

The Politics of Identity, Gender and Nationalism

A study of Select Fictional Works by Tagore

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By

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Declaration

This dissertation *The Politics of Identity, Gender and Nationalism: A Study of Select Fictional Works by Tagore* submitted to the Centre for English Studies, School of Language Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of M. Phil., is a record of my bonafide work.

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Table of Contents

Introduction: Perspectives and Problematics	3
Chapter One:	
<i>Gora</i> : Problematizing Identity and Nation	31
Chapter Two:	
<i>Home and the World</i> : The question of Nationalism and Gender	53
Chapter Three:	
<i>Four Chapters</i> : Violence Violating the Self	75
Conclusion	91
Bibliography	101

Introduction: Perspectives and Problematics

The question of India's national identity came to the fore with the advent of the English imperialist rulers and their entrenchment in power since the last decades of the eighteenth century. This entrenchment in power was achieved not only militarily but culturally and ideologically. In this respect the most favourable site for them was the middle class which in the context of colonial Bengal was termed the *bhadralok*, 'the respectable folk'. It played a pre-eminent role in creating the dominant forms of nationalist culture and social institutions in Bengal. It took initiative to form a new public discourse, laid down new criteria of social respectability and set new aesthetic and moral standards of judgment. It was this class that was imbued with a spirit of nationalism. It thus fashioned new forms of political mobilization to wrest freedom from the colonisers. Yet it was the middle class working under the colonial regime that achieved complete political and economic domination. It enjoyed superiority in every sphere, cultural, literary, philosophical and above all racial. Hence, as Partha Chatterjee observes, 'the colonial middle class, in Calcutta no less than in other centers of colonial power, was simultaneously placed in a position of subordination in one relation and a position of dominance in another' (Chatterjee, 1993,36). It made efforts to form hegemonic ideologies and very obviously it showed deep marks of ambivalence. Yet it offers a social agency worth the name and it is in glaring contrast to other sections of this very class that showed complete surrender through either religious conversion or slavish cultural imitation of the colonial masters.

However, the first generation of the western-educated Indian elite, as much as the Bengali one in the present context, was more a collaborating class rather than a resistant one. This is in relation to the colonial masters whose orientalist self-projection as racially and culturally superior to themselves they accepted. Rather than direct political control, this ideological strife was effected more through pedagogic and evangelical programmes. The system of education, with its emphasis on all that was best in Europe – especially of England – literature and philosophy, projected an

image of excellence. The Enlightenment ideas of liberty, equality, rationality and progress reflected in those works appealed to the imagination of the newly educated class. It also helped to divert their attention from the colonial rule and its various disadvantages. It saw its well-being linked to the empire itself and, as Tapan Raychaudhuri observes, rejoiced at the fact that 'India was part of a glorious, world-wide empire and nurtured hopes of a steady progress under Britain's providential guidance' (Raychaudhuri, 1988, 3). This was the case all the more because in the given situation as a conquered people Indians had accepted their backwardness vis-à-vis the conquering European nation. What attracted them most as a western-educated new middle class were the latter's masculinity, enterprise, rationality and modernity, so much so that they grew critical of their own age-old customs and rituals and felt the need of reforms. While impact of Positivism and the Derozeans are cases in point, nearly all the important early intellectuals and reformers stand a testimony to this fact.

Rammohan Roy (1772–1833), universally acknowledged as the pioneer of modern thought in India, stated in clear terms that he found the Europeans 'more intelligent, more steady and more moderate in their conduct' when compared to Indians. Indeed, he was reconciled to the British rule in India in the hope that it would lead 'to the amelioration of the native inhabitants' (*Rammohan Rachanavali*, Ajitkumar Ghosh (ed.), 1973, 448-50, quoted in Raychaudhuri 1999, 28). In his opinion, Europe's ascendancy derived from her high achievements in the 'useful sciences', whereas much of the Indian thought could be comparable only to medieval scholasticism, the pre-Baconian stage of science and literature (*Ibid.*, 29). What Akshaykumar Datta in his treatise, *The Religious Sects of the Hindus*, 1870, says about the Indian religious tradition echoes the Macaulayan idiom:

