awful nakedness' (24). Thus, along with Sandip, Nikhil too puts Bimala on a pedestal, oblivious to her desires and discontent. She is compelled to inhabit this image that she is physically and mentally unsuited for: it is larger than life and hence impossible to achieve. Nikhil goes on to say that,

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[4] The notion of 'women's writing' which is informed and shaped by psycho-social, physical, and linguistic structures of women's experiences, as theorised by the French Feminists Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray among others, in the 1970s.

[5] From Ovid's *Metamorphoses Book X* translated by John Dryden (London: Sir Samuel Garth, 1826).

[6] In the text, the *Swadeshi* movement (and the larger national struggle) is often referred to as the 'Cause'.

> I had magnified her so, leaving her such a large place, that when I lost her, my whole life became narrow and confined. I had thrust aside all other objects into a corner to make room for Bimala – taken up as I was with decorating her and dressing her and educating her and moving round her day and night. (65)

It is significant that Bimala is visualised as a project that is to be sculpted by Nikhil, which is to be *dressed* and *decorated* by him. Thus, what Nikhil believes to be mental emancipation for his companion, is often a process that requires a material makeover. For instance, he orders 'western' clothes for her even when he stresses the importance of education. In one of his reflections, he compares the pettiness of women's minds to the feet of Chinese women; while he concludes that both are results of societal burdens on women, it is interesting to note that he uses a bodily image to explain what is essentially a mental shortcoming. In that sense, the woman's mental capacity is comprehended through the corporeal.

Sandip's exaltation of Bimala is perhaps more physical at one level but he too renders the materiality of the body into the abstraction of 'Queen Bee' or 'Goddess' or 'Shakti'. In his coercion of Bimala, he attributes a fierce nakedness to himself, to his desire to snatch and loot. For her, he reserves a metaphorical nakedness: it is scandalous and bestowed upon the 'Goddess' by a worshipper. In that, Sandip, like Nikhil, is unable to stand Bimala in her naked ferocity, in naked agency. He claims that,

> What I desire, I desire positively, superlatively. I want to knead it with both my hands and both my feet; I want to smear it all over my body; I want to gorge myself with it to the full. The scrannel pipes of those who have worn themselves out by their moral fastings, till they have become flat and pale like starved vermin infesting a long-deserted bed, will never reach my ear. (28)

Yet, throughout the novel, he is unable to cover the physical distance between him and Bimala; the moment he tries, Bimala rejects the embrace, an action that Sandip is unable to comprehend. Bimala in control of her body, however temporary, is the point of rupture that leads Sandip to believe that the sculpture he had been working on is capable of agentive action and desire and is thus a failed endeavour. Bimala can be foil or companion but she can't be the sculptor of her own self. In the moments of rendezvous, the sitting room or the outer apartment, which is the locale or the relationships to pan out, is witness to three bodies in disarray. Rarely are the meetings, whether between two or three of these characters, a source for comfort. They are tense and always at the brink of rupture. At any point, it is usually Nikhil who leaves so as to preserve the façade of stability and perhaps evade the dangerous possibility of Bimala rushing to Sandip's side; his continued presence triggers that very possibility. The physical distance between Nikhil and Bimala grows in the novel; in the end when it seems to reach a resolution, the imminent danger of Nikhil's death ensures that the distance remains, strong and irrevocable. With Sandip, Bimala is unable to traverse the threshold completely; the relationship that begins with Sandip's oratory and 'handsome face' and Bimala's frantic unveiling of her own face in public, remains without closure. In her liminal and ambivalent state, Bimala attempts to figure and refigure her own relationship with the guest, ultimately finding solace in the role of a mother or sister to Amulya.

Thus, in and beyond the *zenana,*[7] Bimala remains a veiled figure whose dissent reaches no veritable conclusion. Her 'emancipation' remains a question mark as she straddles the threshold between the home and the world, between the 'east' and the 'west', between 'tradition' and 'modernity'. Carolyn Pedwell writes about the diverse and often polar connotations that feminism can have in various cultural contexts.

> Both embodied practices [in the 'east' and the 'west'] function as forms of problem solving which, in the absence of real power or control, help women cope with the competing demands of ambitious professional goals and pressure to maintain a traditional female identity [...] they call attention to the similar gendered dilemmas and inequalities that girls and women face across cultural and geopolitical domains, and to the ways in which these struggles are so often played out through forms of bodily management and control.[8]

In the context of Bimala's case, it is conspicuous that along with mental control, Bimala's liberation is also situated in bodily control. Of course, within the rigid patriarchal matrices of Bengali society during that period, the first form of control emerges in the very thwarting of mobility. While she is free to roam around in the inner quarters, it is important to note that each escape or fantasy of flight remains unfulfilled, by Bimala herself or others around her. Her journey to the outer world is nonetheless limited to the sitting room. The outer world then is what Sandip chooses to tell her. In the course of the novel, Bimala's physical body is seen in three places other than the *antahpur*. During Sandip's speech, she is found sitting behind a screen in the temple pavilion, and she hastily exposes her face. Other than that, she is seen lying on the floor of the balcony in despondence twice and once in the garden. In all three cases, Bimala's encounters are strained: she can only uncover her face during the speech; in the balcony she can only *gaze* at the world outside and in the garden there is no solace to be found surrounded by high walls. Especially in the last two encounters, which occur between Bimala and Nikhil, Bimala either exits the scene in grief or falls down crying at his feet. In all these cases, she is unable to have any bodily authority or control over the situation; instead, she is shackled by physical impediments in the very contact zones that provide her with the fantastical idea of escape. In the text, Bimala is often seen framed next to windows, looking out onto the world, attempting to control it. In the last climactic scene too, she can only venture as far as the window, unable to regulate her own fate. In that sense, Bimala's travails are governed by structures of patriarchal and marital authority. Her journey to Calcutta, desired by Nikhil, remains unfulfilled. The body is subject to biopolitical[9] control and regulation. She is always already physically and psychologically in the service of the familial unit and the larger State. Even as the symbol of an insurgency against that State, she is inscribed with and by the body as the Goddess that represents the Cause and all of 'Bengal's womanhood'. This 'power' of the symbol and thus, Bimala, is then continually configured and reconfigured by the men as they see fit.

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[7] A part of the household for the seclusion of women from the public spaces of the household.

[8] Carolyn Pedwell, *Feminism, Culture and Embodied Practice: The Rhetorics of Comparison* (New York: Routledge, 2010) 85-86.

III

Galatea, whom his furious chisel
From Parian stone had by greed enchanted
Fulfilled, they say, Pygmalion's longings:
Stepped from the pedestal on which she stood,
Bare in his bed laid her down, lubricious.
With low responses to his drunken raptures,
Enroyalled his body with her demon blood.

Alas, Pygmalion had so well plotted
The art-perfection of his woman monster
That schools of eager connoisseurs beset
Her famous person with perennial suit;
Whom she (a judgement on the jealous artist)
Admitted rankly to a comprehension
Of themes that crowned her own, not his repute.

– Robert Graves, 'Galatea and Pygmalion'[10]

While describing Bimala's encounter with the outer world and her association with Sandip, Nikhil says that 'from the tip of her tongue to the pit of her stomach, she must tingle with red pepper, to enjoy the simple fare of life' (24); he thus, posits that Bimala's excursion is akin to an *agni-pariksha*[11] or trial by fire at the end of which she should ideally be able to come full circle to Nikhil, having attained maturity and discerning powers. The trial is of course the test of Bimala's mental strength insofar it involves an evolution of her ideological praxis, but it is also, significantly, a trial that involves her body. If she is to reject Sandip, the rejection has to be both mental and physical. Her repudiation of the outer world that threatens her own interiority must occur physically: she does finally reject his physical advances and supports Nikhil's command for Sandip to leave the estate. The moment she realises Sandip's stronghold on her she attempts to reject it, even though *she feels physically attracted to him.* She later describes the encounter as follows,

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[9] The concept that investigates the various ways in which structures of governance, power, and knowledge control and configure human life and bodies through surveillance and control, as theorised by Michel Foucault in *The Birth of Biopolitics* ed. Michel Senellart (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[10] Quoted in *New Perspectives on Robert Graves* edited by Patrick J. Quinn (London: Associated University Presses, 1999) 92.

[11] The trial by fire is a motif that occurs across epics, poems, and stories in Hindu mythology, the most significant of which is that of *Sita* who had to undergo the trial to prove her fidelity to Rama in *The Ramayana* by Valmiki.

> Once or twice he fidgeted with his feet, as though to leave his seat, as if to spring right on me. My whole body seemed to swim, my veins throbbed, the hot blood surged up to my ears; I felt that if I remained there, I should never get up at all. With a supreme effort I tore myself off the chair, and hastened towards the door. (121)

Bimala's encounter with *Swadeshi* is without a doubt an ideological one, especially in her belief that she embodies the symbol that can and should catalyse the youth of the country into action. Yet, this very embodiment is an exercise in the erotic: it occurs with Bimala coalescing her untapped erotic self with that of the goddess she inhabits. Sandip, in one of his impassioned speeches, tells her that 'you have suckled reality at your breasts' (37). P.K. Datta claims that for Sandip 'the erotic is indeed the test of reality'[12] for that is the only method through which he can present his desire for Bimala as the carnal facet of a higher, more noble cause. Bimala is also aware of the erotic facet of the Cause, in all its connotations and repercussions. When asked to procure money for the movement, she justifies the need by reflecting that 'in this desperate orgy, that gift of five thousand shall be as the foam of wine – and then for the riotous revel!' (109). Tanika Sarkar claims that the

> novel suggests discarding the posture of obedience and subjection which is far more resonant with the image of the woman who claims and flaunts her sexuality and independence over domestic discipline. Nationalist energies – given this reading – could have far more of a sexual charge than allowed by the tropes of filial duty which mask their self-representation.[13]

It is precisely this 'sexual charge', often reduced to the carnal by Sandip, that Bimala increasingly comes to embody.

Although there are moments when Bimala attempts to trace the cause of her own actions through profound introspection, she attempts to sculpt her own self, her own body in these interactions. The deliberate loose hair and golden-bordered jacket that she wears, the continual appearance of the red ribbon etc. are attempts towards Sandip's attentions and thus, his exaltation. On the day she first meets him, her preparations are elaborate; she contemplates in retrospect that,

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[12] P.K. Datta, Introduction, *Rabindranath Tagore's The Home and the World: A Critical Companion* (Kolkata: Permanent Black, 2002) 13.

[13] Tanika Sarkar, 'Many Faces of Love: Country, Woman, and God in *The Home and the World*', *Rabindranath Tagore's The Home and the World: A Critical Companion* edited by P.K. Datta (Kolkata: Permanent Black, 2002) 35.

> That morning I scented my flowing hair and tied it in a loose knot, bound by a cunningly intertwined red silk ribbon [...] I put on a gold-bordered white *sari,* and my short-sleeve muslin jacket was also gold- bordered. (16)

It is conspicuous that Bimala continually fashions and refashions herself according to the spectator. She makes it a point to tie her hair in a top bun according to Nikhil's preference at the beginning of the novel but later lets her hair loose for Sandip. Her initial resolution to not meet Sandip in the outer apartments is broken when her body almost transports her to the place beyond her own mental will. She reflects, 'I felt myself waiting- from the crown of my head to the tips of my toes – waiting for something, somebody: my blood tingling with some expectation' (48). Bimala shifts from image to image, from symbol to symbol without her own agency being foregrounded. Her reactions, primarily those of grief, are deeply entrenched in bodily reactions. She weeps into her sari, the garment that marks her Hindu womanhood. Moreover, she clutches Amulya's pistol to her chest and hides it in her clothes; the stolen money too remains close to her, tied in a knot at the end of her sari. In both these cases, she physically takes the sin of the deeds onto herself and inflicts the repercussions on her body, in a twisted and curious form of self-flagellation. The guilt of the thievery almost makes her faint at the *threshold* of her husband's door. She then meets Sandip, completely unadorned, almost in a sort of penance of widowhood, which is symbolically preemptive of the end of the novel where Nikhil is fatally wounded and her widowhood is imminent. In that penance, she also invents her birthday, as a symbol of a cleansing and thus a new birth, and makes cakes for the household and Amulya. At the very beginning, Bimala foresees this catastrophe, albeit symbolically, in very physical terms: she describes her very body as the potent site and instrument for the catastrophe to occur:

> So long I had been like a small river at the border of a village. My rhythm and my language were different from what they are now. But the tide came up from the sea, and my breast heaved; my banks gave way and the great drum- beats of the sea waves echoed in my mad current. I could not understand the meaning of that sound in my blood. (31)

She continuously negotiates as embodied *ego* with the pull of the *id* that is Sandip and the *superego* that is Nikhil.[14] In this context, Bimala's agency is simultaneously *erotic* and *thanatotic*:[15] her passion culminates with a death drive that finally pushes her and her life into the abyss. Tanika Sarkar further comments on the sort of political and sexual will that Bimala portrays and states that,

> In a strange irony, both Nikhil and Sandip think at different times that they are creating their perfect partner, a creature of their desires. Bimala often expresses herself in terms that are typical of feminine vulnerability, helplessness, weakness, and culpability. Yet,

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[14] Sigmund Freud theorised that the mind, as a psychical apparatus is divided, but not compartmentalised, into three: the *id* which is the chaotic, carnal and instinctual in man, the *superego* which is the moral and ethical controller and the realistic *ego* which mediates between the desires of the *id* and the *superego*.

[15] Freud expounds the concept of the death drive and the life instinct as invariably linked with each other and always already invoking the other in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*

> she decides always on courses of action that strain against and overturn plans of men far stronger than she is. She pulls the narrative out of joint, she opens up violent trajectories.[16]

In that sense, like Luce Irigaray's woman of the 'red earth', she potentially disrupts the very nature of patriarchal homosocial relations between Nikhil and Sandip and temporarily manages to rise above the role of the symbolic commodity that has come to a market that is controlled by the power of the phallus.[17]

IV

> When she refused to come, Duhshasana dragged her into the hall. There she stood weeping, but with fury she asked the question again. With shouts that talking was useless, the Kaurava men started pulling off Draupadi's sari. As each sari was pulled off another appeared in its place. Meanwhile the discussion continued.
>
> – Irawati Karve, *Yuganta*, *The End of an Epoch* (53)[18]

During the course of the novel, Bimala is subjected to a curious but obvious process of robing and disrobing. Akin to Draupadi's predicament and humiliation in *The Mahabharata*, Bimala is literally and figuratively clothed and unclothed, often publicly, that is, in the domain of the outer world. In a startling parallel to Draupadi's story, Bimala recounts the pull of the Cause and the stranger who brings that Cause to her. She says, 'And, through it all, there burned a passion which in its violence made as though it would tear me up by the roots, and drag me along by the hair' (46). While Draupadi was forced into public nakedness and exhibitionism, Bimala almost against her better judgment, *chooses* to be pulled into the whirlpool of the erotico-political. She makes the *choice* to venture into the outer apartments and seek the companionship and physical proximity of a man who is not her husband. Draupadi lets her hair loose after the public humiliation, as a challenge to the men in power; Bimala too lets her tresses loose in what is posited as both a challenge and a temptation to the men in power. It is important to note that traditionally, hair that was let loose was considered a sign of sexual abandon. Yet, Bimala suffers through a series of robing and disrobing in the novel that result in her shuttling from image to image and embodied symbol to symbol. Right at the beginning, the process of disrobing of Bimala's 'real' self begins: although, she is married into a Rajah's house with great prospects, her husband compels her to shed the impetus of tradition and wear the garb of modernity for which Bimala is far from ready. His need to find her, mentally and physically, on that plane creates and exacerbates the discontent that Bimala exhibits both as a child and as an adult. Her body is disrobed of all her ideological moorings, a condition that worsens with Sandip's entry. Sandip perpetuates two kinds of disrobing: he clothes her in the lexical garb of *Swadeshi* but also attempts to dislodge her from her marital moorings. He visualises in her 'a triumphal progress of Truth [...] which, gradually but persistently, thrust[s] aside veil after veil of obscuring custom, till at length Nature herself was laid bare' (35) and describes her as having 'burnt her wings in the blaze of the full strength of my unhesitating manliness' (59). He attacks her with his emphasis on the importance of nakedness, which is the 'real' site for two people to comprehend each other. For instance, he deliberately leaves a book that delves into questions of sex for her to read. In the semblance of the pedestal of the 'Queen Bee', Bimala is yet again ideologically unclad and forced to choose from the ensemble of *Swadeshi* and nationalism. The stealing of the money, the very act of *untying the knot of the sari* in which the money is kept renders her naked, in front of her own self and especially in front of Amulya, who is the only person in the novel who lets Bimala assume the role that she wants. She also loses face when she confesses to the theft that allows her to understand Sandip for what he is. That is not to say that she doesn't retain her own political and sexual views: in the end, she does find some strength to go back to them, to reject the attire that she is coerced into.

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[16] Sarkar 38.

[17] In 'When the goods get together' from *The Sex that is not One,* Luce Irigaray theorises that society is primarily structured homosocially wherein women are reduced to goods that are exchanged in the phallogocentric marketplace between men as objects of male, heteronormative desire. She further formulates that by women *refusing* to take part in this exchange, these oppressive patriarchal structures can be challenged.

[18] Irawati Karve, *Yuganta, The End of an Epoch* (Telangana: Orient BlackSwan, 2007) 53. A collection of essays, this work is a mythical, historical, and political reading of *The Mahabharata.* It provides diverse and at times 'against the grain' interpretations of the episodes and characters in the epic.

Thus, the fetishisation of the body occurs in multifarious ways, both by the men in their embellishment of Bimala and by Bimala herself, in her attempts at moulding herself into unachievable quasi-mythical images or symbols. A running motif in the novel is that of Bimala aspiring to be a protagonist in an epic, a woman par excellence in all possible ways: mentally, physically, privately and publicly, which acts as the ultimate *aporia* for Bimala and her aspirations. Post Sandip's first speech, Bimala's excitement is palpable and perhaps a bit fantastical; she states that,

> Like the Greek maidens of old, I fain would cut off my long, resplendent tresses to make a bowstring for my hero. Had my outward ornaments been connected with my inner feelings, then my necklet, my armlets, my bracelets, would all have burst their bonds and flung themselves over that assembly like a shower of meteors. Only some personal sacrifice, I felt, could help me to bear the tumult of my exaltation. (15)

She continually attempts to mould herself into a *Galatea* or an *Ahalya* but is unable to do so, caught in the fray of agency and duty. At the very outset, the novel poignantly captures her notions about marriage and Hindu womanhood or wifehood. It begins with one of the most oft-quoted passages in the novel where Bimala contemplates,

> Mother, today there comes back to mind the vermilion mark at the parting of your hair, the *sari* which you used to wear, with its wide red border, and those wonderful eyes of yours, full of depth and peace [...] Everyone says that I resemble my mother. In my childhood I used to resent this. It made me angry with my mirror. I thought it was God's unfairness wrapped round my limbs – my dark features were not my due [...] All that remained for me to ask of my God in reparation was, that I might grow up to be a model of what woman should be, as one reads it in some epic poem. (3)

In the larger narratives of nationalism, colonialism, matrimony and gender which form and refresh the novel and its criticism in diverse and conflicting ways, this passage deftly and subtly compels the *body*, and a *woman's body* at that, to take discursive centre stage. In the very memory that Bimala recounts, the *physical* or *bodily* ideal is given more importance; the refuge of virtuous womanhood is secondary, almost a compromise. The memory of the mother and her subservience as the epitome of sacrificial and relentless service is primarily understood through symbols and the ornamentation of the body. P.K. Datta states that Bimala 'evaluates her mother's devotion not for its actual presence [...] but as a series of visible rituals [...] Bimala's preoccupation with public images makes her reprocess the belief in devotion as an aesthetic spectacle.'[19] What inspires Bimala is the hue of the sari, the vermillion, the *performance*; what disappoints her is her own dark skin. Through this memory, a volley of images springs forth, both mental and corporeal, which Bimala attempts to inhabit in the course of the novel. The anger aroused by *the image that does not exist* plagues her in the entire novel. In that sense, Bimala portrays both psychologically and thus physically the classic discontent associated with continual *meconnaissance*,[20] which is always already the precondition for that discontent. She recasts herself into images that are conceptually and physically tangible, *real* even, but fails to fashion herself authentically in these multifarious remouldings. Supriya Chaudhari writes that,

> Bimala's emotional history, within the novel, is predicated upon this sense of lack, it may be read as a history of desire; but a desire returning upon the self, not (despite all appearances) directed towards husband or lover.[21]

She continues,

> But what she projects onto these objects is herself: she wants to become something that they constitute or represent. This too is a kind of love: a love that, impelled by lack, seeks to identify itself with the object of its desire.[22]

Tanika Sarkar too talks about the various bodily and conceptual configurations or images that Bimala attempts to inhabit. She writes that

> Bimala possesses sexual and political will and autonomy, but she cannot imagine a form or identity that can adequately hold and express them. She moves between bodies that are dressed by the desires of her men [...] When she moves away from both, she can only imagine herself back in the past, mimicking the gestures of her mother, almost returning to inhabit her body.[23]

Hence, Bimala's sexual and textual subversion is never fulfilled in a series of substitutable *absent* images that are never completely her own; her ideations of herself, especially in her material and corporeal reality are lost in a chain of significations[24] that lead to her doom and alienation. In that sense, her bodily performance, in the home and in the world, is always already *prosthetic*[25] insofar it is unattainable. She embodies the dissent of sexual and ontological difference that splits the ideal of *Dasein*[26] and compels it to take the presence of the body into a discursive and corporeal encounter. The disrobing of the body, especially a *woman's* body, thus lays bare the arcana of the institutions and structures that are foundational to civil society. The body in *Ghare Baire* thus, emerges as a site wherein power, governance and knowledge straddle each other, publicly and privately, in a continual ideological robing and disrobing of its stark corporeality.

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[19] Datta 16.

[20] Jacques Lacan, in *Ecrits,* theorised about the notion of continual 'misrecognition' in the Mirror Stage wherein the infant sees a reflection of him or herself in the mirror, which is nevertheless not an authentic one and is the condition for the possibility of entry into the Symbolic Order of socio-linguistic structures.

[21] Supriya Chaudhari, 'A Sentimental Education: Love and Marriage in *The Home and the World*', *Rabindranath Tagore's The Home and the World: A Critical Companion* edited by P.K. Datta (Kolkata: Permanent Black, 2002) 21.

[22] Chaudhari 61.

[23] Sarkar 38.

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[24] The ever differing, deferring chain of substitution and meaning-creation in which no absolute signified can be reached, as posited by Jacques Derrida in 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', *Writing and Difference*.

[25] The notion that linguistic and thus, by extension other markers of identity can never be *one's own* and are always already prosthetic or artificial insofar as meaning is always derived from the Other, as theorised by Jacques Derrida in *Monolingualism of the Other; Or, The Prosthesis of Origin.*

[26] The idea that *Dasein* as fundamental ontology can be deconstructed into and as sexual and ontological difference, as theorised by Jacques Derrida in '*Geschlecht*: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference'.

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The Woman Question: Politics of Gender and Space in Rabindranath Tagore's *Home and the World* (*Ghare Baire*, 1916)

Paromita Mukherjee

Abstract:

The focus of this essay is on Tagore's portrayal of the emerging educated woman of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century India, as illustrated through Bimala in *Home and the World*. Bimala is the product of the new patriarchy, who is in the process of 'becoming' the new woman without ever quite succeeding. In this emerging patriarchy, the nationalist agenda had incorporated the woman question and the reality of women was constructed by a nationalist discourse. Women were reminded of a structure embedded in the traditional past which also happened to be a nationalist invention and as such very selective and even exclusionary. The power structure of this discourse and the control it exercised can be traced in Tagore's text. Of course one has to note here that Indian nationalist discourse, like any other discourse, was never a homogeneous one, and it kept evolving as it does even today. In the Indian nationalist discourse, especially in the extremist versions, many women like Bimala became pawns in the overarching nationalist scheme that tapped into the traditional idea of 'Shakti' or 'The Mother' to address the 'woman question'. The failure of Bimala to become the 'new woman' reflects Tagore's reservations regarding the construction of this ideal by the new patriarchy and the nationalist movement.

The Socio-Historic Background and the Text

In late nineteenth and early twentieth century India, in spite of educational opportunities among certain sections of women, the patriarchal discourse was never really challenged. Educated women were made to believe that all their endeavours were ultimately directed towards the greater good of the husband, or the male counterpart, or the society, or the country in general. Education was not seen as a means for women to achieve independence, to express their individuality, to question patriarchal authority or to acquire self-awareness. If we look back into the history of women's struggle for education and empowerment, we will find that the effort was contained within the parameters of certain traditional gender roles. Mary Wollstonecraft, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), had argued that if women are to be held morally and legally responsible, then their rational faculty must be developed, and better educated women will become improved mothers, interesting wives and companions, and more responsible citizens. Wollstonecraft's defence was a starting point, but gender roles were still defined, keeping in mind the benefits of a society that was patriarchal in nature. The 'woman question' was further raised in nineteenth-century Britain by eminent intellectuals like John Stuart Mill in *The Subjection of Women* (1869), and the ideas travelled to the British colonies like India, where 'modernisation' had begun.

