

Before we begin

This study material should not be treated as an adequate substitute for the prescribed text, which in this case is *The Home and the World*. This material is designed only as a supplementary reading to help you in formulating your own responses to the novel. It is important to remember that reading literature is a creative process in itself. Each reader in the process of reading, brings to bear on the text, his/her own experiences and concerns thereby adding to the meaning and richness of the text. So it is important to enjoy the text and formulate your own responses before you read other 'critics'.

Paper II : Twentieth Century Indian Writing

Having said that, I would also like to alert you to the fact that responding to literary texts in an academic way is a slightly different proposition. In literary studies all responses are valid only if they are supported by evidence: both internal (from within the text) and circumstantial (the circumstances under which the author lived and wrote). Hence it is often necessary to read, apart from the text, other supplementary material to understand the circumstances that contributed, indirectly though, to the text in question.

A student of literature, then, is expected not only to be familiar with the prescribed text in question, but should also be able to present an informed response to a literary text. Further, while presenting an argument you could strengthen your position by citing a few other 'critics' who have responded to the text in question in the same way. However, it is important that you read a few essays by other critics on the text in question (before you read other 'critics', because often enough students tend to get overwhelmed by established 'critics').

The Home and the World

Let us begin here

This study material is divided into two parts. Part I contains some discussions about the context of the author and the novel in a sequential fashion. Further you will also find a number of critical essays in the Reading Material on *The Home and the World*, which will provide you with material on the background (contexts) as well as the novel. You may make judicious use of these critical essays.

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In Part I of this study material you will find discussions on the formative influences on R.N. Tagore, Tagore and the Bengali novel, Tagore as a novelist and Tagore's response to the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal. We will go over parts of his family history in so far as it shaped the personality of Tagore. We will also have useful discussions on the rise of the Bengali novel and Tagore's contribution to it. In addition there is a short evaluation of Tagore as a novelist. In all there are seven sub-sections included in Part I. All the seven sub-sections are stand alone sections and can be read independently. However I would like to believe that the best way to do it is to read the introduction and then sub-sections 21,22,23 followed by a reading of the novel and then to follow it up with the other sub-sections.

Part II consists of a discussion of the novel in a sequential, chapter by chapter manner. It is strongly recommended that part II is approached only after you have completed a close reading of the novel. These discussions of the novel take up the issues of the theme, characterization and the narrative technique. Though adequate care has been taken to present a broad view, it is quite po

sible that you might come across comments that you might find yourself disagreeing with. Please feel free to disagree. I must point out that these discussions are only meant to guide you through the text and point out the important thematic and structural features of the text.

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This study material is divided into two parts. Part I contains you some discussions about the contexts of the author and the novel in a secular fashion. Further you will also find a number of critical essays in the Reading Material on *The Home and The World*, which will provide you with material on the background (contexts) as well as the novel. You must make judicious use of these critical essays.

In Part I of this study material you will find discussions on the formative influences on K.N. Targore, Targore and the Bengali novel. Targore as a novelist and Targore's response to the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal. We will go over parts of his family history in so far as it shaped the personality of Targore. We will also have useful discussions on the rise of the Bengali novel and Targore's contribution to it. In addition there is a short evolution of Targore as a novelist. In all there are seven sub-sections included in Part I. All the seven sub-sections are stand alone sections and can be read independently. However I would like to believe that the best way to do it is to read the introduction and then sub-sections 1, 2, 3, 4 followed by a reading of the novel and then to follow it up with the other sub-sections, and finally a general study of Indian context related to Bengali literature.

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1.0 Aims and Objectives

This study material will introduce you to Rabindra Nath Tagore and his novel. **The Home and The World**. We would like to foster an appreciation of The Home and The World and Tagore by:

- * Explaining the circumstances under which Tagore wrote the novel.
- * Placing the novel within the context of the emerging novel form in Bengal.
- * Critically examining the novel from the point of view of theme, characterisation and technique of narration.

After you have worked through the unit you will be able to:

- * explain the various socio-political and literacy contexts which shaped the novel.
- * analyse the literary and biographical elements which influenced Tagore as a novelist.
- * analyse Tagore's attitude towards Swadeshi, Nationalism and Women as depicted in **The Home and The World**.
- * evaluate Tagore's contribution to the Bengali novel and Tagore as a novelist.
- * make and justify statements about the themes and meanings in **The Home and The World**.
- * draw character sketches of the major as well as minor characters in the novel.

1.1 Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore

I hope we can begin this lesson with the assumption that the name Rabindranath Tagore and his achievements would be familiar to most Indians and especially the student of literature. Remarkably multifaceted, Tagore excelled in almost all areas of creative activity. He was a great poet and was the first Asian to have bagged the Noble Prize for literature in 1912. His short stories are some of the finest stories ever written. Most students would be familiar with stories like 'The Kabuliwala' and 'The Post Master'. If you are not familiar with them then you could take a little time out and read some of his stories. I am sure you will enjoy them. Tagore was also a fine painter. His paintings, enigmatic at times, especially his self portraits, started a new modernist trend in Indian painting. One of the reasons for his continuing popular appeal, at least in Bengal, is his songs, popularly known as Rabindra Sangeet. You can gauge the popularity of these songs from the fact that they have become an integral feature of the Bengali cultural landscape. Anyone travelling by the Kolkatta Metro Rail can see his paintings and hear his songs at the Metro Stations.

Tagore was much more than just a creative artist. His contribution to public life was immense. Apart from being a champion of social and religious reform, he was a champion of educational reform and rural development. He set up a school at Shantiniketan which subsequently became the Viswa Vharati University. He encouraged the setting up of co-operatives and small scale industries. He even set up a bank, to provide micro finance and encourage rural entrepreneurship. His enthusiasm for improving the condition of the rural poor continued until his death in 1941. Political freedom was also one of his primary concerns throughout his life. He was active in the freedom movement and was associated, off and on, with the Indian National Congress. Gandhi and Tagore shared a warm relationship and had similar political philosophies. But as far as Tagore was concerned he was more of a philosopher than a political activist and hence remained on the margins of mainstream national politics. He expressed his ideas in the essays and the books he wrote and the lectures he delivered all over the world. One of the most important themes that concerned him was the issue of Nationalism. His essays on Nationalism are prescribed for you and you would do well to read them.

Tagore was an advocate of peace and harmony. During the Swadeshi movement of Bengal in which he took an active part and even led demonstrations on the then Calcutta streets, he had to confront a growing cult of militant Nationalism. Though he admired their courage and sense of sacrifice, he couldn't disagree more with the young revolutionaries on their methods. The violence perpetrated by these revolutionaries militated against his humanism and he withdrew to Shantiniketan for a long time. It is during this period of retreat that he wrote

The Home and The World.

Tagore is often compared to Gandhi, not erroneously either, for his advocacy of peace, harmony and universal brotherhood. In fact it is this message of peace and universal brotherhood coupled with his seer-like appearance which captured the imagination of the western world. Poets like W.B. Yeats, (Yeats wrote the foreword to the collection of poems **Gitanjali**) disillusioned with the crumbling value system of the modern world, found a new voice of hope in, what they often termed, the mysticism of Tagore's poetry. This enthusiasm, however, did not last very long and Tagore came under some very hostile criticism, especially from the marxist critic George Lukac's.

The response to Tagore at home is marked by a certain kind of ambivalence. The pre 1912 Tagore was viewed with much suspicion. Coming from a family which owed a great deal to the British for the rise in their fortunes, Tagore was often accused of being unpatriotic, especially after he parted ways with the Swadeshi movement in Bengal. What compounded the problem was his unconventional ways and ideas. Though Tagore had very little formal education he was highly influenced by the western liberal humanist ideals and propounded these ideals with enthusiasm. But in the charged atmosphere of Bengali Nationalism there were hardly any takers for his ideas. His creative writings of this period could be hardly characterised as popular. In fact two of his novels, **The Home and The World**, and **The Four Chapters** received very hostile reception and Tagore was branded as a lackey of the British Empire. It may not be too far from the truth to say that Tagore did not receive much acclaim, critical or popular, during his life time. It was only after his death in 1941 that his contribution to the Nation and the creative field was fully appreciated and he was canonized as the foremost creative artist not just of Bengal but of India as well. Since then he has received a lot of critical acclaim and attention the world over. But his continuing popular appeal is largely due to his songs, (Rabindra Sangeet) and his short stories. His novels, on the other hand, have not received as much attention. In fact, to a very large extent, Satyajit Ray, the noted film maker, has contributed a lot to the revival of interest in his novels, by making a few full length feature films on them. It would not be way off the mark to say that **The Home and The World** came to the lime-light, at least outside Bengal, through the film 'Ghaire Baire' by Satyajit Ray. But controversy seems to have followed him throughout his life and even after his death. The latest being Kushwant Singh's assessment of Tagore, a few years back, which shook the literary establishment for quite some time. It is quite tempting to ask a few questions here. What kind of a person he was? Why have his writings generated so much controversy?

Interesting as the questions might seem, they can not be addressed with any degree of sincerity in the space of this lesson. If you are interested you could begin with his biography by Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson which is a very comprehensive and interesting read. However what we could do is to outline some of the special circumstances which shaped the man. We will reserve that discussion for the next section and content ourselves with just a couple of remarks on Tagore here.

Throughout his life, Tagore was caught up in various contradiction and paradoxes, which he tried to resolve in his writings and his life with varying degrees of success. These contradictions, were mostly products of his early life as well as a unique kind of family history. Tagore, once in 1930, told an audience at Oxford:

"The unconventional code of life for our family has been a confluence of three cultures. Hindu, Mohammadan and British... I came into a world in which the modern citybred spirit of

progress has just triumphed over the lush green life of our ancient village community. Though the trampling process was almost complete... something of the past lingered over the wreckage" (Quoted in Krishna Dutta & Andrew Robinson, 1995, pp. 17)

Tagore's life was a constant struggle to strike a balance between the new emerging world and the enduring values of a past which was fast disappearing, between the liberal progressive spirit of the west and the notion of a composite and unified existence.

2.0 Part - I (Contexts)

2.1 The Tagores of Jessore

The Tagores originally came from Jessore, halfway between Kolkatta and Dhaka. They themselves claim to have more than a thousand years of family history. They were always hindu and brahmins at that. But later on they came to be known as the 'Pirali Brahmins'. Legend has it that some of the ancestors of Tagores were tainted by muslim contact when they were duped into tasting beef by Pir Ali the Wazir of the Muslim governor of Jessore. Since then the Tagores remained on the fringe of orthodox hindu society. The Tagores moved to Govindpur which subsequently became an important trading city under the East India Company. The merchants from the company, while addressing the Tagores, could not pronounce the Bengali honorific 'Thakur' and mispronounced it as Mister 'Tagore'. And since then they have been known as Tagores. They acted as middle-men for the company and soon enough became very rich.

There was a split in the family and two brothers, Darpanarayan and Nilomani, moved out of Govindpur and built a house at Pathuriatghat on Hooghley. Of the two brothers Nilomani (the great-great grandfather of Rabindranath Tagore) was offered a position with the imperial administration away at Kolkatta. Nilomani moved to Kolkatta to take up the position. Soon after there developed a rift between the brothers, possibly over money, though Tagore does not refer to this incident in his memories, and there was a further split in the family. Nilomani moved out of the Pathuriatghat home and built himself a house at Jorasanko, a little away from the river. It was at this house, No. 6 Dwarakanath Tagore's Lane, Jorasanko, that Tagore was born on 7th May, 1861, almost three quarters of a century later. Since the split, the two branches of the Tagores, one at Pathuriatghat and the other at Jorasonko, had little do with each other.

2.2 Dwarakanath Tagore

Of the Jorasanko Tagores, Dwarakanath, grandson of Nilomani Tagore and grandfather of R.N. Tagore, was the most famous and dynamic of all. He was called 'Prince Dwarakanath', because he loved the good life and in fact lived like a prince. Dwarakanath lived through the expansion and consolidation of British Rule in India. He benefited a lot, financially, from British Rule but his attitude towards them was ambivalent. He was convinced that the East India Company was exploitative in nature yet at the same time he believed that India could ill afford any government, including self governance, other than the British Government at that point of time.

The contradiction within 'Prince Dwarakanath' were amply demonstrated in his life as well. As a Zamindar he was business like and contributed a lot to the oppressive indigo system promoted by the British which was proving to be ruinous for the peasantry. But as a patron and philanthropist and entrepreneur he was way ahead of his times. There were hardly any charitable activities to which he did not contribute generously. He supported liberal newspapers and the arts. One of his passions was theatre and he promoted it with great enthusiasm. As a businessman his ventures were the corner stones of the commercial structure of Kolkotta. He launched the union bank, brought a coal mine near Shantiniketan and pioneered tea growing in Assam. He promoted the Calcutta steamtug association and several other ventures. He was very fond of travelling and cultivating writers and artists. It is interesting to know that one of the writers he cultivated was Charles Dickens. They met several times over a period of five or

six years. But Dwarakanath was a kind of enigma to the British novelist. Dickens attitude towards the 'Prince' can be described as a curious mix of admiration and facetiousness. Dickens, commenting on him in 1842 before they met, wrote 'A Tiger with such a name as Dwarakanath Tagore is not an everyday animal... He is a live hieroglyphic. I give him up' (Quoted in Krishna Dutta, 1995 p.25). Years later, after the death of Dwarakanath Tagore, Dickens wrote once again, 'Dwarakanath Tagore was called, the "Oriental Croesus" and was well known in England.' (Ibid p. 25). Curiously enough Rabindranath Tagore would draw the same kind of response from G.B. Shaw years later. We might as well ask what was it that the grandfather and the grandson shared that evoked the same kind of response from British creative writers?

Rabindranath Tagore, on surface at least, had very little to do with his grandfather, because Dwarakanath had died fifteen years before he was born. But he had much in common with his grandfather apart from appearance and looks. That is not to say that they did not have any differences. In fact the differences were very sharp and essential. For instance Rabindranath did not have his grandfather's business acumen or his hard heartedness as a Zamindar. He did not even have the flamboyance of Dwarakanath. But there were some striking similarities as well. Rabindranath shared his grandfather's love for the arts. He, like his grandfather, was generous, loved travelling and meeting good minds. More significantly both shared a vision of co-operation between the east and the west, an amalgamation of eastern spirituality and western material progress. Both had immense pride in their nation yet they also admired the discipline and energy of the west. And both struggled to come to terms with the contradictions of their vision.

2.3 Debendranath Tagore

The influence of Debendranath Tagore on his son Rabindranath was profound. In his early life Debendranath was hardly any different from other rich spoiled Bengali boys of his time. But slowly and slowly, as he grew up, he was drawn towards Raja Rammohan Roy whom Rabindranath described as the 'best friend of my grandfather'. Ram Mohan Roy, as you must be aware, was one of the leading intellectuals and reformers of his times. He is known primarily for his activism against the obnoxious hindu practice of sati. He also founded the Brahma Sabha which strived to free the hindu society from the bondage of caste and rituals. Based on his interpretation of the Veda's, the society tried to bring about reforms in the caste system, idolatory and obsolete rituals which were debilitatory in their effects on the society.

Debendranath was one of the pillars of this movement in the second half of the nineteenth century which his son, Rabindranath, was to take up in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Debendranath himself became a Brahmo only in 1843, though he had contemplated on the idea for quite some time, having undergone an epiphanic experience after the death of his grandmother. Subsequently, being a leader of this religious and social reform movement, he had to struggle with the idolatrous practices of the Tagore household. A chance discovery of a shloka from the Isopanishad was to have a profound influence on his life and sent him on a spiritual journey which subsequently earned him the title 'Maharshi'. The Shloka from the upanishad stressed on the temporality of the world, and pointed out the path of renunciation of wealth and worldly pleasures as the true path. Thus started his long association with the mountains where he retreated often to find peace and fulfillment.