'Errors, imagination and superstitions pervade every area of Sanskrit learning. Those well versed in English, French and German have little to learn from Sanskrit learning by way of genuine knowledge' (Roychaudhuri, 1999, 29). Europe's triumph was thought to be the triumph of pure intellect. Bankim Chattopadhyay who could be called the first prophet of romantic nationalism in India, too in his early writings

returned repeatedly to the theme of Europe's superiority and the factors which both embodied and explained it. To him Europe represented the 'more perfect type of civilization', while the Indian record provided material for a study of arrested development. It is a different relation of power and knowledge that characterizes European civilization. As he pointed out, knowledge in the western tradition was geared to the quest for power, while in India the quest was for salvation, escape from life's pains (Raychaudhuri, 1999, 30). Vidyasagar, one of the reformers and Sanskrit scholars of the time also believed in the superiority of the British. He was the Principal of the Sanskrit College at Calcutta. He devised an agenda for popularizing western thought in the vernacular through a body of young scholars well versed in English as well as Sanskrit. The objective was to provide correctives to the philosophies of *Vedanta* and *Sankhya*. This shows the early nineteenth-century mindset prone towards European tradition of rationalism. This was largely fed by Mill's *Logic*, study of which was then considered indispensable. What was emphasized at this point of time was the deficiency of indigenous culture. The message that was given was that if India wanted to be equal to the European nations, reason and rational enquiry had to be the basis of the social and individual life. This perception necessitated a wholesale reform in India in all spheres, especially Hindu religion and Hindu social customs, such as suttee, child marriage, widow remarriage, and so on. So far as religion is concerned, the rise of Brahmoism is a case in point.

The Western educated Bengalis faced another kind of dilemma. Western education had obviously shaken their faith in the received Indian tradition without really providing them any acceptable alternative. Moreover, Western criticism of the established practices as barbaric, again, ignited their minds with the need of self-assertion within their own fold. This self-assertion in the earlier decades of the century gave rise to a new religion known as Brahmoism and in the later ones a kind of Hindu 'revivalism' giving rise to the politics of Hindu nationalism. The former implied an acceptance of the western criticisms, while the latter offered the characteristic nationalist resistance to the charges by glorifying the Hindu past. Brahmoism was a 'reformed' Hinduism based on monotheism and the principles of

rationalism. Its founder was Rammohan Roy and its followers and preachers were Akshay Datta, Devendranath Tagore, Keshab Sen. Divested of the so-called Hindu rituals, the new religion in its organization and principle approached the non-conformism of Protestant Christianity. The intellectual terrain during the twenties and the thirties, however, could not be described in terms of a clear division between total loyalty to colonial rule and westernism on the one hand and national resistance or orthodoxy on the other. As Raychaudhury shows, the two strands co-existed: 'The embryonic national consciousness in the twenties and thirties of the century, manifest in concerns for the improvement of "society" and a burgeoning pride in the inherited culture, co-existed easily with a total acceptance of colonial rule' (Raychaudhury , 2). The tension latent in the relationship manifested itself later after the Great Revolt of 1857 with increasing intensity. But at this early stage though there was admiration for the alien rulers and their civilization, it was subject to certain social and psychological constraints. The alien authority's attempts at reformation that interfered with matters of ritual practice were not universally popular. Condemnation of the Hindu rituals as barbaric was highly resented. So far as reforms were concerned, they too were never as radical as were sometimes claimed. Despite deep attractions for European literature, philosophy and rationality, reforms were carried on with the necessary scriptural support. This mixed state of affairs was also noticed by Sumit Sarkar from his own critical angle:

Christian missionary propaganda in India concentrated its fire equally on 'polytheism' or 'idolatry' and caste, and work among the low-castes and tribals constituted on the whole its principal focus. Far from 'blindly' imitating the West as has been alleged so often, the intellectuals of early or mid-nineteenth century Bengal in some respects present an interesting contrast to both these 'models'.

From Rammohan till at least the 1870s, sympathy for patriotic and liberal movements in the West was combined with a fundamental acceptance of foreign political and economic domination over India, tempered by occasional pleas for mildly administrative reforms which remained a minor concern as

compared to the central thrust for social and religious change. Again, ...the Brahmo attack was fundamentally on 'idolatry' and not caste, and no serious attempt was made to emulate Christian missionary welfare-cum-conversion work among untouchables or tribals (Sarkar 1985,72).

