
Paper-II : Twentieth Century Indian Writing**TAGORE**
The Home and the World**Contents**

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Introduction

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I

Rabindranath Tagore's novels are essentially related to his age and it becomes necessary to understand the spirit of the times in which he lived to get a proper perspective for evaluating his achievement as a novelist. Viewed from any angle, the age was one of the most turbulent in Indian history and Tagore played a crucial role in both rejecting and moulding the intellectual, social, and cultural climate in resurgent Bengal. Deeply conscious of the decadence in Indian ethos, he responded readily to the rationalistic, humanistic, and literary influences of the West, brought in by the British advent, and ushered in a new era in Indian letters. I shall, in this chapter, analyze how under the stimulus of Western ideas and literature, the novel emerged as a literary genre in Bengal together with the promotion of liberal humanism in life and thought and the development of prose as an artistic medium. I shall also discuss the induction of social and psychological issues as literary themes, and broadly examine Tagore's novels in point of thematic concerns, character analysis, and structural technique.

II

Tagore was the central figure in the creative awakening that synchronized with what is termed as the Indian Renaissance- an awakening that witnessed the genesis of the novel in India. Not only did the Renaissance effect a remarkable change in the attitude of the Indian intelligentsia towards the problem of human existence by precipitating new critical attitudes, but it also ushered in an efflorescence of literatures in Indian languages by the transplantation of new literary genres from Europe. In the words of Sri Aurobindo :

It revived the dormant intellectual and critical impulse; it rehabilitated life and awakened the desire of new creation; it put the reviving Indian spirit face to face with novel conditions and ideals and the urgent necessity of understanding, assimilating, and conquering them. The national mind turned a new eye on its past culture, reawoke to its sense and import, but also at the same time saw it in relation to modern knowledge and ideas.

Rabindranath Tagore with his extraordinary nexus of talents and gifts - as poet, playwright, philosopher, painter, composer, novelist, short story writer, educationist, culture hero, and reconciler of indigenous and foreign, traditions - may be said to exemplify its climax and has rightly been hailed as "the Leonardo da Vinci of the Indian Renaissance." Indeed, a hermeneutic case study like the one attempted by Sigmund Freud or Leonardo da Vinci would alone perhaps identify the impulses underlying Tagore's phenomenal achievement in arts and literature. He has demonstrated how the graces of life and of art which he so assiduously cultivated could make creativity possible in a culture marked by unprecedented confusion of aims and purposes. Though subject to the notorious whirligig of taste like any other great artist, his endeavours in the domain of ideas and of art were such as to quicken all that he has attempted into undeniable significance. Though cast in the mould of a seer rather than of a rebel in Camus' sense, Tagore succeeded in infusing a spirit of liberal humanism into the life of his times. The values which inform his art as much as his life derive from the very springs

of humaneness and are not invalidated by the experience of the contemporary man and his obsessional preoccupation with existential questions. Tagore's work may be said to have brought a new signification to the perennially profound issues confronting man in the metaphysical, cultural, social, and political spheres.

It is surprising that the significance of Tagore's achievement as a novelist has evoked little interest from his critics who for the most part have been content to pay tribute to his personality or stereotype him as a mystic poet. There is no doubt that as a living legend in his own time, Tagore projected an image of his personality in which the myth and the man seemed inseparable. His multi-faceted achievement has, thus, given rise to an astonishing kind of iconography by his admirers which invariably has had the effect of inhibiting a truly critical response to his work. Commenting on the indiscriminate adulation, set in motion by the award of the Nobel Prize to Tagore, E.M Forster observed in a review of *Chitra* in 1914: "He is a good writer. All must assent to this minimum. But how good? To this, there can be no answer until the adoration, and 'the reaction all adoration entails, have passed away.'" More recently, Sisirkumar Ghose has rightly pointed out that "Superficial adulation, or, as recently, superficial criticism has blunted the edge of keen sensibility and we have to be content with partial or even partisan reviews." A perceptive study of his novels would, in my opinion, go a long way in correcting the imbalances of praise or blame and afford us insights into his excellences and limitations as man and artist.

III

The bestowal of the world's most prestigious literary award on Tagore for *Gitanjali* in 1913 has, apart from turning him into an object of unintelligent veneration, induced a tendency among his critics and readers to look upon it as almost the whole of the Tagore canon and to overstress the mystical element in his writings. That Tagore himself was disconcerted by this popular image of his work can be inferred from Edward Thompson who writes: "I remember finding the poet, just after the publication of the *Garden*, more vexed than pleased at an enthusiastic letter of praise from a distinguished English writer, 'you know she insists on seeing mysticism in all I write!'" Tagore's work has many facets to it and mysticism is but one of them. As B.M. Chaudhuri remarks,

Variety and versatility were important aspects of his genius; to judge the comprehensive greatness of the man only by his poetry, and more inadequate still, usually by his devotional and religious poems, mainly for which he received the Nobel Prize, is to miss a very large part of his greatness.

A keen aliveness to the happenings around him was one of his strong points and he exhibited to the end of his life a deep interest in all matters concerning his country and the world at large. Tagore's novels merit serious consideration as they embody his revealing delineation of the inner landscape of Indian experience at one of the crucial moments of her history.

It is in his novels but not in his poetry, which is spiritually or romantically inclined, that Tagore addresses himself to discovering a suitable medium for his projection of a society in

transition. While his poems, especially those included in *Gitanjali*, may be regarded as a transcreation of the great heritage of Hindu spiritual thought, his novels represent an expression of his deepest concerns about the emerging social order in his country. They deal with social problems of a fundamental nature: the woeful conditions of hindu widows and the emergence of a new type of woman in quest of self- fulfillment as in *Binodini*, the struggle for values in one's own tradition as in *Gora*, the conflict between true and false patriotism as in *The Home and the World*, problems of love versus possession as in *Two Sisters* and *The Garden*, and the futility and tragedy of political terrorism as in *Four Chapters*—in fact, a whole complex of conflicts and cross-currents in contemporary Indian life which could not be framed in theological terms.

Tagore's perspectivization of the social scene in India is marked by an emphasis on humanistic values which his novels in a sense attempt to symbolize. The humanistic persuasion that his novels command is directed towards a change in the diehard reading of the Indian traditions to facilitate the birth of a new order. Mulk Raj Anand, himself a humanist of note, says in his tribute to Tagore:

He was one of the greatest humanists of our country and the world. He taught whole generations of the country to be humanist, not vaguely, but by creating, in his novels, those characters, those human beings who are so real in their weaknesses. He conferred a certain dignity on weakness; his is more than a mere philosophical humanism. His humanism is evident in the courage to inspire and to lead weak people through critical periods.

Tagore loved man so fervently that he believed, there is nothing in creation higher than the spirit of man. Even God has to manifest Himself through man:

The revelation of the Infinite in the finite, which is the motive of all creation, is not seen in its perfection in the starry heavens, in the beauty of the flowers. It is in the soul of man.

Tagore held that humanism which places man in the centre of things was as much a legacy of Indian tradition as it was a gift of the European impact and could form the basis by which Hindu society should reform itself.

IV

It is against the background or social, cultural, and literary developments of his time that Tagore's achievement as a novelist needs to be viewed. Born at a time when the nation itself was involved in a process of rebirth, Tagore inherited the spirit or the Indian Renaissance and later strove his utmost, to consolidate its foundations through what Stephen N. Hay calls "the Hindu-British symbiosis," i.e, a synthesis between the Eastern and Western heritage. The advent of the British in the eighteenth century had the unsettling effect of throwing India into ferment both politically and socially. The country had been earlier conquered by rulers who quickly adapted themselves to the needs and traditions of what they had conquered but the British never looked upon India as their home and brought with them a completely alien culture—that of Protestant Europe—and tried to superimpose it through the medium of an alien language. In the words of **R.C. Mazumdar**, "Fifty years of English education brought greater

changes in the minds of the educated Hindus of Bengal than the previous thousand years.” Writing about the decadent state of Indian society at that time, Sri Aurobindo states:

Undoubtedly there was a period, a brief but very disastrous period of the dwindling of that great fire of life, even a moment or incipient disintegration, marked politically by the anarchy which gave European adventure its chance, inwardly by an increasing torpor of the creative spirit in religion and art, --science and philosophy and intellectual knowledge had long been dead or petrified into a mere scholastic punditism -- all pointing to a nadir of setting, energy, the evening-time from which according to the Indian idea of the cycles a new age has to start. It was that moment and the pressure of a superimposed European culture which followed it that made the reawakening necessary.

The initial impact of the West so dazzled some Bengali minds that there was a headlong rush for Westernization misconstrued as modernization. This began towards the end of the eighteenth century and reached its culmination in the “young Bengal” group of the late twenties of the nineteenth century. There were attempts at an outright and wholesale condemnation of everything Indian but Raja Rammohan Roy, who, according to Tagore, “. . . accepted the West without renouncing the East and, single-handed, brought the new Bengal into being”, turned the growing disaffection of the newly educated towards the prevalent social order into positive channels in order to crusade against institutionalized oppression and degrading social and religious practices such as *sati*, polygamy and idolatry. As a reaction and response to the impetus of Western ideas and education, old customs, ideas, beliefs, and institutions became subject to rational scrutiny and the process of reformation of a fossilized, convention-ridden and barely sacerdotal social system was inaugurated by Raja Raminohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasaear and others. An attitude of self-analysis and willingness to integrate Western values with the ancient traditions of India was fostered, resulting in institutions like the *Brahmo Samaj* (1828). Alarmed by the efforts at reformation of Hinduism by the Western-inspired intellectuals, orthodox Hindus began a counter offensive under the leadership of Raja Radbakanta Deb who started the *Dharma Sabha* in 1830. The reactions to the East-West encounter thus crystallized into two opposing attitudes— the reformist, liberal humanism or humanitarianism as symbolized in Tagore's novels in Paresb Babu and Anandamoyi in *Gora* or even agnosticism as seen in uncle Jagmohan in *Chaturanga*, and the romantic nostalgia for the glories of the past and efforts for a neo-Hindu revival as witnessed in the career of Gora. Tagore's novels hold up a mirror to this society in conflict and reflect the crisis of spirit resulting from the dialectical relationship between the reformist and revivalist impulses. Tagore himself strove for a synthesis of the past and the present, the Eastern and Western viewpoints. It is important to remember that he was a reformer and not a revolutionary and was not for the abandonment of tradition but for its reformation by removing the accretions of ages. That is why he remains true to Indian tradition or all that is acceptable in it while Portraying the emergence of modern sensibility. That is also the reason why his novels appear at one and the same time daring as well as hesitant, as can be seen from *Binodini*, *The Wreck or Two Sisters*; they stress the need for a social change but stop short of a radical transformation.

The European impact on India, apart from providing the intellectual climate for the emergence of the novel by fostering, a spirit of humanism, individualism, and self-analysis, also facilitated the introduction of this literary genre by providing models and initiated a new vernacular prose style. The spurt in East-West cultural exchanges with the spread of English education, the emergence of the middle class, and the extension of the reading habit with the establishment of printing presses and journals further prepared the ground for the novel. The efforts of William Carey and his associates in devising Bengal typescript and the bringing out of stories, dialogues, essays, dictionaries, and grammatical handbooks in Bengali resulted in the popularisation of a standardized prose style which gained a new charm and flavour later in the hands of Raja Rammohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Devendranath Tagore. Among the books published by Carey was *Raja Pratapaditya Charita* (by Ramram Basu), which, according to T.W. Clark, "has some claim to be considered the first historical novel in Bengal." The brief but momentous existence of Fort William College (1800-1854), created by Marquess Wtlesley, then Governor-General, as an "Oxford of the East," was, to quote Priyaranjan Sen, "fraught with far-reaching consequences because it was prolific of results which greatly helped to guide the Bengali language and literature in a new channel. The efforts of the scholars of Fort William College acquired an enlarged base and an extended range as a result of the attempts made by enterprising writers like Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Henry Derozio, Ramesh Chander Datt, Bankim Chandra Chatterji -- many of them products of the Hindu College, established in 1817—to revitalize literature. As Lila Ray succinctly puts it,

When the novel was introduced to Bengal in the middle of the 19th Century, the form itself was new, the prose in which it was written was new, the secular tone was new in a country hitherto wholly dominated by religion and the society in which and for which it was written was new.

Peary Chand Mitra's *Afaler Gharer Dulal* (The Spoilt Child of a Rich Family) which appeared in book form in 1858—"a sort of Jack Wilton in the history of the novel in India"—and Kaliprasanna Sinha's *Hutom Pyacar Naksa* (Sketches by Houtom the Owl) which started in 1862 mark a crucial stage towards the appearance of the novel as both have contemporary settings and employ a colloquial prose style. When the novel did first appear in an integrated form, it took the shape of historical fiction, Bankim Chandra Chatterji's *Durgesnandini* (1865). Krishna Kripalani asserts that "it was Bankim Chander who established the novel as a major literary form in India" and he is supported by T.W. Clark who writes: "In point of time Bankim was the first Bengali novelist. What had gone before was preparatory stuff, at best the novel in embryo; Bankim's novels were really novels." Mulk Raj Anand, however, has differed from this view and has designated Rabindranath Tagore as "the first novelist of India." Tagore more than Bankim could be hailed as the Father of the modern Indian novel in terms of both theme and technique.

VI

The embarrassing question facing the critic of Bankim Chandra Chatterji is whether his proneness to romanticizing has generated any radical vision of experience which would prove

enlightening as regards the pressure of events and the existential choices to which the Indian society was subject at that time. It is strange that such a highly perceptive and gifted artist who brought the new genre an immense prestige and popularity should have refrained from involving himself in the future by depicting the new social phenomenon in Bengal. According to Mulk Raj Anand, he is "...mainly a romancer who is extending the old myth and legend of India . . ." His historical romances suggest an inadequate appreciation of the contemporary situation and a precarious grasp of the novel form. A convert to the spirit of neo-Hindu revivalism, Bankim projects a fictional world of an idealized past with out-of-ordinary incidents and larger-than-life characters.

Bankim's *Durgesnandini* (1865), *Kapalakundala* (1866), *Raj Singh* (1883), and *Devi Chaudhurani* (1884) exemplify, in both form and content, the medieval romances offering little criticism of the life of the times. As T.W. Clark remarks, "He was a story-teller, rather than an observer of men and of their ways with one another." Even *Anandmath* (1882) which stands out among his works by virtue of its focus on the theme of rebellion foreshadowing the freedom struggle to be launched later, does not quite succeed in defining the principal situation because of the author's eagerness to perpetuate old values as a result of which the characters lapse into just ideational abstract figures. *Brishbriksha* (1873) and *Krishnakanter Vil* (1878), set in contemporary times and informed by a certain degree of realism, may be classed as novels although the characters are not sharply individualized nor are they delineated with any degree of psychological subtlety. The characters lack complexity and reveal no inward changes, observable for the first time in Indian fiction in Tagore's *Binodini* (1903). The piling up of incidents in an attempt to sustain the story interest, does not result in the realization of the character's predicament in meaningful terms. As observed by Niharranjan Ray,

The historical novels that dealt with a crowded series of incidents and characters offered little scope for detailed analysis. Even in the social novels of Bankim, man is to all intents and purposes an alien figure.

As has already been observed, Bankim's fiction consists for the most part of historical romances exhibiting little concern about the contemporary reality or about the developing Indian personality. Nor does Bankim's habit of frequent authorial intrusion help in evoking the stirrings of change in this significant period of Indian history. Mulk Raj Anand very perceptively sums up the distinction between Bankim and Tagore:

Tagore had read Turgenev and Tolstoy as well as some of the lesser French novelists on whom the influence of Flaubert was mirrored. And he seized upon the fact that the novel was no longer a heroic recital like the Indian Katha story or the Arabian Nights' Tale, or even like the long short stories of Boccaccio, Nash, Green or Mrs. Aphra Benn, but an altogether new form of narrative. Therefore, while Bankim was still a recitalist, preaching a moral, Tagore saw what the novel is, as Tolstoy had insisted, a dramatic presentation through space and time of the inner changes in the life of a character. Strangely enough, while he stuck for a long time to ancient Sanskrit models in his poetry, he essayed a conscious adaptation of the western novel to suit the sensibilities of his middle class character. He does not enter into the book in the manner of Bankim, "I am telling you, dear reader, to avoid the pitfalls of Krishna

Kanter," but he deals with Ramesh Babu or Anandamayee as persons in their own right, whose life pattern may illustrate some moral truth quietly, so that this may creep into the minds of the reader and become part of the unconscious.