Like his father, Rabindranath was also deeply influenced by the idea that God was immanent in all things. And this idea underpins a large body of his works. It is this belief in the mysterious ways of God which found beautiful expression in Tagore's poetry, that appealed so much to the western intellectuals. But Rabindranath differed with his father in a significant way. While his father saw the Upanishads as the highest achievement of Indian philosophy, Rabindranath considered them incomplete and too intellectual for his taste. He believed that love and devotion had, perhaps, a greater role to play in exploring the nature of reality. Love and devotion, incidentally, are two of the major themes in his writings. You must have noticed that love and devotion is a major theme in **The Home and The World** as well.

Debendranath combined his spiritual orthodoxy with a rare probity of behaviour in all his social and business dealings. But he was finding it extremely difficult to carry the people along with him in his reforms in the fairly conservative Bengali hindu society. Neither he nor his son Rabindranath were iconoclasts like Dwarkanath Tagore and while they continued with some hindu practices they did not agree with them. For instance though Debendranath was radical enough to marry off one of his daughters in the Brahmo way, he still continued wearing the sacred thread and invested his son Rabindranath with one. But while Debendranath grew more and more conservative with age Rabindranath became more radical with age.

Check your Progress 1

1. Tagore said that his family was situated at the confluence of three cultures, Hindu Mohammadan and British. Illustrate this statement from Tagore's unique family history.

2.4 Tagore and the Bengali Novel

The 'novel' was a new literary form and came into its own in Bengal around the middle of the nineteenth century. Many scholars consider Bankim Chandra Chatterjee as the father of the Bengali novel. Bankim was the high priest of this new literary form, and the publication of his first novel, **Durgeshanandini**, serialised in his own monthly *Bangadarshan*, was quite a literary event. Tagore, himself a remarkable novelist and one of the pioneers of the novel, was profoundly influenced by Bankim. In Tagore's words Bankim 'took the Bengali heart by storm.' The young Tagore waited with great longing to lay his hands on the journal and he writes in his memoirs:

"Nowadays anyone who wishes may swallow the whole of **Chandrashekar** or **Bishabriksha (Poison tree)** at a mouthful. But the process of longing and anticipating, month after month, of spreading over wide intervals the concentrated joy of each short reading, of revolving every instalment over and over in the mind while watching and waiting for the next; the combination of craving and satisfaction, of burning curiosity with its appeasement: those drawn out delights, none will ever taste again" (My Reminiscences, 1917 pp. 89)

Bankim's novels, with their colloquial prose style, were so popular that soon enough there were a host of writers who took to novel writing. And predictably they were content to immitate him. Bankim was a romantic at heart and most of his novels were historical romances with larger than life characters. Thus Bankim missed the defining qualities of the novel form, which was realism. His novels hardly ever engaged with the social issues developing in the fast evolving Bengali society. His novels were backward looking, and more often than not, looked back with nostalgia on an idealized past. He lacked a genuine appreciation of the various shades of contempory reality and invariably ended up, perhaps due to his hindu-revivalist spirit, refashioning the old myths and legends and the idealized larger than life characters in them. His early novels, **Durgeshnandini** (1865) and others, had very little to do with the social reality and the complex forces at work which shaped the ways of the people. However Bankim was one of the finest story teller of all times and his use of the colloquial tongue had earned him, almost a cult status and wide readership.

With novels like **Bishabriksha** and **Anandmath**, Bankim attempts to come to terms with the emerging social issues, and perhaps for the first time, attempts some kind of fictional realism. **Bishabriksha** deals with the issue of remarriage of widows, which was legalised largely through the efforts of Sir Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. **Anandmath** on the other hand, foreshadows the militant phase of the freedom struggle in its theme of rebellion. The theme of the plight of a young widow in an orthodox hindu joint family was an engaging theme in the later part of the nineteenth century. Bankim, with a finger on the pulse of the reading public, followed the popular sentiment. Bankim was a fine craftman and there was very little to fault him as far as the plot construction was concerned. But where Bankim's fiction suffers is the lack of sharply delienated characters. In a Bankim novel there is hardly any engagement with the inward psychological struggle and complexities of the character. The character served the cause of the plot or in other words, in his novel plot took precedence over character. The failure to map the matrix of the inner changes in the character made his characters exaggerated versions of popular stereotypes. Bankim also paid very little attention to the logical development of the plot, relying too much on a generous dose of dramatic incidents to sustain the interest in the story. Bankim also had the habit of intruding into the story with his authorial

comments which makes his fiction judgemental. Though Bankim did a lot to introduce and popularize the novel form, he had failed to realize the full potential of the new form. There was a need for someone to come along and give a new direction to the novel.

The young Rabindra Nath, as we have discussed earlier in this section, was highly impressed by Bankim's achievements and following Bankim had already written two romances when he was in his twenties. However he was too much of an individualist to be carried away by the popular fashion of the day. He moved away from fiction writing to the short story and he produced a fairly large collection of stories during the 1890's. Some of the stories are still considered the finest in any language and I am sure you would be familiar with some of them. He returned to the novel in 1902 with **Chokher Bali** (translated as **Binodini**). But this time it was a mature and self-assured Rabindranath, a different novelist with a technique and range of subjects that would set the trend in modern Bengali fiction. This was the new realistic novel which would, later, become the standard form of novel writing in Bengal.

Tagore's realism was a little different from the 19th century social realism of European fiction. Tagore at heart, was no less a romantic than Bankim. But he wanted to avoid the romantic posturing and idealizing which marred most of Bankim's novels. Tagore's intense concern for social and religious reform made him search for a new realistic mode of presentation. But at the same time he was convinced that mere presentation of surface reality (like what you find in European fiction), would be an inadequate method. There was a need to present the truth of experience, to present the realm of experience of men and women in the real world. Thus Tagore tried to present an adequate psycho-realistic exploration of the character in his novels. He tried to work out a symbiotic relationship between the inner world of the characters and the plot. Tagore's method of dealing with the social issues of his times was to explore these issues through the characters' deep involvement and engagement with life. The plot works itself out through the actions and reactions of the individuals and not so much due to external happenings. Thus one can say that Tagore's major contribution to the Bengali novel was to introduce the element of psycho-realism and bringing in life-like characters into the novel. He also rescued the novel from the romantic sentimentality of Bankim and made it a kind of instrument for exploration of the socio-political and psychological realities of the people and their world.

Check your Progress 2

1. Tagore was profoundly influenced by Bankim yet he decided to move away from Bankim's style of novel writing and chart out his own course. Why?

2.5 Tagore: The Novelist

Choker Bali (1902) translated as **Binodini** was Tagore's first major attempt to move away from the quasi-historical construction of the social novel. He attains a rare maturity with this novel. The theme of the novel is the struggle of a young widow to come to terms with her desire for self-hood and love in an orthodox rigid social system which denies her any freedom or rights. The theme was not new. Bankim had dealt with the theme in his hugely popular **BishaBriksha**. But Tagore's novel was new in the treatment of this subject. The subject, in **Choker Bali**, is treated with a rare subtlety, psychological insight and compassion. But even Tagore found it difficult to go beyond the social and artistic expectation of his times. The novel ends in defeat for the heroine Binodini, and she is denied the possibilities of escaping the restrictive mores of the society. At the end when she realises herself and could have had Bihari, the man she loves, she is too tired and sad to wage another battle and she says, "I shall pray and do penance that I may have you as mine in our next life, in this life I dare not hope for more, I do not desire it" (Binodini, p. 272)

Though the novel, in the end, fails to break the conservative mould, yet it is interesting to note that Tagore manages to project a fairly radical vision of the society. A society where human relationships are based on mutual understanding, trust and most importantly on mutual respect. Relationships, instead of reducing individuals to their pre-determined social roles, must give the individual the freedom to discover himself/herself. You can also see that Nikhil in **The Home and The World** reflect on these ideas and tries to work them out in his relationship with Bimala. In most of Tagore's novels you could see women character struggling against an inhuman system which tries to trample their dignity in the name of tradition. While Bankim's Rohini, the young widow of **Bisha Briksha**, is blamed for all the ills of the family and reprimanded for wanting to find a new life for herself with her lover, Tagore's Binodini is treated with dignity and compassion though she also fails to break free at the end.

Gora (1910) was Tagore's next major and perhaps the most ambitious work of fiction. I am sure some of you would be familiar with the story. **Gora** was written at a time when the intelligensia were trying to come to terms with some major questions thrown up by the socio-political developments of the time. The partition of Bengal in (1905) had polarised the society on communal lines and had provided the immediate impetus for the formation of All India Muslim League in December 1906. This separate identity based on religions was institutionalised by Morley-Minto reforms of 1909 which granted separate electorates to the muslim at all levels of the electoral system. There was also the Hindu-Brahmo controversy and

the debate over political freedom which occupied the centre stage in any intellectual debate.

In such a surcharged climate there were very few takers for Rabindranath Tagore's moderate and secular politics with its insistence on a constructive nationalism. He had been marginalised during the later part of the swadeshi movement and had withdrawn to Shantiniketan. **Gora**, written amidst these vital strivings could hardly be expected to side step these issues. Thus polemics occupies a large portion of the novel. One gets the feeling that the essayist in Tagore takes over from the novelist in the polemical sections. But apart from these pieces of brilliant dialectics, it has very vivid living images which very neatly capture the life and mind of the social class it deals with. In the process Tagore lays bare what was false not only in the old social and religious systems but also what was wrong with the new 'enlightened', 'orthodoxy'. In fact **Gora** sparks off, what would be, Tagore's most intense engagement with the pressing socio-political and moral issues of the times in his fiction.

Gorachand or Gora, the protagonist, combines in his character an unmatched intellectual brilliance with an intense idealism. He is a patriot and at the same time he is a staunch orthodox hindu in his religious convictions. But as the story unfolds, in an ironic reversal, we come to know that Gora is not only not a hindu he is not an Indian at all. He is a foundling of Irish origin, orphaned during the First War of Independence of 1857 and brought up by Anandamayee in a hindu family. When he discovers the truth about his origins, his world comes crashing down and in an instant, he becomes rootless, unable to claim any part or any tradition for himself. But this blinding flash of revelation frees him from his self-imposed obligation as well: This release from himself was, unknown to him, a yearning always lurking in the deep recesses of his being. Gora is transformed in the light of the truth and becomes a true Indian at last. He says "To-day I am really an Indian! In me there is no longer any opposition between Hindu, Musalman and Christian. To-day every caste in India is my caste, the food of all is my food!" (Gora, p. 406)

This 'liberal cosmopolitanism' displayed by Gora is already exemplified in the lives of Paresch Babu and Anandamayee. They are free from all forms of bigotry. Paresch Babu even comes under attack from his own Brahmo group for following the founding principles of the society in its letter and spirit. Anandamayee on the other hand becomes an outcast in her own home by adopting Gora for her love of Gora. For Gora she becomes the epitome of Indian mother-hood. Gora describes her thus.

"You have no caste, you make no distinctions, and have no hatred... It is you who are India". (Gora p. 407).

It is significant to note that in Tagore's novels the women slowly emerge as strong individuals capable of transcending the limits imposed by an orthodox social order. But the breadth of vision she achieves is not through the intellect but through the warmth of her heart.

But **Gora** is not just about Gora or Anandamayee. It is a rich portrait gallery with characters like Haran Babu, Sucharita, Binoy, Lalita and others and through the interplay of the various forces in their lives, Tagore manages to introduce various sub themes in the novel. Themes like love, the Hindu-Brahmo conflict are discussed in the Gora, in Sucharita Binoy, and Lalita episodes. But love, for Tagore, is devoid of all sentimentalism. Love is an expression of the freedom of the spirit from the fretters of convention. The political motifs and the theme of love, in Tagore, is interwoven in a complex web of relationship, which is the hallmark of most of Tagore's mature-novels.

The Home and The World (1914), Tagore's next major novel after **Gora**, takes up the theme of aggressive nationalism of the Swadeshi Movement and the disastrous consequence of its mindless violence and sectarian politics. Tagore's disillusionment with the cult of 'Bande Mataram' finds a clear expression in the character of Nikhil. Nikhil opposes the cult of violence with his constructive, tolerant nationalism of which Tagore was a strong advocate. This novel was also new in terms of its technique and style. It is also an allegorical novel where Bimala, representing Mother Bengal, is fought over by Sandip and Nikhil. The former with his brand of aggressive nationalism with 'Bande Mataram' as its magic chant and the later with his sedate but morally superior form of constructive nationalism. In this novel the personal and the political, as seen in the characters of Nikhil, Bimala and Sandip, are inextricably bound up together. Bimala's struggle to emerge from her home, restricted and restrictive, into a new world while securing her home at the same time, parallels Bengals and by extension, India's struggle to emerge into a new world while retaining its inherent individuality. We will have to curtail our discussion of **The Home and The World** here because we are going to discuss the novel in greater detail later. However we will touch upon some of the other novels of Tagore to indicate the direction his fiction followed.

Two of the other major novels which followed **The Home and The World** are **Chaturanga** (1916, **Broken Ties**), and his last novel **Char Adhyaya** (1934 **Four Chapters**). **Chaturanga** is in a sense an experimental novel. The theme, if it can be characterized as such, is the dialectical interplay between the secular and the spiritual in a man's quest for truth and self-realization. The question of 'truth', as you have noticed, is a constant theme in Tagore's works. In **The Home and the World**, Nikhil says 'I reserve my worship for truth'. But here Sachis quest for truth takes place in a kind of social vacuum, Sachis, who took his inspiration from the radical atheism of his uncle Jagmohan, devoted his life to the upliftment of the poor 'muslims' and 'chamars' of his area. But after the death of his uncle he does a volte face and becomes a disciple of Lilananda swami. This religious intoxication would lead him through a whole range of experiences, including Damini's attempt to seduce him when they are stranded in a cave. Sachis renounces everything in his quest for the mystical experience without reaching anywhere.

Sachis and Damini relationship which occupies the core of the novel is a problematic one. Sachis's intense spirituality comes into conflict with Damini's sensuality. Damini a young widow entrusted to the care of Swami Lilanand, emerges as a strong and determined woman. She tries her best to win over Sachis but when she realizes that she has become an obstacle for Sachis in his spiritual journey she is able to sublimate her own desires for Sachis and accepts him as his spiritual guide. The loose ends are tied up when Damini marries Sribilas and Sachis is free to pursue whatever he is searching for. The title, indicates the complexities of experience and the search for truth. The name is also important in the innovative narrative technique used by Tagore. The story is narrated by a character narrator Sribilas from his point of view. He is a witness to the events he narrates. By using a character as witness and narrator Tagore is able to achieve a kind of distance from the subject he was treating. This distancing was necessary because the novel is philosophical in nature and examines the nature of human bondage, physical, intellectual and emotional through Sachis's struggle to free himself.

Char Adhyaya was his last and is perhaps his most controversial novel. In this novel Tagore returns to the theme of agitational and extremist politics verses the enduring human values of truth and true freedom. The story revolves round the love between Ila and Atindra

against the backdrop of the armed struggle in the early twentieth century Bengal. Ila draws Atindra into the terrorist movement. Atindra joins the terrorist ranks not out of any conviction but because he loves Ila. Soon enough Atindra recoils from the mindless violence perpetrated by the terrorist movement. Ela realising Atindra's predicament tries to rescue him but it is too late. And both are consumed by the movement. It is not difficult to see the parallels between **Char Adhyaya** and **The Home and The World**. In the later Bimala is drawn into the swadeshi movement not because she believes in it but because she is infatuated with Sandip. Nikhil, her husband, tries to wean her away but fails. When, finally, Bimala realizes the hollowness of the movement she tries to draw away but it is too late. She has to pay a heavy price for it; a young life extinguished and a half-dead husband. However, the political fallout of the terrorist movement is not the central concern of the novelist. It is the human interest, the suffering of the people caught in the convulsions of the political struggle, that the novels focus on.