The infiltration of western ideas in the early nineteenth century had given a jolt to India's traditional way of life, shocking people into a new kind of awareness and a sense of urgency. As Radha Kumar points out in *The History of Doing*, the Indian bourgeois society that was developing under Western domination, ‘sought to reform itself, initiating campaigns against caste, polytheism, idolatry, animism, purdah, child-marriage, sati and more, seeing them as elements of a “pre-modern” or primitive identity.’[1] Eminent figures like Rammohan Roy, and Henry Derozio, and, later on, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, were passionately executing social and educational reforms, particularly for women. However, issues related to women suddenly disappeared from the agenda of the public debate towards the end of nineteenth century and the discourse of nationalism seemed to take precedence. In his essay, ‘The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question,’ Partha Chatterjee mentions that from the late nineteenth century onwards, ‘questions regarding the position of women in society do not arouse the same degree of passion and acrimony as they did only a few decades before’ and ‘the overwhelming issues now are directly political ones – concerning the politics of nationalism’.[2] The politics of nationalism ‘glorified’ the traditions of India and ‘fostered conservative attitude towards social beliefs and practices,’ thus stalling the movement towards modernisation.[3] A large number of women got involved in the nationalist movements. The nationalist movement had given the women the task of becoming ‘the Mothers of the Nation’ and for many young nationalists, ‘the worship of Kali, Durga, and Chandi became incumbent’ as they thought that the ‘mother’ would help smooth their ‘path to nationalist martyrdom’.[4] Chatterjee argues that the ‘woman’s question’ was not ignored by the ideology of the nationalist politics and instead was resolved in ‘complete accordance with its preferred goals’.[5] These preferred goals were to incorporate the women’s struggle for emancipation into the nationalist struggle for independence. The new woman, in the ideological configuration of nationalist politics, now became a product of a new patriarchy.

The reform movements had already set in motion the process of redefining the spheres of the public and the private. A new set of patriarchal gender-based relations were being constructed. Thus late nineteenth-century India witnessed the emergence of the new woman in bourgeois society, and she also became a part of the nationalist movement. This kind of thought and action gave rise to a body of literature that portrayed liberal and educated women characters at the end of the century, but they needed the agency of a patriarchal discourse. While some literature produced during the late nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century was explicitly political, the style adopted by Rabindranath Tagore was subtle. His idea of the ‘new woman’ or the ‘modern woman’ was explored in both domestic and national contexts. Malashri Lal, in her introduction to *Tagore and the Feminine*, comments that Tagore was ‘to express as well as subvert the equations assumed in the Mother-Nation parallel, especially in his fiction’ but the lyrics of his patriotic songs seem to convince many that the ‘feminine principle is the aura under which the loyal sons of the nation would pursue the path of sacrifice in honour of the Mother'.[6] Chandrava Chakravarty and Sneha Kar Chaudhury, in *Tagore's Idea of New Women*, further argue that 'Tagore was deeply confused in his understanding and hence representations of women' and thus, in his works, women become 'the site of conflicting positioning and perceptions, a battleground of the discursive and the real, the sensual and the sublime, the gross and the ideal.'[7] However, one must note that Tagore's works spanned several decades and his ideas and views about women also underwent significant changes. As Rajasri Basu concludes in her introduction to *Women and Tagore,* 'A more conservative, stereo-typed image of women in his earlier writings led to a "modern woman" in the middle period finally paving the way for a mature, autonomous, independent woman in the later years.'[8]

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[1] Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 1993) 7-8.

[2] Partha Chatterjee, The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question’, *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* edited by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Delhi: Zubaan, 1989) 233.

[3] Chatterjee 234.

[4] Kumar 45.

[5] Chatterjee 237.

In this essay, I will focus on Tagore's portrayal of the emerging educated woman of late nineteenth-and early twentieth-century India, as illustrated through Bimala in *Home and the World*. I will analyse, along the lines of Partha Chatterjee's argument, that Bimala is the product of the new patriarchy, who is in the process of 'becoming' the new woman but never quite succeeds. In this emerging patriarchy, the nationalist agenda had incorporated the woman question and had developed another way of viewing the reality of women. This reality was constructed by a nationalist discourse, where a set of new ideas was not imposed on women and instead women were reminded of the structure embedded in the traditional past. This past also happened to be a nationalist invention and as such very selective and even exclusionary. In his essay 'The Order of Discourse,' Michel Foucault argues that in every society, 'the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality.'[9] Employing Foucault's observation, I will also show that the power structure of the discourse and the control it exercises can be traced in Tagore's text through the ideas propagated by the character, Sandip, a representative of the new patriarchy. Of course one has to note here that Indian nationalist discourse like any other discourse was never a homogeneous one, and it kept evolving as it does even today. Sandip tempts Bimala to follow the ideas generated by the new patriarchy, but Bimala fails to do so. In the Indian nationalist discourse, especially in the extremist ones, many women like Bimala become pawns in the overarching nationalist scheme that taps into the traditional idea of 'Shakti' or 'The Mother' to address the 'woman question'. The failure of Bimala reflects Tagore's reservations regarding the construction of the 'new woman' by the new patriarchy and the nationalist movement.

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[6] Malashri Lal, Introduction, *Tagore and the Feminine: A Journey in Translation* (New Delhi: Sage Publications India, 2015) xxx.

[7] Chandrava Chakravarty and Sneha Kar Chaudhuri, *Tagore's Idea of New Women: The Making and Unmaking of Female Subjectivity* (New Delhi: Sage Publications India, 2017) 7.

[8] Rajasri Basu, *Women and Tagore: Recreating the Space in New Millennium* (New Delhi: Abhijeet Publications, 2012) 11.

[9] Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', *Untying the Text: A Post-structuralist Reader* edited by Robert J. C. Young (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) 52.

Home and the World was published serially in a journal called ‘Sabuj Patra’ (green leaf) from April 1915 to March 1916. It is a novel that portrays a tumultuous period in the history of Bengal during the anti-partition movement in 1905 – a protest condemning the action of the British Raj in dividing Bengal into two sections with Hindu and Muslim majorities in each section. This soon led to the Boycott and *Swadeshi* movements in Bengal. Tagore’s narrative revolves around three main characters: Bimala, Nikhilesh, and Sandip. While Nikhilesh belongs to the educated upper-class landed gentry, Sandip, Nikhilesh’s college friend, is a *swadeshi* extremist, an ardent activist of the nationalist movement. Nikhilesh’s wife Bimala, unlike most women of her time, has received a western education. Bimala, with her husband’s encouragement and support, decides to enter the public world. She gets swept off her feet by the passion and intensity of Sandip, and she is almost hypnotised by him. The narrative is told from the point of view of these characters, and highlights the process of intense self-examination that they go through. As a result, we get a composite, multi-dimensional perspective of each character and event in the narrative as opposed to a third person linear narrative where one has to depend on the narrator’s perspective. Tagore provides an innovative way of doing justice to the complexity of the human relationships in the novel where the female protagonist gets a voice too. It helps us to trace the evolution of each of the characters, and provides a platform for the interaction of the public and the private worlds. Chatterjee points out that unlike women of Europe, for Indian women, ‘the new idea of womanhood was sought to be actualized’ in the private sphere instead of the public, and this ‘change can be constructed only out of evidence left behind in autobiographies, family histories, religious tracts, literature, theatre, songs, paintings and such other cultural artefacts’ that depict life at home.[10] In this context, it is interesting to note that Tagore gives Bimala the autobiographical voice that shows her struggle, which in turn, becomes symbolic of the dilemma of a certain section of women of Bengal who like Bimala felt trapped into the perplexity of tradition and modernity. Both Nikhilesh and Sandip try to construct Bimala’s identity in their own ways, but ultimately both remain unsuccessful.

The Public and the Private: Politics of Freedom, Space and Boundary

The Indian nationalist ideology, while trying to break away from colonial dominance, had included certain notions of what constituted the material and spiritual, in its nationalist project. During the late nineteenth century, the Indian nationalists had argued that it was ‘not desirable to imitate the West in anything other than the material aspects of life’ as the East was quite rich in its spiritual domain.[11] As Chatterjee points out, the material/spiritual dichotomy, in the discourse of nationalism, now became analogous to the outer/inner polarity, which finally led to the separation of the social space into ‘*ghar* and *bahir*, the home and the world’.[12] While the ‘world’ was associated with the male, the external and practical or material interests, the ‘home’ became associated with the female, the internal and spiritual interests. Thus, adhering to the traditional patriarchy, the social roles were identified according to gender to ‘correspond with the separation of the social space into *ghar* and *bahir*’.[13] Chatterjee argues that one needs to look beyond the apparent conservatism of these roles and instead focus on the transformation of these notions that were taking place under the nationalist ideology. The colonisers had subjugated the Indians by their ‘superior material culture’ but had failed to colonise ‘the inner, essential identity [...] the spiritual culture’.[14] According to Chatterjee, the nationalist paradigm did not dismiss modernity but attempted ‘to make modernity consistent with the nationalist project’ within which the women’s question is answered.[15] Tagore in *The Home and the World* seems to show that the nationalist project may attempt to resolve the ‘women’s question’, but true emancipation needs a different channel.

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[10] Chatterjee 250.
[11] Chatterjee 237.
[12] Chatterjee 238.

The Home and the World explores a quest for freedom, the domains being both the public and the private worlds. While Nikhilesh seeks freedom from ignorance and rigid orthodox ideas, Sandip’s quest is for freedom of his country from British rule. Bimala, on other hand, has been granted freedom by her husband to participate in the public sphere, so that she gets an opportunity to utilise her education for the service of the nation. But she is not fully prepared to deal with the complexities of the outside world. She says, ‘My husband had a great wish that I would step outside the inner chambers. One day I said to him, “I don’t need the world outside.” He said, “The world outside may be in need of you.”’[16]

Bimala’s struggle, therefore, was to find freedom from her own inner inhibitions, which no doubt were fostered by her upbringing in the rigid orthodoxy of a traditional patriarchal society. Bimala also shows a deep attachment to her traditional role as the ‘ultimate’ authority in the private sphere. She even refuses to go to Calcutta with Nikhilesh, because she is afraid of losing her current position of authority in the household. As she wonders whether she will ever get back her rightful place if she returns from Calcutta, Nikhilesh assures her that she might not even want it as life will have other things to offer. But Bimala is not ready to let go and tells herself: ‘Men really don’t understand these things very well. They don’t know how significant the positions in the inner-chambers are since they live and breathe the air outside’ (224). In this sense, she is also in need of freedom from her attachment to the private sphere. Her awareness of the public life, and her journey to self-knowledge, was not initiated by a desire to contribute to the nationalist movement; rather it was initially fuelled by her infatuation with Sandip’s eloquence, and his grand ideas and visions for the country. As a result, she finds herself disillusioned when Sandip’s true motives become known to her. The novel begins and ends with Bimala’s autobiographical entries, and by contrasting the two sections, the readers can locate the kind of transformation that Bimala undergoes.

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[13] Chatterjee 239.

[14] Chatterjee 239.

[15] Chatterjee 240.

[16] Rabindranath Tagore’s *Ghare Baire* 1916; *The Home and the World* translated by Sreejata Guha, *The Tagore Omnibus* Volume 1 (New Delhi: Penguin, 2005) 221. Subsequent references to this work will be included in parentheses in the text.

Bimala’s first account reflects her idea of beauty, chastity, tradition, and modernity. She describes her mother, who, without questioning her position in the society, happily catered to the gender role that was pre-assigned to her. Her mother’s generation seemed to be unconcerned with the state of the outside world, and they did not desire any role beyond the private sphere. Bimala’s questioning begins with her entry into her husband’s household:

> The family I married into was very orthodox. Here, some rules were as old as the Mughals and some were even older, set by Manu and Parashar. But my husband was very modern in his outlook. He was the first in his family to be highly educated [...] He dared to transgress the bounds of conformity. So, when he appointed Miss Gilby as my companion and tutor, tongues started wagging at home and outside, and yet, my husband’s will won in the end. (214-15)

Bimala is critical of the traditional rules and welcomes change in the attitudes of people. She appreciates her husband’s modern outlook, but she herself is still quite grounded in tradition. At the beginning of the novel she says: ‘I was his princess and my place was beside him; but it was a greater joy to take my place at his feet’ (215). This shows her subservience to her husband’s wishes, and her desire to serve him, out of the ideas of devotion and love ingrained within her. In spite of her education, what seems to be lacking is the willingness to break away from the traditionally defined roles.

Westernisation of Bengali women threatened the traditional way of life in the nineteenth century. It was taken up virtually in every form of communication and ‘to ridicule the idea of a Bengali woman trying to imitate the way of a European woman or *memsahib* [...] was a sure recipe to evoke raucous laughter and moral condemnation in both male and female audiences.’[17] In the later part of the century, the criticism of manners, that is, of new forms of clothing like blouses, jackets, petticoats and shoes, and use of western cosmetics and jewellery, is something that we see in Tagore’s novel as well, when the sister-in-law of Bimala condemns her: ‘It is shameful how you have gone and decked your body up like it’s a novelty shop!’ (218). Even when we see that some women may be supportive of these fashionable trends in traditional households, it should be noted that such support is guided by an agenda of keeping the men of the house happy. Bimala’s grandmother-in-law didn’t like the clothes that Nikhilesh bought for Bimala from the foreign stores but did not oppose:

> But she felt that men were bound to have some such idiosyncrasies that were quite silly and a mere waste. There was no way of restraining them, but it was important to see that it didn’t lead them to total destruction. If my Nikhilesh didn’t deck up his wife, he’d have done the same to another woman. So, every time a new dress arrived for me, she called my husband and riled and teased him merrily. Gradually her taste changed too. Thanks to this unholy age of modernism, a day came when her evenings would be incomplete unless her granddaughter-in-law read her stories from English books. (223)

For Bimala’s grandmother-in-law, what seemed more important was keeping Nikhilesh interested in Bimala, so that his fancies would not waver away towards courtesans like the other men in the family. Bimala’s education and fashion were perceived by the other women in the house as merely Nikhilesh's passing fancy. His noble intentions did not hold any significance for them.

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[17] Chatterjee 240.

In the novel, Tagore portrays Nikhilesh as an almost unreal character, who has highly liberal and elevated ideas regarding women's role in the private and public world. Nikhilesh gives Bimala the freedom to participate in the outer world, because he wanted her to be his equal in the public sphere. He says, as Bimala recounts, 'I would like you to be mine in the world out there. We need to settle our accounts in that space' (221). Even when Nikhilesh becomes aware of the growing attraction between Bimala and Sandip, he does not put a stop to it because 'he values love only when given out of free will and is open to competition with the outside world and not as an obligation or under duress'.[18] He was even prepared to walk away from his marriage, if Bimala's life in the public world did not include him:

> I shall not lose faith; I will wait [...] when Bimal has left the home behind, the rules binding her to those boundaries no longer operate. Once she reconciles with the unfamiliar world, and comes to an agreement with it, I shall see where my place lies. If [...] there is no room for me, then I will know that everything I lived with it for all these years was a lie [...] If that day comes, I will not protest; slowly and silently I will move away. (244)

Nikhilesh is supportive not only of women's education and their entry into the public sphere, but he is also prepared for the consequences of their free choices, and independent decisions. Although Mary Wollstonecraft had identified virtue and morality as one of the outcomes of women's education, Tagore shows that Nikhilesh does not want to impose any standards of virtue on Bimala. Nikhilesh is portrayed as a person who would allow his wife to search for her own identity, without any moral boundaries.

Late nineteenth-century Bengali society suffered from the ideological confusion regarding what to accept and what not from the West. However, along with the formation of the discourse of nationalism in the latter half of the century, 'an attempt was made to define the social and moral principles for locating the position of women in the "modern" world of the nation'.[19] Chatterjee quotes Bhudev Mukhopadhyay's nationalist answer to the problem, which was keeping women separated in the society because if they continuously eat, drink, converse and travel with men outside their home, their manners may become 'coarse' and be devoid of any 'spiritual' qualities.[20] The point was hammered home that in the Arya system, 'the wife is a goddess', whereas, in the European system, she is a 'partner and companion'.[21] In the new norm for organising family life and determining conduct for women of the 'modern' world, the 'home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture, and women must take the main responsibility of protecting and nurturing this quality' and they must not lose their 'essentially spiritual' virtues.[22]

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[18] Krishna Kripalani, *Tagore: A Life* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1985) 149.
[19] Chatterjee 241.
[20] Chatterjee 242.
[21] Chatterjee 243.
[22] Chatterjee 243.

In *Personality* (1917), which is a structured exposition of Tagore's spiritual thoughts, he provides an answer to the confusion of the society regarding the role and position of the modern women through his piece on 'Woman'. Here Tagore is critical of the western woman's 'restlessness' and instead advocates the 'passive' and 'self-sacrificing' qualities of women as naturally nurturing 'mothers' of their race.[23] He clearly states that 'domestic life' should not be the only option for women and their lives should be full of concrete 'human activities' and not merely 'abstract efforts to organize'.[24] Tagore's objective is unambiguous: 'Woman should use her power to break through the surface and go to the centre of things.'[25] He further invokes a call for action: 'She must restore the lost social balance [...] The time has come when woman's responsibility has become greater than ever before, when her field of work has far transcended the domestic sphere of life.'[26] In his short story 'Apachirita' or 'Woman Unknown' (published in 1914), Tagore had portrayed, in Kalyani, a character who is not only liberal minded, independent and educated, but has also decided not to marry and confine herself in the domestic space, and instead respond to a greater mission, which she calls 'my mother's command', the reference being to her motherland.[27] She has decided to dedicate her life to a noble project – women's education in her country.

In *Home and the World*, Tagore shows that the involvement in the public sphere should not induce women to neglect the private world. Bimala, misguided under the spell of Sandip, takes her private life for granted, and almost like a thief, she steals from her husband's treasury. For the perceived good of the public world, she betrays her private world. She realises her mistake when it is already too late and her journey towards self-awareness has taken an irreversible course:

> I had failed to separate my home from the world. Today I have robbed my home, and therefore robbed the land; for this sin, my home was lost to me in the same instant that my land slipped away from me. Had I gone begging in order to serve the country, and even lost my life before completing my service, that incomplete service would have been accepted by God as obeisance. But theft was no worship – how would I hand this to my country? (342-43)

Eventually, Bimala acquires self-knowledge and breaks out of the spell of the words that Sandip casts on her. She sees beyond the façade that Sandip had created, and during that process, she gets assistance from Amulya, another activist of the nationalist movement, who was also manipulated by Sandip. The novel highlights the necessity and importance of striking the right balance between the private and public sphere, a message that is pertinent even today.

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[23] Rabindranath Tagore, *Selected Essays* (Kolkata: Rupa, 2004) 226-27.
[24] Tagore, *Selected Essays* 228-29.
[25] Tagore, *Selected Essays* 229.
[26] Tagore, *Selected Essays* 232.
[27] Rabindranath Tagore, 'Woman Unknown'; *Aparichita* 1914, translated Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Selected Short Stories* edited by Sukanta Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000) 230.

Gender, Myth and Nation

The nationalist project, while trying to resolve the women's question, had created the idea of the 'new' woman which was a product of the 'new' patriarchy that had started defining the role of the modern Indian woman. Keeping Foucault's argument in mind, we can see that during this time in India, the construction of the 'new woman' was controlled, organised and distributed through several channels by the powerful nationalist discourse. Nationalism had incorporated several elements from the tradition, but they were reconstructed to suit the changing modern world. As Chatterjee points out, 'the new woman of nationalist ideology was accorded a status of cultural superiority to the westernised women of the wealthy parvenu families' and the new woman was expected to attain 'a superior national culture' through her own efforts and 'newly acquired freedom'.[28] One goal of the nationalist ideology was to make women culturally refined through formal education. According to Chatterjee, it is this particular nationalist construction of 'both emancipation and self-emancipation of women' that explained why 'the early generation of educated women themselves so keenly propagated the nationalist idea of the "new woman"'.[29] Women now had a new social responsibility that at the same time moved them both towards emancipation and legitimate subordination under the new patriarchy. Chatterjee argues that this patriarchy, like any other hegemonic force, combined authority and subtle persuasion that was 'expressed most generally in an inverted ideological form of the relation of power between the sexes: the adulation of woman as goddess or as mother'.[30] This ideological form along with 'mythological inspiration' became an overriding trait of femininity in the new woman, highlighting the 'spiritual' qualities of 'self-sacrifice, benevolence, devotion, religiosity, etc.'[31]

Bengali nationalism, by the turn of the century, had started embracing extremism, and during the *swadeshi* movement in Bengal, women's participation in nationalist activities had increased. Revolutionary groups had started developing a 'goddess-centred nationalist rhetoric' where 'anti-British feeling was imbued with a Hindu nationalism in which Kali was repeatedly invoked'.[32] Worshipping of Durga and Kali was one way of emphasising the 'energy, nature and action: prakriti and the martial aspects of shakti, which can be both protective, as in Durga, and erotically destructive, as in Kali'.[33] This led to the creation of new mother images that became influential in the mainstream discourse and started defining 'new spaces for women'.[34] Thus women's role in nationalist struggles was determined by the mother image and power of 'Shakti.' Myths related to Shakti were reconstructed into the idea of Mother India, and this rebuilding of the image also facilitated the women's space as a safe one in the public domain. Twentieth century had witnessed a major change in the role of women across the world. Western women had started participating actively in domestic and international politics, and they had begun to enter the work force in various capacities, especially later during the two world wars, as air-raid wardens, spies, decoders, etc. The scenario in India was different. In India, participation in the nationalist movement seemed to pave the way for women to attain a space in the public realm. The movement gave them a chance to be a part of something greater and more meaningful than their everyday ordinary domestic existence.

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[28] Chatterjee 245.
[29] Chatterjee 246.
[30] Chatterjee 248.
[31] Chatterjee 249.
[32] Kumar 44.
[33] Kumar 45.
[34] Kumar 47.

In *The Home and the World*, by the turn of the century, Tagore shows that true emancipation for women needs to come from within, and women must learn to choose what to incorporate into their identity. The novel identifies the idealistic and opportunistic overtones of the nationalist movement. Not everyone involved in the movement was guided by a desire to serve the nation; some were in it for their own vested interests. Sandip is portrayed as a person who is more interested in projecting a glamorous persona, and impressing people with his vision and eloquence, which added to the delusional aspect of the movement. To this end, his involvement in the movement was self-serving. Sandip does not shy away from espousing the concept of 'free love', and of the necessity of women to let go of their attachments to their husbands and their chastity, in order to be able to serve the nation more effectively. As Mihaela Gligor points out, Tagore in this novel 'dramatizes how exploitation, violence and killing become ritual acts when the individual sacrifices his/her self to an abstraction, and nationalism is put on a pedestal, sacrificing righteousness and conscience'.[35] The evidence is in Tagore's other writings as well. In his essay on 'Nationalism,' Tagore writes that the ideals that take form in social institutions must regulate 'passions and appetites for the harmonious development' of humans and help them 'cultivate disinterested love' for fellow creatures.[36] He argues that if ideologies and revolutions drift away from the everyday realities, then they tend to become empty, dangerous and problematic. Sandip, although he begins as a captivating revolutionary figure, soon loses his way. Instead of continuing dispassionate and disinterested action, as Krishna advices Arjuna to follow in *The Bhagavat Gita*, Sandip stoops to personal gains.

Towards the end of the first autobiographical entry of Bimala, there is mention of a debate between Nikhilesh and Sandip. While Nikhilesh argues in favour of truth, knowledge, and clarity, Sandip promotes emotion, impulse, and imagination. When Sandip defends the *Vande Mataram* mantra identifying the nation with mother goddess, he identifies men with dry logic and intellect, and women with elemental passion and intuition (235-36). Bimala falls prey to this masculine-feminine stereotype, even to the extent of accepting the mystifying '*shakti*', that is an almost divine power of a woman in the images of 'Mother Nature, Mother Shakti and Mother Mahamaya' and 'Kali' (282, 285). It appears that Bimala's deep-seated yearning for power, and her admiration for Sandip's rugged manliness, makes her accept the mythical shakti stereotype, renamed as ‘Queen Bee’ by Sandip (249). Bimala felt that she needed to prove to Sandip how powerful she was:

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[35] Mihaela Gligor, 'The Woman, the Country, and the World in Rabindranath Tagore's View', *Women and Tagore: Recreating the Space in New Millennium* edited by Rajasri Basu (New Delhi: Abhijeet Publications, 2012) 90.
[36] Tagore, *Selected Essays* 251.

> In his eyes I was Shakti – the goddess of power! With his powers of articulation, he had explained to me time and again that the supreme Shakti revealed itself to different people in the form of a special person. (301)

Sandip plays on her inherent weaknesses and lack of awareness, and temporarily gains her unwavering faith, which subsequently induces Bimala to steal from her husband’s treasury.