Thus, it is as a celebrant and threnodist of the glory of pre-Moghul and pre-British Bengal that the chief excellence of Bankim Chandra Chatterji lies and not as the creator of the modern novel, the credit for which must go to Rabindranath Tagore. To quote Mulk Raj Anand again,

. . . as soon as Indian society began to break up under the impact of Europe, the old narrative remained only as survivals and the modernist Tagore began to attempt more complex patterns to present the psychological patterns of individual men and women in the newly-awakening society of Bengal. And the time was ripe for the emergence of the novel in India as an integral form.

VII

Tagore's distinction as a novelist lies in his having created the modern novel form which owes little to his predecessor—a form that is forward looking and manifesting an imaginative comprehension of the central issues confronting the Indian society of the time. Because of the prevalent one-sided approach to Tagore with its emphasis on his poetry, it is often forgotten that he was one of India's greatest social pioneers and had addressed himself to many of the problems of the newly unfolding India— problems like self-government, self-reliance, the status of women, the role of tradition, rural reconstruction, national education and the intercultural synthesis of East and West. He had identified himself with the forces of rationalism and reformation. Writing about Rammohan Roy, Tagore reflected on the state of India at the time of the great reformer:

Our country having lost the link with the inmost truths of its being struggled under a crushing load of unreason, in abject slavery to circumstance. In social usage, in politics, in the realm of religion and art, we had entered the zone of uncreative habit, of decadent tradition, and ceased to exercise our humanity.

It is no wonder therefore that his novels project a humanism born of an acute awareness of the betrayal of human personality engineered by the powers of stagnation and rigid orthodoxy. As Humayun Kabir puts it,

Tagore's humanism is clearly revealed in his universality and sense of identity with all men, in his revolt against all types of tyranny and injustice, in his repudiation of asceticism and in his acceptance of life in its fullness, in his exaltation of human reason and the human quality of his faith and above all in his respect for the human personality.

His novels stress the need for the promotion of catholicism in human relations and dealings and prevention of the erosion of human dignity while creating conditions for the realization of self-actualization, if not self-fulfillment. This is specially true of his women characters who are shown as struggling against their dehumanization in the name of tradition.

Tanore, in fact, assigns a central place to women in his novels because their roles are crucial to any transformation of Indian ethos.

No less remarkable is the spirit of realism that Tagore brought to the novel. Though a romanticist at heart, he sought realistic modes of presentation which would enable him to avoid romantic posturing or attitudinizing. Indeed, Tagore's realism seems primarily governed by preoccupation with the question of fidelity to the truth of experience rather than experience itself although as a novelist he does endeavour to be faithful to the real. Tagore's characterization, though dependent on realistic psychological exploration, does not involve any existentialist choices, as it were, since he is content with laying bare such determinants as are capable of clarifying social relationships and responsibilities deriving from the character's engagement with life.

VIII

The variety of themes figuring in Tagore's novels points as much to his inventiveness as to the immensity of the range of his interests and concerns. It is the tensions, conflicts, contradictions, frustrations, and embarrassments stemming from the polarities of tradition and modernity, past and present, orthodoxy and radicalism, idealism and opportunism that seem to interest him as a novelist. His novels span nearly half a century—his first novel, *Bau Tliakuranir Hat (The Young Queen's Market)*, appearing in 1883, and the last one, *Char Adhyay (Four Chapters)* in 1934, and cover an important and epoch-making era in Indian history, namely late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Tagore's writings encompass almost the whole range of human experience, man's relation to his Creator, to Nature and to his fellowmen but it is in his novels that he takes up concrete human situations to provide a searching analysis of the position obtaining in Indian society. The values that he cherishes in his poetry—values such as devotion, love and sacrifice—are put to test, as it were, in actual experience conditioned by time and place. If some of his men and women do not stand the test, it is not because of their evil propensities but because they are weak-willed or egotistic. V.S. Naravane explains :

Tagore the novelist, like Tagore the philosopher, recognises that man has in him an Infinite as well as a finite element; and that, nobility, love and calmness are as 'real' as depravity, hatred and tension. He, therefore, creates people who have the same passions, foibles and frailties that we have, but who can surprise us by flashes of profound wisdom or by acts of supreme self-sacrifice.

The novelistic world of Tagore embodies a vision of India caught up in the cross-currents of opposing ideologies, of the questioning of the old or traditional moral sanctions in search of self-fulfillment, the clash between the reformist and revivalist forces, the conflict between the moderate and extremist elements in politics as well as the eternal struggle in the human consciousness between love and sacrifice.

Tagore decried the popular brand of patriotism, based on emotionalism and chauvinism and held that independence is best achieved not by the denunciation of the British

and a violent agitation against them but by the promotion of self- help and strength. A weak India without self-sufficiency and social freedom was not fit to govern itself, and neither talk nor violence, but only sacrifice and service are the true tests of strength. The two novels, *The Home and the World* and *Four Chapters* which are discussed in detail in chapters V and X, embody the above theme though the main interest in both is in the human rather than political situation. Nikhil and, to a certain extent, Bimala in the first novel and the two lovers, Ela and Atin in the second novel face suffering and tragedy by being caught up in the convulsions of political struggles. The novel *Gora* upholds the ideal of the synthesis of races, religions and cultures which Tagore was never tired of proclaiming. Starting as a fanatically orthodox and xenophobic Hindu, Gora moves, egged on by his disillusioning experiences and the final revelation of his true identity, towards the goal of liberal cosmopolitanism and the ideal of India as a centripetal civilization.

The novels, *Binodini*, *The Wreck* and *Chaturanga* relate to some of the pressing social issues which rocked the Bengali Hindu society towards the end of the last century. The first novel dramatizes the struggle of a young, beautiful widow for self-actualization and selfhood in a social system that denies all scope for such attempts. *The Wreck*, in the words of Mulk Raj Anand, is "a model of presentation of the new conflict of values that arose in Indian society through the contrast of the hedonistic idea of marriage as against the old Indian idea of marriage by arrangement." Though Tagore upholds the Indian ideal of marriage, he perceptively records the embarrassments and sufferings that might result from the Hindu society's rigid observance of it. *Chaturanga* explores the moral and spiritual dilemma generated by the counteraction of scientific rationalism on the one hand and the resurgent Hindu religiosity on the other, as projected in the career of Sachis.

The other books of fiction which are generally classified as novellas, namely, *Two Sisters*, *The Garden* and *Farewell My Friend*, are psychological studies without political or social overtones. As pointed out by Niharranjan Ray, with reference to the above novels,

All the characters are immersed in themselves, without any consciousness of the larger world in which they live. Their social context serves only as an inevitable background, not as an integral part. No deeper issues of life are involved except the assertion of one's individual personality through love or because of its absence.

Two Sisters is premised on the dual image of woman as mother and beloved and deals with the tensions created by the triangular relationships of a husband, his devoted wife and the wife's sister who is drawn to the husband. The emotional entanglement is resolved by the younger sister's sacrifice and withdrawal and the novel ends on a happy note. Quite the reverse happens in *The Garden*, where the heroine becomes too possessive of her husband's love and in spite of illness and impending death, cannot countenance another woman's love for him. Drained of her capacity for love and generosity, she inflicts untold misery on herself and others and falls a victim to a violent paroxysm of jealousy which proves fatal. *Farewell, My Friend*, a playful mockery of romanticized love, describes the coming together and parting of two lovers in the Arcadian surroundings of a hill-station but whose idealized love cannot withstand the onset of reality. They go their separate ways, bidding fond farewells to each other in verse.

Though Tagore tackles a wide variety of themes in his novels, his characters are confined to a narrow segment of society, that of the "Bhadralok", the upper middle class. A predominantly urban milieu forms a kind of unchanging setting for all his novels. Secondly, the locale of all the novels is Bengal, which being the radiating centre of the new ideological and cultural configurations, stood for the entire nation itself. "What Bengal thinks today, all India thinks tomorrow" was undoubtedly true of the times of Indian Renaissance and Reformation. It is the upper class Bengali Hindu intellectuals who pioneered the new political, social, cultural, and literary movements in the country, and hence, Tagore's projection of the social scene in Bengal has an all-India significance. Commenting on the representative nature of Tagore's male characters, Mulk Raj Anand writes:

Tagore's young heroes, a whole galaxy of contemporary Indian portraits, from the lovers who have learnt through modern education not to regard women as a mere landscape, the friends Gora and Benoy and Amulya, the young student, devoted unto death, and the tough Europeanized sharepushers and go-getters, Haran, Sandip, Amit Ray and company-representatives of our age, they do not offer much hope; bitter, disillusioned, impetuous, mostly concerned to make romantic gestures, they are only relieved by the fact that Rabindranath shows very skilfully how much more they are sinned against than sinning. . in the lovable and human qualities, which cling even to the most vicious of them, they remain in our memory as the poignant symbols of fighters who fell in the all-embracing manifold struggle of our generation to find a new way of life.

Though Tagore occasionally relies on such creaky narrative plot devices such as chance and coincidence to project his action, his characters have a convincingness about them which may be related to his extraordinary capacity for the realization of authentic experience. The tangled relationships among the characters appear as an index of their faltering perception or inadequate moral sense. The cultural or social impasse that the characters confront affords an opportunity for the testing of human personality and its resourcefulness.

If Tagore's heroes falter and fumble when subjected to the stresses and strains of life, his heroines display a rare assurance and psychological strength. Through a variety of perspectives, Tagore depicts their search for identity or realization of self-fulfillment within the bounds of tradition and society. Commenting on Tagore's outlook on woman in Indian society, Edward Thompson writes: "He would have her remain woman—a centre of love and inspiration without which the world is poverty-stricken. But he has never ceased to attack the injustice and cruelty which regard woman as inferior or unfitted for education or the arts." Thus, while conveying the feelings of tenderness and devotion, traditionally associated with Indian womanhood, he depicts their struggle against discrimination and ill-usage, as can be seen from *Binodini*, *Gora* and *Chitru. ranga*. Whoever be the character, Tagore avoids the stereo-types, whether of society or of consciousness. The characters, sharply individualized, interact with other characters and undergo changes, under the pressure of events and other forces of change operating within the milieu. They are never static and do not remain mere products of artistic control or manipulation.

IX

Coming to the architectonics of Tagore's novels, it can be observed that they suffer from a certain weakness of craftsmanship which results in a kind of diffuseness and looseness, a "flabbiness" of narrative. Though this does not detract from the particular thematic realization to which the thrust of each of his novels is directed, it does show an inadequate appreciation of the relative importance of cause and effect in the fictional rendering of experience. The undue reliance on chance and co- incidence in some of the novels and the contrived endings of some others point towards an impatience on the part of the novelist in working out a structure of ordered episodes. These drawbacks, however, do not greatly diminish the merit of his novels which reveal depositions of design which are new to the novel in India.

Though Tagore may not be regarded as an experimentalist in the modern sense of the term, he does show sufficient awareness of the need for, new fictional techniques. As Bhabani Bhattacharya has noted, "Each novel grows in its own individual mould, different from what has preceded it or comes afterward. Some are more or less traditional in manner, others a total departure." Thus, the use of flashback by Tagore in the structuring of his narrative which Bankim Chandra Chatterji has not attempted points to his experimentalist bias. The employment of multiple points of view (as in *The Home and the World*) and central consciousness' (as in *Chaturanga*) though not with the finesse of Henry James, does invest them with a kind of psychological realism which Bankim's novels lack. The use of narration in the first person, though not invariably successful, does help him in eliminating authorial intervention which is what his predecessor has not been able to accomplish. Another instance of his innovative bias can be seen in his heavy reliance on dialogue to intensify the dramatic effect of his novels. Indeed, several scenes from his novels seem fit for stage representation, needing no adaptation whatsoever. This is not unexpected in a writer who was also a playwright of equal merit. The dialogues in his novels as may be expected, are marked by a dramatic verve and poetic grace besides a naturalness which invests the fictional frames with life.

X

Although Tagore's perception of Indian reality and the contemporary issues is modern in the projection of themes, his craftsmanship does not evidence radical novelistic techniques. However, he remains a pioneer in initiating the psychological novel based on social reality and in bringing out the nuances of change in his major characters through their interaction with circumstance. Though he has not contributed anything strikingly new towards the novelistic technique, his novels mark the transition from the tradition of historical romance which characterized the Indian novel upto his time to the realistic tradition that has set in with him. It is Tagore who ushered in the spirit of social realism and liberal humanism into the Indian novel and it is to him that the modern Indo-Anglian novel owes its moral and humane concern in its projection of contemporary reality.

With the passage of time, the novel in India, whether Indo- Anglian or Vernacular, has acquired a wide spectrum of interests and has tended to project the inner more than the outer landscape. Tagore as a realistic analyst of social relationships has contributed much to this development. His themes are formed out of the matrix of social and emotional life. It is, therefore, not unjustifiable to regard Tagore as a liberating influence since it is through his efforts that the novel has come to pay attention to such important themes as the predicament of the Indian woman, the clash between the orthodox and the progressive, the right consciousness of national heritage, and the conflict of values in a changing life style.

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THE SWADESHI MOVEMENT IN BENGAL: 1905-1908

Sumit Sarkar

Down to July 1905, the partition plan had been opposed through an intensive use of the conventional 'Moderate' methods of press campaigns, numerous meetings and petitions (particularly in Dacca and Mymensingh districts), and big conferences at the Calcutta Town Hall in March 1904 and January 1905 attended by many district delegates. The evident and total failure of such techniques led to a search for new forms—boycott of British goods (first suggested by Krishnakumar Mitra's weekly *Sanjivani* on 13 July 1905, and accepted by the established leaders like Surendranath Banerji after considerable hesitation at the Town Hall meeting of 7 August) and Rabindranath's and Ramendrasunder Trivedi's imaginative appeals for *rakhi-bandhan* and *arandhan*. Wristlets of coloured thread were exchanged on Partition Day (16 October) as symbol of brotherhood, and the hearth kept unlit as a sign of mourning. The British crackdown on student picketers through measures like the Carlyle Circular (published on 22 October) threatening withdrawal of grants, scholarships and affiliation from nationalist dominated institutions led to a movement for boycott of official educational institutions and organization of national schools which received a great fillip from the spectacular donation of Rs one lakh by Subodh Mullik on 9 November. Tensions mounted with further measures of repression (the posting of Gurkhas in Barisal, the *lathi-charge* smashing up the provincial conference there in April 1906, numerous 'Swadeshi' cases against picketers), and soon internal differences cropped up within the movement in Bengal. With some, boycott became the starting-point for the formulation of a whole range of new methods, and the abrogation of the Partition came to be regarded as no more than the 'pettiest and narrowest of all political objects' (Aurobindo Ghosh in April 1907)—a mere stepping-stone in a struggle for '*Swaraj*' or complete independence. With others, like Surendranath, boycott was a last desperate effort to get Partition revoked by pulling at the purse-strings of Manchester. The established Moderate leaders managed to call off the educational boycott by 16 November 1905, and were soon taking advantage of the appointment of Morley with his great liberal reputation as Secretary of State to get back to the safer shores of 'mendicancy'.

Such internal differences evidently had a factional aspect, with individuals or groups more-or-less kept out of nationalist leadership so far (like Motilal Ghosh with his *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, or Bepinchandra Pal, or Aurobindo Ghosh) trying to muscle in on hitherto closed preserves and seeking to break up the 'rings of lawyers' which, Pal complained, had monopolized politics till then in the district towns. Yet to present the whole story in terms of a conflict between 'ins' and 'outs' would be to grossly oversimplify things, and rob the *Swadeshi* era in Bengal of its real interest and significance.

2. Trends

At a theoretical level, three major trends can be distinguished in the political life of Bengal between 1905 and 1908 apart from the well-established Moderate tradition. There was

first what may be termed 'constructive *Swadeshi*'—the rejection of futile and self-demeaning 'mendicant' politics in favour of self-help through *Swadeshi* industries, national schools, and attempts at village improvement and organisation. This found expression through the business ventures of Prafullachandra Roy or Nilratan Sircar, Satischandra Mukherji's journal *Dawn* and his Dawn Society which played a seminal role in the national education movement, and above all in Rabindranath, who in his *Swadeshi Samaj* address (1904) had already sketched out a blue-print for constructive work in villages, through a revival of the traditional Hindu '*samaj*' or community. Aswinikumar Dutt's Swadesh Bandhav Samiti in Baris (Bakargunj) claimed to have settled 523 village disputes through 89 arbitration committees in its first annual report (September 1906), and about a thousand village *samitis* were reported to be functioning in Bengal in a pamphlet dated April 1907. In all this there were clear anticipations of much of the later Gandhian programme of *Swadeshi*, national schools and constructive village-work.