Check your Progress 3

1. List out all the issues which concerned Tagore as a novelist.

2.6 Tagore and the Craft of Fiction

If we take into account the range of themes and the way they are worked over in Tagore's novels, then it is not difficult to see why he is considered as the father of the 'Indian novel', if a category like that exists. But then let us also examine the techniques that Tagore used in writing these novels. Did he blaze a new trail so far as the architecture of the novel is concerned?

The answer to a question like this, of necessity, must be ambivalent. Tagore brings in some novelty and a lot of experimentation in narrative techniques. Yet at the same time his novels did not start any new trends with any far reaching consequences. We have already noted in our earlier discussion, that Tagore's mature novels mark a move away from the immensely popular historical romances of Bankim towards social realism in the novel. Concurrently it was also a move away from the larger-than-life characters of the earlier novels to the everyday flesh and blood characters who were quite convincing in their everydayness. It is often pointed out that Tagore had a very limited range so far as his characters are concerned. Most of them come from the urban, English educated, 'Bengali Bhadrak' class. But we must keep in mind the fact that Tagore was writing about a highly volatile socio-political climate and the leadership of these movements, more often than not, came from this class. The middle-class intelligentsia, in a sense, were the representatives of the aspirations of a whole generation of youth. Mulk Raj Anand regards the male characters of Tagore's novels, as "representatives of our age". He further says that "they do not offer much hope: bitter, disillusioned, impetuous, mostly concerned to make romantic gestures, they are only relieved by the fact that, Tagore shows very skillfully 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." (not quoted in G.V.Raj, 1983, p.15)

While Tagore's male characters seem to crack under the immense stress and strain of their struggle, his women characters, remarkably, seem to have tremendous inner strength of character. They not only struggle hard in their search for identity and self-hood, they exhibit a rare self assurance in their endeavour.

While characterisation was a strength with Tagore, plot construction and technique was more often than not the weak link. Tagore used his fiction as a medium to expand his ideas. It is quite a common place to find passages devoted to the exposition of ideas and hence Tagore's novels have a loose rambling feel to them. If you read his novels carefully you would notice that Tagore did not pay much attention to the plot. Instead of developing the plot logically (from cause to effect) Tagore uses a lot of extraneous devices like chance, coincidence to move the plot along. Tagore tries to force some kind of order on the episodes sometimes by contriving situations and endings. But what he misses out in plot construction is well compensated in the innovative use of narrative techniques.

The most significant departure that Tagore makes from his illustrious predecessor Bankim Chandra Chattarjee is the elimination of authorial intervention. It was important for Tagore to give the reader the freedom to form an informed opinion on the issues he dealt with in his novels. Given the fact that Tagore was a champion of individual freedom and that his novels were novels of ideas, it was but logical that he did not want to force his opinion on the readers. Hence some of the techniques Tagore used to achieve this objective were entirely new to the Indian novel. Techniques like flashback, multiple points of view (where many characters narrate parts of the story), first person narration (single character narrates the story from his point of view) and the use of a central consciousness helped Tagore produce in his novels, a kind of social and psychological realism which was new to the novel in India.

Tagore also tried to invest his characters with a language which was colloquial and accessible to the common reader. But the poet in Tagore could hardly be contained. His novels have generous number of passages where Tagore lets go the full potential of his poetic imagi-

nation. This is especially true of passages which deal with the theme of love, humanism and freedom. Since Tagore's novels do not have too many dramatic incidents, he uses dialogues to raise the dramatic effect in his novels. The dialogues which are primarily polemical, are the high points of his poetic imagination and grace. Yet they hardly take away anything from the naturalness of the scenes.

In this discussion we have noted that Tagore's strengths are his technique of characterisation, narrative technique and his use of a judicious blend of the colloquial and the poetic language. Plot construction and drama were the weak links of his craft. However, despite these weak links, Tagore remains a key figure in the rise and development of the novel in India. He also gave a new dimension and force to Bengali prose. Now, keeping the above discussions in mind, you should be able to place Tagore's novels especially **The Home and The World** in a broader perspective.

Check your Progress 4

1. Tagore as a novelist had his strengths and weaknesses. List them out.

2.7 Tagore, Nationalism and The Swadeshi Movement

The Home and The World has the militant nationalism phase of the Swadeshi movement as its backdrop. Hence lets, very briefly, go over the major ideas which were dominant in the political debates of the times. The major debates raging during the movement centred around two very important concepts, that of the 'Nation' and what constituted 'Indian Nationalism'. It is also imperative for you to get acquainted with the Swadeshi movement in Bengal so that you are able to critically examine the representation of the Swadeshi movement in Tagore's **The Home and The World**. So far as the Swadeshi Movement is concerned I would refer you to the article by prof. Sumit Sarkar included in your reading material. Prof. Sarkars article is extremely informative and discusses the various aspects of the movement in Bengal. You could get acquainted with Tagore's views on 'Nationalism' by reading Tagore's essay 'Nationalism in India' which is a prescribed reading for you. What we are going to do in this section is to examine the idea of the Nation as Mother which dominated the popular imagination of the times. 'Bande Mataram' the magic mantra was the battle cry of the young militant nationalist. We will try to place this idea in its historical context and examine Tagore's response to this idea.

If you have read Prof. Sarkar's article by now, it must be immediately clear to you that the immediate cause of the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal was the proposed partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon. Without going into the dynamics of the movement I would just like to mention that the dominant metaphor used in this movement was that of the image of the Mother. 'Banga Mata'. Slicing off a part of Bengal was like dismembering the mother. In your reading of **The Home and The World** you must have noticed that 'Bande Mataram' was not just a battle cry, it was the magic mantra which the militant nationalists believed will not only unite the country but drive away the British at the same time.

Bankim's song 'Bande Mataram' was published in his own journal '*Bangadarshan*' in 1875. This song, with which I am sure all of you are familiar, served the cause of the Nationalist movement many times and in many different ways. It was later inserted into Bankim's novel **Anandmath** in 1882. The key idea in this song is the conflation of the mother with the Nation. Ironically, Tagore, who subsequently opposed this conflation of the Mother and Nation along with the spirit of worship it demanded, set the music for this song and sang it in public at the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress in 1896. But initially the Mother in Bankim's song represented only Bengal. Later on it came to represent Bharata Mata to serve the cause of Indian Nationalism.

Why is it that Tagore opposed the cult of 'Bande Mataram' when he had set the music for the song and sang it in public? To answer this question we must understand the cultural context of the Swadeshi movement. Tagore had no problem with the representation of Bengal as Banga Mata in so far as it helped in raising the consciousness of the people, giving them a powerful symbol to rally around. But the early militant phase of the movement which got its initial impetus from the writings of Bankim and Aurobindo Ghose emphasised the principle of shakti within the cult of the Mother. In an article entitled 'Rishi Bankim Chandra' in a journal in 1907, Aurobindo wrote that it was only after "...the mother had revealed herself... patriotism that work(ed) miracles and saved a doomed Nation was born". Bankim had managed to conflate the ideas of Nation as Mother and Mother Goddess which fired the imagination of a whole generation of young educated middle class Bengali youth. This conflation, in

the context of Bengal, often evoked the image of Kali or Durga as the Mother Goddess in her enemy slaying manifestation. I am sure you remember Sandip in **The Home and The World** plans to organise a huge Kali Puja to energise the hindu populace of rural Bengal.

This conflation also had a very interesting dimension to it. The idea of Mother Bengal had a certain immediacy to it, a sense of reality about it. And this element of reality provided the special devotional quality which in turn demanded a special kind of self-sacrificing love. Amulya in **The Home and The World** is completely swayed by this idea of sacrificing himself for the cause of the Mother. He represents a whole generation of young (school going or school dropout) Bengali revolutionaries who sacrificed their lives for the cause.

In the early phase of the nationalist movement Tagore himself considered the idea of the Nation as Mother as a powerful symbol and he himself had paid homage to Mother Bengal in many of his songs. At this stage even the muslims had no problem with this idea. Poet and revolutionary Kazi Nazrul Islam in his poems did call upon the leaders to save Mother Bengal. But as the idea evolved in the early part of the 20th century it became problematic and developed in divergent ways. One of the dominant strands to develop during this period was the bigoted religious formulation given to it by the revolutionary hindu right wing activists. Yet at the same time there were a large number of revolutionaries who did not need this bigoted formulation to be inspired and develop a bonding with the idea of Mother Nation. But the conflation between Mother Nation and Mother Goddess slowly began alienating a large section of the muslims who were fervent nationalists.

Tagore had a problem with this new formulation. He was uncomfortable with the new religious underpinning of the idea of Mother Nation. Bankim had played a major role in harnessing this hindu extremist sentiment by raving and ranting against the Muslims in his novel **Anand math** and his other writings as well. Many intellectuals of the time including Swami Vivekananda had little sympathy with Bankim's formulations and spoke of the composite cultural identity of India. But the voice of sanity had no takers in the surcharged atmosphere of the Swadeshi movement. Tagore also tried his best to convince people that such a narrow and sectarian nationalism was not only inappropriate for a multi religious and multicultural society but extremely dangerous. It would not be able to accommodate the religious diversity of Bengal. He had warned that by marginalising the muslims in the Swadeshi Movement the militant Swadeshi's were leading Bengal into a communal minefield. Of course Tagore was proved right and the society in Bengal was sharply polarised along communal lines leading to the eruption of communal riots during the Swadeshi movement.

Tagore's humanism and finer sensibilities revolted against the growing communal overtones of the Swadeshi Movement. Tagore could not accept the violence which accompanied the militant phase of this movement. For him Truth and Humanism were greater than the Nation. You might recall that he makes Nikhil, in **The Home and The World**, say that he would worship truth rather than the nation. The man who had led marches against the partition of Bengal during the early phases of the Swadeshi Movement now found himself isolated. Accused of being unpatriotic and a British Stooge, he withdrew from the struggle and retreated to Shantiniketan for a long time. **The Home and The World** was, in a sense, a response to all the accusations hurled at him for what he considered his supreme duty, upholding truth and humanism.

3.0 PART - II

3.1 CHAPTER 1

Bimala's Story

The Home and The World is organised in twelve chapters and twenty-three sections. Of these twenty three sections Bimala's story occupies ten sections, Nikhil's story occupies eight sections and Sandip's story occupies the rest five sections. This in itself is an indication of the centrality of Bimala's character in the narrative. This centrality is further reinforced by the fact that the opening chapter in its entirety and the closing section in the final chapter is given to her.

As far as openings in fiction is concerned, **The Home and The World** has as good an opening as any you would find in world fiction. It introduces the characters, sets the mood, reveals the tensions and indicates the themes. And it does so in a fine balance which is rare in fiction writing in India in the early part of the twentieth century. What is more is that the narrative is in the style of a personal journal, 'Atmakatha' or reminiscences. Reminiscences which flood the mind, especially, during times of great crisis. There is also a strong cinematic quality to the opening chapter. The flash-back mode, the powerful visual quality and finally the quick editing which moves the story quickly from Bimala's childhood, through her marriage to the euphoria of Swadeshi and to the present crisis in her life. The mood, however is not just sombre and contemplative but also critical and evaluative.

Now that we have a broad overview of the chapter let us engage with the narrative itself. Bimala begins by invoking the memory of her dead mother. The invocation is heavy with sadness and a longing for the peace and tranquility which radiated from her. She was a beautiful woman with the radiance of holiness. She wore the mark of tradition on her forehead (vermillion mark) and in her clothes (the white saree with a red border is a very traditional Bengali dress). The peace that radiated from her sprung from a complete devotion to her husband and her family.

This invocation heightens the anxiety in Bimala's tone about the impending crisis in Bimala's life. It serves as a prelude to an interesting and ironical contrast which becomes manifest later between the tradition bound mother and the daughter whose life marks a rebellious departure from tradition.

What follows is a quick update on Bimala's uneventful but favourable marriage into a wealthy aristocratic family. Bimala considers herself lucky to have married Nikhilesh the English educated, liberal humanist. He encourages Bimala to come out of her purdah and realize herself and respect herself as an individual. Bimala's reminiscences recreate an intimate picture of her household and its history in a few brief strokes. This sketch of her household could easily serve as representative of the landed gentry of Bengal at that time. The typical licentious ways of its men folk wasting away their energies in wine and women. The pitiable condition of the women confined to the four walls of their homes.

But Nikhilesh is different. He shuns this self-dissipating ways of his class. Bimala draws a very sympathetic picture of Nikhil. He is shown as a man who combines the best of the East

and the West in him. He is an idealist. Nikhil wanted Bimala to emerge from the narrow confines of her home into the wider world, to find an identity for herself beyond the home. Nikhil not only loved Bimala but also respected her as he would respect any woman. He was tolerant sympathetic and considerate.

But here Bimala's narrative introduces the differences between them which would make them drift away from each other. Bimala is unable to fathom the relationship between Nikhil and his sister-in-law. There is a deep bonding between the two. Nikhil could never be rude to his sister-in-law whatever the provocation may be. There is a hint of jealousy in Bimala's tone at this point. She is a little exasperated at her husband's goodness which she feels was being exploited by others. She wished that her husband had "the manliness to be a little less good" (p. 22.)*

This wish, that her husband had the manliness to be a little less good is quite revealing. It reveals that Bimala had internalised the traditional stereotypes of what a man should be. This perceived lack of manliness in her husband, as she understood it then, is what drives her into the arms of an outsider, Sandip, who, Bimala thought, had plenty of it. But that is not to suggest that she did not admire Nikhil. She did and the third section of the chapter amply demonstrates her admiration for Nikhil's charities. She in fact, at this point of time, was annoyed with the fact that Sandip was fleecing Nikhil on the pretext of Swadeshi work. But as soon as Bimala catches the Swadeshi fever differences crop up between her and her husband.

At this point let us step back and observe Bimala the narrator. Several questions come to our mind. Is Bimala self indulgent in her narrative? Is she able to narrate her 'atmakatha' with any degree of detachment? Of course we must keep in mind that the fact Bimala is narrating in the past tense and hence has the advantage of time and space to reflect on Bimala the character. I would like to think that Bimala's narration is sufficiently distanced to hold Bimala the character in a critical gaze and at the same time it also has sufficient proximity to assume a confessional tone. We see her reflecting on her confusions, flaws and limitations with extreme clarity. She realises that she might have gone astray and that her understanding of Nikhil as well as Sandip was, perhaps, flawed. But there is no self-pity. Bimala the narrator has already moved away from Bimala the house-wife and the would be 'queen-bee' of the Swadeshi. She has got over the contradictions in her life and is able to review herself with detachment and irony. What is ironic is the circularity that marks her life. She starts off as a house-wife, entertains visions of growing bigger than the home, tries to escape the boundaries of the home in a new transformed self-image and finally returns back to her home chastened and after paying a heavy price.