In the novel we find a lot of intertextuality that draws attention to the goal that the new patriarchy intended for women. Bimala not only reads English novels, but also has convinced the aged grandmother-in-law into enjoying their translated versions. Sandip also gives some Western novels to Bimala which contained ‘advanced’ views on gender relations, and certainly Sandip’s intention is not inspired by his love of literature, as he discusses ‘exchange of English and Vaishnav poetry’, but by his desire of seduction, and of moulding and initiating Bimala to ‘free love’ (271). One has to wonder why Bimala feels the need to suddenly hide the ‘modern’ book within a volume of the nineteenth-century American poet, Longfellow, when Sandip enters the room (256). Had the patriarchal discourse decided which books were recommended reading for women, and had some books been identified as clearly dangerous for the female mind and thus forbidden? Sandip tells Bimala not to shy away from reading such books, but that advice means to serve his end only. Sandip also draws arguments from the ancient Indian epic, *The Ramayana*. He claims that Sita could not have maintained her chastity and would have succumbed to passion if a virile character like Ravana had kept her in close proximity and not in the distant woods (284). This brings to mind how Satyajit Ray adapted the novel for his film *Ghare Baire* in 1985, where the title of the film blazes on the screen and fire rages all around the title signifying burning in the home as well as outside. Ray reworks the myth of Sita emerging from fire as a proof of her chastity through the emergence of Bimala on the screen for the first time. He shows the receding of fire followed by Bimala’s voice stating that she has just stepped out of the fire.

Bimala’s journey from the private world into the public sphere reflects a departure from the traditional gender roles. The novel highlights the need for women to overcome their inner inhibitions and participate in the outer world, but at the same time suggests that a balance between the private and the public sphere is necessary for women’s growth and emancipation. Blind adherence to either tradition, represented by the ‘home’, or to revolution, represented by the ‘world’, is seen as problematic by Tagore. Nationalism, no doubt, had played an important role in women’s emancipation in India as it drew women out of their homes into the world outside. Tagore seems to have been troubled by the exploitative, and often reckless, nature of the nationalist movement, and wanted to caution women about the pitfalls of becoming seduced by the glamour and apparent promise of the movement. Tagore positions the two male protagonists in stark contrast to each other. While Nikhilesh is contemplative, philosophical, non-aggressive, and respectful of others’ autonomy, Sandip is exactly the opposite. Sandip’s character represents the masculine stereotype whereas Nikhilesh’s character seems to suggest an alternative form of masculinity. Both Sandip and

Nikhilesh desire Bimala to come out in the public sphere as each try to construct the new woman. But neither is able to bring about the required emancipation in her. Bimala never quite becomes the 'new woman'.

The novel ends with Nikhilesh severely injured but not yet dead. There is an amusing story about a juvenile reader who had written to Tagore enquiring about the fate of Nikhilesh, to which he had replied: 'There is no doubt that the condition of Nikhilesh is extremely critical. But he might still be saved if he is treated by a really good doctor such as Nilratan Sarkar'.[37] In the novel, Tagore describes the scene in evocative language:

> 'A palanquin and a doolie drew into the gates. Doctor Mathur walked beside the palanquin. The estate manager asked, 'Doctor, what do you think?'
>
> The doctor said, 'Can't say for sure. Serious head injury.'
> 'And Amulyababu?'
> 'He took a bullet in the chest. He is no more.' (394)

Tagore had deliberately left the novel open-ended, perhaps to let the readers decide whether Bimala gets a second chance or not. Ray, in his film, gets rid of the ambivalent ending and shows the death of Nikhilesh with certainty. The film ends with Bimala's image transforming from wearing a coloured sari to a white one, signifying widowhood**.** The widowhood that Ray casts on Bimala is perhaps her inevitable fate like that of the other women in the family. In the novel, Tagore does not show Bimala having any children of her own. The closest she comes to being a mother is when Amulya refers to her as elder sister. Symbolically, she loses her child at the end of the novel and is on her way to becoming a widow. Her life becomes no different than that of her sister-in-law, regarding whom she had expressed antagonistic feelings throughout. Under the new patriarchy, she was on her way to becoming the 'new woman' but her progress is hindered by the false essentialisms of the ideology imposed upon her by both Sandip and Nikhilesh, that had put her initiation in process. She is trapped within the power structure of the patriarchal nationalistic discourse.

Tagore argued for women's autonomy through his works and constructed new female images to inspire the future generations. In his works, he portrayed different women characters who actively participate in the public sphere. They acquire education, but still need to make the transition from naivety to maturity. I have argued elsewhere that Tagore has shown a reversal of the culturally constructed ideas of masculinity and femininity in the context of his story 'Woman Unknown' which was published two years before *Home and the World*. In that story, Tagore shows the female protagonist Kalyani as beautiful and charming, but lacking 'the other feminine tags such as coyness, quietude, delicacy, timidity, and so on'; while the male protagonist in the story is shown as 'obedient, anxious, indecisive, and fantasy-prone,' Kalyani is 'rebellious, fearless, resolute, and practical'.[38] Kalyani is encouraged by her father, whereas Bimala is encouraged by her husband and also by her husband's friend. Just like Bimala, Ela in Tagore's last novel *Four Chapters* (*Char Adhyay*, 1934), is a victim of manipulation and exploitation in the name of love, freedom, and nationalism. While Tagore shows active participation of women in the political sphere in some of his other works, we do not see the complete materialisation of a female political voice in *Home and the World*. His objective seems to be to highlight the exploitation of naive women who were being drawn into the glamour and prospects of the public sphere for the first time. These ideas are pertinent even for the modern Indian woman of the twenty-first century. As the gender roles continue to evolve, and the traditional and patriarchal notions of what constitutes 'masculine' or 'feminine' undergo transformation, these ideas assume more significance. What Tagore seemed to stress, which is as valid now as it was a hundred years ago, is that the entry of women into the public sphere should be guided by education, information and clear judgement, and not be dictated solely by passions or emotions. The case of Bimala serves to remind us that all the participants of any revolutionary movement may not necessarily have the best interests of the country or its people at heart, and certain self-serving, corrupt people may take advantage of unsuspecting newcomers.

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[37] Sanjukta Dasgupta, Sudeshna Chakravarti, and Mary Mathew, *Radical Rabindranath: Nation, Family and Gender in Tagore's Fiction and Films* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2013) 149. Sir Nilratan Sarkar (1861-1943) was a famous Indian doctor who was also a philanthropist and a supporter of the *swadeshi* movement.

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[38] Paromita Mukherjee, 'The Strangeness Within: Gender and Identity in Tagore's Short Story, "Woman Unknown"', *Women and Tagore: Recreating the Space in New Millennium* edited by Rajasri Basu (New Delhi: Abhijeet Publications, 2012) 18.

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The Portrayal of Intersectional Masculinity in *The Home and The World* (*Ghare Baire*)

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Abstract

This essay takes on Tagore's representation of masculinity in *Ghare Baire* as its main quest, arguing that the novel rightfully challenges any singular representation of native masculinity within a colonial framework, yet at the same time, critically demarcates what constitutes Hindu versus Muslim masculinity within a class-based social order. It argues that Tagore in this novel sees extreme nationalism as an essential negative effect of rigid patriarchy that defines maleness in terms of aggression and extremity. The essay thus furthers the discussions of the novel's critique of nationalism by arguing that Tagore's intersectional portrayal of masculinity and nationalism sheds light on the performative interlink between these two powerful socio-cultural constructs.

Bengali masculinity and its complex experiences of privileges and insecurities are recurrent themes in Rabindranath Tagore's writings. From Hoimonti's young and powerless husband, Apu in the short story 'Hoimonti' to the isolated and despotic king of the play, *Rakta Karabi* (*Red Oleanders*), Tagore used his artistry to expose and question the enduring social and cultural construction of the expected gender roles of both men and women in Bengali Hindu society. It is also important to note that Tagore has never lost sight of the fact that men and masculinities, like most other social categories, are products of particular time and context, and are shaped by myriad of interlocking socio-cultural, economic, and religious factors. There is a systematic intersectional approach present in Tagore's writing that, when explored in detail, can be useful to comment on many complex relationships, such as that of nationalism and masculinity. There is hardly any dispute that Tagore's novel, *Ghare Baire* (1916), is essential to any discussion of his take on early twentieth-century nationalism. The novel's appeal to a twenty-first century audience is often attributed to its complex yet scathing criticism of nationalism. Fakrul Alam, for example, writing in 2012, perceives the importance of Tagore in the Bangladeshi context in examining the tangled relation between nation and nationalism: 'What I feel will make him even more crucial in this stage of our national identity formation is his complex take on nationalism itself.'[1]

In this essay I will revisit Tagore's exploration of men and masculinity in the novel, which situates both nationalism and masculinity at a juncture of British-Indian historiography when there could not be any one single response to colonial experiences, and when freedom from direct British rule seemed to be a possibility, even if the paths were not clearly defined. In doing so, I argue that Tagore's critique of masculinity deserves as much attention as that of nationalism, since for him they go together, perhaps not as clear-cut cause and effect, rather as a complex cycle of power relations, affecting each other. As Radha Chakravarti says, 'in its exploration of gender issues, the text not only charts the changing status of women in society, but also emerges as a strong comment on the ideas of masculinity in the early twentieth-century Bengal.'[2] This essay reads the text closely to explain how the novel breaks the spatial boundaries of gender, allowing men to cross between home and the world, negotiating their emotional-political selves at a turning point of Indian history.

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[1] Fakrul Alam, *Rabindranath Tagore and the National Identity Formation* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2012) 190.

Indian male identity and masculine practices under colonial rule were complex constructs. Macaulay's minute on Indian education was directly aimed at colonised men; men needed to be cultured so that other kinds of social reformation for the natives could be initiated, as he said:

> We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.[3]

Writing in the early years of the twentieth century, Tagore began *The Home and the World* with the apparent normalisation of colonial 'Babu' class that shaped the imagination of young Bengali men of relatively affluent class even beyond the metropolises. Nikhil, the key protagonist of the novel, is not Calcutta born. Rather, he was born in a regional land-owning (*Zamindar*) family in the eastern part of Bengal (now in Bangladesh), where the poor Muslim peasant class constituted the vast majority of his subjects. In a novel written much in the fashion of a Shakespearean tragedy where soliloquies dominate inter-character dialogues, we are introduced to Nikhil by Bimala, his wife and the main character of the novel. Nikhil, as Bimala informs us, is the first-generation colonial 'Babu' of his family. Much younger than his older brothers, Nikhil embraces English education to be an enlightened young man:

> My father-in-law's house was old in dignity from the days of the Badshahs. Some of its manners were of the Moguls and Pathans, some of its customs of Manu and Parashar. But my husband was absolutely modern. He was the first of the house to go through a college course and take his M.A. degree. [4]

Nikhil is a first-generation educated man, with considerable cultural distance from his brothers. He abhors his brothers' unscrupulous lifestyles, and does not want to abuse his power. Even Nikhil's vices emerge from his colonial consciousness. An enlightened social reformer, he spends money in inventing a date-juice extracting machine, invests to start-up a local microcredit bank, but without much success. He is thought to be a 'spend drift' for rational and right causes (19).

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[2] Radha Chakravarti, *Novelist Tagore: Gender and Modernity in Selected Texts* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2013) 92.

[3] T.B. Macaulay, *Minute by the Hon'ble T.B. Macaulay,* dated the 2nd February 1835. Online. 27 March 2018, http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html.

[4] Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World*, translated by Surendranath Tagore (London: Macmillan, 1919) 4. Subsequent references to the text will be included in parenthesis in the text.

Not unlike many native gentlemen of his time, Nikhil’s new manhood is most pronouncedly exercised on his wife. Bimala becomes a new woman because her husband wants her to be. Nikhil wants to transform Bimala to a young woman rich in Bengali middle-class cultural capital, adept in playing the piano and reading literature. Nikhil, in a way, rewrites Bimala’s fortune. In her first soliloquy, she recollects the irony of an astrologer’s prophecy before her marriage, ‘This girl has good signs. She will become an ideal wife’ (2). Bimala begins her conjugal life with the traditional exercises of becoming an ‘ideal wife’ by worshipping her husband. But Nikhil teaches her the egalitarian nature of marriage, where man and woman can be ‘equal’ in their reciprocity of love. His loyalty to his wife is a matter of feminine jealousy in the Zenana of the house. Nikhil’s sisters-in-law are representatives of how women’s lives and fates were constructed and controlled by men. Unlike Bimala, who could pride herself to be a wife of a socially powerful and culturally refined man, the sisters-in-law suffered from lives of deprivation and degradation.

While love and respect is at the base of Bimala and Nikhil’s conjugal life, there are gaps in their understanding. Nikhil’s ‘gentleman’ nature is part of the problem that creates an unspoken distance between them. Santisudha Mukhopadhyaya defines Nikhil and Bimala’s ‘home life’ as ‘complete and happy without blemish’.[5] However, such reading is limited when readers find Bimala and Nikhil hardly ever in conversation about their conjugal life. Married for long nine years, Bimala and Nikhil seem to be a childless couple; yet, Bimala and Nikhil never talk about it. The use of soliloquies makes it clear that the couple is prone to talking to themselves rather than to each other. Nikhil can hardly help it, for his masculine identity is both gentle yet discreet. Nikhil avoids talking to Bimala when he finds Bimala is attracted to Sandip, and blames her for being attracted to Sandip’s alpha-masculine qualities: ‘Bimala has no patience with patience. She loves to find in men the turbulent, the angry, the unjust. Her respect must have its element of fear’ (44).

Nikhil fails to realise that Bimala is attracted to Sandip not because he represents an unchecked virility, but because Sandip gives Bimala the opportunity to talk, to raise her voice on emotive matters such as patriotism, *Swadeshi* and the *Bande Mataram* ideology. Bimala says:

> Never before had I had the opportunity of being present at a discussion between my husband and his men friends. Whenever he argued with me I could see his reluctance to push me into a corner. This arose out of the very love he bore me. Today for the first time I saw his fencer’s skill in debate. (50)

Before Bimala meets Sandip, her world, despite Nikhil’s effort to make it open, is an enclosed and safe one. She is encouraged to learn new skills, is asked to shun certain old customs, but she is never challenged or pushed to think for herself. Nikhil’s love to Bimala is sacrificial; for him, loyalty is the answer to all kinds of love – be it for his wife, or for his motherland. But Bimala asks for more, she wants to be ‘pushed into a corner’, so that she can be a subject in her own right.

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[5] Santisudha Mukhopadhyaya, ‘Tagore’s *Ghare Baire*: The Conflict of Politics and Ethics’, Mohit K. Ray, ed. *Studies on Rabindranath Tagore,* Vol. 2 (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributers, 2004) 36.

Bimala turns into a thinking subject when Sandip suddenly asks her, of Nikhil's opposition to nationalism, 'what do you say to this?' (38). She finds her logic to contradict Nikhil since she believes that covetous love for one's motherland is prerequisite to snatch freedom from the British rule. It is true that Sandip's first speech has indoctrinated Bimala to take to the side of the Swadeshi, and she starts to believe that she is 'the sole representative of Bengal's womanhood and he was the champion of Bengal' (25); yet she takes a new pride in giving her opinion on the most happening political issue of her time and place.

Nikhil fails to come to terms with this 'new' Bimala. Rational and perceptive as he is, Nikhil often prepares himself for the worst of the world. As a man, he has feared the change of fortune – 'imprisonment, dishonour, death – even Bimala's' (41); but he never could imagine that Bimala would make him feel unworthy as a man. He expected Bimala to be his 'home-made' (43) mould. Nikhil's self-questioning and self-doubts begin from his painful realisation that he is betrayed by his loyalty for one woman. An emotionally calm and controlled person, Nikhil almost breaks down in despair when he cries out, 'I am unworthy, unworthy, unworthy' (42). He reasons that his sense of despair does not emerge from his inability to exert full control over Bimala as her husband – he does not exercise traditional male power, rather he is in despair, partly because his belief in love falters, and partly because he realises that Bimala fails to understand his principles and his love. His emotion is extremely complex here, for he quickly shifts from Bimala and to his countrymen, and realises that they both worship Sandip's alpha-masculine discourses and his blunt display of male aggressiveness:

> I have been noticing for some time that there is a gross cupidity about Sandip. His fleshy feelings make him harbour delusions about his religion and impel him into a tyrannical attitude in his patriotism. (46)

As mentioned earlier, Nikhil uses his loyalty to one woman at home as a metaphor for his loyalty and love for one country, his motherland, the Bengal. The limit of his liberal masculine ideology is pronounced in his sense of unworthiness, for he realises that he needs to be patient to be valued again by his wife and countrymen. He is an anomaly in the whirlpool of confused time when he feels himself isolated and completely different from people like Bimala and Sandip to whom he has given his unquestioned and unrequited loyalty.

In this situation of emotional vulnerability, Nikhil exaggerates his differences from Sandip. The plot often convinces readers and scholars to consider these two men as polar opposites: Nikhil the benevolent hero and Sandip the Machiavellian anti-hero. But when the novel employs flashback method, in particular in Sandip's soliloquies, we come to know that their friendship was intimate; they have debated on philosophical matters of what constituted human success. They read Robert Browning together and translated English poems into Bangla in college club. Both the young men are products of colonial education and imperial consciousness; both, once again, want to see an end to colonial rule in India. Both want to believe in women's power, and want to see women's emancipation as metaphor and metonymy for that of their motherland.

They differ in their methods and philosophies. While Sandip turns into a ‘muscular nationalist’,[6] Nikhil, who is modelled on Tagore’s own version of translocal humanity, embraces practices of social reform to make his country self-dependent. These political-ideological differences among educated colonial men were not unusual; rather, as the educated native class wanted to strike the Empire back, alternative form of Indianness became a source of men’s defiant identity. Ashis Nandy’s critical work on the psycho-social impact of colonisation on colonised men is perhaps most pertinent here; as he notes:

> Many nineteenth-century Indian movements of social, religious and political reform – and many literary and art movements as well – tried to make Ksatriyahood the ‘true’ interface between the rulers and ruled as a new, nearly exclusive indicator of authentic Indianness. The origins and functions of this new stress on Ksatriyahood is best evidenced by the fact that, contrary to the beliefs of those carrying the psychological baggage of colonialism, the search for martial Indianness underwrote one of the most powerful collaborationist strands within the Indian society, represented by a majority of the feudal princelings in India and some of the most impotent forms of protest against colonialism (such as the immensely courageous but ineffective terrorism of Bengal, Maharashtra and Panjab led by semi-Westernized, middleclass, urban youth).[7]

Ksatriyahood was a reactionary response to the colonial construction of ‘effeminate Babu’ as opposed to manly English man. Mrinalini Sinha argues that the colonial masculinity has been structured within the specific practices of imperial social reformation in Britain and India. This colonial imagination of native masculinity was shaped by many significant societal changes within Britain, making some direct impacts on the colonies:

> The figures of the ‘manly Englishman’ and ‘effeminate Bengali’ were [...] constituted in relation to colonial Indian society as well as to some of the following aspects of late nineteenth-century British society: the emergence of ‘New Women’, the remaking of the working class’; the legacy of ‘internal colonisation’, and the anti-feminist backlash of 1880s-1890s.[8]

Both Nikhil and Sandip have wanted to break away from the stereotype of effeminate Babu or the class produced to be loyal to the British Raj. After finishing his education in Calcutta, Nikhil has returned to his own constituency to be an active and engaging ruler of his estate. Over time, he has become dependent on his master Chandranath Babu’s wisdom and knowledge to solve the situational crises of poor peasants. Nikhil has developed a sense of humility by being the ‘master’ of common peasant class. He realises that while western education can teach him theoretical ideas of sympathy and compassion, living close to his peasants has given him the opportunity to encounter such humane values every day. In the text, the juxtaposition of Amiel's[9] journal and Panchu's honesty is an important point of reference here:

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[6] Poulomi Saha, ‘Singing Bengal into a Nation: Tagore the Colonial Cosmopolitan?’, *Journal of Modern Literature* 36:2 (2013) 2.

[7] Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983) 7.

[8] Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) 2.

> Panchu, the tenant of a neighbouring *zaminder,* came to me with a basket full of coca-nuts and greeted me with a profound obeisance.
>
> 'Well, Panchu', said I. 'What is all this for?' [...]
>
> 'Let me make a clean breast of you, sir. Once, when I was hard pressed, I stole some coca-nuts from the garden here. I am getting old, and may die one day, so I have come to pay them back.' (126)

Nikhil recollects, 'Amiel's journal could not have done me any good that day. But these words of Panchu lightened my heart' (127). Nikhil, taking his master's advice of helping the poor, wants to dedicate his life and that of Bimala to 'removing the root of this sorrow in our country' (*HW* 128). He has realised that by living in a distinct elite 'Babu' class, it would never be possible to find a way to solve the myriad problems of poor people.

If Nikhil is against the wind, yet a prototype of Tagore's philosophy, Sandip represents the typical political fever of Swadeshi. He sheds off his 'Babu' image by being a boisterous, reckless angry young man. He makes fun of their friend, Dakshina, who chooses to have a typical 'Babu Class' job of Salt Inspector (249). A worshipper of goddess *Kali* rather than mother Durga, Sandip has wished to disprove the cultural imagination of the Empire about natives being effeminate and mellowed. He has a dangerous liking for seeing things in black and white categories; for him, ancient Indian is synonymous with ancient Hinduism and other groups, whether Muslims or Christians, are mere immigrants, and ought to be treated with an iron rod. The novel makes an accurate prediction that over time many English educated Bengali youths would choose typical political iconoclasts like Sandip as their role model. The youths of Nikhil's village, many of whom went to Calcutta on Nikhil's scholarships to earn higher education, have been influenced by Sandip's dare-devil attitude that validated proverbs like 'all is fair in love and war' or 'the end justifies the means'. Sandip's gift of the gab has enthralled young men and led them to choose the path of extremism and intolerance, even when their education was expected to predispose them to be tolerant and rational. The novel makes it clear that this kind of reactionary masculinity is particularly dangerous because it is based on false premises of religious extremism and ideological brain washing, and its damaging impact could linger long after decolonisation; even when a nation had to take its own responsibility to rebuild itself.

While both Nikhil and Sandip have tried to bring performative differences to their male identities, they are pushed to their limit in their confrontation of Bimala. The male characters perceive themselves 'weak' in front of Bimala, though both want to mould Bimala according to their individual ideological niche. As argued above, Nikhil wants to see her as a conscious but not necessarily an independent woman; and Sandip wants to put her on high pedestal, she is nature, 'the Queen Bee' and she is the reincarnation of goddess Kali. He sees Bimala as an incarnation of the motherland, but gradually, he sexualises both Bimala and her *desh* (homeland) calling them his amorous beloved. He has firm belief that Bimala will fall for his charismatic display of manliness, something that she has missed out on with Nikhil. While Bimala, like most others, is initially blinded by Sandip, as the novel progresses, she understands that Sandip is not a god, rather, a human being with his own share of vices. In this regard, Bimala and Amulya work as each other's catalyst. Tagore uses Amulya as a 'surrogate' son to childless Bimala to bring her back to 'home'. In the following extract, Bimala becomes the real and metaphorical mother of young and vulnerable men like Amulya:

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[9] Henri Frḕdḕric Amiel (1821-1881) was a Swiss moral philosopher, poet and critic; well-known for his philosophical work, *Amiel's Journal*.

> I seemed to see the sin of the parents visited on the innocent child. The sight of his great big eyes shining with faith and enthusiasm touched me to the quick. He was going, in his fascination, straight to the jaws of the python, from which, once in, there was no return. How was he to be saved? Why does not my country become, for once, a real Mother – clasp him to her bosom and cry out: 'Oh, my child, what profits it that you should save me, if so be it I should fail to save you?' (219)

Bimala tears down the patrilineal order of extremist nationalism – Amulya no longer continues to be the blind disciple of Sandip, the patriarch. Bimala and Sandip are caught in a complex power game, each adamant to prove the other weak. If Nikhil sees himself 'unworthy', Bimala makes Sandip 'weak' and takes on a frantic pleasure when she says, 'Oh, the weak! The weak! At last Sandip has realised that he was weak before me!' (246). In both cases, the male characters find it difficult to cope with a ruptured masculinity at a time when nationalism champions male power and its virile superiority.

Subir Dhar argues that the novel's male characters and their complex sense of maleness need to be read within the changing social order of Bengal:

> Deep feelings of male inferiority bred by the fact of political subjugation, coupled with the desire for freedom largely fed by the educated Bengali's readings of socio-literary and politico-philosophical texts in English, produced an unstable and volatile ideological context in which man's social relationship with woman had necessarily to be redefined.[10]

While Dhar emphasises the social context where men struggled to cope with changes, Tanika Sarkar argues that the gender subversion of the novel is played upon the male characters' emotional investment. She sees both Nikhil and Sandip as Bengali heroes without prototypes, since both suffer from the medieval Indian feminine emotion of *Viraha*, where women typically suffer from the need to be loved:

> [*GhareBaire*] is the first major Bengali work of fiction where the man suffers from viraha, from sexual disregard from a beloved, the wife, the woman. It is, moreover, a viraha born out of a proximity unillumined by love or need rather than separation. There was no available literary prototype of Nikhilesh, nor had he a place, as the husband betrayed, in conventional notions of masculinity. [...] On the other hand

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[10] Subir Dahr, '*The Home and the World* as a Postcolonial Text', *Studies on Rabindranath Tagore* edited by Mohit K. Ray, Vol. ii. (New Delhi: Atlantic, 2004) 48.