Such a perspective of slow and unostentatious development of what Rabindranath called *atmasakti* (self-strengthening) had little appeal to the excited educated youth of Bengal, who felt drawn much more to the creed of a more political Extremism. Journals like Bepin Pal's *New India*, Aurobindo Ghosh's *Bande Mataram*, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay's *Sandhya* and the *Yugantar* (brought out by a group associated with Barindrakumar Ghosh) from 1906 onwards were calling for a struggle for *Swaraj*. In practice, as later events showed, many of the Extremist leaders would agree to settle for less—Tilak in January 1907, for instance, expressed his willingness to take 'half a loaf rather than no bread', though with the intention 'of getting the whole loaf in good time'. The more fundamental difference was really therefore over methods, and here the classic statement came from Aurobindo in a series of articles in *Bande Mataram* in April 1907, later reprinted as *Doctrine of Passive Resistance*. Ridiculing the ideal of peaceful ashrams and swadeshim and self-help' as inadequate, he visualized a programme of 'organized and relentless boycott' of British goods, officialized education, justice, and executive administration (backed up by the positive development of *swadeshi* industries, national schools, and arbitration courts), and also looked forward to civil disobedience of unjust laws, a 'social boycott' of loyalists, and recourse to armed struggle if British repression went beyond the limits of endurance. The *Sandhya* of 21 November 1906 had chalked out a similar perspective: 'If . . . the chowkidar, the constable, the deputy and the munsiff and the clerk, not to speak of the sepoy, all resign their respective functions, feringhee rule in the country may come to an end in a moment.' Once again we have practically the entire future political programme of Gandhism, minus the dogma of non-violence, and—significantly enough—no tax or no-rent calls, which Aurobindo explicitly ruled out in his April 1907 articles as going against a *zamindar* community in Bengal which was assumed to be basically patriotic.

In practice, Bengal Extremism wasted a lot of energies in purely verbal or literary violence and in-fighting over the Congress organization, though it did contribute (along with others), as we shall see, to building up an impressive chain of district organizations or *samitis* and in providing some novel political leadership to labour unrest. Already by 1907, however, the mass-movement perspective was being challenged from within its own ranks by calls for elite-action terrorism: 'And what is the number of English officials in each district? With a firm resolve you can bring English rule to an end in a single day . . . If we sit idle, and hesitate to rise till the whole population are [sic] goaded to desperation, then we shall continue idle till

the end of time. . . Without blood, O Patriots! will the country awake?' (*Yugantar*, 3 March, 26 August 1907).

Cutting across the debate over political methods or goals was another controversy over cultural ideals, between modernistic and Hindu-revivalist trends. The *Swadeshi* mood in general was closely associated with attempts to combine politics with religious revivalism, which was repeatedly used as a morale-booster for activists and a principal instrument of mass contact. Thus Surendranath claimed to have been the first to use the method of *Swadeshi* vows in temples, national education plans often had a strong revivalist content, boycott was sought to be enforced through traditional caste sanctions, Extremist leaders insisted in May 1906 on a Shivaji *utsava* complete with image-worship; and radical politics and aggressive Hinduism often got inextricably combined in the pages of *Bande Mataram*, *Sandhya* or *Yugantar*. Yet there were dissidents in every group. Brahmo-edited journals like *Sanjivani* or *Prabasi* were critical of obscurantism, and bluntly declared that 'the patriotism which glorifies our past as ideal and beyond improvement and which rejects the needs for further progress is a disease' (Sibnath Sastri in *Prabasi*, Jaistha 1313/1906). Krishnakumar Mitra's Anti-Circular Society boycotted the Shivaji *utsava* out of consideration for its 'numerous Mahomedan workers and sympathisers', and even some revolutionary terrorists like Hemchandra Kanungo later bitterly denounced the prevalent religiosity. Perhaps most interesting of all is the evolution of Rabindranath—considerably swayed by revivalism for some years, but then breaking away sharply in mid-1907 under the impact of communal riots and vividly expressing the tensions and ambiguities of the age through two of his finest novels, *Gora* (1907-09) and *Ghare-Baire* (1914).

The anticipations of Gandhian constructive work and mass *satyagraha* proved extremely shortlived, and by the end of 1908 Bengal politics was once again confined to the opposite, but not unrelated, poles of Moderate 'mendicancy' and individual 'terrorism'. The central historical problem of the period is why this became so—since an explanation in terms of the external factor of British repression alone is hardly sufficient. Despite much talk in nationalist circles about police 'atrocities' and *Swadeshi* 'martyrs', the total number of prosecutions directed against the open movement down to 1909 was only 10 in Bengal and 105 in the new province, the accused getting sentences from two weeks to a year. The only two cases of firing in this period had as their targets Jamalpur rail workers on strike (August 1906) and Muslim rioters in Sherpur (September 1907), not *Swadeshi* demonstrators. What is needed therefore is a closer look at the strength and internal limitations of the principal components of the 1905-08 movement: boycott and *Swadeshi*, national education, labour unions, *samitis* and mass contact methods.

3. Boycott and Swadeshi

The history of boycott and *Swadeshi* in Bengal vividly illustrates the limits of an intelligentsia movement with broadly bourgeois aspirations but without as yet real bourgeois support. Boycott did achieve some initial success—thus the Calcutta Collector of Customs in September 1906 noted a 22% fall in the quantity of imported cotton piece goods, 44% in cotton twist and yarn, 11% in salt, 55% in cigarettes and 68% in boots and shoes in the previous month as compared to August 1905. The decline in Manchester cloth sales had a lot

to do with a quarrel over trade terms between Calcutta Marwari dealers and British manufactures, resulting in a spectacular drop in 'Lucky Day' contracts for the following year in October 1905 from 32,000 packages to only 2500. Once this dispute was settled, however, the Marwaris went back to their compradore business, while in the districts merchants of the Shaha community often became the principal targets of social boycott due to their refusal to subordinate profits to patriotism. Bombay mill-owners on their part seized the opportunity to hike up prices, despite numerous appeals from Bengal. Bombay could not yet manufacture the finer types of yarn and cloth being imported from Manchester, and therefore was not too enthusiastic about boycott. It is significant also that the sharpest decline was in commodities like shoes and cigarettes, where, as the Collector of Customs pointed out, the demand was mainly from 'Indian gentlemen of the middle class, such as clerks, pleaders etc. . .'. (Government of India, Home Public B. October 1906, n. 13).

The *Swadeshi* mood did bring about a significant revival in handloom, silk-weaving, and some other traditional artisan crafts—a point emphasized by two official industrial surveys in 1908. There was also a related, near-Gandhian, intellectual trend glorifying handicrafts as the Indian or Oriental way to avoid the evils of largescale industry. Satischandra Mukherji in 1900, for instance, quoted Engels to prove the horrors of industrial revolution, and wanted big factories only where absolutely indispensable—preferring wherever possible smallscale 'individual family organization' explicitly run on a caste basis. Such theoretical departures (often associated with revivalism) from Moderate economics did not prevent, however, a number of attempts to promote modern industries. An association had been set up in March 1904 by Jogendrachandra Ghosh to raise funds for sending students abroad (usually to Japan) to get technical training. The Banga Lakshmi Cotton Mills was launched with much fanfare in August 1906 with equipment bought from an existing, Serampore plant, and there were some fairly successful ventures in porcelain (the Calcutta Pottery Works of 1906), chrome tanning, soap, matches and cigarettes. The patrons and entrepreneurs included a few big *zamindars* (like Manindra Nandi of Kasimbazar) but otherwise came mainly from the professional intelligentsia. Lack of capital thus became the crucial limiting factor, as the established Indian business community, in the words of a leading Calcutta merchant as quoted in an official report, felt 'that it is much easier to make money by an agency in imported goods than by investment in industrial enterprise'. One *Swadeshi* pamphleteer, Kalisankar Sukul in 1906, did argue that efforts should be concentrated first on distribution channels rather than starting one or two mills, slowly building up through trade, a new type of business class since the old was essentially unpatriotic—but his views found few takers. *Swadeshi* thus could never seriously threaten the British stranglehold over the crucial sectors of Bengal's economy.

4. National Education

As in other field, a considerable variety may be noticed within the national education efforts in *Swadeshi* Bengal, ranging from pleas for more technical training, through advocacy of the vernacular medium (urged most powerfully by Rabindranath), to Tagore's Santiniketan and Satis Mukherji's somewhat eclectic Dawn Society plans to combine the traditional and the modern in a scheme for 'higher culture' for selected youth. National education with its negligible job prospects failed to attract, however, the bulk of the student community. What survived after a couple of years was the Bengal National College (planned initially as a

parallel university under the National Council of Education set up in March 1906, but quite falling to get any colleges affiliated to it), a Bengal Technical Institute set up by a breakaway group with closer Moderate links, and perhaps potentially the most significant—about a dozen national schools in West Bengal, and Bihar and a considerably larger number in East Bengal districts. It was the latter development which for a brief while alarmed the authorities—the attempt ‘to extend these schools to the villages and get hold of primary education’ (*Home Political A*, March 1909, p. 10-11) involving schools in Mymensingh, Faridpur and Bakarganj which occasionally had large numbers of Muslim and low-caste Namasudra pupils. The Calcutta—based National council, however, largely ignored such district or village schools (it was spending only Rs 12,000 on them out of a total budget of Rs. 125,000 in 1908) and they started in general decline of mass-oriented movements. What survived in the end in East Bengali were certain schools which became virtually recruiting centres for revolutionaries, of which Sonarang National school near Dacca was the most famous.

5. Samitis

The sudden emergence of the *samitis* or ‘national volunteer’ movement was one of the major achievement of the *Swadeshi* age. Hindsight has too often led to an equation of such organization with incipient terrorist societies. Actually, down to the summer of 1908, most *samitis* were quite open bodies engaged in a variety of activities: physical and moral training of members, social work during famines, epidemics or religious festivals, preaching the *Swadeshi* message through multifarious forms, organizing craft, schools, arbitration courts and village societies, and implementing the techniques of passive resistance. Apart from Calcutta, with 19 *samitis* reported by the police in 1907, the main strength of the movement was in East Bengal. This included a central bloc consisting of Bakarganj, Faridpur, Dacca and Mymensingh districts (where originated the five principal *samitis* which were to be banned in January, 1909—Swadesh Bandhav, Brati, Dacca Anushilan, Suhrid, Sadhana), strong organizations in Rangpur, Tippera, Sylhet and the part of the old province lying to the east of the Hooghly river, and some societies in all districts except Sibsagar, Goalpara and Garo hills. A police report of June 1907 gave an estimate of 8485 volunteers for East Bengal; Bakarganj and Dacca topped the list with more than 2600 each. As in other things, there was a lot of variety within the *samiti* movement. Thus the Calcutta—based Anti Circular Society stood out due to its secularism (it was the only *samiti* with important Muslim associates, like Liakat Husain Abul Hossain, Dedar Bux, and Abdul Gafur). The Barisal Swadesh Bandhav did acquire something like a genuine mass base—175 village branches were reported in 1909, and through sustained humanitarian work (as during a near—famine in 1906) its leader Aswinikumar Dutt acquired remarkable popularity among the peasants of his district, Muslims as well as Hindu. The Dacca Anushilan founded by Pulin Das in sharp contrast, concentrated from the beginning on secret training of cadres through physical culture and a paraphernalia of initiation vows steeped in Hinduism—things conspicuously all but absent in the much looser but mass-oriented structure of Swadesh Bandhav Still, down to 1908 efforts at mass contact formed the principal staple of the activities of the bulk of the *samitis*, and this again took on a variety of, at times, extremely imaginative forms: not only a multitude of journals, pamphlets and speech (all increasingly in the vernacular) but a flood of patriotic song plays and use of folk media like *jatras* (particularly those of Mukunda Das in Bakarganj), the organization of festivals, at the cultivation of a traditionalist religious idiom. Increasingly Hinduism was

sought to be used as the principal bridge to the masses, appealing both to the imagination as well as to fear (e.g. the use of caste sanctions in the social boycott of loyalists).

Yet during 1908-09, in face of the very first round of repression, the open *samiti* either disappeared (as with the *Swadeshi Bandhav*), or became a terroristic secret society, the *Dacca* model driving out the *Barisal*. Even *Aswinikumar Dutta's* organization had not really developed a peasant, membership (as distinct from some ill-comprehending attendance at meetings and respect for a benevolent *babu*)—the village societies invariably consisted 'of the *bhadralok* of the village', and it is significant that at *Sarupkhati* (in *Bakarguni* district), for instance, 'nearly half the volunteers (were) . . . persons with a tenure-holding interest in the land'. (*Home Political Deposit*, October 1907 n. 19) An ominously large number of *Swadeshi* cases involved disputes between *zamindari* officials and Muslim vendors, landlord, closing, of village markets became a principle boycott often took the form of pressurizing of tenants or sharecroppers by *zamindars* or tenure-holders. *Rabindranath's Ghare-Baire* would later vividly portray the Oppressive *zamindar* turned *Swadeshi* hero in *Harish Kundu*, and that was not sheer invention is indicated by a November 1907 case in *Tangail* (*Mymensingh* district) where a Muslim sharecropper charged his Hindu landlord of having burnt his *Manchester* cloth in order to terrorize him into relinquishing his lease.

6. Hindu-Muslim Relations

The situation thus was almost tailor-made for British divide-and-rule methods. In October 1907, *Swadeshi* sympathizers in north *Calcutta* found themselves being beaten up by police backed up by some elements drawn from the urban poor, described repeatedly in the non-official enquiry report on the disturbances as 'ruffians and low class people, such as *dhangars*, *mehters*, *sweepers* etc'. But the really serious development was the rapid growth of Muslim separatism. Despite eloquent pleas for communal unity, some memorable scenes of fraternalization (like the 10,000-strong joint student procession in *Calcutta* on 23 September 1905), and the presence of an extremely active and sincere group of *Swadeshi* Muslim agitators (men like *Ghaznavi*, *Rasul*, *Din Mahomed*, *Dedar Bux*, *Moniruzzaman*, *Ismail Hassain Siraji*, *Abul Husain*, *Abdul Gafur*, and *Liakat Husain*—some of whom figured in the very first list of proposed prosecutions for sedition in May 1907), the British propaganda that the new province would mean more jobs for Muslims did achieve considerable success in swaying upper and middle class Muslims against the *Swadeshi* movement. The elite-politics of the *Salimulla* group and the *Muslim League* (founded at *Dacca* in October 1906) will be considered later; much more relevant in the present context is the rash of communal riots in *East Bengal*: *Iswargunj* in *Mymensingh* district in May 1906, *Comilla* (March 1907), *Jamalpur*, *Dewangunj* and *Bakshigunj*, all again in *Mymensingh*, in April-May 1907. 'Ordinary Muhammadans of the lower class in the bazaar' (*Home Public A*, May 1907, n. 163) were prominent in the riot in *Comilla* town, while a strong agrarian note pervaded the *Mymensingh* disturbances. The targets were Hindu *zamindars* and *mahajans*, some of whom had recently started levying an *Iswar britti* for maintaining Hindu images. Debt-bonds were torn at many places, and at times the riots took on the colour of a general 'plunder of the rich by the poor' with even Hindu cultivators joining in at places (*Home Political A*, July 1907, n. 16). *Maulvis* are said to have spread rumours that the British were handing over charge to *Nawab Salimulla* of *Dacca*, who was painted in the rather unlikely colours of a messiah in the

communal leaflet *Nawab Sahaber Subichar*. Such religious leaders often had connections with emerging rich peasant-elements made relatively prosperous by jute, and Muslim propaganda literature like the *Red Pamphlet* (1907) or the later *Krishakbandhu* (1910) visualized a kind of *kulak* or capitalist farmer development side by side with identifying the *zamindar-mahajan* exploiter with the Hindu.

In a series of remarkably perceptive articles written in 1907-08, as well as in his presidential address to the Pabna provincial conference (February 1908), Rabindranath pointed out that simply blaming the British for the riots was quite an inadequate response. 'Satan cannot enter till he finds a flaw', and the crucial problem was that 'a great ocean separates as educated few from millions in our country'. Till that gulf was bridged, no short-cuts like verbal extremism or terrorist action were likely to succeed. Tagore's alternative, however—patient unostentatious constructive work in villages in which he hoped *zamindars* would take the lead in a paternalistic fashion (as he was trying to do himself in his own estates)—had little appeal to militant youth increasingly provoked by British repression, nor did he really have any concrete social or economic programme of mass mobilization. His, therefore, was increasingly a voice crying in the wilderness: as recognized implicitly in *Ghare-Baire*, whose noble but quite ineffective and isolated hero Nihilesh stands in significant contrast to the optimistic ending of his earlier novel *Gora*.