There is enough detachment and clarity in Bimala's narrative to map out the differences and the beginnings of the discord that would rip apart their marital life. Her narrative brings into sharp focus the respective character traits of Nikhil as well as herself. For instance we get to know that both of them were swayed by the call of Swadeshi but in extremely divergent and incompatible ways. Nikhil's approach is more cerebral, reflective and constructive. His endeavour to make people self reliant through indigenous enterprise fails to fire the imagination of Bimala. She, clearly enough, was looking for a more spectacular display of commitment to the cause of Swadeshi. And the absence of such a display makes her think of Nikhil as,

* (All the quotations are from the standard Penguin edition of *The Home and The World* translated by Sundernath Tagore. 1999.)

perhaps, a coward. She, on the other hand, is swept off her feet by the passion and turbulence of Swadeshi around her. 'Bande Mataram' and the fire in the slogan is what captures her imagination. But Nikhil could not accept the spirit of Bande Mataram whole heartedly. The enormity of this difference is captured with rare clarity in the closing lines of the chapter where Bimala reports Nikhil's reasons for not accepting the spirit of 'Bande Mataram'. He says "I am willing to serve my country but my worship I reserve for Right which is far greater than my country". (p. 29)

3.2 CHAPTER 2

Bimala's Story

Bimala's narrative in the second chapter leads us straight into the dramatic events associated with the advent of Swadeshi made more dramatic by a brilliant portrait of Sandip Babu. The narrative, thus far in Chapter I, had introduced us to some of the major themes of the novel (The home, Swadeshi, and the growing discord between Bimala and Nikhil). This chapter recounts a very significant time in their lives when an outsider (Sandip) walks into their lives which disrupts the equilibrium maintained so far. Thus the tone and tenor of this chapter which is loud and hysterical creates a jarring contrast with the sombre and reflective mood of the earlier chapter.

Sandip enters the scene with a lot of pomp and fire. There is delicious excitement all around as Sandip Babu is borne in sitting on a big chair like a king, hoisted on the shoulders of ten or twelve youths. The emphasis here is on passion, youth, grandeur and most importantly high rhetoric. The meeting that Sandip addresses turns hysterical and in that same meeting Bimala is infatuated by Sandip's brilliance. But the narrative is tempered by Bimala's recounting of her first impressions of Sandip from his photograph and his incessant demand for money from Nikhil. The narrative seems to suggest that, perhaps Bimala's initial instinctive assessment of Sandip was quite accurate, she says... "... it seemed to me, in spite of all its brilliance that too much base alloy had gone into its making. The light in his eyes somehow did not shine true." (p.30)

The narrative also sets up the contrast between Nikhil and Sandip beautifully. Nikhil represents the values of restraint, refinement and calm reflection. Sandip, on the other hand, represents the impetuous, the dramatic and passionate action. And this impetuosity in Sandip makes him a hero of the Swadeshi movement in Bimala's eyes. Sandip's fiery speech transforms in Bimala's initial perception of him and now it seems to her that he was, "marked out by the gods as their messenger to mortal men and women". (p. 31).

Bimala is attracted by this man. For the first time in her life she experiences the stirrings of strong passion. She becomes bold enough to raise the purdah and look directly at Sandip and catches his eyes. Sandip is also attracted by Bimala and his words 'flamed up more fiercely, at Bimala's sight. The raising of the purdah is symbolic of Bimala's rejection of 'Home'. Her fascination for this attractive stranger also transforms her self image. She sees herself in a new light. She, who considered herself ugly and always had a sense of inadequacy vis-a-vis her beautiful sister-in-law, now beholds herself in resplendent glory. She was 'no longer the lady of the Rajah's house, but the sole representative of Bengal's womanhood'. (p. 31) Her life is now infused with a new meaning which transcends the narrow boundaries of the 'Home'.

Bimala is unable to contain her excitement and contrives to invite Sandip to stay on for one more day. Sandip accepts her invitation and continues to stay on and quickly casts a spell on Bimala. Nikhil is, but naturally, surprised at Bimala's behaviour because she had, earlier, steadfastly refused to appear before Nikhil's friends. In the evening Sandip engages Nikhil in a debate over the meaning and purpose of Swadeshi. The debate, in section 5, in a certain sense recreates the debate that Tagore had with the proponents of militant Swadeshi. Nikhil, like Tagore, refuses to compromise on the question of truth and moral value for the sake of hyp-

notic patriotism. Nikhil represents Tagore's own deep concern at the violence and hatred spread by the proponents of militant Swadeshi. Bimala, on her part, is so taken in by the subtle flirtation and unabashed flattery that soon she starts parroting the ideas of Sandip. Nikhil's voice of rationality and sanity did not have, for her, the same appeal of excited hatred propagated by Sandip.

Though Bimala is captivated by Sandip's Swadeshi rhetoric, her personal response to Nikhil and Sandip is at best ambivalent. She is aware that Sandip indulged in debate to show off his keen wit. But at the same time she is grateful to Sandip for her now transformed self image. Her radicalisation is almost complete and she now sees herself as shakti incarnate. She is ready for the ultimate sacrifice. "I do not care about fine distinctions ... I would make my country a person and call her mother, Goddess, Durga for whom I would redden the earth with sacrificial offering" (p. 38). Sandip's response to this statement is so exaggerated that it leaves Bimala confused.

Sandip's declamation is halted by the entry of Chandranath Babu, Nikhil's teacher. The tension in the atmosphere is released by his calm and dignified presence. He blesses Bimala and she is released from her trance. The narrative ends with an enigmatic line from Bimala. "I was surely in need of such a blessing at that moment" (p. 40). Why did she need such a blessing when she is emerging from her home into the outer world? Is it to give her the strength to carry forward her mission? Is there a lurking fear that she might be moving away from her husband into the arms of a stranger? Or is it a faint realization that she is at a cross road in her life where she must make a choice and needed the blessing to save her from making a big mistake?

Nikhil's Story

Nikhil, unlike Bimala who was mostly reporting past events, narrates his on-going experiences. His narrative provides the reader a different perspective on the story. There is a perceptible change in tone and mood here. The tone of quiet, sad and honest self searching sets up a contrast with the high pitch declamatory patriotism of the previous section.

This narrative is steeped in sadness. Nikhil believed that he had the strength to stand through any crisis but never had the occasion to test himself. Now he is painfully aware that the time has come to test his mettle. What makes it even more poignant is the fact that the crisis is coming from the most unexpected quarters; his beloved wife. He perceives that Bimala is infatuated with Sandip. He fears the worst and his pain is evident when he says, "The things that should not be seen, the things I do not want to see these I must see" (p. 40).

But he has the strength of character to retain his poise and dignity. He is also able to restrain himself from wading in self pity. Instead he sits down to analyse his strengths and weaknesses. A series of agonised self questioning follows ("What if I am unworthy" (p. 41)). He tries to come to terms with himself and his world under the changed circumstances. He had hoped that he would help Bimala to blossom fully in her truth and power but had failed to anticipate that it would also entail a total surrender of a husband's conventional rights. He even wonders if Bimala until then his own 'home-made' Bimala actually loved him.

Nikhil's story also gives the reader a clear and precise character sketch of Bimala with a high degree of objectivity. While admitting that he had failed to communicate effec-

tively his views to Bimala, he thinks that the misunderstanding between them, is rooted in Bimala's understanding of 'strength' and 'weakness'. Bimala, who considered her husband weak, failed to appreciate that for Nikhil weakness is "all imposition of force". (p. 41) Nikhil further believed that, "Only the weak dare not be just...". (p. 41) His assessment of Bimala is quite revealing. "Bimala had no patience with patience. She loves to find in men the turbulent, the angry, the unjust. Her respect must have its elements of fear" (p. 41). She, by nature, is boisterous and needs excitement to enjoy life. Nikhil, on the other hand, loves the quiet, calm and tranquil enjoyment of the simple things in life.

Nikhil's story articulates Tagore's own concern for truth, justice and universal brotherhood. Those, who, like Sandip, were deifying the country in their attempt to wrest freedom are only doing so out of self love and a need to create excitement because they love excitement more than their country. These are people who can not love men for their own sake. They need violent conflict and noise so that the sparks that fly may light up their own egos. Nikhil also suggests that the people who are being drawn into this movement were not people with any conviction but people in a state of hypnotic trance. It was like an infatuation.

While Nikhil dispassionately analyses the nature of Swadeshi he is also saddened by a sense of alienation, a lone voice crying in the midst of violence and euphoria for some sanity and reason. His wife has moved away from him and does not trust him anymore. He has become unpopular with his people as well because they suspect Nikhil to be a British stooge and that he was afraid of the police. The police on the other hand suspect some hidden design behind his quiet and mild ways.

Amidst this growing sense of alienation Nikhil is able to provide a short account of Sandip's character and his possible motives for propounding militant swadeshi. He perceives a 'gross cupidity' in Sandip. Though Sandip is endowed with a keen intellect, he has a coarse nature and that he glorifies his selfishness in high sounding words. His professed love for his country and the cause is only a mask for him "covetous self love". At the same time Nikhil, in trying to be correct, hesitates to convey this impression of Sandip to Bimala for fear of being misunderstood. He recoils from the possibility that out of jealousy he might even distort the truth.

The second part of Nikhil's narrative introduces the reader to Chandranath Babu, his master for thirty years. Chandranath Babu, with his overriding commitment to peace, truth and a "spiritual vision", is the stabilising influence in his life. The intention behind introducing Chandranath Babu's (an outsider) views on the corrupting influence of Sandip on Bimala is, perhaps, to balance the divergent views on Sandip in Bimala's and Nikhil narratives. Chandranath Babu persuades Nikhil to get rid of Sandip at the earliest so that the home is saved. But Nikhil is unable to get rid of Sandip, who craftily enough, manages to stay on one pretext or the other. Perhaps the only instance of sarcasm from Nikhil comes in this narrative when he says, after Bimala despite her great longing to see the Himalaya's refuses to go to the hills to see the Himalayas. "But she refused... The country's cause I suppose" (p. 44-45).

But this sarcasm disappears in the concluding paragraph where Nikhil decides not to rage against fate. He would rather wait for the outcome of this struggle between the 'Home' and the 'World'. His mood at the end is one of Philosophical resignation which, at the same time, draws its strength from the belief that it is truth which must ultimately prevail.

Sandip's Story

Sandip's narrative is loud and coarse in its self-assertion. The tone is aggressive and argumentative. And the theme seems to be the legitimacy of force. Nikhil in his narrative had, outrightly, rejected force as a symptom of weakness. Sandip, on the other hand, celebrates force, power and seems to revel in the Darwinian principle of the survival of the fittest. What characterises his narrative is, perhaps, the overwhelming preponderance of 'I' the ego. He declares that only the weak have morals and scruples. The strong should have no hesitation in snatching and grabbing what they desire. They make nature yield to their power. There is a strong earthy and sensuous dimension to Sandip and his narrative is full of tactile images and several references to body parts. Sandip's deliberate rhetoric is meant for the consumption of an audience, though absent. In the fashion of a soliloquy he reveals himself to the reader. For him, it seems, greed, covetousness, pride and violence are not only legitimate but desirable qualities.

Sandip debunks Nikhil's idea of strength as passive, "the strength of renouncing". He calls Nikhil idealist who is out-of-sync with the modern world. The modern world does not need word mongers, or people who deal in metaphor like Nikhil. It needs flesh eaters with teeth and nails to grab and tear. And the only desirable principle to have, according to Sandip, "is this working moral principle" p. 47). He winds up his narrative with a long exaggerated boast about his virility and his ability to attract women. He conceals his base desire for Bimala in high sounding words. The affinity with Bimala, he says, is an affinity between two passionate beings. Passionate in the full blooded sense. Seducing Bimala is now a challenge for him. And instead of having any moral qualms he rather justifies his resolve.

Sandip in his boastful and rhetorical monologue hides as much as he reveals. He castigates Nikhil as a dueler in words but he himself seems to be better than Nikhil in this word game. Sandip's words and the passion with which they are spoken betrays his real purpose. The shrillness in his tone makes his words sound hollow and untrue.

3.3 CHAPTER 3

Bimala's Story

With this section the past tense and the confessional tone in the narration is resumed. Bimala regrets that she had lost her sense of balance and shame. She tries to reason out the situation by saying that whatever happened, happened so quickly that she had little time to think about it. It was a spell cast by Sandip. But then we might as well ask, can she really evade responsibility? Sandip was able to work his spell because she was gullible.

During this phase of Sandip's stay at Nikhil's house, Bimala's infatuation grows by leaps and bounds. And Sandip, crafty that he is, encourages her vanity to draw her closer to himself. Though Bimala says that she did nothing by design, and one must accept that she is honest in her confessions, she had tried her best to please Sandip in various ways. She says "Something within me was at work of which I was not even conscious. I used to overdress ... with no particular design." (p.49). Bimala uses the image of the river to indicate the turbulence in her life. She was a small river, calm and tranquil, at the fringes of society. But in a flash everything changes. "So long I had been like a small river... But the tide came up from the sea and my breasts heaved; my banks gave way and the great drumbeats of the sea-waves echoed in my mad current... I who was before plain had become suddenly beautiful. I who before had been of no account now felt in myself all the splendour of Bengal." (p. 50).

With remarkable clarity Bimala analyses the insidious ways in which Sandip acted on her and she allowed herself to be acted upon. She realizes that the veneer of Swadeshi and patriotic glory was after all only a ruse. She also redefines once again, the role of women in society, "possibly this is womans nature when her passion is roused she loses her sensibility for all that is outside it. When, like the river, we women keep to our banks, we give nourishment with all that we have: when we overflow them we destroy with all that we are." (p. 51). It seems to her that women must keep themselves at the margins because if they cross the threshold it can only lead to disaster. You must keep in mind that this reformulation comes with the benefit of hindsight. This statement only reinforces the initial assesment that she started out with before the swadeshi storm hit her. Does it suggest that her experience during the struggle and its disastrous consequences has made her realise that, the traditional gender roles, defined by the male dominated society at large is justified?

Sandip's Story

This narrative takes the reader straight in to a decisive moment in the development of Sandip's relationship with Bimala. the Nanku episode. This episode reveals the extent to which Bimala is entangled in Sandip's trap, so much so that she loses her sense of justice and proportion. Nanku, on orders from Bara Rani, prevents Sandip from entering Nikhil's sitting room. Sandip in a fit of rage slaps him. Latter on Bimala after coming to know of this incident insists on Nanku's immediate dismissal. But Nikhil, with his keen sense of justice, would not allow it. As a compromise Nanku is sent to another part of the estate, of course without losing any privileges.

This incident reveals two things. Firstly there is an imperious dimension to Bimala's

character and secondly it reveals the slow but sure disintegration of her relationship with her husband. And all the time Sandip waits the approaching catastrophe with a macabre sadism. What makes the situation even more sinister is the calculated way in which Sandip manages the pawn in his hands. Like a deft chess player he is plotting each and every move. Bimala, as Sandip rightly observes, is living in a dream not knowing where she was going and Sandip on his part, decides to pretend innocence.

Now we know that Sandip is a wily schemer. He is crafty enough to hide his intention and at the same time he is audacious enough in his flirtation with Bimala, because he believes that with women audacity works. He keeps Bimala confused by his ambivalent use of the notion of freedom. Freedom for the country, of necessity, must also contain within it the freedom of human relationships.

The second event Sandip narrates introduces several ambiguities which make the narrative interesting. Sandip, during this period, engages Chandranath Babu and Nikhil in a debate on the issue of truth. Chandranath Babu is wise enough to refuse Sandip's bait and dismisses his arguments with cool logic and plain common sense. But Nikhil for once is unable to control himself and in an emotional outburst (p.61) reveals all the pain and pent up feelings bottled up inside his suffering heart. This outburst, despite his incredible self-control, in fact makes him more real and less abstract as a character. Nikhil walks out of the room and a nervous Bimala follows him out quickly.