> Sandip, almost archetypically the virile and ruthless lover bent on conquest, becomes hesitant and tender – a state that he perplexedly describes as an uncharacteristic weakness in himself – when he falls in love with Bimala.[11]

Self-conscious and proud of their (gentle)manliness, both Nikhil and Sandip have complex confrontations with Bimala, who, however they want to consider her as a new-doll-in-making, or a goddess, proves that she is a flesh-and-blood human being, whose identity is a work in progress, subject to unpredicted changes.

HW is a unique novel where the personal gives way to the political; just as the first half of the plot guides the readers to concentrate on the love-triangle of Nikhil, Bimala and Sandip, in the similar way, the second part engages us with the complex and murky condition of the world in transition. Here, personal and political are not separate units, unaffected by each other; rather here personal is political. Sandip anchors his revolutionary self in Nikhil's estate after he wins over Bimala; he knows that Bimala will be his strongest ally from home, working for the change of their 'world'. But the plot is also extraordinary as it shifts its focus, and thereby that of ours, from the main characters to the peripheral ones. Historically, East Bengal was a hotbed of political, religious, material turmoil; the division between Hindu landowners and merchant class and the Muslim labourers and poor class became even wider as the 1905 division of Bengal and its annulment in 1911 symbolised the triumph of the Hindus, who protested against the Partition, and the defeat of the Muslims, who largely saw the Partition as beacon of hope for their underdeveloped eastern part. Poulomi Saha notes the complex history of the early twentieth-century Bengal:

> [W]ith a population greater than any other province in colonial India, Bengal was an unruly charge for colonial administration. The line drawn by Lord Curzon's government bisected Bengal on the basis of religious difference: the region designated East Bengal had a majority Muslim population, while West Bengal was predominately Hindu. The decision was the result of a colonial policy intended to isolate the eastern portion of the province from the outspoken nationalist agitation that was largely centred in Calcutta (in West Bengal). However, the plan backfired when the partition unleashed a torrent of revivified nationalist sentiment, outrage by the legal and symbolic violence that had lacerated the body of the Bengali motherland.[12]

Sandip is clearly the representative of the 'revivified nationalist' who instigated the *Swadeshi* spur in the novel's geography. The novel follows the traditional axiom that when powerful wage war against each other, the powerless suffer the most. It is not the Muslim peasant class only, but also low caste Hindu landless labourers such as Panchu had to bear the brunt of the *Swadeshi* zealot.

A character like Panchu represents the change of traditional agro-based livelihood, where some old customs and professions became obsolete. Bimala observes the changes:

> In Bengal the machinery of time thus suddenly runs at full pressure, one following soon after another. Nothing could be held back any more, even in our corner of the country.

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[11] Tanika Sarkar, *Rebels, Wives, Saints: Designing Selves and Nation in Colonial Time* (Chicago: UCP, 2009) 259.

[12] Saha, 6.

> In the beginning, our country was backward, for my husband was unwilling to put any compulsions on the villagers. (132)

A seller of agricultural produce such as betel-nut, Panchu has turned into a petty merchant, buying foreign clothes and other fancy goods from local market and selling them across villages. But for the *Swadeshi* followers, motherland turns into an abstract concept, where the soil matters more than the people who inhabit the soil. Panchu loses his livelihood when his Zaminder, Harish Kundu, the *Swadeshi* nationalist, bars him from selling 'foreign clothes' (154). When Panchu is fined a hefty sum, he finds his voice. Panchu's voice, like that of Bimala's unsettles the power of the tyrant like Harish Kundu. 'Panchu in his desperation blurted out defiantly, 'I can't afford it. You're rich; why not buy it up and burn it?' (154). Panchu is punished; but he has not suffered it silently. Tanika Sarkar emphasises the significance of the voice of the marginal characters:

> The inclusion of a peasant within this sparse cast of central characters is rare and immensely significant in Rabindranath's fiction: the peasant was never before endowed with so much space and narrative function.[13]

But Panchu, a poor Hindu, is not the key aim of the *Swadeshi* anger. The aim is to reclaim *Bharat* as a Hindu nation, where the Muslims should always be at the mercy of the Hindus. Sandip finds success in conquering a Muslim male. This is where the Panchu case is different from that of Mirjan. Mirjan, the chief of the boatmen carrying foreign goods, represents the historical-contemporary discourse of a dangerous Muslim man, who, if let loose, can ravish both the mother (woman) and the motherland. The defiant Mirjan is brought under control when Sandip successfully plots to sink his boat. Mirjan surrenders to Sandip:

> Mirjan understood the whole thing [the plot of sinking the boat]. He came to me in tears to beg for mercy. 'I was wrong, sir [...]' he began.
>
> 'What makes you realise that all of a sudden?' I sneered.
>
> He made no direct reply. 'The boat was worth RS. 2000', he said. 'I now see my mistake, and if excused this time I will never [...]' with which he threw himself at my feet.
>
> I asked him to come ten days later. If only we could pay him that RS. 2000 at once, we could buy him up *body and soul.* This is just the sort of man who could render us immense service, if won over. (172-173, emphasis added.)

Mirjan becomes a badge of honour for the *Swadeshi* ideology; Mirjan is a metaphor of the normalisation of violence against Muslim minorities in India in the name of 'personal, communal, national', and increasingly in our contemporary life, 'international security'.[14]

Sandip momentarily lives up to his ideology of Hindu supremacy. But Tagore warns us that the rift of religion can never be controlled by violence; rather violence gives it more destructive power and takes it to a perpetually dark tunnel of hatred. Sandip, a foreigner in east Bengal, miscalculates the trans-local network of the Muslims. Tagore's portrayal foreshadows our present-day transnational and Pan-Islamic solidarities. The Mahamedan (Muslim) Preachers 'stirred the local Muslims' (250) and thus begins the novel's riotous route. Just as Sandip is an outsider who enters Nikhil's estate and instigates the *Swadeshi* zealot, in the similar way, the Muslim preachers from Dacca (present day Dhaka) (253) come to stir up the local Muslims to take control of the situation, to wage an 'an eye for an eye' war. The poor Muslim peasants of Nikhil's territory are portrayed as peace-loving and loyal. While discussing the grave issue of Hindu-Muslim rift, Nikhil observes, 'The Mussulmans in my territory had come to have almost as much an aversion to the killing of cows as the Hindus' (256). But the preachers divide the Muslims from the Hindus. Thus, the spark of fire that Sandip with his heroic masculinity instigates to terrorise the locals turns into an inextinguishable bonfire destroying everything in its path.

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[13] Sarkar 265

[14] Dibyesh Anand, 'The Violence of Security: Hindu Nationalism and the Politics of Representing 'the Muslim' as a Danger', *The Round Table* 94:379 (2007) 203. Online. 03 August 2018, DOI: 10.1080/00358530500099076

The narrative trope of the novel falls short of being subversive when it, unwittingly or otherwise, reproduces the grand narrative of the fear of the collective Muslim masculinity, ravishing the material, bodily and affective territories of the Hindu Zaminders. The staunch *Swadishi* follower Zaminder Harish Kundu turns into an emasculated Hindu when the angry Muslims attack his treasury and home. The women of his home become the metaphor of motherland, waiting to be rescued by conscientious Hindu ruler like Nikhil. Chandranath Babu, the novel's stalwart symbol of principle and righteousness, becomes the messenger of the news of angry Muslim men's violence:

> The Mussulmans are out of hand. They are looting Harish Kundu's treasury. That does not so much matter. But what is intolerable is the violence that is being done to the women of their house. (342)

The incidents of religion-based riots that Tagore describes in the novel are borne out in the historical evidence, as Poulomi Saha writes:

> The 1907 riots in Comilla, East Bengal ignited communal violence across the region, gaining attention in the House of Commons. There, John Morley, Secretary of State for India, was interrogated about 'whether, seeing that rioting or disturbance between Mahomedans and Hindus was of rare occurrence prior to the partition of Bengal, steps [would] be taken to prevent incitement to disorder by the Nawab of Dacca's agitation in favor of the continued partition of Bengal.[15]

Although Chandranath Babu downplays the severity of material looting in the incident (treasury looting is nothing compared to the looting of women's honour), historical evidences confirmed that in the riots of East Bengal (namely in Mymonsingh) in 1906-7, where Muslim rioters invaded Hindu landlords and mahajons, 'the economic dimension was to the fore, despite the role played by itinerant mullas'.[16] There is hardly any doubt that Tagore was making reference to the series of riots that occurred just after the Bengal Partition in 1905;

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[15] Saha 5

[16] Peter Robb, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947* by Suranjan Das [Book Review], *South Asia Research* 15:1 (1995) 131.

and his contemporary readers could have readily recognised the textual references. Yet what is at stake in the novel's textual-imaginative territory is the inscription of the masculine stereotyping. Sandip, the melodramatic macho man leaves the scene stealthily. Nikhil, the seeker of truth and justice, became the solo unarmed warrior. There is a tragic irony in Nikhil's heroic but ineffectual attempt to oppose those forces beyond his control. When Nikhil is deadly injured, Amulya is dead, and Sandip is off the scene, Tagore leaves the text open-ended, critiquing both the nationalism and the masculine expectations on which such mass emotion is played out.

The novel gives a clear message that while we may quarrel over any particular collective standpoint such as religiously divided nationalism, we also need to pay attention to the performative agents of such ideologies. *HW* is a prototypical novel about men's affective relationship with the home and the world; their emotional vulnerabilities are as much subject of contemplation as their political activism. Tagore invites us to take men's personal and political selves seriously. Breaking away from the traditional demarcation of gender that establishes masculinity as a domain of the public or the world, Tagore explores the intersectionality of masculinity and nationalism within the grey spaces of 'home' and the 'world', in relation to each other, and with women.

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Cultural Hybridity and (Dis) location of Female Agency in Rabindranath Tagore’s *Ghare Baire* or *The Home and the World*

Umme Salma

Abstract

The character Bimala in Tagore’s *Ghare Baire* or *The Home and the World* as a symbol of the struggle for the liberation of Bengali woman as well as Bengal is a centre of scholarly discussion since the publication (1916), translation (1919) and the film adaptation (1984) of the novel. This essay focuses on Bimala and interrogates the location of her agency with respect to her relationship with Nikhil and Sandip. Based on Homi Bhabha’s concepts of occult instability and cultural hybridity, and Laura M. Ahearn’s concept of agency, I investigate how, during the occult moment of the Swadeshi movement, Nikhil and Sandip’s hybrid personalities dislocate Bimala from her home and the world and entrap her into a harrowing stasis and melancholy.

Introduction

To write an essay on Rabindranath Tagore, ‘a cultural icon […] for millions of Indians and Bangladeshis’,[1] is a difficult task. At least I feel so when I sit to read his *Ghare Baire*,[2] along with the monumental critical works on it. So many opinions and perspectives have been accumulated on Tagore’s works over hundred years that like William Radice I wonder ‘What aspects of the book still need to be explored?’.[3] The novel is unique in its style, theme, characterisation, and ideas; in particular, the aspect of constant melding of the poetic with the philosophical.[4] This aspect keeps me fascinated all through my reading of the novel. I have been feeling that the reader in me keeps blurring my critical eye and happily loses herself in lively emotions, gushing passions, supernatural nature and sublime morality, as portrayed in the novel.

This essay is written within this readership anxiety. It aims to focus on the character Bimala, linking the Swadeshi Movement, cultural hybridity and female agency together. The character of Bimala undoubtedly is a unique creation of Tagore. This character, as a symbol of the struggle for the liberation of Bengali woman as well as Bengal, has been a centre of scholarly discussions since publication (1916), translation (1919) and the film adaptation (1984) of the novel. This essay turns the screw slightly, interpreting the time of liberation as an occult time, Nikhil and Sandip as culturally hybrid and the sketch of female *Shakti* as the female agency. It argues that the novel describes its time span as both pre-Swadeshi and during Swadeshi dichotomy and thus can be read in term of stability/instability binary. The time of liberation represents the second part of the binary that disrupts the usual life-flows of the three principal characters. Being colonially educated and locally formed, Nikhil and Sandip become culturally hybrid and with their contrary expectations dislocate Bimala from her home and the world.

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[1] Joseph T O’Connell and Kathleen M O’Connell, ‘Introduction: Rabindranath Tagore as “Cultural Icon”’, *University of Toronto Quarterly* 77.4 (2008) 961.

[2] Both the original Bengali version and the English translation of the novel are used for the present essay. Between the Bengali and English versions of Tagore’s novel there are some discrepancies. As happens in all translations, nothing cannot be found verbatim. I have therefore translated some phrases and sentences which appear to me important for my discussion and cited directly from the translated version where both Bengali and English versions mostly resemble each other. The references of these editions are respectively a) Rabindranath Tagore, *Ghare Baire* (Dhaka: Nayem Books International, 2010) & b) Rabindranath Tagore. *The Home and the World* translated by Surendranath Tagore (London: Macmillan, 1957). References to these works will be included in parentheses in the text as page numbers prefixed with *GB* for the Bengali edition and *HW* for the English translation.

[3] William Radice, Preface, *The Home and the World* by Rabindranath Tagore (New York: Penguin Group, 2005) xiv.

[4] Anita Desai, Introduction, *The Home and the World* by Rabindranath Tagore (New York: Penguin Group, 2005) xxvi.

I will discuss the above assumptions into two parts: firstly, I highlight the theories on which the whole argument is set; and then I present the textual analysis in the light of those theories.

Part I: The Theoretical Framework

Tagore's *Ghare Baire* or *the Home and the World* is a novel which cannot be interpreted straightforwardly with any existing theories of colonialism and postcolonialism. My reading of the novel, therefore, is based on a mosaic of ideas, taken from several sources. Among these sources, two concepts – interpretation of the time of liberation as occult and the notion of cultural hybridity – have been taken from Homi Bhabha. And the concept of female Shakti, as conceived in Hinduism, has been construed as female agency, based on Laura M. Ahearn's general theorisation of agency.

Occult Time and Cultural Hybridity

In his 'The Commitment to Theory', Homi Bhabha proposes a significant interpretation of the time of liberation as 'the zone of *occult instability* where the people dwell',[5] along with the notion of cultural hybridity. Bhabha explains both as interrelated phenomena with the help of the familiar semiotic concept of the process of enunciation where a Third Space emerges as a passage to create new cultural meanings.

Bhabha takes the phrase 'the zone of occult instability' from Franz Fanon and describes this 'moving metaphor' in the context of liberatory struggle of the colonised people.[6] He identifies the time of liberation as occult, that is, paranormal, supernatural and magical, because it is a disruptive and discontinuous period when stable, traditional cultures become instable, and culture emerges as politics. This unsettling time brings the liberation-seeking people into an indeterminate and a volatile zone where national culture loses its synchronicity, totality, and purity, and the subject who claims the authority of cultural knowledge, through its enunciation of cultural difference, becomes split.

To explain the condition of the split in the subject, Bhabha focuses on cultural diversity and cultural difference. He contends, whereas cultural diversity as a liberal approach considers cultures pre-given, seamless and relative and identifies the limit of culture at their boundaries, cultural difference as an authoritative and discriminatory approach identifies the limit of culture in the act of enunciation. This act of enunciation of cultural difference, like the linguistic difference, is a split and ambivalent.[7]

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[5] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004) 51. Bhabha quoted these words from Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*.

[6] Bhabha 55.

In Semiotics, the linguistic process of enunciation, the subject is split between the subject of the *énunciation* (the exercise of language), that is, 'I' and the subject of *énonce* (the statement made), that is, 'You.' Due to this splitting, the 'I,' despite being linked to 'You,' remains distinct from it and keeps the speaker unconscious about the difference between the general systems of language – *langue* and the individual statement – *parole*. Hence, in linguistic performance, the meaning is not produced in the communication between 'I' and the 'You' of the utterance, but in the mode of enunciation of a speaker. The meaning of the utterance lies, not in 'what is being said,' but in 'how it is said' and indicates to the value and status of the speaker.[8]

Bhabha argues that the same thing happens in cultural performance during the time of liberation. The subject, which claims the authority of cultural knowledge, becomes split in its enunciative process. In this split, the subject of *énonce* does not represent the subject of énunciation but acknowledges its presence and its cultural position in a specific time and place. Hence the meaning is not produced in the communication between the 'I' and the 'You,' but in their mobilisation in a new continuum through an indeterminate passage of Third Space. This Third Space, being unconscious about the relation and difference between *langue* and *parole*, represents both and introduces an ambivalence in the meaning and interpretation of the cultural performance. This Space as an in-between space thus asserts that cultures are neither inherently hierarchical nor pure, unitary, total and fixed, and the same cultural signs and symbols can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricised and read anew in another historical context. This Third Space also displaces the claims of cultures as a referent, advanced and evolved through a homogenous, continuous time to a universal form to refer and cross-refer as a resource.

This Third Space as a passage, as an in-between space, stands for the moment of liberation. This moment becomes temporally and spatially an indeterminate zone where occult instability occurs. As this moment represents the disruptive time, which links back to the colonial and forwards to postcolonial periods, it splits the liberation-seeking people and renders them culturally hybrid. The split occurs between their conflicting cultural demands during revolutionary political necessity. In the one hand, they demand conventionally for 'a model, a tradition, community, a stable system of reference' that so far protects them from colonial cultural imposition. On the other hand, they negate that certitude 'in the articulation of new cultural demands, meanings, strategies in the political present, as practice of [...] resistance'. Consequently, the liberation-seeking people unconsciously entangle in the struggle between tradition and modernity, mythical time and displaced time and old and new cultural symbols. They face uncertainty and indecision over their cultural signification and fluctuate between the thoughts they so far nurtured and the modern thoughts. In this way, they call into question their '*constant principles*' and undergo radical changes in the cultural practices and signification.[9]

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[7] Bhabha 45-52.

[8] John Phillips and Chrissie Tan, 'Langue and Parole', *The Literary Encyclopedia*, first published 08 February 2005 https://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true&UID=662, accessed 23 August 2018.

This fluctuating movement helps the liberation-seeking people dialectically reassemble themselves around new forms of cultural practices. They emerge from the very restrictive notion of cultural identity as the way for political change and become bearers of a hybrid identity. They destroy the safeguard of national culture to free themselves and engage in the tasks of translation and negotiation of their cultural identities. They translate their national texts into modern Western forms in every aspect of life, such as technology, language, and dress, and construct their culture, assimilating the contraries in their cultural identities. Bhabha recognises this hybrid identity in the liberatory Third Space as a very productive subject position for the colonised, because this identity produces new meanings in their cultural enunciation, turns people into the Other of themselves and allows them to be a free people in the future.[10]

Female Shakti as Female Agency

In her articles on agency, Ahearn reviews the existing notions of agency and finds them underspecified, ambiguous and slippery. For her research on Nepalese love letters she constructs a bare-bones definition of agency as 'socioculturally mediated capacity to act'[11] and proposes some general ways that scholars interested in agency might consider defining agency. The first suggestion is to consider whether agency is the property of individual, supra-individual or sub-individual. She asserts that since society and human beings are shaped by each other, agency must not be explained on the individual level only because it runs the risk of sidestepping the larger social structures and making them invisible. Similarly, when agency exists at the supra-individual level, scholars need to examine how it might exist in the institution and collective form of entities like states, corporations, unions, lineages, families or couples. Again, when agency exists in the sub-individual level, scholars need to analyse the split and fragmented subject and its recourse to interior monologues and dialogues. They also need to investigate how agency manifests and functions and whether unintentional acts, along with intentional acts, can be called agentive. The second suggestion Ahearn gives is to look at agency from a cultural point of view. Referring to her work on Nepalese marriage narrative, she argues that agency is culture-specific and varies according to space and time. Therefore, to examine how agency is conceptualised in non-Western societies is both significant and crucial. Thus, Ahearn emphasises the necessity for researchers to provide a clear definition of agency, both for themselves and for their readers.[12]

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[9] Bhabha 51.

[10] Bhabha 52-56.

[11] Laura M. Ahearn, 'Language and Agency', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001) 112.

[12] Laura M. Ahearn, 'Agency', *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 9.1/2 (2000) 12-14.

Being motivated by Ahearn's suggestions, I define female Shakti, as conceived in Hinduism, as form of female agency. The word *Shakti* is a Sanskrit word which means 'power' or 'energy'. It is derived from the root 'shak', which means 'to be able', 'to do', 'to act'. It represents an ability, strength, which manifests itself in both nature and human beings, and its absence in living things turns them impotent and inactive.

In Hinduism, the abstract concept of Shakti is exclusively conceived as a feminine principle. It is believed as synonymous with the Great Devi or the Great Goddess of Hinduism to whom Hindus usually pray for health, relief, and vigour. Various schools of Indian philosophy describe the concept of Shakti in various ways. Among them, the Samkhya School describes Shakti as the primordial matter in the creation of the cosmos. It states that in the creation of the cosmos there existed a dual principle, Prakriti (matter) and Purusha (spirit). Prakriti is the primary matter that is primarily passive and immobile but is the power and potential in nature. And this power is Shakti itself, which as the antecedent of Prakriti existed all the time and made it capable of spawning the cosmos, coming in contact with Purusha. Thus, Shakti is an omnipresent, immutable and indivisible goddess, a part of the Divine Consort.

The concept of Divine Consort implies that Shakti or energy cannot exist in a vacuum. It must reside in someone or function as someone's power and ability. For this reason, every god of Hinduism has a female companion, a consort and a goddess who represents the essential energy and power of the god. Accordingly, Shakti is integral to gods, who cannot exist and work without it. Therefore, to worship the gods ultimately requires worship of the goddesses, the feminine with or within masculine principle, as both are interrelated and interdependent. Gods are thought as 'Shaktiman', the masculine principle as the bearer of Shakti; goddesses are Shakti itself, the feminine. Gods possess the power, and the power gives them the ability to perform their job. Thus, they combine the concept of the able and ability where Shakti represents both the life-force and personification of the power of 'Shaktiman'.

These beliefs are very much present in the Bengali Hindu concept of woman.[13] They regard every woman as a manifestation of the divine feminine principle, Shakti. Mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters are the personification of that Shakti and thus bearers of spiritual energy through their attributes of love, care, nurture, intuition, and charity. Therefore, men and the society must respect, practice, patronise and preserve these feminine principles as the guardians and protectors of their culture.[14]

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[13] Tagore's *Ghare Baire* (1916) is set in the then united Bengal which is now Bangladesh (East Bengal) and West Bengal, a part of India.

[14] Frank Morales, 'The Concept of Shakti: Hinduism as a Liberating Force for women', *Dharma Central* 7 Nov 2000. Web. 27 April 2017. <http://www.adishakti.org/pdf_files/concept_of_shakti_(dharmacentral.com).pdf>; Sunil Dutt, 'Samkhya Philosophy and Its Importance in Indian Philosophy', *New Man International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 3.8 (2016) 22-25; further references: Theos Bernard, *Hindu Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996); Varadaraja V Raman, 'Science and the Spiritual Vision: A Hindu Perspective', *Zygon®* 37.1 (2002) 83-94; Tracy Pintchman, *The Rise of the Goddess in the Hindu Tradition* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994).

The above discussion on Shakti and its relation to woman registers that Shakti is a form of capacity, that is agency, which solely represents feminine principle and power. Women are the Shakti incarnate who from time immemorial are passively present as the active force in nature, human beings and the concept of gods. They are considered thus goddesses, simultaneously the part and the whole and active and passive in the life of men – the power itself lives inside the men and becomes active when with and within men. Therefore, female Shakti is female agency which women possess as an inherent attribute.

Part II: Textual Analysis

The Stability/Instability Binary

Rabindranath Tagore set *Ghare Baire* (1916) during the historical event of the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1905-1908) when he already had been the first Nobel Laureate in Asia. Though he actively participated in the movement in its beginning, and in 1906 wrote ‘Amar Sonar Bangla’ (O my, Bengal of Gold) to support the protest of the Bengalis against the division of Bengal by Lord Curzon’s government, his narrative delineates a bleak picture of the derailed nationalism of Bengal. He portrays the movement starting with the boycott of British goods and the promotion of the *Swadeshi*, or domestic products, as a form of patriotism, and gradually moving away from the true path of humanity.[15] Though its watchword was *Bande Mataram,* Hail to you Mother, the movement starts a craze that triggers inhumanity, conspiracies, division and communalism between Muslim and Hindu communities. Instead of enlightening human minds with the light of freedom, philanthropy, and harmony, the movement traps them into petty, selfish desires and emotional anarchy.