To the vast majority of nationalists, the Muslim rioters were no more than hired agents of the British, the equivalent, as the *Bande Mataram* put it, of the Russian counter-revolutionary Black Hundreds. Volunteer organization in fact was greatly stimulated by the 1907 riots, and Extremist propaganda took on aggressive Hindu colours and simultaneously veered towards terrorism—an almost inevitable development, as 'revolution' with the vast masses inert or hostile could mean in practice only action by an elite.

7. The shift of Terrorism

The first revolutionary groups had been started round about 1902 in Midnapur (by Jnanendranath Basu) and Calcutta (the Anushilan Samiti, founded by Promotha Mitter and Aurobindo's emissaries from Baroda, Jatindranath Banerji and Barindrakuniar Ghosh), but their activities had been confined initially to physical and moral training of members and were not particularly significant till 1907 or 1908. An inner circle within the Calcutta Anushilan under Barindrakumar Ghosh and Bhupendranath Dutta (with the behind-the-scenes advice of Aurobindo) started the *Yugantar* weekly in April 1906 and attempted one or two abortive 'actions' in the summer of the same year (like a plan to kill the very unpopular East Bengal Lt. Governor Fuller which misfired). Hemchandra Kanungo, probably the most remarkable figure among this first revolutionary generation, then went abroad to get military (and some political) training, which he ultimately obtained from a Russian emigre in Paris. After Kanungo's return in January 1908, a combined religious school and bomb factory was set up at a garden house in the Mainiktala suburb of Calcutta. Gross carelessness on the part of the leadership (and particularly of Barindrakumar Ghose) however, led to the arrest of the whole group including Aurobindo within hours of the Kennedy murders (30 April 1908), by Kshudiram Basu and Prafulla Chaki—the target, a particularly sadistic white magistrate named Kingsford, escaping unscathed. Terrorism of a more efficient variety was meanwhile developing in East Bengal,

spearheaded by the much more tightly organized Dacca Anushilan of Pulin Das, with the Barrah dacoity (2 June 1908) as its first major venture.

Apart from a wealth of patriotic songs and other considerable cultural achievements (among which may be mentioned a new interest in regional and local history and folk tradition, the scientific work of J.C. Bose and P.C. Ray and the Calcutta school of painting founded by Abanindranath Tagore), revolutionary terrorism was to constitute in the end the most substantial legacy of *Swadeshi* Bengal, casting a spell on the mind of radical educated youth for at least for generation or more. The 'revolutionary' movement took the forms of assassination of oppressive officials or traitors, *Swadeshi* dacoities to raise funds, or at best military conspiracies with expectations of help from foreign enemies of Britain. It never, despite occasional subjective aspirations, rose the level of urban mass uprisings or guerrilla bases in the countryside. The term 'terrorism' hence remains not inappropriate.

Elite 'revolution' did make substantial contribution to the national struggle. The British were often badly frightened, rare examples were set to death-defying heroism in the cause of complete independence (a goal which the congress as a whole would formally accept only in 1930) and world-wide contacts were sought in quest for shelter and arms, leading, as we shall see, to important ideological consequences. Hemchandra Kanungo, to cite the earliest examples, came back from Paris as an atheist with some interest in Marxism. Terrorist heroism evoked tremendous admiration from very wide circles of educated Indians, and sometimes from others, too—a street-beggar's lament for Khudiram, for instance, could still be heard in Bengal decades after his execution. Yet British administration was never in serious danger of collapsing, and the admiration felt was usually no more than a vicarious satisfaction at the self-sacrifice of others. The intense religiosity of most of the early secret societies (a note which however was to partly disappear over time) help to keep Muslim aloof or hostile. The emphasis on religion had other negative aspects, too, as Hemchandra later pointed out. The much-quoted *Gita* doctrine of *Nishkama Karma* stimulated a rather quixotic heroism, a cult of martyrdom for its own sake in place of effective programmes: 'The Mother asks us for no schemes, no plans, no method. She herself will prove the schemes, the plans, the methods...' (Aurobindo in April 1908). And religion could also become a royal road for an honourable retreat, as when Aurobindo departed for Pondicherry, or Jatindranath Bandopadhyay ended his days as a Ramakrishna Mission swamiji.

Above all, elite action postponed efforts to draw the masses into active political struggle, which in turn would have involved conscious efforts to link up national with socio-economics issues through more radical programmes. The social limitation of Bengal revolutionary terrorism remain obvious: in a 1918 official list of 186 killed or convicted revolutionaries, no less than 165 came from the upper castes, Barhman, Kayastha, and Vaidya.

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High Ranges of Fiction

Hiren Mukherjee

The Home and the World (1914-15 English edition, 1919) was written in scintillating style, and though *Gora* has been more popular, has a nearly equal importance. The story is told through the mouth of three characters, almost protagonists — Nikhil, the husband, Bimala, the wife, and Sandip, a friend of the family and an ambitious politician who comes to stay with them. The husband soon discovers that his wife had not come so much into his life as into his home, that he had been trying to fashion her to his mould and she had been, almost insensibly, resisting it. Bimala also realised that with Sandip in the picture and unfolding his notions she had been drifting away from her husband with whom she had thought her links were automatically unbreakable. Husband and wife could come closer to each other only after a strenuous ordeal and Sandip moved out of their lives as abruptly as he had entered. This is the theme of a woman emerging from the home into the world, but it has a much larger connotation, that of India herself, emerging into a restless world and yet making sure of her home. Thus Tagore injects into a purely social theme the drama of the socio-political crisis of his time. Nikhil and Sandip are patriots, both of them, but with a difference. Sandip is fiery, impatient of scruple if it hinders attainment of the objective, too ready to meet force with force, burning with hate for the foreigner and a blind love for his country. Nikhil refuses what is to him the hypnosis of patriotism, looks on means to be as important as ends, thinks of the use of force as a confession of an inner weakness. For a time, naturally, Bimala is carried away by Sandip's fiery fervour, till finally she understands that Nikhil's was inherently the stronger position.

The Home and the World is thus something like an allegorical novel, where Bimala represents India, Sandip with his aggressive, western-style nationalism pulling her with a fierce charm in one direction, while Nikhil, more sedately and with a peculiar calm, trying to recall to her whatever was best in her own tradition. Tagore had misgivings about western nationalism which he thought was nearly synonymous with chauvinism; this was not entirely fair nor accurate but that was the stress in Tagore's mind. Always with Tagore, it was the deep calling unto the deep whenever the traditions of India were concerned. Characteristically, and not without truth, he makes even Sandip acknowledge their uncanny power. 'I was born in India, and the poison of its spirituality runs in my blood. However loudly I may proclaim the madness of walking in the path of self-abnegation, I cannot avoid it altogether.' In the contest, as Tagore portrays it, Nikhil wins and Bimala goes back to him — a symbolic expression of the poet's vision of what India's path of development should be.

In a different vein Tagore wrote, about 1928, *Shesher Kavita* (in English, Farewell, my Friend), notable for its polished and almost too carefully embellished prose, saved from the pitfalls of mere adornment by its pungent satire and in the dialogue a flowing, if rather artificial-seeming, wit. A young man, intelligent but rather pretentious, meets in a hill station a girl whose passion was learning, and for a brief while there is a mutual infatuation but the return of their early flames calls them to order. Flimsy as a romance, it remains memorable for some really fine writing and, interpolated in it, winsomely whimsical verse More substantial

and important is *Jogajog* ('Link on Link') which was written in 1929, a novel which illustrated for the first time in Tagore's works the growing contradiction between the old feudal-landlord family set-up and the dissonances brought into it by successful business. This contradiction was not worked out in terms of the novel, but there is enough in it to suggest that if Tagore had the time to devote himself to, fiction writing he could have made out of this theme something of lasting significance. As it happened, except for the character of Kumudini, he did not give us much to cherish. The elegance of the writing and an easy dignity, however, lends to this novel a certain special attraction.

Chaturanga (1916), *Char Adhyaya* (19M), *Dui Bone* (1933), *Malancha* (1934) are the other notable novels from his pen, and of them *Chaturanga* is the most suggestive and powerful, while *Char Adhyaya* ('Four Chapters') has provoked serious and adverse criticism. In this phase of his writing the woman, like the wonderful Damini in *Chaturanga*, as an individual in her own right, has stepped strongly in. Somewhat strangely, however, the situations and their context seem cramped and the characters, howsoever powerful the clash of their ideas and emotions, live and move almost in a social vacuum. This was rather astonishing, for in his poetry he had evolved differently, but perhaps being 'plagued', as great writers are bound to be, 'by the elusive nature of truth', he was attempting, even in fiction, a sort of compressed objectivity and overshot the mark. What made him, in the 'thirties, recall the terrorist chapter in our national movement and pillory it in a manner that hardly became the maker of *Gora* and even of the *Home and the World*, remains also a question to which no satisfying answer can be given. There must perhaps be dark fastnesses in a great and brooding mind that one cannot unravel.

The poet's compassion and power had brought a new quality into Bengali fiction and his women shone in a light that had not been seen before. Two unique stories, *Strir Patra* ('Letters of a Wife') and 'Laboratory' (1940), the latter, one of the last things he wrote in this line, attest the phenomenon. When in the name of society and its claim every injustice to the personality of woman was laughed away or sedately covered up, he showed how the glow-worm in the woman turned in the last, and in *Strir Patra*, Mrinal writes to her husband and informs him caustically that she has served herself away from 'the shelter of his feet'. His Women leave the unhonoured custody of indifferent husbands with an assurance that illumines a gloomy corner of Bengali life. This could be done superbly, in the comparative freedom of the short story, where the area is limited and the writer does not have to throw his net so wide that unless he carefully ties up to loose ends he gets into a quandary. What even Tagore could not do with complete succession the form of the novel he did with grace and strength in the sphere of short stories which his essentially lyric genius found more congenial to itself.

Rabindranath was born a year after Chekov and eleven years after Guy de Maupassant; a much older man was Edgar Allan Poe, and these four, as Narayan Gangopadhyay, a notable Bengali writer, has recently pointed out, were the master of the short story form in its classic period. All four began writing their stories for periodicals, and Tagore contributed his to the weekly *Hitavadi* to start with and then to monthlies like *Sadhana* and *Sabujpatra*, names to conjure with in Bengali publishing. From 1891 to 1901 he was writing in profusion it was the time when he came to know intimately the sights and sounds of riverine Bengal and people at various levels of life. He was not above a certain sentimentality; 'no one', he wrote in 1886,

'has Yet adequately told the life-story of the patient, submissive, family-loving home-clinging, eternally-exploited Bengali as he dwells in his secluded corner of this tremendously busy world.' But except rarely, the pitfalls of sentimentality were overcome and he gave us gems of tales, of which quite a number luckily, are available in English translation. In different ways but always like a master, Rabindranath has celebrated in his stories the pleasure and pain of mortality, he has opened to view new areas of freedom, melancholy, charm and grace, and in necessarily rare flashes has made the secret life visible. There is hardly any among his numerous stories that is trite and bereft entirely of significance; he was too honest an artist to be like so many talented Bengali writers who are quite often shallow and stylistically careless. Let it be stressed that compared to the novel the aesthetic responsibility is limited in the case of the short story. Even so, the calibre of a writer is seen in his best work — and there are short stories by Tagore which shine out like stars in the night.

If Rabindranath had written only one story as impeccable as *Nashtaneerh* (The Damaged Nest'), he would have kept a sure place among the masters. Love comes into the life of a young married girl, almost unawares and yet with sheer compulsion, and the bonds of normal living are somewhat suddenly snapped; the writer gives no hint of a solution, because in the peculiar context of Bengali society there was none, but that pain must go on smouldering in several hearts. It was a daring theme, but its treatment is without a blemish — the telling of the story a rare aesthetic catharsis. Or one might take the even better known 'Kabuliwala', which any of the great masters would love to have written, the theme, simple and moving, of love for the child which makes the whole world kin. There is the story of the dumb little girl 'Shubha' who merges, in the poet's hands, with the landscape about her. A picture of the lonely child at moon has beauty that haunts: 'In the deep mid-moon, when the boatmen and fisherfolk had gone to their food, when the villagers slept and the birds were still, when the ferry boats were idle when the great busy world paused in its toil and became a lonely, awful giant, then beneath the vast, impressive heavens there were only dumb nature and a dumb girl, sitting very silent — one under the spreading sunlight and the other where a small tree cast its shadow.' There were stories in romantic vein, but never uncontrolled as in 'Hungry Stones', eerie and powerful, the verbal magic being somewhat difficult to render in English. Stark, simple figures walk out of the depths of the rural Bengal, and in 'Shasti' (Punishment) or Mahamaya' leave their impress on literature. And there are stories shaping them from out of the stress and strain of patriotic emotion sometimes tinged with the laughter that flitted so near his high seriousness. In the most prolific phase of his story writing he was almost always drawing upon the resources of Bengal's countryside, drinking in the hospitality its very soil gave his artist soul, which explains the regret he expressed later that his fast-moving city pen could no longer recapture the soothing beauty and untouched wealth he had once so intimately known.

It was in the later phase that he wrote stories and sketches like *Strir Patra* ('Letters of a Wife') referred to already, and powerful evocations of womanhood in 'Number One' and 'Laboratory'. Like the novel 'Four Chapters' (1934) which, somewhat surprisingly, shows him portraying a political theme with a bitter sense of disillusion and also a kind of partisan prejudice unworthy of him, he wrote also a couple (or so) of short stories of a similar ilk. They do not fit in with the total body of his work — a heap of treasure, indeed, that no touch of derogation can sully.

Man's fate was always the concern of this great writer and humanist. He was always setting forth in search of ever newer values of life wherever he could find them. His deeply lyric temper prevented him being able to write the very highest type of novel, but what he did write was on any computation remarkable, and in the more manageable sphere of the short story his genius rejoiced and sometimes soared to heights rarely reached in any literature.

From : *Rabindranath Tagore*, PPH, N.D., 1961, pp.84-89

THE HOME AND THE WORLD

K. S. Iyenger

Love comes into conflict—more narrowly, more fiercely—with politics and this is the theme of *The Home and the World* (*Ghare Bhaire* 1916) and *Four Chapters* (*Char Adhyay*, 1934). In the former, set in the revolutionary Bengal of 1905, rent with the battle-cries of 'Swadeshi' and 'Bandemataram', there are but three principal characters—husband (Nikhil), wife (Bimal), and the 'third', the friend Sandip—whose separate autobiographical narratives intertwine to make the novel. Bimal, who has lived the sheltered life of a Hindu wife, suddenly hears (or is made to hear) the call of the outside world. She is thus caught between the pull of the 'home' and the pull of the 'world'—of husband, who symbolises peace, stability, security, and of the friend, who seems to promise excitement and adventure, and point towards realms of infinite possibility—and henceforth there is no quiet for her. Suddenly the 'call' comes from outside—it may be a Krishna calling out the Gopis, it may be Christ calling out the 'fisher' (of men), or it may be merely a calculating politician calling men out hoping to make adroit use of them for his own purposes. Nikhil is what is best in traditional India, to him the *end* does *not* justify the means; Sandip is typical of the new world that would like to fashion itself in the image of the West, and to him the end does justify the means. In the opening decade of the present century the issue between Moderatism and Extremism, between the cult of humanism and the cult of the bomb, was fought all over the country, and with particular acerbity in Bengal; and *The Home and the World* is an artistic study of the impact of these forces on everyday life in an obscure Zemindari in Bengal. Of the three principal characters, neither Nikhil nor Sandip changes much in the course of the novel; it is Bimal alone that changes under the stress of trial and error and failure. If Nikhil's is the *sattwik* nature, silent, long-suffering, reconciling, and Sandip's is the *rajasik* nature, voluble, impetuous, violent, then Bimal's is—to start with—the *tamasik* nature. She has to work out her salvation in diligence, through tribulation and experimentation and suffering and disaster; she has to go through fire and brimstone before she can see the difference between gold and tinsel—before she can see that the *sattwik* Nikhil has more strength and courage to face a crisis than the *rajasik* Sandip, who takes to heels the moment difficulties start. There are also the subsidiary characters. Nikhil's teacher who connotes the strength of traditional wisdom, the Bara Rani who signifies the obstinacy of tradition, and the boy Amulya who is verify the burning brazier that is youthful idealism—a moth attracted by the flame and destroyed by it. The central issue, of course, is between God and Caesar, the ineffable realm of absolute values and the limited Nation that is the field of politics. Nikhil rightly says:

I am willing to serve my country; but my worship I reserve for Right which is far greater than my country. To worship my country as a god is to bring a curse upon it.