This incident brings into sharp focus Bimala's ambivalence so far as her relationship with both the men are concerned. She is aware of Nikhil's pain and is touched by it. From now on Bimala would be consumed slowly by this ambiguity, the pain caused to Nikhil and her passion for Sandip and Swadeshi. For her, as Sandip says, the dream life is over. She is now beginning to understand the situation that she finds herself in.

Meanwhile Sandip finds it difficult to understand Nikhil's magnanimity in allowing him to stay on. He interprets it as a sign of weakness bred out of excessive idealism. Sandip wonders if it was a mistake to have acted a little too bold with Bimala. But he refuses to give in. He is also consumed by his passion for Bimala and therefore refuses to be a spectator any more. There is a deliberate ambiguity in the ending of the section. Sandip takes out Bimala's photograph from the double photo frame of the couple and replaces it with one of his own photographs. Sandip remarks that now his own photograph sits next to Nikhil, and that seems to be in the fitness of things because are they not really old friends. It is difficult to miss the irony here. But more importantly, it seems that there is also a little remorse for what he was doing to an old friend.

3.4 CHAPTER - 4

Nikhil's Story

Once again we see Nikhil, in keeping with his character, immersed in deep introspection. He is struggling to come to terms with his ongoing experiences. This intense self searching makes him try to look at himself through Bimala's eyes. And he is honest enough to admit that the picture of himself from Bimala's point of view is not attractive enough. But then how does he come to terms with it? Nikhil echoes Tagore when he says that he must see his sufferings in relation to the outerworld. It is of no consequence to burden the world with one's own sorrow when the world is already full of it.

Nikhil, then, critically examines the source of his sorrow. Possesiveness, he reasons, is perhaps the source of his sorrow. Though he never considered Bimala as his possession, he had, nevertheless, assumed that Bimala was the most precious thing in his life. Further, he reasons, it is not possible to arrest a whole personality within a socially determined relationship like 'wife'. He says "My wife—does that amount to an argument, much less the truth?" (p. 64). If Bimala is not his of her own free will then nothing will make her his own. Consequently he decides that a man's life is much more than his personal loss in his life.

Nikhil is also fair to Bimala in so far as he admits that he had idealised Bimala and it was not her fault that the ideal was betrayed. Her nature, perhaps, would have made her a natural mate of Sandip. He thus decides to save himself from self-distrust and to recognise and value the qualities he possessed. He is no less a man than Sandip. "I have come to distinguish what is really in me from what I foolishly imagined to be there ... that which remains in myself — not a crippled self dressed in rags and tatters... but a spirit which has gone through the worst and has survived." (p. 66).

What we see here then is a different Nikhil. One who has evolved into a stronger human being. Looking out of the window of his room he sees a star shine through the parting of the clouds. I am sure you will not miss the symbolic import of this scene. This scene triggers off a mystique vision for Nikhil. It seems to tell him that there is a kind of permanence to love. Nikhil, now, is at peace with himself. He decides to reach out to Bimala from whom he had been keeping away for some time. He goes up to a sleeping Bimala and kisses her without disturbing her. He is reconciled to himself and the world.

Bimala's Story

The first section of Bimala's narrative in this chapter picks up the mood of retrospective self analysis of Bimala's narrative in the third chapter. This section reveals the extent to which Bimala is caught up in the contradiction and ambiguities of her own circumstances. There is a touch of regret as well as complaint in her voice. She is painfully aware of her own plight. What started for her as an unquestioning and self-less surrender to the cause of the country has now turned out to be a violent and self-destructive passion for Sandip. She says, "I will not shirk the truth... Oh the mystery of his seething passions, so immense, so tumultous." (p. 68).

Bimala's passion for the truth and Swadeshi that she found embodied in Sandip is now

transformed into a passion for Sandip himself. Yet ironically she who worshipped Sandip earlier, now did not even respect him. But at the same time she finds her desire for him difficult to contain. She says: "Nevertheless this flesh and blood lute of mine... found in him a master player. What though I shrank from his touch and even came to loathe the lute itself: its music was conjured up all the same." (p. 68).

The feeling of shame coupled with the overpowering promptings of the flesh makes Bimala loathe herself as well. She is in the grip of a fearful intoxication and is unable to resist it. All of a sudden it seems she has been cut off from her past, isolated and alone in her misery. She seems insulated from the world outside so much so that her sister-in-law's taunting doesn't even touch her.

Bimala notes that during the initial phase of their interaction, she and Sandip at least talked about the Swadeshi and various other related topics. But slowly that pretence has disappeared and now the conversations invariably veer around, among other things, to 'modern sex problems'. In a situation like this, caught between revulsion and allurements, Bimala tries to break free, ironically, by busying herself with her domestic chores. She keeps away from Sandip for a few days.

There seems to be a kind inevitability in the manner in which Sandip is able to draw her out once again. He once again casts a spell on her with his passionate and fiery speech about the shakti of the country made manifest in Bimala. This image of glory puts her in a dilemma. She says "There was again that tremor within me. I could feel the crisis coming, too importunate to be put off. Joy and fear struggled for the mastery"(p.73). The appeal, from Sandip, to break free from the shackles of home in to the freedom of the outer world couched in a clever formulation of the cause never failed to excite Bimala. Bimala, in this scene, is only saved by the entry of a maid servant which breaks the spell.

This is a very important chapter for us if we wish to understand Bimala the character. So I would expect you to pay special attention to the evolution of her character through the struggle raging inside her. In the tenth section of Bimala's narrative, Tagore in a very subtle way, makes Bimala analyse the struggle within. There is a sense of loss and remorse coupled with exultation and passion. Remorse at the pain and suffering she had inflicted on Nikhil and their relationship and exultation at the possibility of a resplendent womanhood and glory. But then, she is forced to ask, at what cost?

She says that the things which seemed so "glorious when viewed from the height of the country's cause, looks so muddy when seen from the bottom. One begins by getting angry and then feels disgusted" (p. 75). She shuts herself up in her room and wonders if she would recover from her present crisis. The room evokes in her the memory of happier times. She remembers the first time she entered the room as a bride nine years ago, the orchid her husband brought for her when he came home after his M.A. examinations. In a few deft touches the narrative, and its difficult to miss the symbolism, holds out the promise of a reconciliation. For instance the orchid had flowered only once but Bimala kept watering it with the hope that it might flower once again. This is a symbolic suggestion that their relationship (between Nikhil and Bimala) may flower again, it holds out hope.

In an interesting twist the narrative also points to a photograph of Nikhil framed in ivory. Bimala used to offer flowers at the photograph everyday. Now she is unable to look at the photograph out of sheer shame. Nikhil had chided her once for idolising him. He had

observed then, "It shames me to see you place me on a height to which I do not belong... It only shows that I am too petty for you, that you want some extraordinary man who can overpower you with his superiority, and so you needs must take refuse in making for yourself another "me"."(p.76). This remark had evoked tears in her eyes then. But then how true was the remark, for now she has another photograph hidden in her jewel case, of Sandip, powerful, passionate, and all the more alluring because of the secrecy attached to it. Bimala is trapped within her own hidden desires, desires which echo Sandip's cry "I want".

This self centered and amoral desire, to have for one's own self only, recognizes no boundaries, neither home nor the world. And one must be strong in one's desires. Strength, then, for Bimala as well as Sandip, is the strength to snatch, to grab. This Darwinian reasoning almost silences the voice of reason and sanity within Bimala and she is tempted to throw away the orchid. But a sudden pang in her heart restrains her and the torment in her heart remains unresolved.

Sandip's Story

Sandip's narrative in this chapter, unlike the earlier chapters, begins with a very uncharacteristic soul searching on Sandip's part. We see for the first time, Sandip genuinely trying to analyse his own motives and character. The style however is still rhetorical. Since this analysis comes from Sandip himself it allows the reader a glimpse into Sandip's inner world.

Sandip begins by making a subtle distinction between his inner-self which lies hidden from the world and his outer self which is, interestingly, made up of words and ideas for public consumption. For the first time he admits that he is not what he seems to be. He hardly ever exhibits his inner self not even in his narratives. The outer self is not exactly himself, it is rather an ideal which he projects to the world. Since he has decided to reveal his self, at least in his narrative, we need to examine what he says and evaluate it within the overall context of his activities.

Sandip says: "I am not merely what I want, what I think- I am also what I do not love, what I do not wish to be."(p. 78) With great ingenuity he argues that to be cruel, to be unjust is to be moral, because that is what leads nations and people to greatness. Yet at the same time he reveals that what he professes (injustice, cruelty) are only his ideas and need not be confused with his self. Once he allows us a glimpse of his inner self we realize that despite the tough exterior there is an extremely soft and sensitive side to his character. He says: "the best part of myself was created before I came to this stage of existence."(p. 79) There is a tacit admission here that the soft and the sensitive part of him is the best which now lies hidden. This is once again reinforced by the incident of the goat where he cuts off the leg of a goat to teach his followers a lesson in cruelty. His followers, he says, were impressed but they failed to perceive the tender and merciful nature of his inner self.

The tough exterior, then, is a carefully cultivated mask. Sandip is also caught up in the contradiction within himself. He tries to get over this contradiction by consciously adopting a philosophy, much like the proponents of violent action, part Darwinian and part Machiavelian. This philosophy helps him overcome whatever moral qualms he might have about his plans for his life. It helps him to stay focussed on his idea of success at all cost. Success to him is the yardstick by which he measures everything. This is in sharp contrast to Nikhil's worldview

for whom, like Tagore himself, the soul and the spirit are of the essence and success gained at their cost is at best pyrrhic and amoral.

Many critics have denounced Sandip as a black guard, as an epitome of evil. But I am sure, you will appreciate that, a careful reading of this chapter presents a different picture of Sandip. He seems to be a much more complex character than what has been accepted so far. He is certainly not the undimensional face of terror as he is made out to be. He has a lot of redeeming features in his character the best instance of which comes later in the final chapter of the novel. This portrait of Sandip reveals that though Tagore fell out with the militant swadeshi's over the means used in the struggle, he nevertheless, had a lot of admiration and respect for the enthusiasm and courage displayed by the activists. You can perceive this much better in the portrait of Amulya later in the novel.

Coming back to Sandip, we see that in sharp contrast to his earlier boasting, he has morals and compunctions though suppressed they may be. Once you strip Sandip of his Swadeshi cloak, you realise that he is like any other ordinary human being, and as he says, he might be actually no different from Nikhil. His apparently ruthless pursuit of his goals is punctuated by moments of self searching and self-doubt. He is honest enough to admit that Bimala has become his object of desire. Since Bimala also wants him, he considers his desire as legitimate. He rejoices at Bimala's growing infatuation and entrapment, beautifully conveyed through the metaphor of the hunt. Like an accomplished hunter Sandip must pluck the fruit of his labour at the right time.

But at the same time he is touched and moved by her anguish. He says, "I can see that poor Bimala is struggling like a snared deer. What a piteous alarm there is in her eyes!" (p. 82). A struggling Bimala evokes pity and Sandip allows the opportune moment to slip by. Bimala's struggle sparks off a struggle within Sandip and this is a moral struggle. He concludes the section by saying that "Man does not know himself for what he really is" (p. 83). This is a major theme in Tagore's writing, the discovery of the self. Life is a journey of self discovery and one moves from ignorance to knowledge. Tagore's characters including the characters in this novel also go through this movement. The characters evolve through this self-discovery and are transformed in the process.

In the sixth section of Sandip's narrative in this chapter, he also factors in the presence of Nikhil who is after all a friend. He is aware that he has taken advantage of Nikhil's friendship. What is, perhaps, more significant is that he is finding it difficult to ignore Nikhil's point of view anymore. Nikhil's nobility, compassion and steadfast adherence to truth has touched a chord in Sandip, so much so that his own arguments no longer ring true to his own ears. Sandip's sense of shame at what he had done to Nikhil makes him avoid Nikhil as much as possible because whatever he may be, like Nikhil, he would not like to be a hypocrite. But during this crisis Sandip is clear sighted enough to recognise that this weakness (Sandip considers morals as a weakness) will divert him from his path. He needs to be strong and get over his contradictions. But how does he do it? One possibility which he considers and then abandons, interestingly enough, is to come clean with Nikhil with the truth and explain to him that it should not come between their friendship. One must admit that Sandip's intentions are honourable though they are hardly ever actualised.

The reflections over, Sandip returns to his deceptive and scheming ways once again. His choice, of course, is determined by his self-interest. He decides to break through the contradictions by equating Bimala with the country and he hopes that the turbulence of the times

will blow away the veil of conscience from the country as well as the veil of shame from Bimala. The way to deliverance then is through strife and turmoil. Bimala, he reasons, was fascinated by the promise of Sandip's manliness, hence he must hide his weakness to gain Bimala. It may be a bit too simplistic to characterize Sandip's desire for Bimala only as a desire for conquest. It seems that the attraction between Sandip and Bimala is quite deep and one can see the play of primordial passions, so very beautifully summed up in the closing remarks of Sandip. There is an interesting and ironical play on Sandip's notion of freedom here. He says "The way of retreat is absolutely closed for both of us. We shall despoil each other: get to hate each other: but never be free." (p. 84).

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3.5 CHAPTER 5

Nikhil's Story

Though Nikhil's narratives, thus far, are saturated with the experience of loss, pain and nostalgia, section IV and V of his narrative marks a significant departure. It marks a movement away from the personal to the public domain. Nikhil begins by setting up a contrast between himself and Bimala where she is characterised by the abundance of energy in her life which make her fresh and her company stimulating. One might say that here Nikhil is being a little harsh on himself. He acknowledges that it is he, with his passivity and his reflective nature, who should be blamed for depriving Bimala of lively companionship. He can only lament, as Vidyapati does in his famous doha:

“It is August, the sky breaks into a
passionate rain;
Alas, empty is my house

(p.86)

This theme of emptiness in plenty runs through this section almost as a refrain. Each incident Nikhil recalls makes this awareness more acute and painful. What marked their early relationship is the notion of sacrifice and worship. But the attempt to elevate a relationship into the realm of the ideal without a strong grounding in its earthiness fails ultimately. But the way out of this pain, Nikhil decides in a Tagorean fashion, is not through self-pity and silent suffering. Nikhil must not suffer so that he can set Bimala free. And he must set Bimala free so that he himself is set free from the untruth of this relationship.

The fifth section acts as a counter point to the earlier section in that it shifts the focus from Nikhil's inner turmoil to the goodness in humanity epitomised by Panchu, a poor tenant of the neighbouring Zamindar. Though poor and destitute, Panchu has his values and loyalties in the right place. Panchu had come to Nikhil with a basket of coconut and when Nikhil offers to pay for it he refuses. It is a debt, unknown to Nikhil, he is repaying. He stole some coconut from Nikhil's estate and wants to be free of this debt before he dies. Panchu is hardworking/devoted and knows his place in the world. He is honest and possesses a goodness of heart which touches Nikhil. Once Nikhil had planned to make a charity for Panchu but was prevented from doing so by Chandranath babu. Chandranath babu had said that charity fails to destroy the hardship of man it only destroys his dignity. The answer to the problem of poverty was constructive social work, to provide the poor with the opportunity to make his destiny.