This portrayal of the *Swadeshi* facilitates the reading of the novel through the stability/instability binary, with respect to its timescale as before and during the Swadeshi Movement. [16] Two interior monologues of Sandip and Nikhil represent the stability/instability dichotomy, where Nikhil personifies the first part and Sandip the second:

> Sandip: Still, a thorough shaking up is essential. One must begin by realizing that things supposed to be unshakable can be shaken. (*HW* 73)
>
> Nikhil: My life has only its dumb depths; but no murmuring rush. I can only receive: not impart movement. (*HW* 108)

These quotes reflect the pre-*Swadeshi* time and the period of *Swadeshi* through a characteristic difference between two friends. Sandip, the nationalist leader, in his monologue appears as the agent of transformation. He conceives that for any transformation a thorough shake-up is essential. Nevertheless, the first step to bring change is to realise that things people consider fixed and stable are not so. Those things can also be shaken, newly conceived and transformed. On the other hand, Nikhil appears as the symbol of immobility. He thinks that he has a depth of character, but it is mute and motionless. He has no force of current in his nature that can stir and move anything or anyone. He seems to be a receiver, not the actor, who cannot change his surroundings.

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[15] Poulomi Saha, ‘Singing Bengal into a Nation: Tagore the Colonial Cosmopolitan?’, *Journal of Modern Literature* 36.2 (2013) 6-8.

[16] To read *Ghare Baire* or *The Home and the World* concerning binary is an old practice. Due to its dichotomous title – home/world, many postcolonial scholars read it according to some other binaries, such as man and woman, local and cosmopolitan, nationalism and colonialism, tradition and modernity and nationalism and patriotism (Radice xiv).

The novel sketches the story of a fictional village in Bengal named Suksar. Before the stirrings of the *Swadeshi*, it has been a place of peace and harmony under the benevolent rule of Nikhil, the Zamindar. During this time, Nikhil and Bimala are a happy couple. They are both satisfied and settled in their poem-like disciplined conjugal life. Nikhil places 'the fullest trust upon love' (*HW* 44) of Bimala and she in her turn feels her home contains so much 'that there was not room for it in the universe' (*HW* 19). Then the *Swadeshi* comes and, through its revolutionary zeal to boycott the British, changes everything in the home and the world. The storm rages in the outer world through processions, meetings, conspiracies, and communalism and in the inner world through stirring up of new emotions in the minds of Bimala, Sandip, and Nikhil. So far, what has been harmonious becomes anarchic and turns the time, space and minds into the zones of occult instability, as Bhabha states.

The Zone(s) of Occult Instability

This time of the liberation of Bengal is occult, that is, paranormal, magical and supernatural, especially for Bimala, caught in the binary of Nikhil/Sandip, stability/instability. All through the narrative Bimala identifies the *Swadeshi* era as a disruptive and discontinuous time that changes Bengal magically and unsettles her mind:

> One day there came the new era of *Swadeshi* in Bengal; but as to how it happened, we had no distinct vision. There was no gradual slope connecting the past with the present. For that reason, I imagine, the new epoch came in like a flood, breaking down the dykes and sweeping all our prudence and fear before it. We had no time even to think about, or understand, what had happened, or what was about to happen. (*HW* 22)

The *Swadeshi* is presented here as a sudden event in Bengal that has no continuous connection to the past. No one can grasp clearly how it comes and how it happens. It comes like a devastating flood that breaks down all former barriers and carries away reason and discretion. People become so engrossed with its call that none has the time to think or consider its consequences and consequences of their acts.

Bimala identifies the era several times as a new epoch: 'another epoch' (*GB* 6), 'the new epoch' (*GB* 14) or 'the modern age' (*GB* 6). She claims that the Swadeshi separates her teenage years from her youth: 'But no sooner had I reached my youth from the teenage, it seems to me that I arrived in another epoch' (*GB* 6). She constantly compares the traits of the past age with that of the present and asserts that if she 'had never have to struggle with the present age' (*GB* 6), she would never understand 'the drama of the new epoch [...] clearly' (*GB* 14). Bimala recognises the period as a new epoch, a magical time, because it is a special gift from a god for Bengal: 'How could we help thinking that it was all supernatural. This moment of our history seemed to have dropped into our hand like a jewel from the crown of some drunken god' (*HW* 116). She hopes that this 'auspicious moment' with 'the spell of some magic charm' (*HW* 116) will eliminate all the miseries of Bengal. Hence, she becomes ready to welcome 'the unthought-of, the unknown, the importunate Stranger' (*HW* 120).

This new epoch has a drastic impact on Bimala's being. So far, she has been inside her home with all its duties and responsibilities, well-ordered and stable. The call of Swadeshi, like a mysterious call from a faraway horizon, makes her restless. Bimala neither realises nor deciphers the meaning of that call, but feels a kind of disturbance inside her:

> My sight and my mind, my hopes and my desires, became red with the passion of this new age. Though, up to this time, the walls of the home – which was the ultimate world to my mind – remained unbroken, yet I stood looking over into the distance, and I hear a voice from the far horizon, whose meaning was not perfectly clear to me, but whose call went straight to my heart. (*HW* 22-23)

Sandip's first preaching in Suksar adds fuel to Bimala's already restless mind. The narrative describes Bimala's hypnotic state of mind and its projection around her during Sandip's speech with hyperbolic expressions. Bimala feels, when Sandip utters '*Bande Mataram*!' three times and delivers his speech like 'a stormy outburst', the skies are 'rent and scattered into a thousand fragments!' (*HW* 27-28). She also feels that everything is undergoing a supernatural change. Sandip is no longer a flawed mortal man but embodies heaven and becomes a messenger of immortal gods. His revolution is also a sacred rebellion which flashes out a divine power at every word. Bimala also feels that she is an inspiration to this power, 'the flame of the soul itself'. Her presence turns Sandip's divine power into a 'fire', and makes it spark like 'the flash of lightening'.

Consequently, Bimala undergoes a drastic transformation. She feels she is glowing with 'a new pride and glory' (*HW* 29). The '*Swadeshi* storm' (*HW* 24) is inside her and turns her wild and impatient. The storm plays with her place and identity. She can no longer remain 'the lady of the Rajah's house' (*HW* 28), a woman cocooned at her safe home. She is now the representative of Bengal's womanhood who must do something, any extreme form of sacrifice, for the champion of Bengal, Sandip. Accordingly, she wants to cut her hair for her hero and glorify him with a garland. She wants to burn all her favourite foreign clothes and demands Miss Gilby's expulsion from her home. She supports Noren's blind rage towards all the British and his malicious attack on Miss Gilby. She feels ashamed of Nikhil's failure to accept the Swadeshi spirit and to understand her or Noren's patriotic zeal. She also becomes angry with Nikhil for his compassion to Miss Gilby and refusal to look after Noren any more.

When these positive feelings of Bimala turn negative upon her realisation of the real face of Sandip and the *Swadeshi*, Bimala still describes the time as magical. She calls Sandip a snake-charmer and a demon that in the guise of the nation appears at her door and charms and possesses her true self. She admits that, due to Sandip's eulogy of her as Queen Bee and then an incarnation of the country-goddess, her mind becomes 'fully clouded with fumes of intoxicating gas' (*HW* 58). Whenever she meets Sandip, she feels a type of 'madness, naked and rampant' (*HW* 189) dances on her heart and 'her sight is clouded over like an opium-eater's eyes' (*HW* 200).

Although Nikhil, the repudiator of this intoxication, remains untouched ideologically by the charm of *Swadeshi*, he identifies the period as a paranormal time. He finds in the ideas of the *Swadeshi* the reflection of the 'gross cupidity' and 'fleshy feelings' of Sandip, who underneath 'some hypnotic stimulus' (*HW* 45-46) hides his greed and lust. He regrets Bimala's hero-worship and asserts that the way to the nation of Sandip and Bimala is nothing but 'frantic impetuosity, helped on by the fiery liquor of excitement' (*HW* 44). Bimala and Sandip do not accept Nikhil's attitude towards the *Swadeshi*. Sandip mockingly tells Bimala that to Nikhil the *Swadeshi* is like a poem whose metre is to keep correct at every step. But Sandip is here only to break the poetic rule. Bimala also argues with Nikhil about his judgement of the excitement over *Swadeshi* as a 'destructive excitement' (*HW* 24) and 'a fire of drunkenness' (*HW* 117).

Despite his ideological distance from the *Swadeshi*, Nikhil cannot remain unagitated emotionally. He feels isolated and unrequited. He becomes sad, seeing that his beloved is emerging into a new world of excitement and behaving like a stranger day by day. These situations compel him to review, revise and rethink his old views of love and life according to the new perceptions of time. He looks at himself from outside, from Bimala's point of view. He understands the dynamic qualities in Sandip and finds himself worthless: 'I am unworthy, unworthy, unworthy' (*HW* 43).

Sandip is the agent who creates this condition of occult instability with his hedonistic motto '*I want, I want, I want*' (*HW* 53). He is a perfect ideological acrobatic who rejects the taken-for-granted moral values and prefers passion to reason, illusion to truth, sin to good deeds, destruction to construction and the concept of 'seize the day' to the future. He is also a successful womaniser with practical knowledge of seduction. That is why he lays plans to win both Bimala and money. He at first hypnotises Bimala, eulogising her as a nation-goddess, and then wakes her up violently from that doze as if she, in a sleepy state, can break all her old bonds and become his consort. Sandip also describes his approach towards the nation and Bimala as 'hypnotism', 'charm', and 'delusion' (*HW* 165) that win in the long run. He defines Bimala's condition as 'not conscious [...] living in a dream' (*HW* 64) and describes her as a 'sleep-walker' (*HW* 68), 'a snared deer' (*HW*104), 'one [...] on fire' (*HW* 74) and 'a captive balloon' (*HW* 169). He justifies his agitation as necessary for Bimala to achieve her freedom from the traditional bondage of shame, reason, identity, and home. And he contrives that, through his establishment of Bimala as a Goddess, he will bring her in the open world: 'The turbulent west wind, which has swept away the country's veil of conscience, will sweep away the veil of the wife from Bimala's face, and in that uncovering there will be no shame' (*HW* 106).

Cultural Hybridity

This moment of occult instability in Bengal, as a Third Space, as a passage towards a postcolonial future, sheds significant light on Nikhil and Sandip and reveals them as culturally hybrid in their enunciation of cultural difference from the British.

Although the novel represents Nikhil and Sandip opposite to each other, in many ways they are alike. Nikhil's master observes those similarities and comments that despite they do not ‘rhyme,’ their ‘rhythm is the same’ (*HW* 139). Nikhil and Sandip also feel their similarities to each other. Nikhil considers Sandip his equal and rival: ‘on the whole he is not superior to me’ (*GB* 40) and cannot blame Bimala for her infatuation. In the similar way, Sandip acknowledges that he and Nikhil are the same in nature: ‘But I cannot bear hypocrisy as like as Nikhil—at this point we are alike’ (*GB* 52). Consequently, we see that the motto of both friends is ‘know thyself’ (*HW* 100). They read voraciously across disciplines and can argue with each other with the same rhetorical zeal. They equally nourish modern sensibilities within themselves and are ready to work for the cause of Nation.

However, Nikhil and Sandip occupy specific positions in their enunciation of cultural difference from the British and unconsciously introduce a split in Bengal cultural purity and totality. In the one hand, they articulate the need to preserve the Bengal culture regarding the land and women, on the other hand, they demand a new cultural manifestation in Bengal where women and land will enjoy unbound freedom. In their similar aspirations, they are found continuously translating and negotiating Bengal cultural codes into modern Western ones and absorbing contradictions in their thoughts and actions.

The two key terms, *Swadeshi* and *Bande Mataram* – frequently used in the narrative in the triadic arguments, both overt and covert, among Nikhil, Sandip and Bimala – are the best example of this split and hybridity. The word ‘Swadeshi’ means ‘of one’s own country.’ According to Prindhita and Fariha, ‘any action, any product or service produced domestically in the country qualifies to be called *Swadeshi*’.[17] The Bengal *Swadeshi* Movement advocates the revival of cultural authenticity through production and consumption of indigenous goods and rejection of everything British. It also calls for the restoration of the sense of self-sufficiency in the Bengalis, shunning all correspondences with British official bodies and observing a nation-wide mourning day.[18]

The second key word ‘Bande Mataram’ becomes a *mantra*, the sacred cultural articulation of the Hindu-Bengali faith and cultures, during the *Swadeshi*. Introduced by the Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in *Anandamath* (1873) and taken up by the nationalist leaders as their buzzword in 1905, ‘Bande Mataram’ conceives the motherland Bengal as the Divine Mother. The Bengal becomes an icon of motherhood in its beauty and bounty whom her children not only worship but also protect from all predicaments.[19] Therefore, the Bengalis take the British Partition of the Bengal as an attack on their mother and become ready to defend her honour at any cost, even by crooked means. They continuously mutter the term and circulate it all around as if they can internalise the fervour of patriotism and nationalism.

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[17] Riza Sovia Nur Priandhita and Inayatul Fariha, ‘The Representation of Indian Nationalism in Rabindranath Tagore’s *The Home and the World*’, *SKRIPSI Jurusan Sastra Inggris-Fakultas Sastra UM* (2013) 1. http://karya-ilmiah.um.ac.id/index.php/sastra-inggris/article/view/27443

[18] Biswas, A. ‘Paradox of Anti-Partition Agitation and Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1905).’ *Social scientist* 23.4-6 (1995): 38-39.

[19] Bagchi, Jasodhara. ‘Representing Nationalism: Ideology of Motherhood in Colonial Bengal.’ *Economic and Political Weekly* (1990): WS65-WS69.

However, these two concepts, as practised by the colonially-educated Sandip, represent a vision of hybridity. During the *Swadeshi* Sandip often asserts that *Bande Mataram* is his buzzword. But when he speaks in favour of nationalism, he spontaneous utters ‘Hurrah!’ instead of ‘*Bande Mataram*’ (*HW* 40). He claims falsely to Bimala that he is so attached to Bengal that without swadeshi medicines he cannot recover from sickness. But we know from Nikhil that he cannot recover without foreign medications. Again, we see that Sandip is very fond of English literature, philosophy, and science. He shows a thorough command of modern poetry and philosophy in his discussions with Bimala.

That such a hybrid man during *Swadeshi* will turn into a pure Bengali with the touch of ‘Bande Mataram’ is incredible. Sandip turns his nationalist project hybrid by combining the Western concept of nationalism with *Swadeshi* and *Bande Mataram*. Tagore found both the western concept of nationalism and the Indian concept of the Nation as a god unsuitable for the Bengal: ‘India has never had a real sense of nationalism. Even though from childhood I had been taught the idolatry of Nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity, I believe I had outgrown that teaching.’[20] Sandip is aware that nationalism and religion cannot go side by side. He states that the main anomaly of his age is that Indians combine religion, *Bhagavadgita*, and nationalism, *Bande Mataram*, together. He compares this combination with the performance where both English military band and Indian pipes are playing together. He calls it a form of cultural confusion that he will end, promoting the western military style and passion as the prime power in the battlefield of life. Nonetheless, Sandip fails to do so and remains culturally hybrid. Rather he articulates hybridity through his plan of establishing Bimala as the incarnation of the nation-goddess, the Kali. He boasts: ‘It must be my supreme legacy to the Nation. Ignorant men worship gods. I, Sandip, shall create them’ (*HW* 166).

In Sandip’s seduction of Bimala, he also translates Bengali cultural symbols into modern Western symbols. He translates the concept of ‘Affinity’ (HW 54) into the modern scientific notion of passion in order to remove the restraint Bimala feels as a loyal wife. Affinity refers to the social and religious belief that ‘God has created special pairs of men and women, and that the union of such is the only legitimate union, higher than all unions made by law’ (*HW* 54). It advocates sex-in-marriage as legitimate and higher form of human love. Sandip asserts that affinity is not one but can be thousand and innumerable, and no one can reject many affinities for the sake of one. Thus, he conceives the modern notion of free sex and plans to make Bimala ready to remove her cultural restraint by giving her English books on the science of sex. He hopes that these books will make Bimala ‘acknowledge and respect passion as the supreme reality’ (*HW* 74-75). She thus will be willing to reject shame and restraint and become modern.

Like Sandip, Nikhil is also hybrid in his thoughts and actions. As he is the only M.A. in their family, in Nikhil’s case the act of translation of native cultural codes into Western modernity has been started long before the *Swadeshi*. This translation continues throughout the *Swadeshi* era in his persistent friction with and ultimate fracture from Sandip and Bimala.

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[20] qtd. in Saha 15

However, unlike Sandip, Nikhil's character manifests a hybrid version of humanism which juxtaposes elements from Western modernity and Indian Vedantic philosophy, the Divinity of Man.[21]

Before the *Swadeshi* Bimala describes Nikhil as 'absolutely modern' (*HW* 11). He fills his house with English books, appoints Miss Gilby as an instructor for Bimala and loves to adorn her with European dresses and ornaments. Nikhil also likes the modern concept of the equality of man and woman and supports the concepts of women's liberation from the narrow circle of home. Nikhil's grandmother disliked his penchant for the English culture at first, but gradually she starts loving the stories from the English books that Bimala reads to her. Nikhil's grandmother becomes uncomplaining to such an extent that if Bimala came out of the home, leaving her *purdah*, she would even accept it.

Nevertheless, during the *Swadeshi*, the true nature of Nikhil's modernism is revealed. His humanism is not only modern, but also Vedantic. He is a modern mystic imbued with spiritual and ascetic strength. He is unique in thoughts, character, and actions. He does not give in to self-indulgence, extravagance, and alcohol like his predecessors. He is patient, selfless and grave, and his motto in life is to uphold goodness, Right, love and freedom. He looks at the whole world from a fair point of view and considers the twentieth century an age of fortune for all countries. For this reason, to him, Sandip's *Swadeshi* is an inebriation, and his worship of the country as a goddess is a wrong way to serve the country. He considers that all countries are divine, and that human beings, divine themselves, must love all countries equally. That is why, when Bimala insists on the dismissal of Miss Gilby from her home, Nikhil says: 'I cannot look upon Miss Gilby through a mist of abstraction, just because she is English [...] Cannot you realize she loves you?' (*HW* 25). He does everything to save Panchu, his poor vassal and becomes strict to Noren, his dependent, for his misconduct to Miss Gilby.

Love for science and the application of scientific methods for the betterment of human being is also a watchword in Nikhil's kind of *Swadeshi*. He innovatively, though vainly, tries to employ science to uplift the life conditions of his people. He opens banks, produces sugar and even buys unsold local threads from Suksar bazaar to produce clothes locally. When Sandip explains science only regarding violent passion, he asserts that

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[21] Humanism generally refers to a man-centered philosophy of the universe. It originated in the sixteenth century renaissance and germinated the age of modernity. In the twentieth century humanism is defined as 'a philosophy of joyous service for the greater good of all humanity in this natural world and advocating the methods of reason, science, and democracy' (Lamont 13). It is secular, scientific, naturalistic and democratic in thought and approach (Lamont 48-51). Nevertheless, the humanism that Nikhil represents is the one where we see the presence of the Vedantic concept of *Nara-Narayana*, the Divinity in Man (Sarma 58). This philosophy advocates a non-dualistic concept of the divine nature of human soul that is one with the Atman or the Divine Spirit. It asserts that human being has a-three-dimensional relationship with the Divine Spirit – body, soul and nature. Whereas the relationship of body and soul with the Divine is master-slave and part-whole relationship, the relation of nature is that it itself is divine and inseparable and indivisible from the Divine. For this reason, the goal of human nature is to transcend the animal nature within it and, through different stages of evolutions in real life, to become a true image of the Divine Spirit (Abhedananda 63-66; 89-90).

> in Europe, people look at everything from the viewpoint of science. But man is neither mere physiology, nor biology, nor psychology, nor even sociology [...] Man is infinitely more than the natural science of himself [...] You want to find truth of man from your science teachers, and not from your own inner being. (*HW* 73)

He emphasises here that human beings cannot be described or understood from scientific theories, because man is infinite and his truth lies within, in the soul that is divinity itself. In this way, man has both rational and divine powers within himself to be guided through the way of Right and to the welfare of man. He accuses Sandip of being a biased person who indulges the animal nature and wounds regularly 'the great, the unselfish, the beautiful in man' (*HW* 73).

Nikhil's version of humanity also becomes clear in his views of the emancipation of woman. He considers husband and wife as equal and considers love, not respect or worship, its basis. For this reason, he does not let Bimala touch his feet as a form of worship. He dislikes the separation of women from the outer world in the name of the traditional *purdah* system. He thinks that it keeps the women cocooned both physically and intellectually, not letting them know themselves. He says to Bimala: 'Here [the Home] you are wrapped up in me. You know neither what you have, nor what you want' (*HW* 18). In this way, women, all through their lives, live in a small world and thus become narrow-minded. Nevertheless, this view of Nikhil is also informed with a spiritual perception. He expects that coming in the outer world Bimala will know herself, her husband, love, and freedom in their real form. She will love the divinity in man with all its positive values and free herself from the worldly temptations. When he finds that Bimala 'has no patience with patience' and loves to see 'in men the turbulent, the angry, the unjust' (*HW* 44), he decides to renounce her. He decides to dedicate his life for the sake of humanity: 'The suffering which belongs to all mankind shall be my crown [...] Save me, Truth! […]. If I must walk alone, let me at least tread your path' (*HW* 144).

Dis(location) of Bimala's Agency

Nikhil's and Sandip's hybrid thoughts and practices have an impact on Bimala's agency as a wife and as a nationalist worker. It snatches away the Shakti, power, Bimala feels before and during the *Swadeshi* in herself and dislocates her from her place. The novel presents this feeling of dislocation in the beginning and at the end of the narrative through Bimala's words:

> The storm within me had shifted my whole being from one centre to another. (*HW* 29)

> Where I am, I am not. I am far away from those who are around me. I live and move upon a world-wide chasm of separation, unstable [...] When I look into my heart, I find everything that was there, still there, – only they are topsy-turvy. Things that were well-ordered have become jumbled up. The gems that were strung into a necklace are now rolling in the dust. And my heart is breaking. (*HW* 254-255)

In the first quotation, Bimala talks about two centres in her life and in the second she indicates an abyss in which she has fallen. In the first quotation, she refers to the time of *Swadeshi* when her centre has been shifted from Nikhil to Sandip, home to world, stability to instability. The second one talks about the consequences of that shift when she has no centre, but a world of gap and separation where all things are disorganised.

The narrative presents Bimala as a traditional woman, brought up within a Bengali Hindu culture in the then India. Being the product of that time when women, marriage and family were considered the nucleus of the nation,[22] Bimala feels that she is ‘the Goddess Lakshmi’ (*GB* 16), the deity of the household. Due to Nikhil’s love, unlike her other sisters-in-law whom their husbands do not love, Bimala becomes the centre of her home. She exercises considerable authority in all decisions in the inner quarters. For example, Nikhil wants Bimala to move Calcutta after the death of grandmother. Bimala does not agree with Nikhil because she does not want to leave the seat of the guardian of the household to the hand of her sister-in-law. Or Nikhil desires that Bimala will come out of her inner quarter to meet Nikhil’s friends and know about her surroundings outside the home. But Bimala refuses to leave her seclusion.

This power is compounded during the *Swadeshi* after Bimala attends Sandip’s meeting. She no longer considers herself ‘only the deities of the household fire, but the ‘Bharati’ ((*GB* 16), India as the Mother Goddess. She is now ‘the *Shakti* of the Motherland’ (*HW* 31) and ‘the *Shakti* of Womanhood, incarnate’ (*HW* 36). She feels an urge to serve the hero and the country. Subsequently, becoming the centre of the movement as Queen Bee, she conceives herself as a passively active power who, playing the role of an adviser of Sandip, is actually present in the heart of the *Swadeshi*: ‘behind whatever was taking place was Sandip Babu and behind Sandip Babu was the plain common sense of a woman’ (*HW* 58). This honour makes Bimala happy and makes her consider herself a goddess incarnate whose magical power summons Sandip to submission at her feet and makes Amulya bright with devotional feelings. During this time Bimala’s ultimate purpose is to be a dedicated worker for the Bengal’s cause: ‘The glory of a great responsibility filled my being’ (*HW* 58). She has indeed shifted her centre from Nikhil to Sandip, but she never wants to leave the first one for the second. She never thinks that this shift will move her further away from this centre in the upcoming days. Sandip will prove a man of flesh and blood, not the representative of the immortal gods. And, renouncing her identity as a mother, she will appear as a beloved, the goddess of destruction, Kali.

Nevertheless, Bimala’s men never understand what she is or what she truly wants. In Nikhil’s modern mysticism and Sandip’s modern hedonism lie their motto ‘I want’ that in mild and wild form dislocates Bimala’s feelings of Shakti all through the narrative. They always consider themselves the authority of Bimala and attempt to mould and remould her according to their expectations.

From the very beginning of their married life, Nikhil tries to shape Bimala as he likes. Nikhil wants Bimala to leave *purdah*, to arrive in the outside world and to know herself. But in Nikhil's mildness, goodness and generosity, there is a substantial burden of expectations towards Bimala. He expects Bimala to know herself, where to know herself actually means to know Nikhil, the selfless truth and love in her life. He expects Bimala with her modern education and experiences of the outer world will belong to him only and help him in his work of picturing himself as a complete human being. Nikhil also expects Bimala to be a humanist like him, freeing herself 'from her infatuation for tyranny' (*HW* 44). When Bimala fails to fulfil his expectations, Nikhil becomes sorrowful. He vivisects her nature unpleasantly saying that she is naturally a lover of violence and rage: 'But now I feel sure that this infatuation is deep down her nature. Her love is for the boisterous. From the tip of her tongue to the pit of her stomach she must tingle with red pepper in order to enjoy the simple fare of life' (*HW* 44). Then he promises to free her from his tie and move to the eternal truth and love he invents for himself. This decision of setting Bimala free is actually Nikhil's fulfilment of his desire. Because to Nikhil, setting Bimala free means setting himself free from the worldly impulse: 'never would I be free until I could set free' (178). Instead of prompting Nikhil to negotiate and reconcile with Bimala, Nikhil's goodness thus disengages him from her.