(p.26)

Again:

The day that we seek the good of the country along the path of righteousness, He who is greater than our country will grant us true fruition.

(p.26)

Nationalism alone is not enough; patriotism is not in itself enough either. Tagore saw this very clearly during the 'Partition of Bengal' agitation, although he was himself deeply stirred by the march of events. If bureaucratic tyranny roused him, the tyranny of fanaticism—be it religious or political—moved him no less, and he raised his voice boldly against it. For Bimala (and for India too in so far as she is symbolised in Bimala) it is a double education, the moving towards the vortex that is the Sandip brand of revolutionary action and the return to the old safe moorings, though now enriched and chastened by the experience of the 'world'. An alternative title to the novel could be, 'The Education of Bimala', and the point of the story has been well brought out by Hiren Mukerjee:

"Husband and Wife could come closer to each other only after a strenuous ordeal and Sandip moved out of their lives as abruptly as he had entered. This is the theme of a woman emerging from the home into the world, but it has a much larger connotation, that of India herself, emerging into a restless world and yet making sure of her home".

There are 12 chapters in the novel, divided into 25 autobiographical narratives out of which 10 are Bimala's, 8 Nlikhil's, and 5 Sandip's—and to Bimala also is given the first as well as the concluding piece. The narratives convey a sense of zig-zag motion but this merely adds to the piquancy of the developing action. After we have been prepared by Bimala's story in the opening chapter, things begin to happen in the following chapters. Already, in the second chapter, the first moves are made by Sandip and Bimala, Bimala is crowned 'Queen Bee' by Sandip, and Nikhil's master warns him about the dangers inherent in the situation. Presently, Sandip makes further moves, his photo nestles close to Nikhil's in Bimala's room, the consciousness of sex comes rather into the open in Sandip's relations with Bimala, and the Bara Rani begins to make her insinuations. "The way of retreat—is absolutely closed for both of us", is the note that Sandip makes now, and adds, rather ominously: "We shall despoil each other: get to hate each other: but never more be free."

There is soon a linking up between the tension within the 'Home' and the strife in the 'World' outside. Young hotheads try to persuade Nikhil to take an active (that is, a violent) part in the Swadeshi campaign, but of course they fail. Sandip's movement to 'burn foreign cloth' gathers strength, and Nikhil is more and more embarrassed. For Sandip, all is fair in love and political warfare; it is right "to dilute ten per cent of the truth with ninety per cent of untruth", and the 'basic fact' is that man's goal is not truth but success." Nikhil no doubt feels strongly that "to tyrannise for the country is to tyrannise over the country" but this view is anathema to the revolutionaries. Having already degraded Queen Bee the visible symbol of 'Mother India' to a woman of glamorous sex appeal, Sandip now degrades her still further by making demands for money, ostensibly for the Cause. With terrible precipience the Bara Rani calls the Chota Rani (Bimala) the 'Rubber Queen'. Nikhil has some vague understanding of Bimala's perplexities but still decides to set her free to do as she likes: "Whatever I may or may not have been to you, I refuse to be your fetters." She is thus left at last entirely to her own devices.

Things happen now in quick succession. Bimala takes the keys from her husband's pockets and steals twenty rolls of gold:

I had robbed my house

mine, my country also was estranged from me. Had I died begging for my country, even successfully, that would have been worship,—acceptable to the gods. But theft is ever worship ...

(p.193)

The moment I had stolen my husband's money and paid it to Sandip, the music that was in our relations stopped.

(p.211)

She also sees how the poison of Sandip is ruining idealistic boys like Amulya and perverting them:

Let those who are snake-charmers play with snakes ... But these boys are so innocent, all the world is ready with its blessing to protect them. They play with a snake not knowing its nature.

(pp.207-8)

This is the beginning of Bimala's cure. And yet she has gone too far to be able to redeem everything. One mistake leads to another, Amulya's very idealism and romantic adoration of Bimala complicate matters, there are thefts and restorations, moves and counter-moves. Only, as the hours pass, Sandip becomes more and more deflated. Bimala records:

Sandip, the wielder of magic spells, is reduced to utter speechlessness, whenever his spell refuses to work. From a King he fell to the level of a boor. Oh, the joy of witnessing his weakness. His snake coils with which he used to surround me, are exhausted,—I am free

(p.239).

A reconciliation becomes possible between the repentant wife and the forgiving husband, but the earlier folly and the cumulative sins of the 'home' and the 'world' demand their sacrifice. On a report that the mob is looting a fellow—zemindar's house and molesting the women, Nikhil gallops on horseback to the scene of the crimes, "with not a weapon in his hands." A little later he is brought back in a palanquin, seriously wounded in the head. And Amulya is 'done for', with a bullet in his heart. Bimala has learnt her lesson, but at what a price!

From : *Rabindranath Tagore: A Critical Introduction*, Sterling, N.D., 1965, pp. 89-93

The Home and The World: Parameters of Self-Emancipation

G.V. Raj

Set against the stormy days of the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1903-08), *The Home and the World* unfolds the trials and tribulations of a home, caught up in the convulsions of a political struggle, with profound implications for the individual and the nation alike. The action of the novel is predicated on two movements—one, an inward movement towards the projection of the home as a world in miniature and the other, an outward movement towards the perspectivization of the world as a larger home, a greater home as it were. The novel does not, however, as the title might imply, engage itself with any metaphysical reflection about the nature of their relationship but only seeks to define the inter-relatedness between the home and the world, between family life and life outside with a view to emphasizing the dangers of the outside world to immature and impetuous minds. Failure to appreciate this has led even such a perceptive writer about India as E.M. Forster to comment in a review of the novel that “He (Tagore) meant the wife to be seduced by the world, which is, with all its sins, a tremendous lover; she is actually seduced by a West Kensington Babu...” and to underrate the novel as “a boarding-house flirtation that masks itself in mystic or patriotic talk.” Forster’s flawed perception of the Indian society in the turbulent Swadeshi Movement days makes him interpret Tagore on the superficial plane and lose sight of the dialectical interplay of the essential values symbolized in *The Home and the World* under the stress of the upheaval.

The problems raised by the novel are, in fact, of profound significance: the meaning of true patriotism, the correlation of ends and means in any struggle for human emancipation, the pulls and counter-pulls of home and the world in women’s consciousness and the perils inherent in her attempts at apprehending the truth of her very being. While examining these issues as relevant to the context of the plot, Tagore provides a persuasive argument in favour of the essential human values of love, loyalty, and truth in the private as well as the public sphere of contemporary Indian life. It is through the acceptance of the home and the world not as mutually exclusive but as complementary “grounds of being” that one possibly can achieve a unity of spirit which is at once creative and meaningful. It is through a reconciliation of home with the world with their symbolic connotations that one could hope for self-fulfilment. Love and loyalty which sustain the home are not incompatible with love and loyalty to the country. There is no need to break the one in order to build the other. The novel’s distinction lies in identifying the outer world of political strife and the internal world of domestic tension with the quest for a creative equilibrium between the two.

II

The dominant theme of the novel is the triangular relationship involving Nikhil, Bimala, and Sandip and the Swadeshi Movement activates and complicates the relationship between these characters highlighting the tension and conflict between the home and the world. Starting as a broadbased and united protest against the partition of Bengal (1905), the

Movement was conceived, as the expression 'Swadeshi' suggests, in terms of economic and social regeneration of India. Tagore, who had as early as 1897 started a Swadeshi Bhandar in Calcutta for the promotion of indigenous goods, actively supported the Movement, composing a number of national songs, leading processions and raising funds for funding National Schools. When in course of time, the Swadeshi Movement assumed the form of a mere political agitation producing extreme reactions Tagore withdrew from it. From the serene surroundings of Shantiniketan, he watched with anguish the have being wrought by intemperate nationalism: the burning of much-needed cloth in the name of boycott of foreign goods and the alienating of Muslims by introducing Hindu religious motifs in the struggle.

In one of his letters to C.F. Andrews, Tagore explained the reasons for his withdrawal from the Swadeshi agitation which appeared to him to have degenerated into a negative campaign of hatred and exclusiveness: "...the anarchy of emptiness never tempts me, even when it is resorted to as a temporary measure." *The Home and the World* may in a sense be regarded as Tagore's assessment of the Movement in fictional form. As one of the historians of the Movement puts it,

...the complexities of the Swadeshi Age—its grandeur and its pettiness, its triumphs and problems and tragedies—have indeed been immortalized in the writings of the greatest literary figure of the times.

The novel, though it faithfully records certain aspects of the political struggle in Bengal, transcends the purely historical situation and acquires a larger significance, as Niharranjan Ray observes,

...because of its vivid and ironic indictment of unscrupulous politicians, of its denunciation of violence, aggressive intents and methods, and chauvinistic nationalism, and of the humanist logic of good ends being the product of good means, and equally humanist ideals of love and truth and any given situation.

It is not surprising therefore that *The Home and The World* Tagore's first novel to appear in English translation, evoked much interest abroad because of the relevance of its perspectives to situations in other countries as well. The novel, however, is not an investigation of the Swadeshi Movement in toto but only a dramatization of its implications for individuals and their relations with one another in the hectic days of the struggle. As Bhabani Bhattacharya remarks:

...it is the human interest in The Home and The World that main counts. The characters are no pawns in the hands of history, even if they are good symbols.

III

The two male protagonists, Nikhil and Sandip exemplify the parameters of approach to the problem of Indian emancipation; the former's a rationalistic, constructive approach with

emphasis on self-reliance and righteous means and the latter's that of emotional extremism, questionable means, crude nationalism, and brute force. Nikhil's concept of freedom, self-government, and constructive leadership seems to reflect Tagore's own vision of the struggle for independence. Tagore, like Nikhil in the novel, had to face unpopularity, isolation, and even hostility due to his opposition to coercive and frenzied patriotism. Krishna Kripalani writes:

Not even in his fiercest outburst of patriotism would Tagore be jingoistic which may partly explain why among his own people he was never popular, whatever the praises sung after his death.

A patriot to the core, Nikhil had, long, before the advent of the Swadeshi Movement, done his best to encourage indigenous manufacture in his estates, though without much success. As a rich zamindar he could afford the luxury of imported goods but preferred native ones. His wife, Bimala, recounts when the boycott of foreign goods had become a fashionable slogan;

Then were all eyes turned on my husband from whose estates alone foreign sugar and salt and clothes had not been banished. Even the estate officers begin to feel awkward and ashamed over it. And yet, some time ago, when my husband began to import country-made articles into our village, he had been secretly and openly twitted fir his folly, by old and young alike. When Swadeshi had not yet become a boast, we had despised it with all our hearts.(122)

As opposed to Nikhil's genuine patriotism, Sandip's is opportunistic and a means for achieving personal power. He is, in fact, the prototype of a 'populist' demagogue—hypocritical and unscrupulous, capable of sweeping, along everyone with his magnetism, sophistry, and rhetoric. The following passage from his diary illustrates his braggadocio:

Am I not born to rule? to bestride my Proper steed, the crowd and drive it as I will, the reins in my hand, the destination known only to me, and for it the thorns, the mire, on the road? This steed now awaits me at the door, pawing and champing its bit, its neighing filling the skies.(103)

Rather than inculcating the Swadeshi spirit among the people, Sandip goes about inflaming them with the cult of *Bande Mataram* and the concept of freedom by force. Nikhil sees through the game of Sandip and his kind "...who needs must shout and deify their country in order to keep up their excitement—these love excitement more than their country"(45), but also realises that his restraint and moral stance would have no appeal to the mass mind. He, nevertheless, does not flinch from his stand however unpopular it is:

I am willing to serve my country; but may worship I reserve for Right which is far greater than my country. To worship my country as a god is to bring a curse upon it.(26)

He declares further:

so long as we are impervious to truth and have to be moved by some hypnotic stimulus, we must know that we lack the capacity for self-government. (45)

The antithetical postures of Nikhil and Sandip—both friends—provide the base for the main conflict of the novel.

IV

For nine years, Bimala has led a happy married life, anchored in the love of her husband, the modern minded Nikhil, who arrange for her English education and introduces her to modern ways of life. Longing to find her blossom fully in the knowledge of herself in the wide world outside, Nikhil urges her to step into it:

What I want is, that I should have you and you should have me, more fully in the outside world....I would have you come into the heart of the outer world met reality...If we meet and recognize each other, in the real world, then only wi8ll our love be true.

Perfectly content with her life and also out of regard for the convention of the Rajah's house, she declines to come out of the Zenana. She recalls:

I have read in books that we are called "caged birds." I cannot speak for others, but I had so much in this cage of mine that there was not room for it in the universe,—at least that is what I then felt. (19)

The eruption of the Swadeshi Movement breaks down then barriers between the home and the world for Bimala because its impact is felt even in the innermost recesses of every home in Bengal. Bimala recounts:

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 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. 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 heard a voice from the far horizon, whose meaning was not perfectly clear to me, but whose call went straight to my heart. (22-23)

Eager to do some personal sacrifice, she wants to get rid of her English teacher, Miss Gilby and also burn her foreign clothes but is dissuaded by her husband who tells her:

*...why this bonfire business? ...
Why not try to build up some thing?*

You should not waste even a tenth part of your energies in this destructive excitement. (24)

Bimala feels unhappy that though her husband supports Swadeshi, he has not wholeheartedly adopted the spirit of *Bande Mataram*. Unbeknown to herself, she has a longing for the flamboyant and the passionate, and hence, her husband's "dull, milk-and-watery Swadeshi"(122) does not appeal to her.

It is at this critical point in the story that Tagore introduces Sandip whose fiery eloquence holds Bimala spellbound. Sitting behind a screen at his meeting, she impatiently pushes it away—the action is symbolical that now she is face to face with the world—and fixes her gaze upon him. She records later:

I was no longer the lady of the Rajah's house, but the sole representative of Bengal's womanhood. And he was the Champion of Bengal.... I said within myself that his language had caught fire from ray eyes: for we women are not only the deities of the household fire, but the flame of the soul itself.

Bimala's delusions of being the "Shakti of the Motherland"(31) are cleverly exploited by the unscrupulous Sandip who through clever flattery lays a snare for her mind and body. Under the pretext of promoting Swadeshi, he stays on with Nikhil and pursues his strategy of seduction extolling Bimala as the "Queen Bee" of the Swadeshi workers. She feels exalted when told that all the country is in need of her. To quote Bimala,

Sandip's hungry eyes burnt like the lamps of worship before my shrine. All his gaze proclaimed that I was a wonder in beauty and power; and the loudness of his praise, spoken and unspoken, drained all other voices in the world. Had the Creator created me afresh, I wondered? Did he wish to make up now for neglecting me so long? I who before was plain had become suddenly beautiful. I who had been of no account now felt in myself all the splendour of Bengal itself. (56-57)

Nikhil, though perturbed and pained by Bimala's growing infatuation with Sandip chooses not to intervene but to wait patiently for her to realize the truth of circumstance and recant herself from her headlong rush to ruin. He can easily expose Sandip for the hypocrite that he is—his habit of glorifying his selfish lusts under high sounding names—but desists from doing so for reasons given below:

It will be difficult to explain to Bimala to-day that Sandip's love of country is but a phase of his covetous self-love. Bimala's hero worship of Sandip makes me hesitate all the more to talk to her about him, lest some touch of jealousy may lead me unwittingly into exaggeration. (46-47)

His idealized image of Bimala has to reckon with the stubborn reality of her nature—her partiality for the audacious, the tumultuous in men—and he feels that it is upto her to realize her error. If she cannot liberate herself from her delusions, he would rather bow out of her life than exercise the traditional authority of a husband over a wife to claim her back.