At this point of time this recollection lifts Nikhil's spirit and he decides to rededicate his life to the cause of the poor once again. It also triggers off another recollection of a conversation he had with Bimala which also reveals, in a very subtle way, Nikhil's perception of Bimala's character and the seeds of incompatibility inherent in their respective characters. Nikhil had suggested to Bimala that they should dedicate their lives to the cause of constructive social work. Bimala had received the suggestion with skepticism. Nikhil considered this skepticism as natural in Bimala because she was a 'Lady' at heart. There is an elitism in Bimala. She seems to regard class hierarchies as a given (you can recollect the incident of Miss Gilby and the incident of Nanku). Moreover she sees their deprivation as a condition which protects

them and prevents their baseness from contaminating the society at large. Nikhil in his obsessive desire to transform this Bimala ends up losing his focus. He says, "I had thrust aside all other objects into a corner to make room for Bimala... forgetting how great is humanity and how nobly precious is man's life." (p.89). The narrative ends once again on a note of lament with Vidyapati's doha.

Bimala's story

Like Nikhil's narrative in this chapter, Bimala's narrative also shifts its focus from the personal to the world outside. The turmoil inside Bimala and the turmoil in Bengal seem to echo each other. In this chapter Bimala provides a quick sketch of the euphoria of the swadeshi movement especially the call for the boycott of foreign goods given by Sandip. Interestingly while describing the incidents associated with this call she also provides us with an insight into the way the relationship between Sandip, Nikhil and Bimala was evolving.

In keeping with the euphoric mood, the language in section XI is poetic and allusive. The allusions used (the sixty thousand sons of Sagar, the ancient sculptor, Devi Ahalya) have one thing in common, the transformation of the lifeless to life. Lifeless Bengal and by narrative implication Bimala have come to life through the agency of Swadeshi and now want to assert themselves. Bimala recalls the heady, exciting as well as intoxicating time which marked a complete break with the past. The past was in fact seen as a burden. The present was a miracle and the proponents of swadeshi believed that all the wants and miseries would disappear through the magic charm of 'Bande Mataram'. This romantic revolutionary vision seemed extremely attractive to the youth. But, as Bimala notes, it failed to find an echo in Nikhil. It rather deepened the strain of sadness in him. He seemed to see beyond the euphoria to a future which is gloomy.

But that is hardly going to dampen Bimala's enthusiasm. Like the followers of Sandip, Bimala wishes for that extraordinary moment which will sweep away the questions of responsibility, right and wrong. It is not difficult to see that Bimala's death wish is a product of the moral dilemma she is experiencing. Only a catastrophe could be the logical end to the course she has opted for.

It is interesting to note here that in Bimala's narrative here there is a kind of blurring of the distinction between the home and the world. Bimala and Bengal seem to have collapsed into a single identity. It is a time of crisis for Bengal as well as Bimala. Both are rushing to their destinies, severing all ties, all responsibilities and all emotional bondings. In Bimala's mental atlas the country and the 'stranger' (Sandip) have merged. Bimala is chasing this strange dream of attaining the country, her identity and the stranger. But this in itself is so confusing that Bimala lost everything and ironically even her way in this chase. Yet so great is this yearning that the only possible or even the only desirable end, for Bimala, seems to be complete self-annihilation. I would like you to read the last two paragraphs of section XI of Bimala's narrative carefully. The anguish and the churning is apparent when she says: "I, also, am possessed of just such a yearning. I likewise have lost my home and also lost my way. Both the end and the means have become equally if shadow to me... if the Dark which sounded the flute should lead to destruction, why trouble about the hers after? When I am merged in its blackness, neither I, nor good and bad, nor laughter, nor tears, shall be anymore!" (p.94)

In the next section (section XII), the tone and the style changes and the narrative becomes analytical. In this section Bimala tries to present Nikhil's brand of swadeshi with a great degree of objectivity. She had observed earlier that Nikhil was out of tune with the times, because Nikhil would not support the call for the boycott of foreign goods. She tries to present Nikhil's point of view in a perspective.

She tells us that everything in Bengal was moving so fast that no one had any time to reflect. People were asked to shun foreign goods. Zamindars were asked to banish foreign goods from their estates. 'Sacrifice' was the watch word for the proponents of swadeshi. But Nikhil would not force anyone to sacrifice anything, because doing so would be self defeating. But Sandip had the youth on his side. They were fired by the notion of freedom, sacrifice and glory. When Nikhil refuses to banish foreign images, salt and cloth from his estate, he immediately became suspect in the eyes of the youth. This was quite disquieting for Bimala as well.

Ironically the same Nikhil, who is now despised for refusing to ban the sale of foreign goods from his estates, was ridiculed by everyone including Bimala, for encouraging local industry and patronising Indian goods. Nikhil's commitment to swadeshi went beyond any rhetoric. He still used Indian made goods including a very old fashioned castor oil lamp. However this kind of constructive swadeshi did not appeal to Bimala and she was reluctant to use Indian made goods at home. On the other hand Nikhil's insistence on using Indian goods becomes a source of tension between her and Bada rani. The Bada rani was enthusiastic about Nikhil's idea not because she herself subscribed to those ideas but because it made Nikhil happy. Bimala, obviously, was jealous of her and she has an exchange of words with her. The Bada rani accuses Bimala of being Nikhil's dissipation. Today she remembers those words and understands the import of those words and remarks, "Today I feel – if a man needs must have some intoxicant, let it not be a woman." (p.96).

Section XIII of Bimala's narrative highlights the distance that, now, separates her from Nikhil. The problem she sets out to find a solution to is to make Nikhil agree to ban foreign goods from Suskar. It was important for Sandip to ensure a ban inside Suskar so that the movement became successful. He uses his charm on Bimala and asks her to ensure Nikhil's compliance. Bimala decides to use her charm and exploit Nikhil's love for her to achieve this goal. But at the end she is at a loss because she realizes that they had drifted too far apart. She who was good at contriving excuses to draw Nikhil to her, was unable today to contrive a single excuse to send for him.

You must have also noticed that a new character, Amulya, a young boy, is very quietly introduced in this section. He is devoted to Sandip and the cause. When he is introduced to Bimala she could see a spark in the boy's eyes. Sandip reports later that the boy was already under the spell of Bimala at the very first meeting. This boy is, in a sense, the representative of the innocence and hope of the youth. Amulya later on would play a very crucial role in Bimala's life.

Nikhil's Story

Interestingly, unlike the earlier chapters, Nikhil is given a further two sections in this chapter. Coming as it does after Bimala's narrative it provides a completely different perspective on the movement. While Bimala's narrative focussed on the euphoria and hope of the youth, Nikhil's

narrative recounts the devastating effect the ban on foreign goods had on the common people. This is illustrated in the case of Panchu. However before going on to describe what Panchu suffers under the swadeshi, Nikhil provides a little background sketch of Panchu. His wife died of consumption. Panchu must complete the funeral rites according to customs. The funeral rites cost him a princely sum of Rs.123/- and he is ruined. Impoverished and on the brink of starvation, Panchu leaves his children behind and goes wandering. Without informing Nikhil, Gopal Babu takes Panchu's children under his care. Panchu gets over his depression and returns. He has to rebuild his life once again.

Nikhil, like Tagore himself, is critical of these customs framed and enforced by the brahmins which were extremely oppressive. He believed that true swadeshi emancipates people from these social evils. The same sentiment is echoed in Gopal Babu's gesture when he refuses to make an outright charity to Panchu. Tagore was a firm believer in setting a man free not by charity but by strengthening his self-respect and self belief. Gopal Babu does the same and soon enough Panchu becomes self reliant and pays back the debt to Gopal Babu. What is more significant is that Panchu in the process is freed from his servile attitude. But in contrast to this effort of Gopal Babu the Swadeshi of Sandip, in the name of freedom for the people, negates all the good done to Panchu by Gopal Babu.

The story is interrupted here to bring into focus the effect of swadeshi on a different section of society, the students. Tagore had a special bonding with the youth. They represent the future of a civilization. Tagore was deeply disturbed by the way they were being misled by the leadership of the movement. Nikhil's narrative in section VII focuses on the youth of the area. They had come back to their villages from schools and colleges during the vacations. And immediately they were swept off their feet by the rhetoric and leadership of Sandip. Some of them even sacrificed their studies to be a part of this new movement. One day they came in a group, ironically most of them, were beneficiaries of Nikhil's generous scholarship', and demanded an explanation from Nikhil about his refusal to ban foreign goods. In a very rare show of spirited defence, Gopal Babu, explains to the students that it was the poor who suffer the most by the ban and the students had very little idea about the sufferings of the poor. He further adds that what the swadeshi followers were doing amounts to oppressing the poor who seem to be sandwiched between the Zamindars and the proponents of swadeshi. But the students unfortunately have lost the power to rationally engage with these ideas. They had infact stopped thinking, intoxicated as they were with the slogan 'Bande Mataram'. They leave after Nikhil politely refuses their demand to ban foreign goods.

3.6 CHAPTER 6

Nikhil's Story

This section picks up the threats of Panchu's story from section VI once again. Panchu conducted his business from Harish Kundu's estate. He is fined a hundred rupees by the Zamindar for selling foreign goods. Harish Kundu is all that a Zamindar, according to Tagore, should not be. Tagore believed that a Zamindar should be like a father figure, like Nikhil, who would lead his people to emancipation and a dignified life. But Harish Kundu is different. He insists that Panchu should either pay the fine or burn up his stock. Panchu's retort to this exposes the hypocrisy of this position. On being asked to burn the stuff Panchu says, "I can't afford it! you are rich; why not buy it up and burn it?" (p.104). Consequently Panchu was fined as well as beaten up for his insolence.

Nikhil tries to help Panchu out of this situation. He wants Panchu to lodge a complaint with the police. But that would not work as no one would stand witness for Panchu. Nikhil wants Sandip to stand witness to the truth. But Sandip has other ideas. Sandip dismisses Nikhil's insistence on truth as an idealistic fantasy. He would rather use untruth to achieve success which he considers as the only legitimate goal of man. Unable to secure Sandip's support Nikhil and his master work out an alternate plan. Nikhil buys Panchu's holding thinking that it would solve the problem. But it seems Panchu's problems were just beginning. Zamindar Harish Kundu, determined to teach Panchu a lesson, comes up with a counter plan. From no where a second aunt of Panchu appears and claims a share of Panchu's inheritance. Once again Panchu's story is interrupted here and the narrative shifts to an important incident in Nikhil's life.

In section IX Nikhil goes back to the afternoon when Bimala had sent for him. Bimala had, in her narrative section XIII had referred to this afternoon where she had found it extremely difficult to think of an excuse to send for Nikhil. She had left it at that. Nikhil in this section recounts this incident. He was surprised to receive an invitation from Bimala, especially after such a long time. He is even taken aback by the fact that she had dressed up for the occasion in an obvious way. Bimala had quite abruptly asked Nikhil to clear out his estate of foreign goods. Nikhil had refused and said "To tyrannise for the country is to tyrannise over the country" (p.109).

With this refusal a significant change came over Nikhil. He felt, light and free and realized that the bond between him and Bimala which had caused him so much pain and suffering was finally broken. Bimala is demystified and he sees her as a mere net of enchantments which he had created for himself. He gains his freedom from the domestic illusion and dedicates his life to the world outside.

Sandip's Story

Sandip's narrative continues with the same episode but from a different perspective. Bimala sends for Sandip after her disappointing meeting with Nikhil. Sandip's reading of the situation is brilliant. With a remarkable insight he describes the vulnerable situation that Bimala is in. Pride is the key here. Bimala's pride is hurt and broken. She had believed in her ability to coax things out of Nikhil. But she had failed despite making a great effort. You can gauge the vulnerability of Bimala

from Sandip's description. He says, "When Bimala stood silently there, flushed and tearful in her broken pride, like a storm-cloud, laden with rain and charged with lightning lowering over the horizon, she looked so absolutely sweet that I had to go right up to her and take her by the hand. It was trembling, but she did not snatch it away." (p.111).

This was the 'moment of moments' for Sandip but surprisingly he lets it slip by. And why? There was an obstacle but as the description points out it was a trifling one but it was enough to divert the currents of the mighty Padma away from its course. If you read the narrative carefully you would be able to appreciate that Sandip, after all, has some redeeming features. He could have easily taken advantage of Bimala's vulnerability but he holds back and allows Bimala to ride out of the crisis. Somewhere deep down Sandip also had morals and a code of ethics which he values. But this comes as a surprise considering that his public posturing is so very different. Sandip himself is baffled by his own behaviour. He says, "it is because I am such a mystery to my own mind that my attraction for myself is so strong! If once the whole of myself should become known to me, I would then fling it all away-and reach beatitude."(p.111) Here I would like to refer you back to the discussion of the ending of the third section of Sandip's narrative in chapter 3. There we had discerned a hint of ambiguity in Sandip's character which Sandip the revolutionary tries hard to suppress, but it manages to surface from time to time. He calls it cowardice and holds this other self responsible for his failure to attain Bimala. It also reveals that Sandip's involvement with Bimala has certainly progressed beyond mere flirtation and at a certain level it is also moral. This state of intoxication, as he calls it, ironically, brings out the best in Sandip. But he wakes up from this state with the entry of Amulya and the latent good in Sandip once again is made subservient to the amoral realist in him.

Amulya brings with him news concerning the movement. Thus the narrative changes its mood and tone and becomes brisk and matter of fact. Soon they begin to discuss practical problems. And what follows in the scheming double standards practised by the followers of swadeshi to push through their agenda. They realize that burning foreign goods was proving to be counter productive. It only resulted in greater suffering for the poor and greater profits for the foreigners. There was also a hint of communal trouble because most of the poor traders who suffered losses were muslims.

There was hardly any way out of this mess created by Sandip himself. It would not be possible to give up the agitation at this stage. The only way out was to compensate people whose goods were being burnt. Sandip also has to compensate Mirjan, whose boat they had sunk, to win back his loyalty. All this ofcourse exposes the hypocrisy and shortsightedness of the revolutionaries. But where was he going to get the money from? Sandip decides to ask Bimala and when he meets her he demands fifty thousand rupees from her. Sandip plays on her pride and tells her that she could get the money. But he also knows that the sum is too big even for Bimala. Sandip is sharp enough to realise that the thought of selling off her jewels had passed Bimala mind and he is quick to add that the money must come from Nikhil's treasury because it belongs to the country. It was indeed very thoughtful of Sandip not to ask Bimala for jewels because a married women's ornaments occupy a significant space in a woman's life. We shall discuss this idea later when we discuss the jewels again in chapter 10.

3.7 CHAPTER - 7

Sandip's Story

This chapter is completely given to Sandip and the three sections in this chapter are the final ones from Sandip in this novel. I would like you to pay special attention to this chapter because it reveals a lot about Sandip's character. You are aware that whenever Sandip is caught up in contradictions, he tries to fight his way out through a clever combination of Machiavellian and Darwinian logic. In this process he lays bare his deepest feelings and beliefs to the reader in the manner of a Shakespearean soliloquy.

He had made a demand for money from Bimala. But it is unpalatable to his male ego. In his world-view women are subservient to men and it was the duty of the woman to receive what was given to her by men. The eight sections of Sandip's narrative is an extended exercise in justifying his demand for money from Bimala.

The first few paragraphs of this section repeat arguments which, I am sure, are already familiar to you. Plunder and dominance are the watchwords for him. Nature and women must yield themselves to the desires of men. Both are meant to be exploited for the benefit of man. It is only by surrendering that they gain their greatness. He says, "so, for men to accept is to truly give: for women to give is to gain." (p.116).

Sandip is an imperialist in his world-view and finds the patriarchal ideology suitable for his purposes. This is in sharp contrast to Nikhil whose world-view is inclusive and seeks a harmonious balance between nature and man.