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[22] See Somdatta Mandal, ‘Was Tagore a Feminist? Re-evaluating Selected Fiction and their Film Adaptations’, *Literature Compass* 12.5 (2015) 5; Sunita Peacock, ‘The Nationalist Question and the Bengali Heroine in Rabindranath Tagore’s *Ghare Baire* or the Home and the World’, *Pakistan Journal of Women’s Studies*: *Alam-e-Niswan* 18.2 (2011) 28.

The same thing happens in Bimala-Sandip relationship. Sandip does not realise the real emotion Bimala feels towards the *Swadeshi*. He emerges quickly as a womaniser and keeps contriving to transform Bimala, the rational, to Bimala, the passionate. With his hybrid thoughts that combine modernism and idolatry, he entices Bimala to be the goddess Kali, the destroyer. Bimala gradually feels that the power she had of feeling like the Mother Land is vanishing under the manly power of Sandip. Her conversation with Sandip is slowly dropping 'all talk of the country's cause' (*HW* 85) and turning towards the discussion on modern sex-problem and poetry. Bimala hears underneath their talk the resonance of Sandip's 'true manly note, the note of power' (*HW* 85) and is submerged in his cajoling to break the cocoon of the inner quarter:

> Do you not know that I come to worship? Have I not told you that, in you, I visualize the *Shakti* of our country? Is this power of yours to be kept veiled in a zenana? Cast away all false shame [...] Take your plunge to-day into the freedom of the outer world. (*HW* 90-92)

Sandip's eulogy renders Bimala so powerless that she starts to consider Bengal a beloved, like her: 'She is no mother. There is no call to her children in their hunger, no home to be done. No; she hies to her tryst' (*HW* 120). Thus, Sandip's endearments dislocate Bimala from her centre as a worker of the country and re-centres her emotion around Sandip.

This dislocation of Bimala from one centre to another, then another again, creates a vast gulf in her world. She feels she is not what she has been and is utterly alone. Her home that she used to take care of is mocking her. She is no longer at home at her home, in her country. She is the looter of its safety and destroyer of its peace. She looks at her heart and finds that all things are there what they have, but all are disorganised and dishevelled. She is not what she has been. She is the not near and dear one of anyone and 'unstable as a dew drop upon the lotus leaf' (*HW* 253). She desperately tries to regain her power through Amulya, but in the meantime, her home and the world have already descended into chaos. Conflict, communalism, and death hover over Suksar. Sandip has taken his leave, and Nikhil has left home to try and resolve the communal conflicts.

Bimala at this stage experiences a harrowing physical and psychological stasis. Her body is petrified beside the window and her mind goes blank. She feels she needs to commit suicide or do something for her home, but she can neither move to take the pistol nor pray. She keeps staring at the darkness outside and hear the indistinct noises far and near. She feels her mind is blocked and she cannot think anything. She waits inertly for her fate to prevail: 'But I could not move a step from the window [...] was I not awaiting my fate?' (*HW* 279). She feels broken and becomes remorseful: 'So long as I was alive, my sins would remain rampant, scattering destruction on every side' (*HW* 279).

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Feminist Appropriation of a Tagore Classic on the Screen: The Case of *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World)[1]

Md Rezaul Haque

Abstract

The year 2016 marked the hundredth anniversary of the publication of Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World). Tagore scholars regard the novel as one of the most controversial texts written in Bangla. Although the work is ostensibly based on the *Swadeshi* Movement that swept colonial Bengal in the first decade of the last century, it is the intersection of Indian nationalism and what has come to be known as 'the woman question' (Chatterjee 1993) that forms the bone of contention in most of the readings of the novel.[2] The critical debate intensified when more than half a century later Satyajit Ray recreated *Ghare Baire* on the silver screen in 1984, reconfiguring the position of the Indian woman in relation to the agenda of nation building at a time when independent India had already witnessed the third wave of feminism. In reconstructing the text Ray appears to have tilted the discursive balance more towards the woman question, thus relegating the national issue to a secondary position. In the present essay, I attempt to read Ray's cinematic translation of Tagore's *Ghare Baire* with a view to examining how Ray appropriates the source text to feminist ends as well as exploring his reasons for doing so.

Ghare Baire (The Home and the World), first published in book form in 1916, is one of Rabindranath Tagore's most talked about fictions.[3] Somdatta Mandal even considers it to be 'one of Tagore's most controversial novels.'[4] Set against the backdrop of the *Swadeshi* Movement that shook colonial Bengal in the early years of the last century, the novel deals with a number of issues that don't appear to have become obsolete even a century after its first publication.[5] Questions regarding (post)colonial modernity, nation formation, and female emancipation are as relevant today as they were when the text originally came to be produced. *Ghare Baire*'s continued relevance is perhaps best exemplified the way it has been able to draw attention not only from present-day scholars and students of Bangla literature but also from artists working in non-literary media, especially the cinema.[6] The present essay looks at one of the most powerful engagements with Tagore's book, that is, the 1984 cinematic adaptation of the novel by Satyajit Ray.[7] The one single aspect, as it were, that makes Ray's recreation of *Ghare Baire* on the silver screen unique is the fact that Ray reads the text predominantly, though subtly, from a feminist perspective, thus apparently emptying his translation of the national-political content so palpable in its literary counterpart. But every translation stands in the same kind of relationship with its so-called 'original' as a historical fiction with the time it chooses to reconstruct. Diana Wallace notes:

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[1] This essay grows out of an earlier draft that I presented at an international conference titled *Redrawing Gender Boundaries in Literary Terrains* organized (on 18-19 May, 2017) by the Department of English and Humanities, BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

[2] See Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (1993; rpt. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1994).

[3] Rabindranath Tagore, *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World), trans., Surendranath Tagore (London: McMillan,1921).

[4] Somdatta Mandal, 'Two Masters One Text: Satyajit Ray's Transcreation of *Ghare Baire*,' *Filming Fiction: Tagore, Premchand, and Ray* ed. Mohd. Asaduddin and Anuradha Ghosh, 2012, Oxford Scholarship Online, 6 April 2017 www.oxfordscholarship.com.

[5] The *Swadeshi* Movement was an anti-colonial movement in India. It originated as a reaction against the then colonial government's decision to divide the Presidency of Bengal into two administrative units – East and West Bengal – in 1905. The Movement had its epicentre in the Presidency in question. It began as a non-violent campaign urging Indians to boycott foreign/British goods and use *swadeshi* (home grown) ones instead. But the Movement soon turned violent and went underground in the face of state retaliation. The decision was eventually revoked in 1911. For a detailed account of the Movement, see Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973).

> Although readers are often attracted to historical novels because they believe they will learn about the past time recreated in the novel, any historical novel always has as much, or perhaps more, to say about the time in which it is written.[8]

The same interpretational logic applies to Ray's adaptation of *Ghare Baire*. That is to say, it sheds as much light, if not more, on the historical moment when the film came to be conceptualised and given form as on the earlier historical moment when its 'source' text was written and published. This essay thus aims at achieving two things: one aim is to examine how Ray appropriates a Tagore classic to feminist ends, and the second aim is to explore some of the major factors that shaped this appropriation.

As a film maker, Ray is famous for his commitment to realism and it is no accident that one of his earliest influences was the Italian neorealist director and actor Vittorio De Sica whose *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) Ray saw during a visit to London.[9] This commitment stands out even in his very first attempt at film making, that is, *Pather Panchali* (Song of the Little

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[6] A more recent adaptation is Reema Mukherjee's *Ardhangini Ek Ardhsatya* (Better Half: Half a Truth, 2016). The last in line (to date), however, is Aparna Sen's *Ghare Baire* which is reported to be released later this year or early 2019. The cast given in the Works Cited entry for Sen's *Ghare Baire* is based on the same newspaper report ('Aparna Sen's "Ghare Baire" to release later this year,' *Times of India* 6 March 2018, 13 April 2018 https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/bengali/movies/news/aparna-sens-Ghare Baire-to-release-later-this-year/articleshow/63185729.cms). On a different note, throughout the essay I'll be using 'Bangla' to mean Bengali language and 'Bangali' to mean Bengali nation. However, 'Bengal' would retain its old meaning, designating the Presidency of Bengal in colonial India.

[7] *Ghare Baire*, dir. Satyajit Ray, perf. Soumitra Chatterjee, Swatilekha Chatterjee and Victor Banerjee, National Film Development Corporation of India Ltd., 1984. These days terms like 'adaption' and 'transcreation' seem to have largely replaced the older supposedly pejorative term 'adaptation,' while 'anterior' and 'posterior' are preferred to 'original' and 'copy.' See Shohini Ghosh, 'Disobedient Women/Disobedient Detours,' *Filming Fiction: Tagore, Premchand, and Ray* ed. Mohd. Asaduddin and Anuradha Ghosh, 2012, Oxford Scholarship Online, 6 April 2017 www.oxfordscholarship.com.

[8] Diana Wallace, *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 4.

[9] *Bicycle Thieves*, dir. Vittorio De Sica, perf. Enzo Staiola and Lamberto Maggiorani, Ercole Graziadei, Sergio Bernardi and Count Cicogna, 1948. To do justice to his multi-faceted talent, it should be noted that Ray also experimented with other forms of representation such as fantasy (in *Hirak Rajar Deshe* for example). *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (Kingdom of Diamonds), dir, Satyajit Ray, perf. Soumitra Chatterjee, Utpal Dutta, Tapen Chatterjee and Rabi Ghosh, Govt. of West Bengal, 1980.

Road, 1955), the first of the three films constituting what has come to be known as Apu trilogy after the name of its male protagonist.[10] On the thematic front, feminism appears to have been one of Ray's favourite subjects. As with realism, the tendency to engage with issues directly relating to the difficult socio-economic condition of Bangali/Indian women can also be traced back to Apu trilogy, especially in the last film called *Apur Sansar* (The World of Apu, 1959).[11] From the 1960s onward, Ray's feminism gradually became more nuanced and at the same time more pronounced. In his brilliant study of the intersection of tradition and modernity in Ray's cinema, Darius Cooper identifies 'two distinct ideological concerns' in the films Ray produced during these years, one being feminism:

> From 1960 to 1985, Ray embarked on a series of woman-centered films in which he traced, with a remarkable feminist sensitivity and historical insight, the troublesome *yatra* or journey the trapped Bengali/Indian woman had to make under the patriarchal gazes and threat of a conspicuously Bengali/Indian masculinity.[12]

It is important to note here that the timeframe within which Cooper locates Ray's 'remarkable feminist sensitivity' includes his wonderful adaptation of Tagore's *Ghare Baire*, perhaps the last Ray film with a clear feminist agenda.

For a long time translation theorists as well as translators themselves tended to believe that in the process of translation something vital gets lost, a belief that inevitably led source and target text to be evaluated differentially as cultural products. The former invariably came to be assigned a higher position than the latter on the scale of value judgment.[13] Only recently a change in attitude appears to have taken place. It is widely accepted these days that if in translation something vital gets lost, something equally vital is also gained.[14] From one perspective then, Ray's recreation of Tagore's *Ghare Baire* suffers some loss of meaning insofar as it relegates the national-political content of the novel – the *Swadeshi* Movement – to a secondary position. But the same ideological/representational move also works to enrich Ray's translation by way of inflecting it with a robust feminism.

Perhaps the most obvious departure of Ray's *Ghare Baire* from Tagore's is the way the film reworks the novel into Bimala's rather than Nikhilesh's or Sandip's quest (albeit initially propelled by her husband) for a self (re)defined in terms of the larger 'world' rather than 'home.' This reworking is accomplished in three ways: first, by giving Bimala a far greater narrative space than Nikhilesh and Sandip; second, by carefully omitting or appropriating those episodes that are likely to present the female protagonist in a negative light; and finally, by employing the mirror trope to chart her psychological growth. Written in the form of a series of retrospective monologues by its three main characters, Tagore’s text contains a total of eighteen chapters, with Bimala and Nikhilesh each allocated seven while Sandip gets four. In contrast, Ray’s film is predominantly narrated from Bimala’s perspective. However, in light of what Ray said about its narrative patterning in an interview soon after the film was released, one would appear justified to think otherwise:

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[10] *Pather Panchali* (Song of the Little Road), dir. Satyajiy Ray, perf. Subir Banerjee, Uma Das Gupta and Runki Banerjee, Government of West Bengal, 1955.

[11] *Apur Sansar* (The World of Apu), dir. Satyajit Ray, perf. Soumitra Chatterjee, Sharmila Tagore and Swapan Mukherjee, Satyajit Ray Productions, 1959.

[12] Darius Cooper, *The Cinema of Satyajit Ray: Between Tradition and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 5.

[13] In *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 8, Brian McFarlane shows how the discourse on adaptation (from novel to film) 'has been bedevilled by the fidelity issue.' See also Robert Stam, 'Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation,' *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* ed. Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005) 1-52.

[14] For a postcolonial (re-)conceptualization of the limits and possibilities of translation, see Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, eds., *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (Oxon: Routledge, 1999).

> The entire narrative is divided into four phases, the first being from Bimala's point of view, where we have Bimala's commentary and we do not have a single sequence without Bimala; upto [*sic*] a point the narrative runs this way. Then before the second phase, a full fade-out and a full fade-in brings us to Sandip's point of view and there is no sequence without Sandip; through his commentary we are able to enter into his state of mind. Thus when the tragedy has taken quite a turn we enter the third phase, where it fades out again to bring us to Nikhilesh's point of view, and here we are concerned with Nikhilesh only and everything happens in relation to Nikhilesh. But the story proceeds all the time in its proper chronological order. And finally in the fourth and last phase we get the director's point of view. The camera can now go wherever it likes, to Bimala, to Sandip or whomsoever it may be.[15]

On the face of it, one cannot be blamed for thinking that Ray maintained an impartial attitude to his main characters by giving each an opportunity to narrate the story from her/his point of view and exercising his directorial authority only in the final phase of the film. But this initial impression gives way to a different evaluation as soon as one takes the length of the ‘four phases’ into consideration. The longest phase – spanning almost an hour – is the first one focalised through Bimala. Sandip gets about half an hour. Nikhilesh and Ray (the omniscient directorial gaze) divide the last fifty minutes or so between themselves. Ray’s assignment of the longest narrative slot to Bimala clearly suggests that Ray has been markedly partial to his heroine. While this partiality sheds light on an important aspect of Ray’s temperament as an artist, it also reveals what Ray had wanted to do in recreating Tagore’s novel.[16] By allowing Bimala take centre stage and thus marginalising the male protagonists in his adaptation, to put it in plain words, Ray succeeded in turning it into a female *bildungsroman*. His decision to open the film at the end – so effortlessly accomplished by means of Bimala’s flashback – does endow it with a sense of finality. But the same narrative circularity, insofar as it is achieved through the female protagonist’s retrospection, works to turn *her* sensibility into the film’s framing sensibility.

Ray takes care that viewers see his translation of *Ghare Baire* the way he wants them to, that is, primarily as a female *bildungsroman*, charting Bimala’s journey from innocence (represented by a partially modernised home) to experience (represented by the modern world). Hence his opening the film with Bimala looking back at what she has come through: 'I have passed through fire. What was impure in me has been burned to ashes.'[17] The point to be noted here is that she does not appear to judge herself harshly for what she has done. On the contrary, she seems to consider what she has gone through as worth undergoing because it has given birth to a truer self.[18] Although the very next sentence – 'What remains, I dedicate to him, to the man who accepted all my failings in the depths of his stricken heart' – would appear to suggest that Bimala ultimately chooses home and the kind of indigenised modernity it embodies over the world and the sort of radical modernity it represents, there remains not the least doubt that her decision to come back home and all that it stands for is hers and hers alone.[19] Loser or gainer, at the end of Ray's film Bimala is what she herself has chosen to become. Seen from this point of view, Ray's *Ghare Baire* is above everything else a *bildungsroman* with a female protagonist who is well aware of the perils that stepping beyond defined limits entails for the Bangali/Indian woman and who at the same time is ready to pay for her defiance of the set code of behaviour.

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[15] Satyajit Ray, cited in Mandal, ‘Two Masters One Text.’

[16] As an artist, Ray is temperamentally drawn more towards characters who vacillate than towards the ones who identify themselves with a particular cause. See ‘Ray on Ray: *Cineaste* magazine interview with Satyajit Ray,’ *SatyajitRay.org*, 19 April 2017 http://www.satyajitray.org/about_ray/ray_on_ray.htm.

In adapting *Ghare Baire* Ray is partial to Bimala not only in giving her narrative prominence but also in characterising her. Those episodes in which the female protagonist appears in a negative light in the literary work are either omitted or appropriated. The incidents involving Miss Gilby and Nanku are two such incidents. Both tend to generate in the readers of *Ghare Baire* a feeling of antagonism towards Bimala. Ray does not include the incident involving Nanku, a watchman in Nikhilesh's household. As narrated (from the perspective of Sandip) in the novel, this episode opens with Nanku trying to prevent the narrator from going to see Bimala in her drawing room. Asked to explain his unusual behaviour, Nanku tells Sandip that he has been ordered not to allow him in, when Bimala is in the drawing room. After a brief verbal altercation, Sandip pushes Nanku aside and has almost entered the drawing room when Nanku grips his hand and begs him not to go in. Freeing his hand from Nanku's grip, Sandip slaps Nanku on the cheek. Bimala comes out and orders Nanku to go away. With Nanku gone, Bimala asks Sandip to get in and then sends for her husband. When Nikhilesh arrives, Bimala informs him of the incident more to draw out an explanation from her husband than to tell on Nanku. All three become speechless when Nanku tells them that it was her sisters-in-law who had ordered him to stand guard on Bimala. Not being in a position to humiliate her sisters-in-law the way they have humiliated her, Bimala shifts her fury onto Nanku and asks Nikhilesh to dismiss him. A conscientious master that Nikhilesh temperamentally is, he sends Nanku away to the countryside in a different capacity. Nanku is thus (represented as) the proverbial scapegoat – a loser in the play of superiors. As such, his victimhood earns him sympathy from the readers who, on the other hand, have nothing but hostility for the victimiser. Quite understandably, Ray could not but omit the Nanku episode; in all probability its inclusion in the film would have presented Bimala in an unfavourable light and thus ruined his whole ideological design.

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[17] Satyajit Ray, *Ghare Baire*. Quotations from Ray's *Ghare Baire* are all subtitles taken from the film.

[18] The metaphor of trial by fire also invokes one of the most cited trials ever faced by an Indian woman – that of Sita in the great Indian epic *Ramayana* by Valmiki. A good English translation of the epic is *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, trans. Hari Prasad Shastri (London: Shanti Sadan, 1962).

[19] Ray, *Ghare Baire*. Bimala's coming back home has mostly been read as a conservative ending. But a critical reading of the circumstances that lead Bimala retrace her steps would suggest otherwise. I discuss these circumstances in a later section of the present essay.

With regards to Miss Gilby episode, Ray adopts a totally different strategy. Instead of omitting it, he rather appropriates it to his own ideological/representational end. Unlike the Nanku episode, the one involving Miss Gilby is narrated by Bimala herself. One fine morning Miss Gilby, whom Nikhilesh has hired to teach his wife modern manners, is returning home from church when a boy named Naren injured her by hitting her with a piece of brick. Nikhilesh who had been like a guardian to Naren till then didn't hesitate to send him away. In marked contrast, Bimala sided with Naren who had recently become a champion of the *Swadeshi* cause. She even tried to convince her husband that Naren was innocent and that Miss Gilby was merely fabricating a story against him. But Nikhilesh didn't revise his original decision. However, as the *Swadeshi* Movement began to gain momentum, Miss Gilby herself decided to quit. At the time of her departure, Miss Gilby could not help crying; even then Bimala didn't relent. So, in her own account Bimala stands out as a heartless, immoral and obstinate woman who doesn't hesitate to part with truth for convenience.

Ray's cinematic reconstruction of Miss Gilby episode is notable for two reasons. First, it is represented less elaborately, with the whole thing compressed into a scene in which a bandaged Miss Gilby is seen sitting with Bimala while Nikhilesh stands behind them. Second, Bimala's reaction to Miss Gilby's disgrace and injury doesn't bear the least trace of antagonism. The compression issue perhaps owes its justification to the kind of medium Ray chose to translate Tagore's novel into. However, what Ray achieves from this formal adjustment is a concretely realised delineation of human relationships, using both the auditory and visual potential of the medium to his utmost advantage. Another gain from this same adjustment is that it allows Ray to present Miss Gilby episode in such a way that viewers cannot but feel sympathy for his female protagonist on the eve of her separation from her English tutor. I will look at the scene in some detail to show how all this is achieved.

Unlike Tagore's text, Ray's film does not mention Miss Gilby's assailant by name. It's just 'a local schoolboy' who 'hit' Miss Gilby 'on the head with a stone.'[20] In thus turning a named attacker (in the novel) into an anonymous, faceless one in the film, Ray renders the very question of taking sides redundant. Who will Bimala plead for? More importantly, the assault on Miss Gilby is narrated by Miss Gilby herself in the presence of both Bimala and Nikhilesh. This changed mode of narration and perspective (first-person autobiographical instead of third-person omniscient) has the distinct advantage of addressing the viewers directly. Deprived of her narrative mediation, Bimala is deprived as well of the opportunity of accusing Miss Gilby of falsehood: viewers already know the truth. Ray's use of make-up for Miss Gilby in this scene also contributes to his achieving the intended effect. With her bandaged head, Miss Gilby leaves no room for Bimala to contradict her victimhood which in its turn saves Ray's female protagonist from projecting a negative self-image and thus becoming alienated from the viewers. From this brief analysis of Ray's recreation of Miss

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[20] Ray, *Ghare Baire*.

Gilby episode, it becomes clear that whatever else Ray had aimed at achieving through this reconstruction he had obviously wanted to appropriate the episode in such a way that he could present Bimala in a positive light, a position radically different from Tagore's in the source text.

Perhaps more forcefully than the other two strategies discussed in some detail above, Ray's recurrent deployment of mirrors in *Ghare Baire* lends credence to my central argument in the present essay, which is to say, Ray's reading of Tagore's *Ghare Baire* is primarily a feminist reading. The mastery with which Ray has deployed mirrors in a number of scenes in his film has been noted by Ray scholars.[21] One such scholar holds that 'Ray uses "mirror" as a[. . .] recurring motif throughout the film to suggest self-reflection and understanding of the individuals concerned as the "Subject" and the others as the "Other".'[22] Although largely in agreement with its broad interpretational drift, I would like to spend some time on problematising this reading. The first point to be noted about Ray's deployment of mirrors in *Ghare Baire* is that it is Bimala who is found using them most, from the moment when a housemaid does her hair early on in the film to the moment when she realises that Sandip is not what he claims to be and breaks down. A second point is that Bimala's use of mirrors is suggestive of her psychological growth. That is to say, the moments marking Bimala's use of mirrors are also moments that signpost the different stages in her journey from her somewhat modernised home to the modern world, a point to which Jayita Sengupta, the scholar in question, doesn't appear to have given much critical attention. In what follows I'll focus on three such moments.

The earliest use of mirrors in Ray's *Ghare Baire* takes place, significantly, in a traditional domestic setting. Most of the female characters of the film – Bimala, her widowed sister-in-law, and three housemaids – are present in the scene under discussion and are seen listening to music on a gramophone. One of the maids is doing Bimala's hair, while Bimala is looking steadily at a small-sized mirror sitting on the floor and is perhaps enjoying a *paan*. Bimala's voiceover at this point – 'Our rooms were in the inner apartments of the palace. A passage with stained-glass windows led to the outer apartments. The door of this passage always remained closed to us. I didn't mind the confinement, because I was raised to follow traditional values' – clearly suggests how Bimala felt at that time, that is, before her entry/initiation into the world.[23] She felt happy in her confined existence at this juncture in her life. Ray's deployment of a small-sized mirror in this early scene is a brilliant metaphor for the smallness of Bimala's existence/world at that time. Bimala would step out of this world when it comes in contact with a kind of modernity almost incompatible with the one she had known so far.

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[21] Mandal (in 'Two Masters One Text), for example, 'take[s] the[] mirror shots [in *Ghare Baire*] to symbolize the delusion which all of them [the three main characters] are suffering from.' My reading, however, radically differs from Mandal's.

[22] Jayita Sengupta, 'Ray's Narrative Vision and Synaesthetic Appreciation of Tagore in *Ghare Baire*,' *Filming Fiction: Tagore, Premchand, and Ray* ed. Mohd. Asaduddin and Anuradha Ghosh, 2012, Oxford Scholarship Online, 12 April 2017 www.oxfordscholarship.com.

[23] Ray, *Ghare Baire*.