I must not lose my faith: I shall wait. The passage from the narrow to the larger world is stormy. When she is familiar with this freedom, then I shall know where my place is. If I discover that I do not fit in with the arrangements of the outer world, then I shall not quarrel with my fate, but silently take my leave.... Use force? But what? Can force prevail against truth? (49)

V

Bimala is not altogether unaware of Sandip's designs; the patriotic cause which has drawn her to him has well nigh been forgotten; his conversation takes an intimate, personal turn; yet she feels hypnotized by him, unable to free herself from his spell. She confesses:

I will not shirk the truth. This catalysmal desire drew me by day and by night. It seemed desperately alluring,—thus making havoc of myself. What a shame it seemed, how terrible, and yet how sweet! Then there was my overpowering curiosity, to which there seemed no limit. He of whom I knew but little, who never could assuredly be mine, whose youth flared so vigorously in a hundred points of flame—oh, the mystery of his seething passions, so immense, so tumultuous! (83)

It is made evident time and again that it is Sandip's passionate rhetoric that enthralled Bimala. She reminisces:

Sandip's eyes took fire as he went on, but whether it was the fire of worship, or of passion, I could not tell. I was reminded of the day on which I first heard him speak, when I could not be sure whether he was a person, or just a living flame. (91)

Nikhil's refusal to banish foreign articles from the markets in his estates provokes Sandip and his followers to resort to violence. Nikhil's argument is that it is upto the people to choose between indigenous and foreign goods. He declares: "To tyrannize for the country is to tyrannize over the country"(142). As the Muslim traders are particularly obdurate. Sandip's followers sink a boat, and as its owner, one Mirjan, threatens to go to the police, it becomes necessary to pay him some hush-money. As usual in his flamboyant manner, Sandip asks Bimala for a sum of fifty thousand, but settles for five thousand at the end. Bimala steals the sovereigns of gold from her own home and the indignity of it sets her on the path of self introspection:

The burden of the theft crushed my heart to the dust...I could not think of my home as separate from my country; I had robbed my house, I had robbed my country. For this sin my house has ceased to be mine, my country also was estranged from me. (192-93)

The turning point in the story occurs when she goes to present the gold sovereigns to Sandip. Seeing all that gold, Sandip is unable to restrain himself and springs forward as if to embrace Bimala in congratulation; she thrusts him away from her—a symbolical release for her. He feels back hitting his head on the edge of a marble table and drops to the floor. Bimala recounts:

The moment I had stolen my husband's money and paid it to Sandip, the music that was in our relations stopped. Not only did I destroy all my own value by making myself cheap, but Sandip's powers, too, lost scope for their full play....Sandip has lost his aspect of the hero; a tone of low quarrelsomeness has come into his words. (211)

He betrays his covetousness and jealousy when Bimala hands over her jewels to Amulya, the young revolutionary, to be sold to replace the stolen amount. She now sees him in his true colours, and realises that all his eloquence is mere bluster and all his songs of praise false. She exclaims:

Sandip, the wielder of magic spells, is reduced to utter powerlessness, whenever his spell refuses to work. From a king he fell to the level of a boor....His snaky coils, with which he used to snare me, are exhausted,—I am free. I am saved, saved. (240)

She is restored to Nikhil and receives his blessing but she cannot get rid of the feeling that her disastrous journey into the world has left its permanent mark on her:

....What keeps crushing my heart is the thought that the festive flutes which were played at my wedding nine years ago, welcoming me to this house, will never sound for me again in this life...How many years, how many ages, aeons, must pass before I can find my way back to that day of nine years ago? (255)

The reunion of Nikhil and Bimala does not last long, however. Sandip's attempts to turn nation-worship into Kali-worship and his joining forces with a neighbouring Zamindar in coercing Muslim tenants to take to Swadeshi, result in a break out of communal riots and Nikhil rushes out in defence of the women of the neighbouring Zamindar's house and is seriously hurt. The novel ends with Bimala disconsolately gazing out at the distant flames as Nikhil is brought in a palanquin with serious head injuries.

VI

The Home and the World has been variously interpreted as "a defence of certain principles but also, in a way, the author's defence of his own role," that is, in the Swadeshi Movement, "a devastating exposure of these black-hearted 'Patriots' who shut the door on truth and humanity and right, and for their own utterly selfish ends inflamed immature minds to frenzy in the name of patriotism," the best picture of Bengal's time of political awakening," "an allegorical tale with Bimala representing India, Nikhil all that is good and vital in the Indian tradition and Sandip personifying the aggressive. Western-type nationalism," and "a psychological study of relationship between a husband and his wife."

While there is some truth in all these observations, it can be seen that the novel is primarily a delineation of the delusions and discoveries of self of the principal characters—Bimala's delusions of grandeur about herself and about Sandip, Nikhil's delusions of Bimala and Sandip's delusions of Bimala and himself which are powerfully dramatised in their interaction to the objective reality—the Swadeshi Movement against alien rule. The interplay of delusions and discoveries gains in psychological intensity by Tagore's adept use of the multiple points-of-view technique which makes for a clearer enunciation of the motives and states of mind of the principal characters. The device of presenting separate segments of the story through different characters helps Tagore to highlight the internal conflicts and convulsions, leading to the discovery of self in the central character of Bimala. Bimala is able to realise the explosive potentialities of a self-centred Sandip who under the guise of a chauvinistic stance unscrupulously exploits the religious and patriotic sentiments of the people with disastrous results—almost breaking Bimala's homelife by postulating a false connection between the home and the world.

From : *Tagore the Novelist*, Sterling, N.D. 1993, pp. 53-63.

The Home and the World

Ashish Nandy

Against the stated political ideology of Tagore, we shall now examine the three explicitly political novels he wrote, treating them as vital psychological and cultural clues to his concept of politics and his political selfhood. We shall do so with the awareness that some of his other novels—for instance two early works, *Bouthakuranir Hat and Rajarshi*—also have clear political messages; the vicissitudes of power and the corruption brought about by it were amongst Tagore's favourite themes. However, the novels analysed here are ones which give a central place to the political debates taking place in India over the methods of the Swadeshi movement and social reforms in general.

Of the three novels, *Gora* is technically closest to the nineteenth century idea of a proper novel. But it has the worst English translation of the three and about invariably disappoints the English-speaking reader. There have however, been excellent translations of the novel into the Indian languages and its reputation and influence are built on them. *Gora* was written in 1909, when the poet was forty-eight. It was Tagore's sixth novel, counting his unfinished first novel, *Karuna*.

The second novel considered here is *Ghare-Baire*, available in English as *The Home and the World*. Published in 1916, it was Tagore's eighth novel. The third is *Char Adhyay*, translated slightly more competently into English as *Four Chapters*. It was Tagore's thirteenth and the last novel. When published in 1934, it immediately sparked off a first-class public controversy because of its theme.

As we shall see, Tagore's political concerns in the three novels were roughly the same; they did not change over the twenty-five years of his life that writing of the three novels spanned. This analysis therefore will not follow the historical order in which a problem that is primarily political-psychological in *Gora* becomes predominantly political-sociological in *Ghare-Baire* and political-ethical in *Char Adhyay*. Instead, the analysis imposes a psychological sequence on the historical order by tracing the political sociology of *Ghare-Baire* and the problem of political ethics in *Char Adhyay* to the political psychology of *Gora*.

Bimala's Choice

The story of *Ghare-Baire* is simply told. Bimala is a highly intelligent, fiery girl whose very name conveys both everyday plainness and transcendent power. She marries into a rich, aristocratic family proud of the beauty of its women and equally of its dissipated self-destructive men. However, her husband Nikhilesh or Nikhil, she finds her out, has broken with family tradition. Not only has he married in her a girl who is not beautiful, he is a well-educated modern man, given to scholarship and social work.

Bimala's main support in Nikhil's family turns out to be his grandmother, who adores Nikhil and believes Bimala provides an auspicious presence in the house. The grandmother is the one who vehemently defends Nikhil when he founds a bank to give easy, unsecured loans to poor peasants in his area, and loses a fortune through it. She considers it a small price to pay for Nikhil's refusal to be drawn into the 'normal' lifestyle of the men of his family.

Nikhil adores his wife who is happily absorbed in her domestic life, but has other ambitions for her. A liberal humanist, he wants her to enter the modern world by learning the English language and English manners and he engages an English governess, Miss Gilby, to instruct her. Gradually, Bimala gains acquaintance with the outer world through Miss Gilby virtually becomes a member of the household.

There are also two widowed sisters-in-law of Nikhil in the household—in the English version only one of the characters is retained—who provide the counterpoint to Bimala. They are uneducated and petty-minded, but Nikhil does not seem concerned with their education or exposure to the world. To some readers, though, they may emerge as self-willed women outside the control of the hero, what Bimala herself might have become, had she been less sensitive, impassioned, or alert.

It is the era of the Swadeshi movement, and one day a friend of Nikhil's Sandip comes to the house. Sandip, true to his name, is a fiery nationalist leader. Nikhil has been supporting him financially, much against his wife's wishes. Bimala had seen Sandip's splendid features in photographs but was never quite liked him, feeling that he lacked character, that 'too much of base alloy had gone into (the) making' of his handsome face and 'the light in his eyes somehow did not shine true'. However, when Bimala hears him speak in public she is thrilled, and inspired by his ideas; he appears like a conqueror of Bengal who deserved 'the consecration of a woman's benediction'. For the first time Bimala feels unhappy at not being 'surpassingly beautiful', since she wants Indian men to 'realize the country's goddess in its womanhood'. Above all, she wants Sandip to find the *shakti* or divine power of the motherland manifest in her. She invites him to dinner at home.

Over dinner, Bimala and Sandip discuss the national movement. Sandip makes a show of being impressed by her invites her to rise above her diffidence and become 'the queen Bee' of the movement. He promises that his associates would rally around her, that she would be their centre as well as inspiration. As for himself, he is more direct: 'The blessing of the country must be voiced by its goddess.'

Bimala is carried away by all this. She starts meeting Sandip regularly and Sandip begins to consult her on every aspect of the nationalist movement. As Bimala recounts it,

I Who was plain before had suddenly becomes beautiful. I who before had been of no account now felt in myself all the splendour of Bengal itself.... My relations with all the world underwent a change. Sandip babu made it clear how all the country was in need of me. (p.43)

This change acquire for Bimala transcendental features. She would later remember the experience almost mystical terms—'Divine strength had come to me, it was something which I had never felt before, which was beyond myself.' Sandip nurses her new-found sense of magical power and is quick to establish an equation between his political mission and the 'natural' politics of women, as opposed to the socially-learned politics of men.

In the heart of the women Truth takes flesh and blood. Woman knows how to be cruel.... It is our women who will save the country.... Men can only think but you women have a way of understanding without thinking. Woman was created out of God's own fancy. Man, he had hammer into shape. (pp.31,43-44)

Bimala now goes all out to help Sandip in his work, neglecting her husband, home and friends. She even 'takes' from the household money to give to the movement. Her love for Sandip has, however, a tragic end ; Bimala loses both the home and the world, for Sandip runs away once large-scale violence, instigated by his speeches, breaks out and he is shown to be merely a shallow and callous manipulator; and Nikhil dies trying to quell the violence born of Sandip's version of nationalism. The angry, bitter outburst of one of Nikhil's sister-in-law at his death reveals the deeper conviction of the family: it is a death brought about by Bimala, by her cannibalistic impulses.

It also becomes clear that the tragedy is not merely a personal one, for the social divide brought about the nationalism is more permanent than the political movement it spawns. Bimala's identification with the country becomes a literal one; the destruction of her home and her world for shadows the destruction of the society.

The story of *Ghare-Baire* is told through the first person narratives of the three main characters. But there is no Roshomon effect; it is the same story, fleshed out by all three in their own ways. The aim to reveal differences in personality through differences in perspectives, not the plural nature of reality itself. The issues and personality of the main protagonists do not change from narratives. There is, in effect, a single, straight narratives from the point of view of Bimala, symbolizing Bengal, who is shown confronting the choice between two forms of patriotism. Though the background is the Swadeshi movement, in which Tagore himself had actively participated and for which he had written some of his finest poetry and songs, the novel's message is clear: nationalism has enormous hidden costs. To make this point, the British remain a shadowy presence in the novel, which is essentially an exploration of the Indian consciousness as it confronts, grapples with and resists the colonial experience. The author splits this consciousness into two parts: one finds expression in the contrast between the hero and the villain, the other in the conflicts within the heroine.

As for the contrast between the hero and the villain, one gradually learns from the narrative that the aristocratic landowner Nikhil is no less a patriot than the demagogue Sandip. But Nikhil's patriotism is not as dazzling or strained as his friend's. Sandip believes that God is manifest in one's own country and it must be worshipped. Nikhil believes that, in that case, God must be manifest in other countries, too, and there is no scope for hatred of them. He believes that countries which live by oppressing others have to answer for it; their history has not yet ended. Sandip and, under his spell Bimala, hold that one has right to be humanly

covetous on behalf of one's country, while Nikhil feels that as a human one should avoid projecting individual evil into the self-definition of a country. To Sandip, Nikhil's position is staid, unimaginative and unfeeling; to Nikhil, Sandip's nationalism is only another form of covetous self love. It is easy to guess which ideology wins in short runs: Sandip becomes a successful political leader who invades and overruns Nikhil's family life.

Bimala's first instincts were right. Sandip is inauthentic, both as a patriot and as a lover. He is only a professional politician. Bimala's love for him, however, is genuine, though it is of a special kind. Though there is a physical component to it, the love is not entirely blind infatuation: she is shrewd enough to sense Sandip's shallowness considers it her patriotic duty to ignore it. Fired by the sprit of nationalism and a search for freedom which demands no deep political vision and stems from the defiant idealism of youth, Bimala finds in Sandip both a heroic role model and a love-object which she cannot break away from.

Nikhil's, in contrast, is low-key and unheroic both as a lover and patriot, and he is outshone by Sandip's flamboyance till a tragic, irreversible sequence of political, social, and personal events reveal his true heroism to Bimala.

Bimala, therefore, is the link between the two forms of patriotism the men represent. Not only is she the symbol for which Sandip and Nikhil fight, but her personality incorporates the contesting selves of the two protagonists and becomes the battlefield on which the two forms of patriotism fight for supremacy. In this inner battle, Nikhil's form of patriotism eventually wins, but at enormous social and personal cost.

There is another, less consequential, link between the protagonists: Amulya, an idealistic young student, with whom Bimala has a special relationship. Amulya works closely with Sandip and as a result, finds out quite early Sandip's instrumental concept of patriotism. Caught between his affection and respect for Bimala and his awareness of what Sandip is, Amulya turns out to be real victim of Bimala's politics, and Bimala knows this. His death at the end of the story foreshadows Tagore's later anxiety about the nature of the violence let loose by nationalism.

The violence, a full-fledge Hindu-Muslim riot, is the inevitable corollary of Sandip's nationalism, Tagore suggests. The riot that kills Nikhil—his fate is left unclear in the novel, though in Satyajit Ray's film he dies—is set off by the ruin that poor Muslim traders face due to the nationalist attempts to boycott foreign goods immediately and unconditionally.

The violence is a natural by-product of the strategy of mobilization employed by Sandip and his enthusiastic followers. Such a mobilization requires, Tagore implies, symbols embedded in an exclusivist cultural-religious idiom. *Ghare-Baire* does not say why it should be so, but there are hints that, for Tagore, this form of populism combines mob politics with *realpolitik*. It is this combination which Tagore holds responsible for the growth of communalism, not religious differences, not even the representation of these differences in the political arena. Sandip precipitates a communal conflagration not merely by refusing to accommodate the interests of the Muslims as a community, and by imposing on them glaringly unequal suffering and unequal sacrifice for the nationalist cause, but also by

depending on form of political stridency which requires primeval sentiments to be mobilized and acted out.

One remarkable aspect of the novel is Tagore's brief but prescient reconstruction of the process by which a communal divide takes place in Nikhil's world. As Tagore tells the story the image of the Mussalman in Bengali upper-caste Hindu minds emerges as that of a primal force, representing untempered, unmediated 'primitive' impulses. However Mussalman are also part of the 'natural' scene in Bengal and are in communion with similar primordial forces within Hinduism which, by common consent, have to be contained. Thus, beef-eating among Muslims is balanced by buffalo-sacrifice among the predominantly *shakto*, upper-caste Hindus of the area. But one's Sandip's nationalism reaches down to find roots in the primordial, to give nationalism a base in the deepest of passions, it induces a similar regression in Muslim. On Nikhil's estate, Muslims who had more or less given up eating beef turn to it not on ideological grounds. To them, too, religion becomes a faith or a way of life than an ideology

Lukacs' Choice

How incommunicable such an approach to anti-colonialism can sometimes be is best evidenced by Georg Lukacs' caustic review published in 1922, of *The Home and the World*. It is true that the novel in translation fails to convey the subtlety of the original and Tagore's magical power over words, notably his poetic use of prose. Also, Tagore comes off in the English version as moralistic and 'consciously attitudinizing' in his narratives. Yet one suspects behind Lukacs' critical judgement there are specific political barriers erected by the European critical consciousness which Tagore could not penetrate. Lukacs, given his Eurocentric Marxism, would find it difficult to admit the extent to which his critical apparatus was designed to maintain a hegemonic cultural discourse. For, if Lukacs is right and Tagore cannot but fail to communicate with Europe, Satyajit Ray's reasonably faithful film version of *The Home and the World* should make little sense to the modern world fifty years after the novel was first written. Certainly Ray's work does not raise doubts about Tagore's anti-imperialism either in India or in Europe.