If this shows some of the limitations of our so-called Renaissance, then in Tapan Raychaudhuri's analysis it can be interpreted as 'the cultural bed-rock of the nationalist awareness': 'A selective veneration for elements in the Hindu tradition was thus the cultural bed-rock of the nationalist awareness. It co-existed, but not very easily, with at an equal veneration, also selective, for the civilization of the master race' (Raychaudhuri,1988, 3). The latter refers to the fears of proselytization under the protective aegis of the British rule and the frantic efforts to set the neglected house of Hinduism in order. It was in this clash that 'the negative dimension of nationalism – its xenophobic content – began to emerge almost as early as the proud sense of a new identity and commitment to social change' (Raychaudhuri, 1988, 2). From this perspective, the emerging nationalist consciousness in the last decades of the nineteenth century in a bid to define Indian identity in terms of the Hindu cultural heritage and its glorification can well be understood.

The first task that anticolonial nationalism set itself was to challenge 'the rule of colonial difference' in order to overcome the subordination of the colonized middle class in the domain of the state. But the colonial state would not allow it to happen because, as Partha Chatterjee explained, it 'was not just the agency that brought the modular forms of the modern state to the colonies; it was also an agency that was destined never to fulfill the normalizing mission of the modern state because the premise of its power was a rule of colonial difference, namely, the preservation of the alienness of the ruling group' (Chatterjee,1993,10). On the contrary, the more its power was entrenched in the second half of the nineteenth century, its ruling groups saw to it that the precise difference between the rulers and the ruled be laid down, especially in lawmaking, in the bureaucracy, in the administration of justice, and so on. The enforcement of this alienness on the part of the colonizers was based on a

self-projection of racial, cultural and civilizational superiority over the Indians or for that matter the non-Europeans. It got hardened after the Great Revolt of 1857 when the colonial rulers decided on non-interference in social and religious matters. They laid all reasons for the revolt at the door of India's deep-rooted ills of casteism and rather reforming it now they wanted to police it in the far-reaching interest of the empire. From their view of India as a land of age-old and barbaric social customs and beliefs, nothing was farther from their conception than such a united war on them. They knew India to be forever divided in terms of caste hierarchy, cultural difference, religious orthodoxy and communal quarrels. They never believed that India could ever emerge as a nation. The Great Revolt also called India's first war of independence was, therefore, a great shock and surprise for them. Not was there now a principle of non-interference, there was now a programmatic study of India along ethnographic and anthropological lines in a bid, as it were, not to be taken by surprise any more. It was buttressed by a further programme of enumeration of the Indian's in terms of caste, creed and religion by introducing the Census in 1872. This recording of tradition, as Nicholas B. Dirks observes, goes now along with policing it to keep it in place:

Colonial ethnography appropriated barbarism from the missionaries in the late nineteenth century. Barbarism was now of interest to science, its scandal as much a justificatory basis for empire as it was something that had to be controlled and periodically contained in order to celebrate the civilizing mission of empire. But by the end of nineteenth century, the civilizing mission was less urgent, and yielding increasingly to the imperatives of a colonial science that would contain barbarism both through the policing of tradition and the recording of tradition that so frequently emerged out of policing activities. The Victorian policy of non-intervention thus became the charter for a colonial anthropology: involving the delineation of religion, custom, and tradition on the one hand, and the firm maintenance of public order in an imperial regime that held the colonized in place through the knowledge and enlightened protection of tradition on the other. Barbarism was a sign of

colonial difference, producing an ever widening chasm between the subjects and objects of colonial knowledge. And even the benign aspects of tradition, such as the caste system itself, worked both to explain how Indian society could be orderly in the absence of either political authority or tradition, and why it was that Indian tradition would never become mobilized around the political aims of national self-determination (Dirks, 'The Ethnographic State', quoted in Dube 2004, 78).

The British pride of superiority of having a sense of nationhood and a patriotic tradition and their absence in India was resented though implicitly accepted. But this led the intelligentsia to rediscover and reinterpret the Indian past and present to counter the charges and defend its history. The moral and cultural principle that the Indian situation gave rise to was pointed out to be 'unity in diversity'. It showed India as a country to have diverse languages, cultures and ethnicities, but underlying these diversities there was claimed to have elements of cultural homogeneity that forged through centuries a tradition of cultural unity. This element was claimed to be more relevant to the Indian context than the European concept of nation. In fact, limitations of this concept were pointed out, while at the same time patriotism, although accepted as a virtue, was thought one of a low order because in the Indian context it precluded the ideal of universal love and led easily to conflict and aggression. That each civilization had its characteristic proneness was accepted to be the criterion rather than the European to be the 'standard' one. Despite their strong admiration for the European civilization, its rational philosophy, science and literature, Bankim Chattopadhyay, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, Akshay Datta and their other important contemporaries, too, qualified their admiration in their later writings by pointing out the limitations of that civilization. Bankim emphasized that Indians needed to feel superior to Europe at least in some respects in order to regain their national self-confidence. But they also maintained at the same time that that claim to superiority had to be based on sound reasoning. For him even the nineteenth-century Europe with all its achievements was still an immature stage in the evolution of human society. Western science that was once to him the height of man's achievement was now seen