The next mirror moment can be called the moment of the threshold, to adapt the title of Malashri Lal's impressive study of 'women writers in Indian English.'[24] My reason for defining this moment as the moment of the threshold will be self-explanatory to those who have seen the film, characterised as it is by tensions and vacillations on Bimala's part. The scene opens with Bimala looking at her image in a larger-than-life-sized mirror and humming an English tune. The comment her widowed sister-in-law makes at this point – 'English clothes, English songs. Soon we won't even seem related.' – points to the kind of radical transformation Bimala will undergo as a consequence of her venturing into the world.[25] Seen from the perspective of Bimala's sister-in-law, whom Ray represents both as an advocate and a victim of the older (feudal) Hindu patriarchy, this sort of drastic change looks dangerous and disruptive, hence undesirable. Had the scene ended at that point, Ray's reading of Tagore's text would have been anything but feminist. As if to bring his feminism back into focus, immediately after this anxious comment, Ray makes Bimala ask her sister-in-law how she looks in the *new* jacket. The implication of Bimala's impending transformation thus comes to be evaluated from an internal-personal rather than external-social point of view. By virtue of this simple shift in perspective and focalisation, Ray is also able to ground the narrative back into Bimala's consciousness. The more important question now is if Bimala will recognise herself once she steps beyond the threshold. Her husband's entry into the scene and the conversation that follows between the two works to mitigate, if not totally remove, whatever apprehensions Bimala still has about crossing the threshold.

The final mirror moment involving Bimala in Ray's *Ghare Baire* marks the climax of her psychological growth. By the time Bimala confronts herself for the last time in the mirror, Sandip and she have kissed each other twice.[26] That means her relationship with Sandip has already reached its climactic point as far as the narrative trajectory of Ray's adaptation is concerned. The second kissing, however, is directly followed by another climax in which Bimala seals her allegiance to Sandip's militant *Swadeshi* by giving Sandip the gold coins she has stolen from her husband's chest. Unlike its earlier counterpart, the second climactic moment is not only brief but also loaded with dramatic irony: no sooner has Bimala gone over to Sandip's camp than Nikhilesh's revelation of his friend's moral fraudulence in carrying out *Swadeshi* work snaps the very fabric of her fascination for Sandip and all he stands for. It's only after this revelation that the last use of mirrors by Bimala occurs in Ray's film. The narrative positioning of Bimala's final use of the mirror speaks volumes for the kind of meaning with which Ray inflects Tagore's novel in recreating it. It's not without ideological significance that Bimala faces herself in the mirror not after she has violated the sanctity of Hindu conjugality by allowing herself to be kissed by Sandip but after she comes to know from her husband of his friend's morally dubious character as a *Swadeshi* leader. It's Sandip the *Swadeshi* leader, not Sandip the lover, whom Bimala rejects at the end of the day, though the first rejection inevitably leads to Sandip's doom as a lover as well.[27] Bimala's rejection of Sandip would thus appear to issue from a sense of betrayal, *not* from a sense of guilt, a small but vital detail for understanding both Ray's agenda and achievement in translating *Ghare Baire*.

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[24] Malashri Lal, *The Law of the Threshold*: *Women Writers in Indian English* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1995).
[25] Ray, *Ghare Baire*.
[26] See footnote 27 below.

In depicting Bimala's rejection of Sandip as originating from a sense of betrayal rather than from a sense of guilt, Ray definitely goes a long way towards endorsing Bimala's passion for Sandip.[28] In clear contrast to Tagore who represents Bimala-Sandip relationship as nothing but a threat to the very foundation of Hindu family life, Ray would thus seem to represent female – erotic or otherwise – desire as a valid passion. The two full-blown kiss scenes briefly discussed above dramatise such a passion in unambiguous terms. It's only in light of these ideological and representational coordinates undergirding Ray's reconstruction of *Ghare Baire* that one can hope to tease out the true meaning of Bimala's last use of the mirror in the film. Betrayed by Sandip, Bimala does go back to her bedroom but, instead of throwing herself onto bed to cry away what has befallen her, she clings to her image in the mirror, though crying all the while.[29] Being the first woman in the world of *Ghare Baire* to step beyond the threshold, there's no one in her household to whom Bimala can turn for consolation or help. Thus the most obvious implication of Bimala falling back upon her own image in the mirror is that, right or wrong, loser or gainer, she takes full responsibility for whatever has happened as a consequence of her crossing the threshold. Her desperate effort to set things right and win Amulya over does not succeed but it does prove that, unlike Sandip who chooses to take to his heels, she does not have the least hesitation to pay for what she has, knowingly or unknowingly, helped to bring about.

In my opinion Ray's decision to give his adaptation of Tagore's *Ghare Baire* an unambiguous ending should also be considered in the same light as his final deployment of the mirror in the film. The ending of Ray's film is exactly the reverse of how Tagore's novel ends. Tagore leaves his text open-ended: Nikhilesh, who had gone out to stop Hindu-Muslim riot spreading like fire in his estate, is brought home in a critical condition. As such, Tagore's ending leaves readers suspended between hope and despair, and would thus appear to suggest that at the end of the day Tagore stops just short of passing any judgment on Bimala so that readers too don't become judgmental about his female protagonist. In marked contrast, Ray chooses to round off his film with a definite ending: 'a series of lap dissolves' gradually 'strip Bimala of her fine accoutrements and clothe[] her in widow's whites.'[30] This ending has commonly been read as upholding a conformist position.[31] These scholars take the last scene's Bimala (dressed) in the traditional white *sari* of a Hindu widow as dramatising Ray's ultimate endorsement of the age-old moral dictum: as you sow, so you reap. They, in other words, read Ray's reading of Tagore's *Ghare Baire* the way Samuel Johnson had famously read Shakespeare in his *Preface to Shakespeare*, that is, as a moralist.[32] But I don't think this is really the case. I would rather argue (as I've done in the preceding paragraph) that in locating Bimala's rejection of Sandip in a sense of betrayal rather than guilt Ray in fact moves away from Tagore's Victorian brand of morality and thus seems to lay the whole burden of responsibility for his female protagonist's impending doom not on her shoulders but on both her lover's and husband's. For Nikhilesh is no less culpable. And that is what Bimala in the white *sari* of a Hindu widow is meant to stress. Throughout the film Ray has brilliantly capitalised on the make-up of Bimala's widowed sister-in-law. Dressed as a widow, the sister-in-law forcefully brings home to viewers the contradictions inherent in Nikhilesh's project of modernising Bimala. If Nikhilesh is so concerned about his wife's emancipation, viewers cannot but ask, why doesn't he do something that will really help his sister-in-law live with dignity in her own eyes as well as society's? He could have organised her remarriage.[33] Or he could have included her as well in his modernising scheme. Thus read, Ray's ending constitutes a powerful critique of all man-initiated projects meant to modernise the Indian woman, whether the initiator is an enlightened liberal landlord or an unscrupulous firebrand revolutionary.

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[27] Bimala's rejection of Sandip boldly asserts that she doesn't subscribe at all to the (western) idea that 'all's fair in love and war.'

[28] Another endorsement is the kiss scene discussed above. Incidentally, *Ghare Baire* is the first Ray film to show a full blown kiss scene.

[29] In times of crisis or distress a South Asian heroine commonly locks herself in her bedroom, throws herself onto her bed, and cries her misfortune away.

[30] Ghosh, 'Disobedient Women/Disobedient Detours.'

As mentioned at the beginning, this essay has a two-fold aim: it intends to examine how Ray appropriates Tagore's *Ghare Baire* to feminist ends as well as explore why he chooses to do so. I hope I've been able to shed some light on the 'how' part of my objective through a brief discussion of Ray's *Ghare Baire* as a female *bildungsroman*, a close reading of the strategic omissions and appropriations Ray carries out in his film with a view to presenting Bimala in a positive light, and a somewhat detailed analysis of how the film deploys mirror (moments) as a structural device to chart the female protagonist's psychological growth. Moving on to the 'why' part of my objective, I would say there are basically two reasons why Ray chose to read Tagore's novel the way he did. In a 1983 interview for *India Today*, Sumit Mitra had asked Ray about his take on Tagore's *Ghare Baire*. To Mitra's question: '*Ghare Baire* is both a love story and a political novel. How are you treating it?', Ray's straightforward answer was: 'As a love story. Isn't it a love story first?'[34] Ray, however, added: ‘I mean the political allusions and the interpretation of terrorism are all there, but what is more important to the script is the triangle between the characters, and the eventual resolution of the triangle.’[35] Although from Ray’s answer it becomes clear where his preference lay as far as the novel’s themes are concerned, one learns almost nothing about the reasons determining this preference. Important light is shed on the issue in Ray’s later answers. In one of them Ray identifies both the political culture and the ‘censorship laws’ prevailing in India at the time as factors that decided for him to downplay the ‘political theme’ in his cinematic recreation of Tagore’s text.[36] As far as representation of politics in Indian cinema was concerned, Ray frankly admitted: ‘In India it is not possible to make a Costa-Gavras type of film.’[37] What the allusion to ‘a Costa-Gavras type of film’ suggests is that it is futile to look for overt political themes in a Ray film. Then how could Ray engage with such a politically charged agenda as feminism in his reconstruction of *Ghare Baire*? Ray himself has answered the question in more than one interview. He does confront socio-political problems in his films but always as an artist.[38] And there can be no doubt that for Ray the artistic way meant the way Emily Dickinson had advised poets to adopt to tell the truth:

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[31] Several listeners at the conference where I presented the first draft of this essat, for example, asked me (during the question-answer session) if such was not the case. See footnote 1.

[32] Samuel Johnson, *Preface to Shakespeare*, *The Project Gutenberg EBook*, 28 August 2005, 19 April 2017 http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/5429/pg5429-images.html.

[33] The Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act was passed in 1856, that is, exactly sixty years before *Ghare Baire* was published in book form.

[34] Sumit Mitra, 'The Satyajit Ray Interview,' *India Today* 2 May 2012, 25 April 2017 https://www.indiatoday.in/india/photo/satyajit-ray-91st-brithday-367552-2012-05-02. The original interview titled 'The Genius of Satyajit Ray' was published in the magazine's 15 Feb 1983 issue. The issue I've used reproduces excerpts from the original interview to mark Ray's 91st birth anniversary in 2012.

> Tell all the truth but tell it slant,
> Success in circuit lies,
> Too bright for our infirm delight
> The truth’s superb surprise;
>
> As lightning to the children eased
> With explanation kind,
> The truth must dazzle gradually
> Or every man be blind.[39]

In fact, Ray’s very decision to choose Tagore’s *Ghare Baire* to articulate his thought on the question of modernising the postcolonial Indian woman itself is a clear indication that his method of telling the truth is the slanting one. It is by slanting (that is, by subtly reworking) his source text that Ray is able to inflect it with his kind of feminism. Hence his deployment of the Tagorean love ‘triangle’ in the film in such a way that the two male protagonists merely serve as props to facilitate Bimala’s journey towards attaining a larger and truer sense of the self.

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[35] Mitra, ‘The Satyajit Ray Interview.’

[36] Mitra, ‘The Satyajit Ray Interview.’ Interestingly, in a much earlier interview Ray had made similar comments. In answering the interviewer’s question if censorship in India had ‘limited’ his work, Ray admitted that it had ‘[i]n certain areas,’ particularly in the areas of ‘sex’ and ‘politics.’ See Lindsay Anderson, ‘An Interview with Satyajit Ray,’ 1969/1970, 2 May 2017 http://raylifeandwork.blogspot.com/2011/01/interview-with-satyajit-ray.html.

[37] Mitra, ‘The Satyajit Ray Interview.’

[38] See, for example, Bert Cardullo, ‘Master of Art: An Interview with Satyajit Ray,’ Bert Cardullo, *World Directors in Dialogue: Conversations on Cinema* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2011), ProQuest Ebook Central, 28 August 2018 http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/flinders/detail.action?docID=648615.

[39] Emily Dickinson, ‘Tell all the truth but tell it slant,’ *Emily Dickinson’s Poems: As She Preserved Them*, ed. Christanne Miller (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2016) 563-64.

Ray's *Ghare Baire* was not his first cinematic adaptation of a Tagore classic. Much earlier Ray had recreated Tagore's *Nastanirh* (The Broken Nest, 1901), a novella, on the silver screen under the title *Charulata*.[40] As can be inferred from the very title (named after the female protagonist) of the earlier translation, Ray is more openly a feminist in this film than in the latter. This openness has to do with the historical moment when *Charulata* was released. In 1964 with the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru still in power, India was a much more secular and tolerant geopolitical space than it would come to be after the infamous Emergency of 1975 when most of the civic rights of the Indian citizen were to be curtailed by Indira Gandhi, the first female Prime Minister of India. Hence Ray's cautious move to tell 'all the truth but tell it slant.' His principal objective is to appropriate Tagore's *Ghare Baire* to feminist ends. But Ray being Ray, he sets out to achieve his goal in a roundabout way. Hence his subtle attempt to rework Tagore's novel into a female *bildungsroman*, his omission or appropriation of those episodes that are likely to present Bimala in a negative light, and finally his brilliant use of the mirror (trope) to chart the psychological growth of his female protagonist.

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[40] Rabindranath Tagore, *Nastanirh* (*The Broken Home: English Translation of Rabindranath Tagore's* Nastanirh), trans. Lopamudra Banerjee (Ontario: FinalDraft Editing and Publishing Services, 2016). *Charulata* (The Lonely Wife), dir. Satyajiy Ray, perf. Madhabi Mukherjee, Soumitra Chatterjee, Sailen Mukherjee, Syamal Ghoshal and Gitali Roy, RDB & Co, 1964.

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The Home and the World in *Mansfield Park* and *Ghare Baire.*

Gillian Dooley

Abstract

Although widely separated by time, language, country and culture, Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1815) and Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World* (1916) share some enduring themes. The concepts of home, or a quiet secluded life in the country, and world, or the busy social life of the city and town, are set into opposition in *Mansfield Park* more markedly than any of Austen's other novels. Without wishing to strain the comparison, one could conceive of Tagore's 'eternal triangle' of Nikhil, Bimala and Sandip as having some equivalence to the triangle in *Mansfield Park* of Fanny, Edmund and Mary Crawford. Nikhil, like Fanny, adheres to a well-defined internal ethical compass, while Sandip and Mary share an amoral, modern approach to the world. The characters of Bimala and Edmund are drawn away from Nikhil and Fanny respectively by the (largely sexual) temptations of the more modern view.

There are, of course, huge problems with schema of this sort, and my interest lies as much with the differences between the novels as the similarities. However, taking this basic scheme as the starting point, I wish to examine how the forms in which the two authors were writing – Austen in comedy, Tagore in tragedy – are reflected in the construction of the respective narratives, and how the two writers use point of view either to reinforce or to undercut the conventions of these forms.

Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* and Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World*[1] are both serious, thoughtful novels on enduring human themes, and are at the same time works very much of their own respective times and settings. At the heart of each of these novels, both written within the realist tradition, is a contrast, which becomes a conflict, between the domestic and the worldly or political spheres – the inner and the outer. And this conflict is played out in the sexual dynamics of the principal characters.

It is difficult to establish whether Tagore would have read Austen's novels. Patrick Colm Hogan has written about Tagore's 'corrective revision' of *Mansfield Park* in *Gora*, as well as other intertextual relationships between Austen and Tagore.[2] However, I have not been able to find a definite causal link, and it is not my intention to assert a direct influence. My interest is in seeing how two authors from different countries and periods, using different formal structures and techniques, writing in different languages and with different intentions, deal with a dramatic situation which in its basic essence is similar.

According to Ulka Anjaria, *The Home and the World* is

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[1] As I cannot read *Ghare Baire* in its original language, I am relying in this paper on the translation by Surendranath Tagore, and will refer to the novel by the translated title of *The Home and the World.*

[2] Patrick Colm Hogan, '*Gora*, Jane Austen and the Slaves of Indigo', *Rabindranath Tagore: Universality and Tradition* ed. Patrick Colm Hogan and Lalita Pandit (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003) 178.

> constituted by persistent questions around what realism is, how far it can be taken before it becomes something else and negates its own value, and its political and ethical costs. It does not offer a clear answer to these questions; its mode of representation is built precisely on the impossibility of resolution.[3]

I would like to explore how far this statement also applies to *Mansfield Park.* The fact that there is a resolution of the most conventional kind – a marriage – at the end of Austen's novel, while Tagore's novel closes with the question of whether Nikhil will die left uncertain, perhaps contradicts this. However, the resolution of *Mansfield Park* is undercut with such irony that its validity is called into question, and, as in Shakespeare's darker comedies, the comedic formula is grafted onto far more troubling narrative material. As John Wiltshire writes, 'this is not a story of ambition fulfilled, nor of the country house culture renewed, but [...] of healing imagined.'[4] And even that imagined healing is only partial.

Anjaria continues, still talking about *The Home and the World*: 'The novel simultaneously makes use of the realist mode and draws attention to its limits, and in doing so actively represents realism as a site of both promise and disillusion.'[5] I have no reservations about saying that this is also true of *Mansfield Park.* We need to look no further than the beginning of the final chapter:

> Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore every body, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort and to have done with all the rest.[6]

This is one of many such narratorial statements throughout *Mansfield Park* that draw attention to the fictive nature of the work, and the author's sophisticated awareness of the limits of the fictional enterprise, with which she is nevertheless seriously engaged. Margaret Doody writes of Austen,

> Assumptions about realism have often got in readers' way, occluding Austen's treatment of angles of vision and the role of assumptions and biases and habits in creating what passes for 'reality'. [...] Craving the authoritative narrator, we think we are walking on a solid surface, but we tread unsteadily on crumbling shale or sliding cliff, as in the disconcerting geology of *Persuasion*. Austen reassures us at one level, for she is attentive to the world outside the self. Yet she profoundly questions the procedures and habits by which characters and readers compose individual and social reality. Her attentiveness and questioning are combined, not separable.[7]

There is nothing much more apt to mislead human beings about the nature of reality and to engender beliefs about the conflict between the inner and the outer realms – the home and the world – than sexual love and jealousy. This is not to deny the political aspect of either of these books. However, as Supriya Chaudhuri proposes,

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[3] Ulka Anjaria, *Realism in the Twentieth-Century Indian Novel: Colonial Difference and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2102) 16.

[4] John Wiltshire, *The Hidden Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 121.

[5] Anjaria 16.

[6] Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* ed. R.W. Chapman, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934) 461. Further references to this work will be included in parentheses in the text preceded by 'MP'.

[7] Margaret Doody, *Jane Austen's Names: Riddles, Persons, Places* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2015) 387.

> In its treatment of love, *The Home and the World* contributes as much to a history of the emotions as to the political history with which it is more usually associated. [...] [T]he novel undoubtedly places a scandal at the heart of both politics and domestic life.[8]

That 'scandal' in Tagore's novel is a private matter, kept within the limits of the household, although its consequences reach beyond the home into the world. In *Mansfield Park*, the scandal is public with consequences (not exclusively negative) that are felt deeply in the domestic sphere. The political aspect is not absent, but it is not explicit as in *The Home and the World.*

While it might perhaps seem more logical to 'map' the love triangle plot of Tagore's novel onto the choice between Henry Crawford and Edmund Bertram as potential husbands for Fanny Price, I believe that the emotional logic of *The Home and the World* corresponds in many more telling ways with another triangle in *Mansfield Park.* It is true that Fanny and Bimala are both brought from their homes at an early age to live in a wealthy household, one as a poor cousin, the other as a 'girl-wife', and they both come to love the older mentor figure, whether cousin or husband, whom they meet there. And Henry Crawford does in some ways seem a similarly amoral and opportunistic figure to Sandip: they share cavalier attitudes to the female sex, for example. But Henry, for all his attractions for her cousins Maria and Julia, has virtually no appeal for Fanny, who is constant in her love for Edmund. I propose, then, that it makes more sense to see Fanny as representing 'home' – in her steady, enduring love of Edmund, in parallel with Nikhil's love of Bimala.

It may seem rather a stretch to equate Bimala, the wife who has been in purdah and is encouraged by her husband to emerge into the world, with Edmund, the son of Sir Thomas Bertram, a young man who has studied at Oxford. However, given the differences in the societies and situations of these novels, I believe that parallels can be drawn. Sandip is attractive to Bimala partly because he is of the world rather than the home; Edmund is drawn to Mary Crawford, the bright, clever, amoral woman of the world, partly because she inhabits a social sphere with which he is unfamiliar.

The parallels I am suggesting are of course only suggestive in a very broad sense. Many of the particulars of these two triads of characters do not match. Not least, of course, is the significant difference inherent in the sex of each character being opposite to that of their proposed counterpart. This is especially true of the mentor-like relationship that Nikhil and Edmund have with Bimala and Fanny respectively, which is also partly a function of their differences in age: Edmund is six years Fanny's senior, and although it is never stated, it is implied that Bimala is somewhat younger than Nikhil. The custom of the household seems to be for brides to be married young, and at one point Bimala is referred to as 'a slip of a girl-wife' (21) by her older sister-in-law. Once Edmund is bewitched by Mary, the mentoring aspect of his relationship with Fanny falls away. She can even be seen trying to give Edmund advice, although to little avail.

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[8] Supriya Chaudhuri, 'Dangerous Liaisons: Desire and Limit in *The Home and the World,*' *Thinking on Thresholds* ed. Subha Mukherji (Anthem Press, 2011) 87-99; 91.

At one point in *Mansfield Park*, the narrator writes of Fanny, who is beset by jealousy she believes is illicit and must be kept hidden, ‘Having regulated her thoughts and comforted her feelings by this happy mixture of reason and weakness, she was able, in due time, to go down and resume her usual employments [...] without any apparent want of spirits’ (MP 265). What makes this regulation and comfort necessary is that Fanny has just heard herself described by Edmund as one of ‘the two dearest objects I have on earth’: confirmation of ‘what she had long perceived’; that Mary Crawford was the other. ‘It was a stab; – for it told of his own convictions and views. They were decided. He would marry Miss Crawford’ (MP 264). It will take ‘all [her] heroism of principle’ to ‘be rational, and to deserve the right of judging of Miss Crawford’s character and the privilege of true solicitude for him by a sound intellect and an honest heart’ (MP 265). She believes, with justification, that she is condemned to a life of concealing her inner self not only from the world at large, but even from her closest, if not sole, friend. Nevertheless, she finds after all that nothing is ‘decided’: her ‘rationality’, though strategic at this stage, is not borne out by the plot’s outcome. Fanny’s realism has been learned from an early age through bitter experience and reinforced by the way that her guardians Sir Thomas and Mrs Norris have treated her in the years she has spent at Mansfield Park; in other words, by everything that happens in the novel until the very end, when the narrator/novelist dispenses rewards and punishments in a brief, dazzling and implausible conclusion.

Fanny is on one level merely an eighteen-year-old girl in love with her cousin. But there are many ways in which her life, like that of Bimala, is constrained by established patterns of power in her society. She is a poor cousin, removed from her family home as a young girl and brought to live with her relatives, from a mixture of motives, some of which are benevolent, others not. While Bimala’s transportation to the house of Nikhilesh as a child bride is a function of her sex, Fanny’s fate is more related to her class than her sex: a nephew would have been equally welcome at Mansfield Park. In some ways, it hardly seems too strong to say that the critique of slavery which some critics believe is absent from *Mansfield Park*[9] is embodied in Fanny, the child brought from a poor environment to fulfill a subservient role in a house of power and privilege, who has limited rights over her own person, who internalises her inferiority and who is punished when she claims the right to her own agency. Edward Said writes that Fanny is, in a sense, ‘a kind of indentured servant or, to put the case in extreme terms, [...] a kind of transported commodity,’ but that once she has endured her servitude, she ‘has the promise of future wealth.’ He also describes Sir Thomas as ‘her mentor, the man whose estate she inherits.’[10] None of this can be literal. The promise Said refers to is presumably to be understood as implicit in Austen’s novelistic vision. Fanny is not Sir Thomas’s heir in any substantial sense: her cousin Tom will inherit the estate. Sir Thomas is hardly her mentor: it is Edmund who fulfils that role. She finally prevails only by the most determined insistence on her right of refusal, rather than rights to any more positive benefits. The positive benefit that she desires – marriage to Edmund – could be seen as the default ending to the comedy genre, rather than something Fanny actively demands or earns. Said, however, is quite aware of the need to 'read novels attentively' to 'get a far more discriminating and subtle view than the baldly "global" and imperial vision I have described thus far.'[11] Likewise, I do not want to over-emphasise the slave analogy, and I agree with Wiltshire's caution: 'Fanny Price is not a slave, [...] nor is she a displaced person, refugee or asylum seeker.'[12] However, it is striking that the word 'slave' appears twice in *Mansfield Park*, once literally and once figuratively.

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[9] See for example Hogan, 178.

[10] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994) 106.