Lukacs notes with a great sarcasm that Tagore's hero is an aristocrat. He ignores that Nikhil, even if by default, stands with a religious minority which is also the poorest section of the society and confronts boldly a middle-class-dominated, avowedly majoritarian formation that, modelling itself on India's colonial rulers, is dismissive towards the peripheries of the society. Lukacs says:

Tagore himself is—as imaginative writer and as thinker—a wholly insignificant figure. His creative powers are non-existence; his characters pale stereotypes; his stories thread-bare and uninteresting; and his sensibility is meagre, insubstantial...

The intellectual conflict in the novel is concerned with the use of violence... The hypothesis is that India is an oppressed, enslaved country, yet Mr Tagore shows no interest in this question...

...A pamphlet—and one resorting to the lowest tools of libel—is what Tagore's novel is, in spite of its tediousness and want of spirit.

This stance represents nothing less than the ideology of the eternal subjection of India...

This propagandistic, demagogically one-sided stance renders the novel completely worthless from the artistic angle.

But Tagore's creative powers do not stretch to a decent pamphlet... The 'spiritual' aspects of his story, separated from the nuggets of Indian wisdom into which it is tricked out, is a petty bourgeois yarn of the shoddiest kind... (his) 'wisdom' was put at the intellectual service of the British police.

Lukacs gives a number of reasons for this distaste for the novel. Three of them obvious. First, Tagore raises the issue of violence in the context of the nationalism and ventures a moral—according to Lukacs, Spiritual—critique of the anti-colonial struggle. Second, Tagore glorifies conventionality, family life and one sidedly turns the nationalist leader Sandip into a 'romantic adventure'. The extent of Lukacs knowledge of Indian politics can be gauged from his belief that Sandip is a caricature of Gandhi. For some strange reason, this alleged attack on Gandhi goes against Tagore, because Lukacs seems naively unaware that he has neatly displaced on to Tagore the Comintern's evaluation of Gandhi ventured two years earlier in September 1920, at its first congress in Moscow. That evaluation (which Lukacs did not contest), states: 'Tendencies like Gandhism, thoroughly imbued with religious conception, idealize the most backward and economically most reactionary forms of social life, preach passivity and repudiate the class struggle, and in the process of development of the revolution become transformed into an openly reactionary force. Third, Lukacs thinks that Tagore has failed to write a proper novel with detailed development of characters. The characters in *Ghare-Baire* are almost caricatures, the plot is a trivial one and the tone partisan.

Ghare-Baire is a nineteenth-century novel, written in a nineteenth-century style. It is only chronologically a product of this century. The novel's English translation, whatever its other demerits; is fortunately not designed to introduce somewhat provincial European intellectuals to the plural traditions of the Indian freedom movement and the debates within it. Lukacs, having read *The Home and the World* second or third-hand and living in what he believed to be the middle kingdom of world literature, is naturally willing to believe that, to Tagore, Gandhi in form of Sandip is the rabble-rouser, seducing India in the form of Bimala from a gentle colonial figure, Nikhil, who is keen to introduce her to the modern world.

As we shall see, Tagore provides a slight more nuanced approach to the interconnected problems of violence anti-imperialism and nationalism. But to understand where Lukacs goes wrong, we must look beyond his Eurocentrism and his absolute faith in his culture's critical apparatus, into the nature of the enterprise which Tagore's political novel are.

The concept of the novel entered South Asian societies in the nineteenth century as part of the colonial experience. There are many descriptions of the process of assimilation, which first took place in eastern India. The process itself is not particularly relevant to our

concern, though its end-product are. The genre quickly became popular and entered the interstices of the Indian literary world; Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-94) was already India's first established novelist when the novel as a literary form entered other Asian and African societies.

Bankimchandra was influenced by a number of English novelists. Of them, for some reason, he found Walter Scott to be the most congenial. Many contemporary critics were to be called Bankim the Scott of India. Yet Bankim's concern and worldview were fundamentally different; he only borrowed from Scott something of his narrative method. These influences and the subsequent popularity of the novel form in India should not blind one to the sophisticated narrative traditions that predated the novel in the region and which, once the genre was established, entered it as if through the back door. *Upanyasa*, the Bengali term for the novel, itself indicates that the novel was expected partly to serve the purposes of—and to seek legitimacy and sustenance from—the older tradition of *upakathas*, fairy-story like narratives surviving in the public memory, often as morality tales. This tradition is alive in *Ghare-Baire* and it dominates *Char Adhyay* in many ways.

At first, the novel served as a residual category for many South Asian thinkers. Individual novelists gave it a more personalized form, before such liberties became common in Europe: after all, the reason for the popularity of the novel form in South Asia was its ability to take up issues and themes that were peripheral to traditional forms of literature. For instance, the novel could be directly used, Indian writers found out, for political, polemical, and satirical purposes. Tagore himself used it mostly as an extended short-story. Once he had written his early novels—*Gora* being one of them—he chose to move from the prose form of a conventional novel to a poeticized form more suited to allegorical tales of the kind which were to appear on the English and French literary scene much later. In the Indian context, one could say that he started writing contemporary *upakathas* or *puranas* rather than *upanyasas*.

His specific cultural experience with the novel was alien to Lukacs to whom the categories of literary could not but be universal, which in his case meant exclusively European. Hence his two devastating errors of political judgement which no Indian social analyst can ignore, for the errors arise from an ethnocentrism that verges on racism.

The first of these errors is a ludicrous one and only someone like Lukacs could have made it. The 'villain' in *Ghare-Baire* is not a caricature of Gandhi. (Gandhi was hardly a part of the Indian political scene when Sandip was created in 1915-16. Tagore had observed from a distance Gandhi's South African *satyagraha*, and the two had met in March 1915; this limited acquaintance made him an admirer of Gandhi. His reservation about an important aspect of Gandhi politics and counter-modernism came later.) Sandip is, if anything, anti-Gandhi and criticism of him is an oblique defence of Gandhian politics before such a politics had taken shape, besides being a bitter criticism of sectarian Hindu nationalism, which at the time was a powerful component of Indian anti-imperialism. Creating a character like Sandip at that time would actually have deeply offended many Bengali revolutionaries who would have been seen in him attack on their own ideology, as well as character.

Second, *Ghare-Baire* offers a critique of nationalism but also a perspective on the form anti-imperialism should take in a multiethnic, multi-religious society where a colonial political economy encourages the growth of a complex set of dependencies. In such a society, the politically and economically weak and the culturally less westernized might be sometimes more dependent on the colonial system than the privileged and the enculturated. The novel suggest that a nationalism which steam-rollers society into making a uniform 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.

Lukacs does, however, get the title of his review right. *Ghare-Baire* is Tagore's Gandhi novel. It anticipates the low-key, unheroic, consensual nationalism which Gandhi wanted a multiethnic society like India to follow. For it was on such a consensus that Gandhi sought to build his more complex critique of the West and the western—that is, modern—civilization.

From : *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism*, OUP, Delhi 1994

*In Search of an Elusive Freedom: History, Class and Gender in Tagore's
Ghore-Baire*

Shirshendu Chakrabarti

Incredible as it may seem today, Rabindranath Tagore's literary output drew hostile and outraged reactions from the establishment of his time. *Ghore-Baire* (1916) was no exception. As it was being serialized in the avant-garde Bengali journal, *Sabujpatra*, in 1915, letters poured in, accusing Tagore of betraying his country and ruining Hindu morality, in particular the institutions of family and womanhood. Tagore's response to one of the letters which was different from the hate mail throws light on the novel. Tagore argues that if there is a purpose behind writing the novel, the author is not conscious of it and indeed cannot be, since it is the movement of history, the pressures of his own time which unravels that purpose through the vehicle of the writing. It may or may not be termed purpose or orientation but visibly and invisibly the author's own time operates within his consciousness. Specifically, the advent of modern times in India has imperceptibly influenced Tagore's sensibility leaving its mark on the novel. Thus, the social reality of *Ghore-Baire* is inseparable from the artistic complex—the craft and the form—and lessons of conservative morality cannot be drawn from the novel.

Tagore's lifelong critique of the swadeshi movement and terrorism with their accompanying populist rhetoric may be construed as a lack of patriotic feeling. But actually he is able to take a somewhat distanced and larger historical view of the turmoil around him. Till the end of his life, his political writings cautioned against the dangers of fanatic nationalism. In many of his novels—*Gora*, *Ghore-Baire*, *Char Adhyay* and so on—Tagore exposes the class bias and the servile greed for power concealed in such nationalism. *Bhadralok* (middle class) militancy is correctly shown to be ineffective on the colonial rulers, and its targets are, ironically enough, the poor and vulnerable sections of society. In fact, Tagore suggests an insidious similarity between colonial master and *bhadralok* subject. Much of the latter's impotence is reflected in verbal manipulation, even verbal dexterity: there is often in Tagore's fiction the presence of an inarticulate, illiterate India, excluded by the eloquence of the middle classes. The nexus between power and servitude is extended to psychology, in particular to the strange and unforeseen masks of domination in gender relations. Outraged critics found the story of extra-marital passion in *Ghore-Baire* unrealistic. Was such behaviour to be found, they asked, among the western-educated, luxury-loving elite or in the traditional Hindu family? Identifying such a notion of realism as only a species of gossip, Tagore tears apart the

hypocrisy and hypocrisy that prop up conservative ideology by simply pointing out the endless struggle in traditional Hindu society between moral code and transgression, between *Manusamhita* (the code of Manu) and untrammeled human nature.

Tagore's work thus needs to be rescued from the mystical nihilism in which it is placed in popular perception and read rather in terms of a continuous, incisive dialogue with his times, marked, as they were by transition and disintegration. *Ghore-Baire*, like *Gora*, *Chaturanga* and *Char Adhyay*, responds to a fractured reality in an essentially dialogic mode. For all it retains a landmark: the three main characters—Nikhilesh, the zamindar of Shikshayar, Biola, his wife, and Sandip, his college friend and swadeshi extremist—offer three different records of self-examination (atmakatha). These records are interrupted and interspersed with one another so that a character's inside view of his self/herself and the world is at once codified by another character's outside view of the previous character. In this way not only does the novel do justice to the infinite complexity of human relationships but also finds a formal equivalent for the interaction of the outer and the inner worlds.

The basic link between these two worlds, the public and the private, is in the quest for freedom which, receiving its specific impetus from crisis and transition, blurs the margins of binary opposition through the experience of fluidity. As we move into the novel freedom is increasingly problematised, an obscure object of desire. What does it mean to be free? If, as *Ghore-Baire* clearly indicates, the concept of political freedom is tainted by bourgeois self-interest ignorant of and indifferent to the existence of the masses, then where and how far does the journey towards self-knowledge take us? Perhaps it takes us to the deep and treacherous passages of the psyche, ultimately a labyrinth through which we grope our way even as we do in its larger counterpart, the nation. Tagore's choice of the *atmakatha* as the specific mode of the novel is in no way a withdrawal from social reality; in fact, it is the opposite. The confessional mode intermeshes self-questioning and self-scrutiny with self-concealment and self-deception and thereby authenticates the elusive goal of freedom.

The most poignant and clear awareness of change comes not from Nikhilesh or Sandip but from Biola her first *atmakatha*, as she compares her situation with that of her mother. The latter belonged to an older generation happily inhabiting an enviably stable world, performing her gender role without self-questioning; there seemed to be an understanding between the outer and the inner. But as Biola describes the conservative household of Nikhilesh, in which the latter is a remarkable exception, there are already signs of uneasiness. The swadeshi movement effects the final break with the old age and, like a deluge, sweeps away barriers and boundaries, especially those between men and women. There is simply no continuity between the old and the new, and Biola feels that in moving from girlhood to youth she has moved from one age to another.

Of course, her widowed sisters-in-law do not experience discontinuity in the same way. Educated at home in the enlightened mode, Biola's entire lexicon undergoes disruptive transformation. Thus, even as she describes her attempts to relieve her mother's life, aspiring to a simple, devoted loyalty (*bhakti*) to her husband, her own words sound poeticised and contrived to her ears. Had she not entered the new age, she realises, these same words would have matched the easy, unthinking, prosaic devotion of an earlier age. But of late what

had been as easy as the process of respiration was being moulded counter-historically into an aesthetic ideal: this was particularly true for the widow's *brahmacharya* (ascetic self-abnegation) and the wife's *bhakti*. Since there was no going back in time, there was an irreparable breach between truth and beauty in this sphere of life.

The critique of swadeshi in *Ghore-Baire* exposes it as ultimately inimical to freedom in its many-layered aspects. Far from uniting the nation, its totalising impulse—a legacy inherited by the middle classes in part from European nationalism—divides it in terms of class and religious belief. In the novel, this division results in the communal frenzy between Hindu and Muslim Bengalis. Swadeshi is also strangely addictive in its destructive fury, a kind of narcotic which numbs the deep-seated slavishness of the colonized middle classes. Fomenting the irrational in politics, it conflates the deification of woman with that of the motherland, failing to see the truth through the veils or, rather, enveloping it in hysteric worship. At the deepest level such a symptom bears testimony to the power that stereotypes of masculinity and femininity exercise on our inner lives. Virtually no one is free from this servitude which affects our fundamental linguistic negotiations of the world. Sandip and Bimola, the supposed agents of subversion and emancipation, are not free from it—nor indeed is Nikhilesh in the ultimate analysis.

The swadeshi call for boycott of all English products—salt, sugar, clothes, woollens—did not find support among the poor because these were substantially cheaper than Indian products. The retail trade was often handled by Muslims, who were among the poorest in Bengali society. The market in Nikhilesh's territory sells both kinds of products, and despite the threat of the swadeshis he refuses to remove the English products in the interest of his poor tenants. Failure turns the swadeshis to dishonesty and duplicity, and they forcibly burn the *vilayati* (foreign) clothes that were being sold by poor traders, punishing them if they did not comply with their orders. The whole situation finds a parallel in Nikhilesh's household: Bimola tries to 'charm' her husband into accepting the swadeshi boycott when her impetuous support and animated argument are calmly refuted by him. As Nikhilesh's old teacher bluntly explains, people who have never spared a moment's thought about the poor suddenly want to legislate on the food and clothes of the poor in order to satisfy their own resentful, servile hankering for power. Their affordable whim is, however, a matter of life and death for the poor. It is not surprising that both Bimola and Sandip reveal a haughty disdain for servants. The India that Nikhilesh envisions is not that of the *bhadralok*, but of the poor, the lower classes, and the outcast. According to him, Bimola is a legatee of Manu while he is a descendant of Guhak and Ekalavya.

The delusive function of the swadeshi enthusiasm is brought out sharply in the Nikhilesh-Sandip debate (described in Bimola's first *atmakatha*). Sandip operates systematically through binary stereotypes. If Nikhilesh argues in favour of truth, knowledge, clarity and constructive labour, Sandip promotes emotion, impulse and imagination as though they are antithetical in human experience. As he whips up enthusiasm, Bimola is totally overcome with feeling. When Sandip defends the *Vande Mataram* mantra identifying the nation with the mother goddess, he identifies men with dry logic and intellect and women with elemental passion and intuition. Bimola falls prey to this masculine-feminine stereotype even to the extent of accepting the mystifying *shakti* (power, almost divine) of woman. The link

between the popularization of the cult of the mother goddess and the demoralizing effect of servitude on Bengali life is brought out by Nikhilesh later when he shows that while the Marathas and the Sikhs empowered themselves against Muslim rule, the Bengalis empowered the goddess with victory-giving *shakti*. Now that same cult is being used by Sandip to split the country along communal lines fabricating the counter-historical untruth that the Muslim is not a part of India. There seems to be almost a premonition of the Partition which Tagore fortunately did not live to see. The strategy of deification or exaltation seems to offer release from a long history of submissiveness but in fact it perpetuates the habit of subservience to a superior authority, and above all the use of terror and coercion is ultimately a vindication of colonial oppression.