But after these initial abstract arguments he reverts back to the basic problem that he is confronted with. And that is how to justify his demand for money and make it look honourable at the same time. Now Sandip seems more like an opportunist than a radical idealist. His qualms are not moral but only a disguise for his hurt male ego. He had thus deliberately made the demand big because as he says, "A thousand or two would have had the air of petty theft. Fifty thousand has all the expanse of romantic brigandage." (p.117) Furthermore after having made the demand he entertains doubts about Bimala's ability to get the money. Hence he is also prepared to be content with a thousand or two. "The wise man is content with half a loaf or any fraction for that matter, rather than no bread." (p.118)

If Sandip's ideas are morally bankrupt his public dealings are no better. As his narrative reveals, he bribes, cheats and adopts all possible immoral methods to achieve his goals. Yet at the same time he is honest enough to admit to himself that it was not possible to hide the truth from one's own self, though he tries to get around it by giving truth an altogether different dimension, neither good nor bad but simply science. He admits that, "underneath the cult of Bande Mataram, as indeed at the bottom of all mundane affairs, there is a region of slime, whose absorbing power must be reckoned with". (p.119) Lesser needs then, his own as well as the others in the movement, are a part of the greater need, that is money. Sandip, it seems, is a practical man and does not entertain any illusion. It is illustrative of his philosophy that he cites the case of Shakuntala who lost her object of desire because she was lost in the memories of her lover. Sandip brushes aside the thoughts of Bimala, however much he is stirred by it, to attend to the contingencies of the present.

The IXth section of his narrative recount these contingencies of the present which were beginning to assume dangerous proportions. There was communal polarisation taking place in the countryside, a fall out of the policies pursued by Sandip's followers. Sandip had failed to rally the muslims around to his side. Sandip's response is quite predictable. He decides to unite the hindus and if necessary suppress the muslims in this movement. Nikhil on the other hand would have the muslims as a necessary part of a united India.

Sandip works out a plan to rally around the people in a patriotic fervor. He decides to make a goddess of the country or rather take the current image of a goddess and make it represent the country. I am sure you know that the reigning deity of Bengal then was the fierce and weapon wielding goddess Durga who subdued the rakshas Mahisasura. It was a brilliant idea, an idea that could really fire the imagination of the country and draw people out with its clever mix of worship and sacrifice. But it was also a very dangerous idea given the multi-religious society of rural Bengal. The muslims would find it difficult to themselves associate with such a movement.

Nikhil obviously disapproves of this method and warns Sandip of its consequences. Pursuing short term goals could prove disastrous in the long run. But Sandip dismisses Nikhil as irrelevant to the present context of the struggle.

Section X of Sandip's narrative returns to the Sandip-Bimala relationship. We see that in his next meeting with Bimala, Sandip uses his charm on Bimala with great success. He showers Bimala with high praise and pays homage to her as if she was a goddess. But the contrasting pictures that emerges out of this encounter could not be any sharper. While Sandip is full of grand expressions which actually sound contrived and insincere, Bimala on the other hand uses words charged with sincere emotions. Bimala's utterances have the poignancy of anguished love which she can suppress no more. And at the end of it the only thing she could do was to sob at Sandip's feet in abject self surrender.

You will not fail to notice that while Bimala's responses instinctive and spontaneous, Sandip plots his every move and utterance. He is pleased with himself after finding Bimala at his feet. He lifts her up and makes her sit on a chair. But he would not allow Bimala to recover from the crisis. He cleverly manipulates Bimala's emotion. Bimala once again offers her jewels but Sandip could not accept the jewels. He very gently scales down his demand to five thousand rupees. Bimala readily agrees to bring the money. Sandip is clever enough to realise that the high passion that he drummed up in the beginning should not be allowed to be overtaken by the mundane demand of money. There he cuts short his discussion about money and draws her attention to the grand celebration of the goddess that he was planning. Bimala's enthusiasm is rekindled and she leaves after promising to bring the money the next day.

 Nikhil's Story

The story is now moving towards its climax and the narrative pace quickens considerably. There is a perceptible change in tone and mood as well. We have seen that in the narratives from Chapter V onwards there is a progressive intermeshing of the personal and the political. Nikhil's narrative in this chapter also quickens its pace. It takes the reader directly into the action which is beginning to build up quite rapidly now. The mood is apprehensive and there is a possibility of disturbances which could overtake Nikhil's life. You would also notice that there is a change of attitude in Nikhil, a new resolve, not to be a passive observer any more.

Nikhil is aware that a steady campaign was going on to isolate him. He was being projected as a British stooge. It is interesting to note that Tagore himself was subjected to such a campaign after he criticised the violence and communal methods adopted by the swadeshis during the movement. Nikhil is hurt and disappointed. To add insult to the injury Zamindars like Harish Kundu and the Chakrabarti Zamindar were being projected as patriots despite the fact that they were collaborators of the colonial administration in the exploitative indigo plantations. As a final straw Nikhil receives a letter threatening him with dire consequences for not supporting the cause. Nikhil knows that the letter was sent by the local students.

Fear and terror are the very antithesis of freedom and swadeshi. Nikhil calls the students over and tries to explain to them that by terrorising a hapless people they were only perpetuating slavery. Abstract ideas like freedom, have meaning only when they address the needs of a living people and not by trampling over them. But predictably the students fail to see any merit in Nikhil's argument. But the experience, this failure to convince the students gives rise to a new resolve in him and he decides, "to save the country from the same kundus, chakravartis and officials." (p.131)

The immediate victim of the cruelty of these people is Panchu. In the XIth section Nikhil returns to Panchu once again. The problem was how to get rid of the sham aunt who was claiming a share of Panchu's property. Chandranath Babu offers to solve the problem. He leaves on his mission and Nikhil is left alone. Nikhil is yet again assailed by the thoughts of Bimala. And in a very significant encounter with Bimala in the garden, he finally opens up with her and tells her in no uncertain terms that she was free. "Whatever I may or may not have been to you, I refuse to be your fetters." (p.134) Nikhil experiences a strange kind of elation and realises, in crystal clear terms, that freedom in the true sense is the ultimate object of man. To achieve it one needs, first, to reform not the world but ones own self.

Coming back to Chandranath Babu, we know that he accomplished his task in a novel way. He stayed with Panchu for a few days during which, interestingly, he breaks the caste barriers by accepting water from Panchu's sham aunt. Here one is able to appreciate why Tagore in his life and Nikhil in this novel are so insistent on social reform as a first step towards true swadeshi. Chandranath Babu breaks the caste barrier for Panchu's sake. But ironically Panchu lost all respect for Chandranath Babu for breaking an orthodoxy of which Panchu himself was a victim. Thus it was important for Nikhil to rid the country of the obscurantist practices of religion, customs and selfishness.

Bimala's Story

We return to Bimala's story after a long gap. But from now on, as the narrative quickens and moves towards its climax, Bimala's narrative continues until the very end punctuated only thrice by Nikhil's narratives. You might have noticed that there is a concentric pattern in the narrative. There is the inner world of the characters which is contained within the domestic world which in turn is placed within the larger context of the outer world. And each of these spheres is intersected by the other at various levels. In short the narrative does not follow a linear pattern. There is also a rhythmic shift in focus from each of these circles to the other so that each one is illuminated, reinforced or modified by the other. Through the shifting focal planes the characters and the incidents assume multiple dimensions and the reader is made aware of the complexities in them. Tagore, as an author, did not want to be judgemental. He wanted his readers to see and decide for themselves. And in the case of this novel the reader not only has the freedom but also the perspectives to arrive at an informed opinion.

Nikhil's narrative in the preceding section articulated the disturbing developments in the countryside. Bimala's narrative on the other hand returns to her inner world. She takes the reader back to the incident where Nikhil refuses to accede to her request to ban the sale of foreign goods in his estate. Something broke inside her and later in the garden when Nikhil tells her that she was free, she feels a deep sense of loss and sadness. This freedom makes her lonelier than ever before.

In this journey of self-discovery, this pining for freedom Bimala had taken for granted the security and shelter of her domestic world. Now that it was no longer available to her she only encounters emptiness. A room without a soul. Bimala oscillates between the emptiness of her domestic world and the possibilities offered by the outer world which she glimpses every now and then when she meets Sandip.

Her situation is further complicated by the fact that in a state of intoxication she had accepted the challenge of arranging five thousand rupees. But where was she going to get the money from? The only probable source was the estate treasury. And she enlists the support of Amulya to rob the treasury. The plans Amulya suggests are too wild for Bimala to even contemplate on. But Amulya's innocence and his earnestness touches Bimala deeply. Her maternal instincts are aroused. During the course of this discussion Amulya takes out a copy of the Gita and a gun. It is quite obvious he had planned to kill the cashier because he could not be bribed to become an accomplice. It horrifies Bimala to know that a small boy's mind could think of killing a man without any qualms. And worse still, there seemed to be no sin in the boy's heart. It stirs the mother in Bimala. She decides to save Amulya from the path of self destruction at all costs. I would like you to read this section carefully especially from page 138 to page 140. Here, for the first time, Bimala realizes the danger of personifying the country as mother and she laments, "Why does not my country become, for once, a real mother"(p.140)

While Amulya was about to leave, Bimala remembers that it was the day of Raksha-Bandhan. She calls him back and binds the boy in a brother-sister relationship. Tradition demands that the brother must make a reverence offering. Bimala in a deft move demands the pistol as the offering. Amulya is only too glad to accept this relationship. Bimala is childless and Amulya appeals to her hidden maternal instincts. Amulya's innocence had rekindled the possibility of a new beginning for Bimala. But as Bimala says, the mistress in her took the place

of the mother and closed that door for her. She finds it difficult to admit to herself that this was indeed her true self. "What was this? I had never before known this shamelessness, this cruel one within me.... Some demon has gained possession of me, and what I am doing today is the play of his activity - it has nothing to do with me."(p.141)

The contradictory pulls of these two strong impulses (maternal and sexual) between Amulya and Sandip builds up to a crescendo in this chapter. Sandwiched and trapped, Bimala has very little control over the situation. What makes it almost tragic is her acute awareness that she had lost control. The intensity of this conflict is captured beautifully in the final paragraph of this chapter. 'Desperate orgy', is the theme of the last paragraph. Bimala sees the world in a tempestuous, intoxicating movement which is swiftly followed by oblivion. Bimala sees herself wrapped in a blaze, a fire intense enough in its creative design to produce that desired for moment of eternity and at the same time consume it. Her tone becomes delirious and she says "The immovable world shall sway under our feet, fire shall flash from our eyes, a storm shall roar in our ears, what is or is not in front shall become equally dim. And then with tottering foot steps we shall plunge to our death - in a moment all fire will be extinguished, the ashes will be scattered, and nothing will remain behind"(p.142). At the end she wishes for total self annihilation.

3.9 CHAPTER 9

Bimala's Story

Bimala's narrative continues but the frenzied tone of the previous chapter gives way to a resigned acceptance of her fate. Bimala is aware that the decisive moment had come and that she must arrange the five thousand rupees demanded by Sandip. She decides to steal the money from her husband, though she knows that it could be the beginning of her end. In an ironical reversal Bimala, who use to regard the Bada Rani as a thief for squeezing money out of a trusting Nikhil, steals the six thousand rupees gifted to the Bada Rani by Nikhil.

Bimala steals the gold coins kept in the safe. She is immediately overpowered by the weight of her guilt. Would she be able to carry the burden? She is able to carry out the act by chanting *Bande Mataram* like a magic formula. But this magic spell could not last long and she is forced to reflect hard on her actions. What is at stake here is her sense of dignity and self respect. She feels alienated not just from her self but also from her country. Robbing her own house was a deeply distressing experience for her. She, who had seen the country only as an extension of her home, feels that by robbing her home she had robbed the country and now neither belonged to her. She feels impure for betraying trust and righteousness. She spends the night on the terrace all by herself.

She meets her sister-in-law in the morning and is sarcastically greeted as 'Robber Queen'. The dart hits its mark straightaway. She waits impatiently for Sandip and Amulya to show up. There is a marked change in Bimala's attitude now. For the first time she comes into Sandip's presence in ordinary clothes. Infront of them she feels that she is drained of all dignity and honour. And she wonders if she actually meant anything to Sandip. She entertains the idea that, perhaps, she was being used by Sandip for petty things. She feels betrayed. She had broken all the bonds and had come out into the open as Shakti incarnate. Now that herself image lies in tatters. She says; "Do they want to tell me now that all this was false. The psalm of my praise which was sung so devotedly, did it bring me down from my heaven, not to make heaven of earth, but only to level heaven itself with the dust".(p.146)

In the next section (section XVI) Bimala hands over the money to Sandip in a dramatic sequence. This section also builds up a contrast between the innocent enthusiasm of Amulya and the greedy and feigned devotion of Sandip. The utter disgust on Sandip's face at seeing the paper rolls is immediately transformed when he sees the gold coins inside the rolls. Sandip's subsequent flattery smacks of artificiality and deception. In a sudden impulsive gesture Sandip rushes towards Bimala only to be pushed away rudely by her. He hurts himself in the process. Amulya is upset by Sandip's impulsive gesture. But Sandip quickly regains his composure and almost instantly wins back both Bimala and Amulya with his flattery and glib talk. And the cry of *Bande Mantaram* redeems Bimala guilt at least for the time being. It is almost a necessity for Bimala now as she herself admits that it was the only way to keep her self respect alive.

You can see that Bimala is trapped within this image of the "goddess of the revolution". And now that her self image is dented by the theft she needs the flattery all the more. Sandip is now a necessity. She can't live without Sandip yet at the same time she can't live with Sandip because Sandip represents for her the loss of dignity. This is a contradiction which cannot be

resolved without tragic consequences.

In the next section Bimala returns to her domestic world. By this time her relationship with her husband had hit its nadir, so much so that they try to avoid meeting each other. One day at meal time when both Nikhil, Bimala are together Bada Rani joins them. She warns Nikhil about keeping the money he gave her at home especially after Nikhil had received a few threatening letters from the revolutionaries. Nikhil promises to send the money along with the Government Revenue in a few days time. This piece of news triggers another crisis for Bimala. She must replace the money she stole quickly enough to avoid detection.

I am sure you must have noticed that as the narrative moves forward the tempo quickens and the introspective sections become infrequent. Now the narrative is moving fast and taking the reader quickly from one crisis to another. In these sections Bimala hardly gets any time to think, pre-occupied as she is with finding solutions to the crisis at hand. In her desperation she summons Amulya once again. She directs Amulya to make a trip to Calcutta at the earliest to sell or Pawn some of her jewels and get her back six thousand rupees that she needed to replace.

Amulya, of course readily agrees to do the needful. Once again Bimala is touched by Amulya's devotion and naivete. She is eager to save Amulya from the poisoned fangs of Sandip. Sandip drops in on the scene and demands Bimala's time which is promptly denied by Bimala. Sandip is not happy at Bimala's attempts to wean away Amulya. Bimala has a small exchange of words with Sandip and Bimla emerges stronger from this exchange. The relationship that was developing between them is slowly becoming shaky and the attraction between them is waning, Bimala is once again rediscovering herself especially after she was literally pushed into thieving in her own house. She breaks off the conversation and in a symbolic gesture tears herself away from the chair and moves away from Sandip. This could be the beginning of her return to her home once again.

Sandip tries to rekindle the fire in their relationship the only way he knows : through his flattery. Nikhil's entry disturbs the situation for Sandip. Nikhil warns Sandip of the impending dangers of a communal flare up. And he asks Sandip to leave his estate. This is perhaps the first decisive action taken by him. He also tells Sandip that in five days time he wishes to leave for Calcutta and that Sandip must accompany him. Sandip's response is remarkable in its boldness. He once again sings a hymn to Bimala before leaving. But this time Bimala is only amazed.