On the first occasion the word is used, Sir Thomas has returned from Antigua and drawn the Mansfield Park household back towards its more customary inwardness, banishing the Crawfords and other outsiders and putting an end to the home theatricals which had aroused such heightened emotions. Only Fanny thinks this is an improvement. She tells Edmund, 'The evenings do not appear long to me. I love to hear my uncle talk of the West Indies. [...] Did not you hear me ask him about the slave trade last night?' (MP 197-8). But she could not pursue the subject, despite her wish to do so: 'There was such a dead silence! And while my cousins were sitting by without speaking a word, or seeming at all interested in the subject, I did not like – I thought it would appear as if I wanted to set myself off at their expense' (MP 198). When Fanny's subjection within the household extends to her being silenced when bringing up the question of slavery, it seems to me difficult to sustain Hogan's argument that Austen is engaged in making Sir Thomas's implication in imperial project ''natural', unquestionable, obvious, and normal as our ordinary environment and thus, in practice, [...] little open to questioning and reconsideration.'[13] Said is of the opinion that the 'dead silence' suggests 'that one world could not be connected with the other since there simply is no common language for both.'[14] My reading, however, is that this shows rather that there is no common language between her and her cousins Maria and Julia. Fanny, tethered as she is to her home in Mansfield Park, is able to expand her view to encompass the broader world in which slaves labour on her uncle's Antigua plantations, while her cousins, caught up in the 'worldly' excitements of the theatricals, and contracting advantageous marriages, have a more limited view.

The second time that slavery is mentioned it is used figuratively, and negatively, of Mary Crawford, in implicit but direct contrast with Fanny. Fanny, having for once exercised her right of refusal and repelled Henry Crawford's proposal, is desperately though passively hoping to escape a private conversation with his sister Mary by sitting with her aunt, Lady Bertram. However,

> Miss Crawford was not the slave of opportunity. She was determined to see Fanny alone, and therefore said to her tolerably soon, in a low voice, 'I must speak to you for a

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[11] Said, 90-1.

[12] Wiltshire 122.

[13] Hogan 178.

[14] Said 115.

> few minutes somewhere;' words that Fanny felt all over her, in all her pulses, and all her nerves. Denial was impossible. Her habits of ready submission, on the contrary, made her almost instantly rise and lead the way out of the room. She did it with wretched feelings, but it was inevitable. (MP 357)

Mary is *not* a slave – she dominates Fanny's physical behaviour entirely in this scene. Having concentrated all her resources of opposition on her refusal to marry Henry, Fanny is once more subject to the desires and schemes of others and, although she has recently asserted her right to refuse, she feels that she has no choice but to suppress her inner wish to avoid Mary and behave in accordance with the meek outward face she has cultivated. Fanny, unlike Mary, is constrained not just by opportunity but by her situation in the household, as John Wiltshire points out:

> Her apparent passivity is a coping strategy. [...] But when the narrative does enter her consciousness [...] the reader is presented with a selfhood arduously struggling to attain calm and integrity against repeated assaults and incursions. The contrasting modes of her presentation work together, then, to dramatise the consequences of her displacement. By temperament and training self-effacing, she does rarely assert herself: but that – in contrast to her intense inner life – is the point.[15]

The narrator makes a point of showing how Fanny must exercise explicit and sometimes ingenious control over her often turbulent inner self in order to compose her desired exterior: calm, dutiful, helpful, unobtrusive. *Mansfield Park* is, as I have said above, in its most basic form a comedy, while *The Home and the World* is a tragedy. I maintain that this is a matter of emphasis and plot line rather than emotional tenor. Austen always wrote in the comic form, but her novels sometimes come close to tragedy in the same way as Shakespeare's darker comedies do, with the 'happy ending' grafted, with conscious irony, onto grimmer, more realistic material. There are, for example, intimations of tragic or at least thwarted lives among the secondary characters in *Mansfield Park* – Maria Bertram's disgrace, for example, and even the doomed though genuine love between Edmund and Mary.

The plot of *Mansfield Park* is driven by the erotic urges and jealousies of several characters. It is a long and complex novel. *The Home and the World* is shorter and more concentrated on the three main characters. The narrative is related alternately through the first-person points of view of these three main characters: Bimala, her husband Nikhil, and his friend, the revolutionary Sandip. In *Mansfield Park*, on the other hand, the narrative is all in the third person but often focalised through various characters, Fanny most of all. This means that it is harder to 'read the minds' of other characters than in *The Home and the World*, where we have access to the three characters' thoughts as the action progresses. In *Mansfield Park* we have a narrator guiding our interpretation of events to some extent, though the multiplicity of critical readings of the novel shows that the apparent authority of the authorial voice is more ambiguous than it seems. Austen's very practice of slipping in and out of the various characters' points of view, while it presents a 'realistic' picture of their thoughts and feelings and encourages the reader to suspend disbelief, at the same time presents a practical impossibility and thus emphasises the fictional nature of the narrative, created by a guiding hand of an author who can describe the main character as ‘My Fanny’. Tagore’s fairly lightly-sketched and perhaps deliberately implausible framing of the parts of narrative as diary entries does little to enhance the realism. On the few occasions when Nikhil and Sandip mention that they are writing their accounts of events, it is a token gesture towards a realist convention which has the opposite effect of drawing attention to the narrative as a fiction.

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[15] Wiltshire 101-102.

Said notes Austen’s ‘curious alternation of outside and inside’[16] in a passage towards the end of the novel where Sir Thomas has become aware of ‘some thing [...] wanting *within*’ his daughters’ moral education (MP 463). He points out that Fanny has come from ‘without’ Mansfield Park and provides what is needed to supply the deficiency. This is not the only place where Austen talks of the inner and the outer. In one prominent example, Edmund, early in the novel, is asked by Miss Crawford whether Fanny is ‘out’ or not, referring to the custom of formally presenting young ladies into society. Before they are ‘out’, young women are supposed to act modestly and not to attend social events outside the family circle – not entirely unlike being in purdah. Edmund replies, but ‘will not undertake to answer the question. My cousin is grown up. She has the age and sense of a woman, but the outs and not outs are beyond me’ (MP 49). Closing down a frivolous discussion between Mary and his elder brother Tom about awkward situations caused by this kind of ambiguity, he bluntly rejects their notion that properly regulated behaviour is dependent on such social conventions:

> such girls are ill brought up. [...] They are always acting upon motives of vanity – and there is no more real modesty in their behaviour *before* they appear in public than afterwards. (MP 50)

Bimala similarly critiques the conventions of her society as they affect her relations with her husband Nikhil:

> The element of devotion in woman’s love is not like a hackneyed passion quoted from a romantic poem to be piously written down in round hand in a schoolgirl’s copy-book.
>
> But my husband would not give me any opportunity for worship. That was his greatness. They are cowards who claim absolute devotion from their wives as their right; that is a humiliation for both.
>
> [...] My husband used to say, that man and wife are equal in love because of their equal claim on each other. I never argued the point with him, but my heart said that devotion never stands in the way of true equality; it only raises the level of the ground of the meeting. Therefore the joy of the higher equality remains permanent; it never slides down to the vulgar level of triviality.[17]

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[16] Said 109.

[17] Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World* trans. Surendranath Tagore (London: Penguin, 1985) 19-20. Further references to this work will be included in parentheses in the text preceded by ‘HW’.

Edmund and Bimala, at this early stage in the story, both look beyond ‘outer’ social conventions to the genuine values they see in Fanny and Nikhil – ‘the age and sense of a woman’ in Fanny’s case, and in Nikhil’s case the respect he accords Bimala as his equal, refusing to accept her worship in the ‘cowardly’ way of other husbands. Nevertheless, despite Bimala’s admiration for her husband’s wish for her to love him in the modern way, she ‘is never able to make her self coincide with her self-image, which is, we realise, in each case a projection on to her of *male* desire’, as Chaudhuri writes.[18]

There is, however, a significant difference in rhetorical position between these two passages. Bimala appears to be writing from a future time:

> It comes back to me today how, in the days of our happiness, the fires of envy sprung up all around us. [...] But providence does not allow a run of luck to last forever, unless its debt of honour be fully paid, day by day, through many a long day, and thus made secure. [...] Alas for the boons that slip through unworthy hands! (HW 21)

On a first reading, we can sense the tragic overtones, without yet knowing the details. Reading the novel for a second time, we can better understand the regret with which she is living. Although the first-person accounts of three main characters in *The Home and the World* are given in roughly chronological, albeit overlapping, order, they are not all written from a time beyond the novel as the earlier part of Bimala’s account is. The characters in *Mansfield Park*, however, have no retrospective view beyond the novel’s close. The narrative is written entirely in the third person, although it is often focalised through one of the characters, and most often through Fanny. It is only during these instances of free indirect style, in dialogue, or in letters, that we have their first-person, ‘inner’ views.

Both Bimala and Edmund at first criticise those whom they later come to love. Bimala distrusts Sandip: ‘what annoyed me most was the way that Sandip Babu used to fleece him on the pretext of *Swadeshi* work’ (HW 27). But that was before she had seen him in person:

> I had seen Sandip Babu’s photograph before. There was something in his features which I did not quite like. [...] The light in his eyes somehow did not shine true. That was why I did not like it when my husband unquestioningly gave in to all his demands. [...] Any number of such reflections come back to me today, but let them be.
>
> When, however, Sandip Babu began to speak that afternoon, and the hearts of the crowd swayed and surged to his words, as though they would break all bounds, I saw him wonderfully transformed. [...]
>
> I was utterly unconscious of myself. [...]
>
> I returned home that evening radiant with a new pride and joy. The storm within me had shifted my whole being from one centre to another. (HW 32)

Similarly, at first there is something about Mary that Edmund thinks is ‘not quite right’ (MP 63). Edmund can see that Mary does not show proper respect for the uncle with whom she had been living since her mother died when she was a child: Edmund discusses this with Fanny, as is his habit. She is more inclined to accuse Mary of ingratitude, while Edmund prefers to call it impropriety, and excuse her of the graver charge. However, he is satisfied that Fanny agrees with him: ‘I am glad you saw it all as I did’, he says (MP 64). It is not long, though, before

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[18] Chaudhuri 94.

> there began to be some danger of dissimilarity, for he was in a line of admiration of Miss Crawford, which might lead him where Fanny could not follow. [...] The harp arrived, and rather added to her beauty, wit, and good humour, for she played with the greatest obligingness, with an expression and taste which were peculiarly becoming. [...]Without studying the business [...] or knowing what he was about, Edmund was beginning at the end of a week of such intercourse, to be a good deal in love. (MP 64-5)

There is a parallel scene where Fanny is drawn to Henry despite herself, when he is reading Shakespeare. This wonderful scene, however, just shows the strength of Fanny’s resistance: although she is attracted temporarily, she is not tempted. As soon as he stops reading, ‘the charm was broken’ and ‘she was shrinking again into herself’ (MP 337).

Once the dramatic events of the narrative have passed, both Edmund and Bimala become disenchanted with these objects of their fascination who have come from the outside world to disrupt the inner realm of the home. They both come to understand the worth of the ones who have waited for them passively, refusing to act, even while understanding their own jealous feelings. Edmund’s enlightenment is painful but not fatal, and Fanny is his consolation:

> Her mind, disposition, opinions, and habits wanted no half concealment, no self deception on the present, no reliance on future improvement. Even in the midst of his late infatuation, he had acknowledged Fanny’s mental superiority. (MP 471)

The inner and the outer come together: Edmund no longer needs to hide his misgivings about Mary from himself; Fanny can now show her feelings for Edmund without the need for stringent self-discipline and dissimulation.

Bimala is less fortunate. The last chapter is related by Bimala in the present tense, beginning: ‘Come, come! Now is the time to set sail towards that great confluence, where the river of love meets the sea of worship. [...] What was inflammable has been burnt to ashes; what is left is deathless’ (199). Following her reconciliation with her husband Nikhil, he is called away almost immediately on an ill-fated quest to quell the trouble Sandip has fomented, only to be brought back on a palanquin, seriously, probably mortally, wounded. Thus this novel has the tragic ending foreshadowed throughout, while in *Mansfield Park* the tragedy, though still inherent in other narrative threads of the novel, is dismissed to the background and Fanny’s quiet triumph is in the foreground: ‘My Fanny indeed,’ writes the narrator, emphasising the fictional nature of the events and her own role as creator of them, ‘at this very time, I have the satisfaction of knowing, must have been happy in spite of every thing.’ In spite, that is, of the suffering of all those she loves the most – Sir Thomas, Lady Bertram, and all their children, especially Edmund. This is one of several passages which belie interpretations of Fanny as either a righteous prig or an uncomplicated figure of good.

Nikhil and Bimala are a married couple whose marriage is threatened by Bimala’s infatuation with Sandip, while Edmund and Fanny are cousins and temperamentally natural allies in the household of Mansfield Park and it is in no sense improper for Edmund to pursue another woman. Fanny came to the house at the age of ten and they have grown up together. They will become the married couple destined by the comedy-romantic plot, so only in hindsight, in the most generic sense, does the reader understand the wrongness that Edmund's marriage to Mary, and Henry's to Fanny, would represent. Outwardly they have a close but sedate relationship, with Edmund, the elder by six years, 'directing her reading' and 'forming her mind'. However, Fanny keeps her secret well hidden, and he is not aware that her love for him is more passionate than his brotherly affection for her. Accordingly, he confides in her, not realising the pain he is causing.

Between Nikhil and Bimala there is a domestic love, deep and certainly passionate: Bimala says of him, looking back to the days before Sandip divided them,

> I have seen what depth of love there was in your eyes when you gazed at me. I have known the secret sigh of pain you suppressed in your love for me. You loved my body as if it were a flower of paradise. You loved my whole nature as if it had been given you by some rare providence. (HW 20)

Quite apart from the futility of any action they could take, Nikhil and Fanny both see clearly what is happening but feel morally obliged not to act. 'If Bimal is not mine, she is not; and no amount of fuming, or fretting, or arguing will serve to prove that she is. If my heart is breaking – let it break' (HW 65), writes Nikhil. As for Fanny:

> It was her intention, as she felt it to be her duty, to try to overcome all that was excessive, all that bordered on selfishness in her affection for Edmund. To call or to fancy it a loss, a disappointment, would be a presumption; for which she had not words strong enough to satisfy her own humility. To think of him as Miss Crawford might be justified in thinking, would in her be insanity. (MP 264)

When she receives an anguished letter from Edmund, confiding in her that he cannot give Mary up, and speculating on the best means 'to try for her', Fanny reacts, in internal monologue, 'There is no good in this delay. [...] Why is not it settled? [...] Fix, commit, condemn yourself' (424).

In both their cases, Fanny and Nikhil are shown directing considerable mental and emotional energy inwards to rein in their heartache, and to try to talk themselves out of their more extreme feelings of jealousy. There are also matching scenes where both these characters find solace in looking out at the night sky. Nikhil, in a rare reference to the rhetorical position of the book, as if it were a diary entry, writes:

> I had written thus far, and was about to rise to go off bedwards when, through the window before me, I saw the heavy pall of July cloud suddenly part a little, and a big star shine through it. It seemed to say to me: 'Dreamland ties are made, and dreamland ties are broken, but I am here for ever – the everlasting lamp of the bridal night.'
>
> [...] The unveiled star tells me not to fear. That which is eternal must always be there. (HW 66-7)

Nikhil, thus, is comforted by the star and what it means to him. For Fanny, stargazing is equally romantic but rather more ambiguous. Mary has just been called away to sing with the other young women, and Fanny and Edmund are standing by the window at Mansfield Park. They look out together to a scene

> where all that was solemn and soothing, and lovely, appeared in the brilliancy of an unclouded night, and the contrast of the deep shade of the woods. Fanny spoke her feelings. ‘Here’s harmony!’ said she, ‘Here’s repose! Here’s what may leave all painting and all music behind, and what poetry only can attempt to describe. Here’s what may tranquillize every care, and lift the heart to rapture! When I look out on such a night as this, I feel as if there could be neither wickedness nor sorrow in the world. (MP 113)

But after talking for a few minutes about the stars, complimenting Fanny on her enthusiasm and ‘taste for nature’, and suggesting they go out onto the lawn to see the constellation Cassiopeia, Edmund is lured away into the room to hear the singing, and ‘Fanny sighed alone at the window till scolded away by Mrs Norris’s threats of catching cold’ (MP 113).

These two passages show Nikhil and Fanny both contemplating and drawing moral and spiritual strength from the night sky, seen from inside the house. Although they are looking outwards here, in fact as far outwards as the naked eye can see, the lessons they draw are directed inwards. Fanny fails in the end to find the consolation there that Nikhil does, however temporarily. It is not much later, however, that he finds no solace in nature, and quotes the poet Vidyapati:

> It is August, the sky breaks into a passionate rain;
> Alas, empty is my house. (HW 85)

This verse, melancholy and yearning, is repeated three times in this section of ‘Nikhil’s Story’. He ruminates on the way he has magnified Bimala’s importance in his life, ‘that when I lost her, my whole way of life became narrow and confined. [...] That is why I find no gap in my misery, and spread this minute point of my emptiness over all the world’ (HW 90).

Their worldly rivals have no patience with the philosophical contemplation of nature**,** any more than Fanny’s cousins will participate in a discussion of the slave trade. When Fanny extols the beauties of Mrs Grant’s shrubbery to Mary, her response is ‘careless’ and in quite a different register to Fanny’s romantic ejaculations:

> It does very well for a place of this sort. One does not think of extent here – and between ourselves, till I came to Mansfield, I had not imagined a country parson ever aspired to a shrubbery or anything of the kind. [...]
>
> I am something like the famous Doge at the court of Lewis XIV.; and may declare that I see no wonder in this shrubbery equal to seeing myself in it. (209-210)

She cannot see the shrubbery in the way Fanny does, in the context of the wider world of nature and botany. She sees it only as a symbol of social status, and her only interest is what it would say about her own situation in society’s ranks were she to decide to settle there – which, as Fanny understands only too well, would eventually be the result of her marriage to Edmund. Sandip, more forcefully, would subordinate nature to his own desires:

> Every man has a natural right to possess, and therefore greed is natural. It is not in the wisdom of nature that we should be content to be deprived. What my mind covets, my surroundings must supply. This is the only true understanding between our inner and outer nature in this world. (HW 45)

These pairs, Nikhil and Bimala, and Fanny and Edmund, are, within the scheme of their respective novels, anchored at home. The gender difference does mean that in a more literal sense Fanny and Bimala are more tied to the interior life (although, perhaps significantly, both originate from outside the home) while Nikhil and Edmund have the freedom of movement accorded to men in their societies. But it is Bimala and Edmund who are tempted by outside forces, represented by Sandip and Mary.

Mary Crawford is no caricature: she is a fully realised character and many readers find her more engaging and sympathetic than Fanny. Sandip is more of a stereotypical villain – as Chaudhuri writes, 'a bitter parody of *swadeshi* politics and of the nationalist leader as self-serving charlatan.'[19] He is, however, a complex enough character to be taken by surprise by his feelings for Bimala:

> Why am I allowing my life to become entangled with Bimala's? [...]
>
> Not that I have any false shame at Bimala becoming the object of my desire. It is only too clear how she wants me, and so I look on her as quite legitimately mine. [...]
>
> But what is teasing me is that I am getting entangled. Am I not born to rule? [...]
>
> I can see that poor Bimala is struggling like a snared deer. What a piteous alarm there is in her eyes! How she is torn with straining at her bonds! This sight, of course, should gladden the heart of a true hunter. And so I do rejoice; but, then, I am also touched; and therefore I dally, and standing on the brink I am hesitating to pull the noose fast. (HW 81-2)

The two societies in which these novels are set, though different in many respects, are united in their assumption that it is the privilege of the male to initiate sexual involvement, and so there is not an exact parallel with this situation in *Mansfield Park***.** Nevertheless, Mary knows her own sexual power, and finds it 'very vexatious' when she finds that she prefers Edmund to his older brother Tom, Sir Thomas's heir. She realises that 'so far from now meaning to marry the elder, she did not even want to attract him beyond what the simplest claims of conscious beauty required' (MP 114). There is little doubt that she could have elicited a proposal of marriage from Edmund if she wished. Edmund's letter to Fanny in Portsmouth makes it clear that when he met Mary in London 'from the very first she was altered; my first reception was so unlike what I had hoped, that I had almost resolved on leaving London again directly' (MP 421): her manner to him in London discouraged him from proposing despite his intentions. Mary cannot quite make up her mind to take the irrevocable step which would make her a country parson's wife, tied to domestic life within the domain of Mansfield and divided from the fashionable world where she feels she belongs. There is another difference in situation here, however. Sandip fails to seduce Bimala because, despite his beliefs about male entitlement, he is moved by her plight and hesitates to force her to sacrifice herself, whereas Mary's reluctance is motivated by her own preference for London life which, as Fanny rather primly believes, 'was very much at war with all respectable attachments' (MP 433). The 'respectable attachment' implicitly referred to is specifically attachment to Edmund.

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[19] Chaudhuri 92.

As Anita Desai writes of *The Home and the World*, 'it would be unfair to read the book merely as a romantic novel, without informing oneself of the historical facts of the period to which it belongs.'[20] There is much more going on in this novel than the personal history of a wife tempted to stray. However, the love triangle in the novel personifies the struggles which were going on in Bengal at the time, and in which Tagore had been involved.

> His disillusionment with the [nationalist] cause and his reply to his critics were embodied in the novel *The Home and the World*, which illustrates the battle he had had to fight in his own mind, and the extent to which he had both won and lost.[21]

In the novel's dramatisation of inner and outer worlds the personal and the political are not separable. Every decision made by either Sandip or Nikhil on a matter of political or ideological principal has consequences, for good or ill, at a personal level, for themselves, for the other members of the household, and for the people whose lives are disrupted by Sandip's careless and destructive radicalism. Sandip, however, gets away, out of trouble, leaving 'almost at a run' (HW 201) while Nikhil is left to venture into the fray and risk his life trying to prevent 'the violence that is being done to the women' of a neighbouring estate (HW 201). Anjaria writes that Nikhil's 'idealism is presented as the extreme, although far less dangerous, antithesis of Sandip's pragmatism' and 'that the two perspectives they represent cannot be synthesized into a more convincing, realist [...] figure.'[22] Furthermore, Bimala feels herself split into two people. 'One of these in me can understand that Sandip is trying to delude me; the other is content to be deluded' (HW 149). This irreconcilable split is what leads to the tragic conclusion of the novel, and Tagore's 'aesthetic ambivalence around its two male characters is [...] the most effective form for what it seeks to describe.'[23]

Conflicting world views also cause the dark and dramatic events of *Mansfield Park.* Edmund is committed to being a genuine and sincere minister of the Anglican church, while Mary is too cynical and worldly to take religion seriously even though she is love with Edmund. Fanny, in turn, believes that she thoroughly disapproves of Henry. The narrator seems to differ:

> Could he have been satisfied with the conquest of one amiable woman's affections, could he have found sufficient exultation in overcoming the reluctance, in working himself into the esteem and tenderness of Fanny Price, there would have been every probability of success and felicity for him. His affection had already done something. Her influence over him had already given him some influence over her. Would he have deserved more, there can be no doubt that more would have been obtained, especially when that marriage had taken place, which would have given him the assistance of her

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[20] Anita Desai, Introduction to Tagore, 8.
[21] Desai 9.
[22] Anjaria 20.
[23] Angaria 21.

> conscience in subduing her first inclination, and brought them very often together. Would he have persevered, and uprightly, Fanny must have been his reward, and a reward very voluntarily bestowed, within a reasonable period from Edmund's marrying Mary. (MP 467)

This passage, as much as anything in *Mansfield Park*, illustrates how little justification there is for seeing Fanny as embodying anything like the novel's overall ethic. It is true that there are many 'could he haves' and 'would he haves' – there is a significant gap between the 'real' Henry and the hypothetical character who might have received the 'reward very voluntarily bestowed.' Fanny knows her own mind; she knows that she could never marry Henry. In the same way, she 'knows' – she 'firmly believe[s]' – that Edmund's 'heart is wedded to [Mary] for ever' (MP 424). In another novel, *Pride and Prejudice* for example, or *Emma*, the discrepancy between what the narrator 'knows' to be the case, and what Fanny 'firmly believes', would have been exploited to its full comic potential. In this novel, the dark irony that begins the final chapter returns in the mere paragraph which bestows Edmund's love on Fanny:

> I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion, that every one may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary much as to time in different people. (MP 470)

Austen's realism here is both grim and comic, and gives Fanny and Edmund the formulaic 'happy ending' only by a sleight of hand that barely conceals the impossibility of that healing resolution, like the realism that causes the fissure in Tagore's novel and leaves it unresolved. Austen's narrator speculates about Edmund's happiness: 'it must have been a delightful happiness!', she writes. 'But there was a happiness elsewhere which no description can reach' (MP 471). Fanny's feelings are cut off even from her authorial view. Indeed, she will allow no one to 'presume to give the feelings of a young woman on receiving the assurance of that affection of which she has scarcely allowed herself to entertain a hope' (MP 471). This denial of access to the inwardness which has been on view throughout the novel is startling: even earlier in the same chapter, we have read that Fanny, 'I have the satisfaction of knowing, must have been happy' (MP 461). It underlines the implausibility both of the realist illusion which appears to allow readers extended exposure to the inner worlds of the characters, and of the resolution which seals off that exposure at the novel's end and projects us back into the 'reality' of our own lives.

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