There can be no true freedom without a conscious emancipation from the psychology of master and servant. As Nikhilesh puts it, the oppressed wife will become the oppressive mother-in-law. Bimola's deep-seated yearning for power, revealed in her acceptance of the *shakti* stereotype, is equally evident in her attitude to servants, to her sisters-in-law and so on. She refuses to go to Calcutta and set up house with Nikhilesh because she does not want to lose her position of authority and honour in the vast Shukshayar household. Her love of power is of course most insidiously manifest in her admiration for a rough and rugged manliness that she finds in Sandip but not in her seemingly gentle husband. Nikhilesh does not conform to the male stereotype because for him domination betrays weakness. Bimola, he discovers, cannot admire a man without being intimidated and ruled by him. But she does acquire self-knowledge and breaks out of the spell of words that Sandip casts over her and that she initially echoes. Unfortunately, her self-realization comes too late and although she finds support from Amulya, who is not a manipulative swadeshi activist and who also sees through Sandip's strategies, the tragic course of the novel has by then become irreversible. The Amulya-Bimola relationship could in fact be seen as an alternative to and a critique of the Sandip-Bimola one: here again Amulya overcomes the mystifying appeal of *shakti* in Bimola.

Sandip is both a villain and a much more complex presence in the novel. In his monologues, he systematically dismantles all ideals and values of what he considers to be their linguistic covers. His philosophy of aggressive power is hardened by his subscribing to male-female stereotypes: men will grab and women will surrender; moreover, it is male rapacity that gives women their casket of jewels, their sorrows. But even he discovers chinks in his self-construction according to a driving idea. Above all, his consummate verbal manipulation rebounds on him as he wonders whether he himself is made of words alone.

At the same time Tagore needs to make Sandip a villain in the novel because that is essential for linking Bimola's infatuation for him to something lacking in Nikhilesh. Many of Tagore's heroines—Damini in *Chaturanga*, Niraja in *Malancha*, Charulata in *Nashtaneer*, Bimola—reveal a reservoir of tempestuous passion (reminiscent of the heroines of Bankimchandra) which cannot be contained within placid domesticity. Perceptive, enlightened and gentle as he is, Nikhilesh nevertheless pays the price for subscribing to a rational, tidy, and orderly vision of life. He is too secure and balanced in his knowledge and wisdom, and therefore although he encourages Bimola to cross the threshold he is totally unprepared for the consequences. As one encounters the domestic world of Nikhilesh and Bimola, one wonders if the former, in showering his wife with gifts ornaments, and affection, is not unconsciously

reducing her to a commodity. Bimola herself perceptively contrasts the flower on the roadside with the one in a flower pot and finds the essence of love in giving all, not in receiving. This emotional and sexual denial explodes into tragic consequences; once again, it is too late when Nikhilesh realizes that in giving Bimola freedom he could not have retained any possessive claim on her. He complains of too much insight, suggesting his unprepared state of mind. But his attitude to his wife is grasped by his grandmother who says that Nikhilesh would have adorned courtesan or concubine, (common practice among zamindars) if he had not adorned his wife. In this kind of an interpretation, Nikhilesh and Sandip appear to be alter egos of each other and, in fact, both Nikhilesh and his teacher recognize a strange underlying bond, an affinity in rhythm, between the two.

But Nikhilesh does not come to terms with the vast canvas of humanity and nature against which his personal tragedy is cut down to size. Here again the moment of release comes not through debate, analysis, and verbal dexterity but through a simple gesture on the part of Ponchu. As Nikhilesh reads Amiel's journal in vain for peace of mind, Ponchu brings some coconuts for him. Although he was not Nikhilesh's tenant, extreme poverty had once forced him to steal some coconuts from Nikhilesh's groves. That is why he has come to make amends. Suddenly the burden of middle class grief based on marital infidelity is lightened completely. In a later meditative scene, Nikhilesh experiences the leisurely peace of an autumn afternoon as he comes out of his bedroom, his broken cage. The happy, ruminating cow he spots outside reminds him of Ponchu but only as a contrast. For Ponchu is trapped in poverty and the machinations of the rich. He seems to lie quietly like the cow but not in relaxed ease: rather, in fatigue, disease and starvation. If Ponchu is the symbol of the destitute peasant, zamindar Harish Kundu is like the stagnant, scummy pond. The nexus of ignorance and exploitation that links the two must be broken first within our consciousness before the latter may expand and shape the course of history.

From: *In Search of an Elusive Freedom: History, Class and Gender in Tagore's Ghore-Baire in Shormistha Panja (ed.), Many Indias, Many Literatures*, World View, Delhi 1999, pp 99 - 106.

Lukacs on Tagore: Ideology and Literary Criticism

Kalyan K. Chatterjee

"Tagore's enormous popularity among Germany's intellectual 'elite' is one of the cultural scandals occurring with ever greater intensity again and again—a typical sign of the cultural dissolution facing this 'intellectual elite'"—so wrote George Lukacs in a review of Tagore's *The Home and the World* (*Ghare-Baire*) in 1922. This article, titled as "Tagore's Gandhi Novel" is only one of nineteen such review articles contributed by Lukacs to the German periodical *Die Rote Fahne* in that year. An English translation of these nineteen articles has been available for some years in a book form: *Reviews and Articles*, translated by Peter Palmer (London: Merlin Press, 1978)*. Together these articles represent a considerable body of applied Marxist criticism. Tagore, however, is the only non-European author to figure here.

Lukacs, to be sure, was never an "official" Marxist critic. His judgement on Tagore too is not shared by Russian critics. In a recent visit to Calcutta, a Russian Tagore scholar, Alexander P. Danielschuk, extolled the merits of *The Home and the World*, particularly for its ideological stance against terrorist politics, and dubbed Lukacs' critique of Tagore as an example of "vulgar Marxism" (reported in *The Statesman*, 13 March 1987). It is, however, not entirely beside the point to relate this new appraisal of Tagore by Marxists to a renewed appreciation of Gandhi himself and his philosophy of peace and non-violence in the Soviet Union.

The vituperative and prophetically forbidding note of Lukacs' article can be attributed to the characteristic style of Marxist criticism of that period, when the Bolsheviks had only recently been installed in power in Moscow and the great Lenin was still alive and leading the revolution. The Utopian vision of an imminent world-revolution was much more of a prospect in those days than ever afterwards.

But it is a bit difficult to swallow the description of the great Lukacs as a "vulgar Marxist". Until 1918, when he converted to Marxism, Lukacs was a brilliant young Hegelian. He brought to Marxism his very extensive reading in European philosophy and literature. Now regarded as an important ideologue of "Western" Marxism, Lukacs is undoubtedly a pioneering Marxist literary critic. By 1922, when he reviewed Tagore, Lukacs had already published his new famous *Theory of the Novel* and composed his equally famous *History of Class Consciousness*. It is with these books and his later *Studies in European Realism and The Historical Novel* that Lukacs established himself as one of the foremost Marxist critics of the world.

Yet we have this piece before us—"Tagore's Gandhi Novel"—with its polemical abuse and insensitive generalisations. Declared Lukacs in a fury: "Tagore himself is—as

* Quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from this book.

imaginative writer and thinker—wholly an insignificant figure. His creative powers are non-existent; his characters are pale stereotypes; his stories threadbare and uninteresting; and his sensibility is meagre, insubstantial.” There is also in his words more than a hint of that unsympathetic suggestion that Tagore’s Nobel Prize was a recognition of his service to the Empire. “The English bourgeoisie,” continued Lukacs, “has reasons of its own for rewarding Mr. Tagore with fame and riches (the Nobel Prize); it is *repaying its intellectual agent in the struggle against the Indian freedom movement.*” (pp. 8-9, Parenthesis and italics as in the original).

A Hungarian by birth, Lukacs was, however, very German in his intellectual upbringing. His literary taste formed before he embraced Marxism. Did the chauvinistic pride of the central European powers rub off on him too? The suggestion is ungenerous to a Marxist literary critic of Lukacs’ stature. Yet his pronouncements on Tagore reek with so much abuse and banter that it is difficult to credit him with cultural tolerance. His high moralistic reading of European literature—no matter how Marxist he was—made him vulnerable to that kind of attitude.

Lukacs came to literary criticism wearing two hats, one on the top of the other. The critical hat sat tight and safe on him when he was dealing with a European great, such as Dostoevsky, even though the ideological hat tilted it somewhat. Disregarding Lenin’s contempt for Dostoevsky, Lukacs showed his very great admiration for the novelist, calling him “Russia’s greatest writer” and “undoubtedly one of the very greatest figures in world literature”, and that in spite of his “political bias”, “inner contradictions”, and “Utopian outlook” (“Stavrogin’s Confession”, pp. 44-49). And in the Tagore article, Lukacs is further emboldened by the company he has pushed the great Russian into to call his novel *The Possessed* as counter-revolutionary” (pp. 10-11).

But he tacitly admits the detachability of the social theorist and religious philosopher from the imaginative writer so that Dostoevsky’s “failure [as a social philosopher] was transformed into an over-whelming artistic triumph” (“Stavrogin’s Confession”, pp. 47). Lukacs had the same ideological quarrel with Strindberg and same admiration for him. Strindberg’s failure was that bourgeois society appeared to him as “an unalterable ‘fact of life’.” He took refuge in the Church, but “the inner truth and strength of his work will...survive.” (“On the Anniversary of Strindberg’s Death”, pp. 14-15). Even the great Shakespeare must be subjected to an incoherent ideological drubbing : his plays “arose as reactionary, feudal, courtly compositions, so that the Puritans’ battle against this theatre was by no means an uncouth philistinism.” (“The Genesis and Value of Imaginative Literature”, p. 72).

Lukacs therefore can hardly be viewed as making a monolithic approach to literature. A writer’s being bourgeois, feudal, or reactionary, his being innocent of history and class struggle does not preclude his imaginative works being an artistic triumph over these shortcomings and having inner truths of their own. No mellowed Marxist to-day will seriously question this argument, but in 1922, the heyday of the Bolshevik revolution, the mellowed Marxist was an unhistorical species. The fact is that Lukacs’ conversion to Marxism had little effect on his literary taste, formed earlier. As a Hegelian Lukacs saw that great works of art

had a dialectic of their own and embodied a creative struggle for inner truths and strength of conviction.

In the case of Tagore, Lukacs suspended his critical catholicity towards the European greats, in default of which he subscribed to a rather simple version of the parallelism between literature and politics. It is interesting to note that Lukacs' position on Tagore echoes very audibly the Comintern thesis on Indian nationalism, as declared in its first congress in Moscow (September 1920) just two years before his article on Tagore:

Tendencies like Gandhism in India, thoroughly imbued with religious conceptions, idealise the most backward and economically most reactionary forms of social life, see the solution of the social problem not in proletarian socialism, but in a reversion to these forms, preach passivity and repudiate the class struggle, and in the process of the development of the revolution become transformed into an openly reactionary force. Gandhism is more and more becoming an ideology directed against mass revolution. It must be strongly combated by Communism.

Tagore's novel, published in 1916, was not influenced by the non-cooperation movement of Gandhi in the twenties but by the terrorist politics unleashed by the Bengal partition movement of 1905, a watershed in Indian politics. It is in the character of Sandip, the rival hero of the novel that the new political type is represented. He is a stark contrast to the noble-souled idealistic hero of the novel, Nikhilesh, thought to be modelled on Gandhian ideals.

But Nikhilesh's social ideals derive from the biography of Tagore himself : rural service, education of villagers, idealistic but impractical economic projects, and effusive sentimentalism. The hero's belief in the goodness of the human soul, his insistence on personal generosity, his abjuration of violence and impure means to attain his objectives—all these and more make him the kind of person that Tagore and Gandhi appeared to be to the West. It is interesting to note that it is largely for these virtues, as represented by the life and opinions of the idealised hero, that the novel is being revalued in the West, particularly by Soviet critics, anxious to project their concern for peace and rejection of terror and violence as political weapons.

Lukacs' vehemence against Tagore derived, not only from the ideological content of the novel, but also from its form and techniques : the characters are stereotyped, the novel is tedious, "propagandistic" and "demagogically one-sided", the hero idealised and whitewashed, the opponent blackened and caricatured. The novel is not a novel but a pamphlet (pp. 9-10). If the Indian novel is to be judged by the same standards as European novels, then Lukacs' charges have an apparent truth in them. But the principles of European literature do not apply verbatim to non-European writings. Marxist criticism is inconsistent with its philosophy of class and history if it expects the realism and psychologism of European literature in an Indian novel of an earlier part of this century. Lukacs should have looked at the novel in its own historical perspective.

The Home and the World is by no means a Tagorean story at its best and there is even an element of self-parody in it. The novel would indeed read as an absorbing story if Tagore had cut out much of those unending monologues. Then the triangle of human inter-relationship and conflict between the female ingenue and the two men would have developed its dramatic potential unencumbered.

As a political novel, its great merits are obvious to any one, but Tagore overloaded the novel with a style that belongs more properly to poetry. It is a poetising, idealising style with little real action or dramatic development. From beginning to end, the novel is strung on a high moral key. What sounds so good in his poetry and songs seems to be somewhat of a tedium in this novel. In the consciously attitudinizing narrative of the novel, few speak normally or realistically and the philosophic language is a shade too intrusive.

But the novel does have, quite undeniably, a dialectic of ideas, enhancing the interest of its socio-political message. And the form of the narrative is literally a dialectic, that is, an alternating series of monologue-like first person narrative by each of the three protagonists: the new woman, the Tagorean humanist of a syncretist faith, and the nationalist politician, whose egoism is as conspicuous as his patriotic fervour. By involving the story in this dialectic between the three forms of idealism, Tagore in fact advances the one close to his heart, that is the reconstructionist social action of the aristocratic idealist Nikhilesh.

The interest of the story lies in the conflict between Nikhilesh's idealism and the self-aggrandising nationalism of Sandip on the one hand, and on the other, in the inner conflict of the heroine Bimala with her divided loyalty, caught as she is between her loyalty to her unassertive husband and the attraction she increasingly feels for the articulate and assertive Sandip. But from beginning to end there never is any doubt as to which way the reader's sympathies should turn. The dialectical interest of the novel would have been far more enhanced if the sympathies could have been equally distributed between the three characters with the readers and interpret being free to draw his own conclusion. But that is not why a poet writes his novel.

The style and techniques of the novel is steadfastly attuned to communicate a mystic felling and the sense of an immanent spirit in nature. Echoing the eloquence of the *Upanishads*, also the English Romantic poet notably the ethereal Shelley, this Tagorean style is pervaded by the Hindu-Romantic and pantheistic celebration of the spirit-like presence in nature. The ethereal morning glory, the freedom of the sky, the mystery on the twilight, the fingers of light in the starry sky with their eternal call to the spirit, the animated flowers and leaves, the breeze, river and pond, all made so tremulously suggestive in his poetry, spill into his prose and captivate the reader. Here is a page from Nikhil's diary (in my imperfect translation):

After having written up to here, I was about to go to bed when the July cloud in the sky before my window suddenly tore open and to rough that opening a big star shone forth brightly. It seemed to be talking to me: 'so many relations are being broken and then formed again like dreams ever so often, but I am changeless and constant; I am the

eternal lamp's flame in the bridal chamber, I am the perennial embrace of the wedding night.'

At that very moment a thought came to my mind as if filling my lungs from side to side. It is that my bride of eternal time 'was sitting still hidden behind the screen of the material universe. . In the shifting mirrors of a thousand births and rebirths, have I not seen her image ever so often? Broken mirrors, mirrors blurred by dust! Whenever I say let me make the mirror my own,' 'let me put it inside a box', the picture recedes.

This mystical-philosophical style tumbles in ever so often in Tagore's prose fiction and nowhere so much as in *The Home and the World*. To a Western reader, this style is apt to seem vapoury. And when it comes to man-woman love, Tagore's language is so poetically, even pathetically innocuous that the novel is likely to appear as an elaborate pretence. But no novel can be read out of its cultural context. The sexual reticence, the effusive style, the ornate manner pleased the Victorian taste of Tagore's contemporaries. It was a taste that firmly disapproved of naturalism. But when the novel is abstracted from its style and manner, it yields a very valuable socio-political document.

Lukacs drove his Marxist critical apparatus over Tagore with a vengeance, enjoying his deleterious trail all the way. But the political stigma he attached to Tagore now stands removed : Tagore's parody of political violence now receives praise from other Marxist critics. Russia's greatest writer, Dostoevsky, too failed the ideological test given to him by Lukacs. "The great question is why Dostoevsky, like so many great Russians, preached suffering ? Why did he see no other means of escaping injustices of (Capitalist or Feudal) society than a reformed Christianity" ("Dostoevsky : Novellas", pp 49-50, Parenthesis as in the original).

Therefore the bottom line in Lukacs' poetics is that the artist must abide by the same question as the ideologist and the "understanding of man's innermost hearts", with which he credited Dostoevsky, is left out of account in his final estimate of him as a writer. With this inconsistent ideological approach he was hardly in a position to judge Tagore's novel in the right perspective.

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