3.10 CHAPTER 10

Nikhil's Story

As we progress further you can see that now the narrative alternates between Nikhil and Bimala. While Bimala's narrative focuses on the impending crisis within the home, Nikhil's narrative focuses on the impending crisis in the outside world. Now there is a simultaneity between the home and the world. It is interesting to note that, Tagore in a very novel way, makes the various narratives from chapter 8 onwards, converge on each other and explore the intimate intertwining of the crisis within and the crisis without.

Bimala has realized that Sandip, after all, is hollow and the course that he has set for others will certainly carry them over the precipice. This realisation makes her withdraw slowly from the world outside. She is now busy trying to save her home. But the harder she tries she seems to get entangled more and more in it. She is even, unwittingly, drawing Amulya into the trap with her.

In this chapter Nikhil very quickly recounts the events unfolding in the countryside. With the arrival of muslim preachers from Dacca, the communal fires had started spreading. Nikhil tries to reason with his hindu tenants to exercise restraint but he fails to convince them. News filters in that Nikhil's Chakua sub-treasury was looted and interestingly only six thousand was missing. The guard Kasim who receives a bullet wound, a minor one, in the leg is the initial suspect. Nikhil is not convinced but he warns Kasim not to drag others in unnecessarily.

Nikhil invites over his master for consultation in the evening. Chandranath Babu asks Nikhil to get rid of Sandip and the Swadeshis. He also wants Nikhil to take Bimala to Calcutta so that she is able to see the broader world and expand her vision. The intention is of course to drag Bimala away from the corrupting influence of sandip. The same night Nikhil wakes up in the middle of the night hearing some one sob. He finds Bimala sobbing in the balcony. This is a significant moment in their lives. They take their first tentative steps to bridge the gulf that had grown between them. A reconciliation seems possible now. Nikhil puts his hand on Bimala's head. Bimala's initial stiffness gives way and she holds Nikhil's legs in a tight embrace until her bottled up emotion is spent.

Bimala's Story

Bimala skips the reconciliation scene of the night before and starts with the following morning. She is waiting for Amulya to return from Calcutta. Suddenly she realises that she had placed Amulya in great danger by asking him to sell such valuable ornaments. He would be immediately suspected and arrested. She is filled with remorse and she is apprehensive as well. She has not only endangered Amulya's life, she herself would be in trouble because if Amulya is arrested the jewels could be traced back to her. She can only pray to god to give her one more chance.

She goes into the sitting room and finds Sandip sitting there. She is filled with disgust and asks him to leave. To her surprise she finds Sandip taking out the jewel casket from under his

cloak. -She is relieved to know that Amulya had indeed not gone to Calcutta. The strain in their relationship is becoming more and more pronounced. Amulya rushes in and demands the case back from Sandip. In the exchanges that follow Bimala slowly gains the high moral ground. She has seen through Sandip's deception, greed and hollowness. She keeps her pride and refuses to squabble over the jewels. Sandip once again tries to regain the respect by using the ultimate weapon in his hands the jewel case. But even this gesture proves futile.

I think we need to understand the symbolic import of the jewel case. I would refer you back to our discussion of the importance of the jewels in chapter 6. Bimala offering her jewels for the cause is in a sense the ultimate sacrifice that a woman can make, which was of course rejected by Sandip. A woman's jewels occupy a significant space in a woman's life and a variety of sentiments are attached to it. At one level they represent the love and affection of the giver. But more than that the wearing of jewels, in a traditional household, represents all that is desirable in womanhood. When she is given the family jewels, a practice still prevalent today, she becomes the trustee of the family honour and pride. She must perform all her household duties sincerely and becomes a partner in her husband's spiritual and material well being. That is why she is supposed to renounce all her jewels when her husband dies. Thus giving away of her jewels was an act of betrayal which shuts her off from her legitimate space as Nikhil's wife.

The next section of Bimala's narrative (section XIX) is almost entirely in reported speech. The intention, of course, is to provide the reader with yet another point of view on Sandip. In this section Bimala reports Amulya's impression about Sandip. Amulya, due to his physical proximity to Sandip, is the only character who could throw light on Sandip's thoughts and actions when he is away from the lime light. Sandip also would have very little hesitation in revealing his inner self to Amulya because he believes that Amulya is completely devoted to him.

But Bimala has also forged an even stronger bond with Amulya. She had slowly managed to wean Amulya away from Sandip. This is, perhaps, the only fulfilling and positive achievement of Bimala in the novel. Amulya now knows Sandip for what he is a self-serving greedy opportunist. He tells Bimala how Sandip had misappropriated all the money she had given him. He also reveals that it was he who had stolen the money for Bimala. She is distressed to know that she had pushed Amulya from the frying pan to the fire.

It is now important for Bimala that the stains of the sins she has committed must be washed away. Bimala once again sends Amulya back to the treasury to replace the money he stole. She says "Remember it will not be your expiation alone, but mine also. ... I must put on you the burden of my sin." (p.172) This is a defining moment for Bimala. She sees herself in a new light. Her world view also undergoes a transformation. She realizes that the mission in the world outside can only be accomplished by a man even if it is only a boy/man (Amulya). Her expiation is dependent on the success of this boy. It devastates her but then that is perhaps the only possibility left.

3.11 CHAPTER 11

Bimala's Story

This chapter is entirely given to Bimala. The narrative is primarily in the present tense, bringing the reader closer to the concluding part of the story. It is the day before she is supposed to leave for Calcutta with Nikhil, though at this point of time, she is not aware of it.

After sending off Amulya she realises that it was equally dangerous to replace the money in the treasury. She sends for Amulya. But Sandip takes this opportunity to barge in. Bimala refuses to give in to Sandip's entreaties for a reconciliation. Sandip gets more and more frustrated at not being able to revive the old magic. And soon enough he loses his composure and behaves like a boor. The more Sandip loses control over himself the stronger Bimala becomes until she is almost free of his clutches.

Nikhil drops in and informs Sandip that he was leaving for Calcutta and that he wants Sandip to accompany him. Upon refusal Nikhil warns Sandip that if it was necessary he would not hesitate to use force. This gives Sandip one more chance to act the wounded martyr. In a long and emotive speech loaded with high passion Sandip throws away the garb of Bande Mataram and admits that it was Bimala alone in the form of a lover who fired his imagination. You would do well to read the entire text of his speech on page 177. In a final flourish he says, "There is no reality in the world save this one real love of mine. I do you reverence ... I am not righteous. I have no beliefs, I only believe in her whom, above all else, in the world, I have been able to realize." (p.177)

This powerful outburst of emotion reveals a Sandip we had not seen before. We know that Sandip had morals which he had deliberately suppressed. And he had redeemed himself to a certain extent when he returned the jewel box. But this is a Sandip, who is capable of powerful emotions and it makes him attractive. Even Bimala wonders if she had indeed misread him. The fire in him, now seemed true. Sandip, after all, may be a hero. Bimala realises that though there is much that is false in Sandip yet there is some depth in him which no one can fathom. And she concludes, perhaps rightly so, that Sandip was like Shiva, the lord of chaos, at once frightening yet all joy at the same time.

What then are we to make of Sandip? The plunderer in him is transformed. He is grateful to Bimala for saving their relationship. A relationship which began at a carnal plane is now lifted on to a spiritual plane. He is grateful to Bimala not just for saving herself from becoming impure but also for saving him. He sets Bimala free. She is overcome with emotion for the man she despised a few moments ago. She offers him the jewel case once again but this time the offer was made from the heart and with respect. Nikhil for his part remains a silent spectator all through to allow both of them to free themselves of each other.

The narrative in section XXI breaks off from the emotionally charged atmosphere of the living room and returns to the domestic world. It is interesting that the focus shifts to the kitchen. Bimala has almost completed her circular journey. She is seen in the kitchen making cakes for Amulya who has gone out to do a 'man's' job.

On the domestic front things were getting a little too complicated for Bimala. When she realized that it was Amulya who had robbed the treasury she was relieved. She wants to call back Amulya so that he could return the money to Nikhil and she could explain everything to

him. But Amulya had already left on his mission. She feels the need to communicate with Nikhil but is unable to do so. Nikhil goes out to meet Panchu who is arrested by the police.

Bimala spends the time in a state of anxious forebodings. She holds herself responsible for Amulya's troubles. She was overcome with guilt and contemplates suicide with the gun Amulya left with her. But the temple songs distract her from this course of action. She goes to the bedroom wanting to take the dust off Nikhil's feet but finds him sleeping. She wants to confess her sins. She longs for forgiveness from her husband and god. In this state of utter loneliness she goes out into the balcony and breaks down. Nikhil comes out and touches her. This touch which she had longed for opens up a possibility for her. She finds a new strength to endure the penalty for her betrayal. She wonders if it was possible to recreate the magic of their wedding once again. Even in the midst of her emotional rebirth she retains enough objectivity to appreciate that trust and relationships once broken cannot be recreated. The space that she lost, is perhaps lost for ever.

3.12 CHAPTER 12

Nikhil's Story

This is the concluding chapter of the novel. Nikhil begins his narrative on a reflective note. As he prepares to leave for Calcutta he begins to reassess his life with Bimala. He reminds himself that each one must travel his/her own path in life's journey. And as long as you travel together on the same path it was alright. But once you start drifting apart it was self-destructive to preserve the bond in its original form. One must allow it to evolve and renew itself.

It is also time for him to rediscover bonds that have endured. One such bond is the one that he shared with the Bada Rani. In Bada Rani, when she takes him to show him her packing because she does not want to be left behind, he hears the true voice of home. A home which makes no demands, a home where despite the quarrels, the jealousies, the hurt, the heart is together. Nikhil remembers all the happy times they had spent together as children in the house. He realises that this was perhaps the only true relationship he had built up in his life. It was also the only relationship she had in the world. Now he understands the source of the tension between Bimala and the Bada Rani.

Nikhil is overcome with emotion and becomes nostalgic. Interestingly Bada Rani's response to this nostalgia is one of disapproval. She would not like to be born as a woman ever again, though she cherishes the moments they shared together. Her explanation neatly sums up the situation of women in rural Bengal. She says freedom is not for women because women would not like to be free. It is in the nature of women to seek bondage and keep others bound. Despite her close proximity to Nikhil who is quite progressive in his outlook she still clutches on to worn out stereotypes of which she herself is a victim.

In the meanwhile the moment that Bimala had dreaded arrives. Amulya is arrested and brought before Nikhil. Amulya had refused to reveal anything to the police. Nikhil, more than anything else is surprised to find Amulya in this state. Finally Amulya reveals the truth to Nikhil. Bimala is sent for and she comes with hesitant and apprehensive steps. Amulya pays his respect and declares that he had returned the money and had refrained from lying. Bimala's

only words are, "you have saved me my little brother".(p.194) Nikhil is baffled by these startling revelations. He retreats from the scene. Once again he is forced to turn his critical gaze on himself. What strikes him hard is the fact that despite his commitment to Truth and Right, he was not been able to influence or save anyone from the path of destruction. He realises that all along he had been inward looking, lacking the warmth and energy to light other lamps. He had been dealing merely with ideas which, due to his reticence, could not strike a chord in others. On the other hand Bimala, in her own way, had managed to reach out and was able to bring back Amulya from the path of self destruction.

While returning to his inner apartments further revelation from Bimala stuns him. Bimala confesses that she had taken out the six thousand rupees that Nikhil had kept in the locker. But then slowly he begins to understand that in trying to draw Bimala into the process of self realization he had only distanced her from himself, so much so that she was unable to trust him on such small matters, as money. Ideas, then, by themselves can not win people. It is important that one must be able to draw people in a simple and natural way which he had failed to do. He refrains from blaming anyone else and concludes that in his desire to 'manufacture' a co-traveller in his path he had spoiled a 'wife'. Bimala appears at the door but then withdraws immediately. Nikhil rushes out and leads her back into the room. He allows her to express her grief in her own way. She clasps his feet in a gesture of worship. Nikhil initially resists, but then finally allows her to do it her own way. The narrative ends on an ambiguous note. Nikhil says, "who was I to stop her? Was I the god of her worship that I should have any qualms?"(p.199)

Bimala's Story

While Nikhil's narrative ends with ambiguity, Bimala's begins on a note of hope. She had finally cast away her burden of lies and deceptions. She had passed through fire and had come out new and pure. She likens her forthcoming journey to the journey of a river to the wide open sea. She was about to set sail, free at last, to begin a new life with Nikhil.

She begins packing and Nikhil helps her with it. But their packing is interrupted by the appearance of Sandip once again. But this time they go out together to hear what the outsider had to say especially after they had said goodbye to each other. There seems to be a narrative compulsion to introduce Sandip once again, because the circular pattern is not realised fully. Sandip must redeem himself and more than that Sandip still has to return the jewel case. He returns the sovereigns as well as the jewel case. With this gesture the picture is complete. The jewel case is back where it belongs, with the trustee of domestic well being. Sandip, thus finally cuts himself off from Bimala and once again becomes the outsider, he vacates the domestic space that he had intruded upon. This is a different Sandip, a Sandip with compunctions. He is in a hurry to leave because the communal situation had become very dangerous for him. But even in such difficult circumstances he retains his sense of humour. As a parting shot he cracks a joke about the muslims having taken a liking to him.

At this point news filters in that the mussalmans were attacking Harish Kundus family. Nikhil immediately rushes off to the scene. Bimala and Bada Rani spend a tense and agonising time waiting for him to return. Finally news filters in once again that Amulya was shot through the chest and was not likely survive and Nikhil was seriously wounded in the head. Finally then Bimala is unable to escape retributions for her transgressions.

The ending is inconclusive and comes as a surprise to the reader. The narrative fails to reach its desired conclusion: the emergence of a reformed home through the circular journey of Bimala. Though Nikhil by deciding to abandon the home and move to Calcutta had already admitted defeat, Bimala's transformation had kept alive the possibility of saving the home. But then at the end Tagore allows swadeshi to not only invade the home but to destroy it as well. Perhaps the pessimism of the ending points to the inability of the author to formulate a just, humane order which could have replaced the old.

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II - REPAI TEST

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Reading List

If you wish to further explore the world of Rabindranath Tagore and his novels. You can consult the following books which are easily available. You could look them up at the SCC&CE Library or any of the good Libraries in Delhi like the Sahitya Academy library at Mandi House This list is only indicative and not an exhaustive one. You will find an excellent bibliography in Krishan Dutta and Andrew Robinson's book *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad Minded Man*.

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TEST PAPER - II

Q.1. In Tagore's *The Home and The World* Bimala's final statement is: "I have passed through fire... I have dedicated myself to the feet of him, who has received all my sins into the depths of his own". Discuss whether this is a convincing resolution of the problem. **20**

Q.2. In Tagore's *The Home and The World*, whose version – Bimala's, Sandip's or Nikhil's - do you find the most pervasive and why? Discuss. **20**

Q.3. Analyse Tagore's critique of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal in *The Home and The World*. **20**

Q.4. Discuss the role of Panchu in *The Home and The World*. Comment on her people like him feature in the different Swadeshi agenda of Nikhlesh and Sandip. **8**

Q.5. Discuss the title of *The Home and The World*. **8**

Q.6. "Bimala's movement from the home to the world does not give her real freedom." Discuss. **20**

Q.7. Comment on the presentation of Amulya in *The Home and The World* indicating Tagore's complex attitude towards the militant swadeshi movement of this time. **8**

Try and write assignment on at least two twenty mark question and one eight mark question and send them to me for evaluation. In case of any difficulty feel free to contact me at the School of C.C. or email me at pksatapathy@rediffmail.com. You are also welcome to send in your suggestions for improving the study material.

Session 2013 -14 (2400 Copies)

Paper II : Twentieth Century Indian Writing

The Home and the World

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