to be a handmaid of war. Its machine that **once served man** was now in its turn **served** and worshipped by man. Patriotism, the **ultimate** virtue in western eyes, had **showed** all its horrible features leading to aggression and genocide to serve the **interest** of one's own people. Nations of Europe fought over the spoils of conquest. They **made** the conquest itself valid. For Bankim, it **appeared** like validating the right to **theft**. He contrasted this western immorality with **what he** projected as the Hindu ideal. **Hence**, he discouraged and virulently attacked in his **satirical** writings the mindless imitation of the western ways by a section of the **contemporary** middle class.

Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, too, in his *Samajik Pravandha* (Essay on Society) stated that different cultures were not comparable because different civilizations did not pursue identical aims. And to follow Raychaudhuri's summing up of Bhudev's views, that criterion had to be the gradual expansion of **man's** capacity for love. Focusing **first on** one's self, it had spread out to encompass **the family, community, nation, mankind** and finally the entire universe. In western **culture** it had stopped at the level of the nation. Compared with the Hindu ideal of universal love, this was an inferior goal for mankind. The apotheosis of the nation state was the end product of Europe's history with its endless conflicts between and within **nations**. The characteristic **virtues of** European life – solidarity, discipline, **obedience to the leader and self-sacrifice in the** national cause – were the necessary products of **this long** record of conflict. To **these** were added ideologies born of love of money and an excessive concern for property rights. Their ultimate embodiment was **individualism** reduced eventually to an apotheosis of selfishness. Hence, in respect of human love and values India had nothing to learn from the West. It was just **the other way around for the West, while** for India it had to concede to the former's **superior practice skills** (Raychaudhuri 1999, 39-40). This reversal of the relation was further carried on among others by Vivekananda to glorify India and its past as an answer to the western criticism. But the culmination of this line of evaluation is found to have reached in no other than Tagore. Through out his life Tagore tried to come to a proper understanding of India and its relationship with Europe. He, however, could prove to be uncompromisingly

critical when our nationalists tended to commit the same mistakes as their colonial masters.

In a series of essays written from 1905 onwards, Tagore explored analytically this issue. He tried to see the difference between the East and the West and tried to prove India's uniqueness. He wanted India to adopt means accordingly for its cultural and civilizational progress. He wanted Indians not to feel ashamed for what they should not be. In his essay, 'Prachya o Paschatya Sabhyata' (Eastern and Western Civilization), Tagore cites Guizot to describe after him the unique feature of the European civilization as one growing in complexity, contradiction, size and proportion. But at the same time he expressed his apprehension about its aggressive nationalistic goals of engulfing more and more countries into itself. The main purpose of Europe was only to protect and expand its national interest. As Tagore observed, this national interest was pursued with a lot of intensity and it transgressed all sense of moral or religious laws. It was fast approaching a point of no return. Indeed, the destruction of the civilization itself could not be far off. According to Tagore, the very fact that Indian past had no record of nationalism should become a cause for our pride rather than for shame. In essays like 'Nationalism in India', Tagore expressed the idea that Nationalism as a concept was not the ultimate stage of civilization, nor was it benign free from the ills of aggression, cruelty and fanaticism. Elaborating on the Indian difference Tagore says:

The word 'nation' was not in our language, nor was it in our country. It is due to the recent European education that we have learnt to put an extraordinary value to its pride and glory. But its ideals are not inherent as parts of our soul. Our history, religion, society and household – none really recognizes nation-making as the dominant principle. Europe gives pre-eminence to freedom, while on the contrary India holds salvation to be more important. We consider as great only the freedom of the soul and of no other. For us the greatest bondage is that of the bodily urges, and if we can overcome them, then that is tantamount to achieving more than a king's place. In our duty as householders

consists our very duty to the world. We have established the whole universe and the creator of the universe in our very household (Tagore, 'Prachya o Paschatya Sabhyata', *Rabindra-Rachanavali*, Vol. 13, 1990, 150).

As against European culture that emphasized nation, Indian culture emphasized society. Indian civilization with society and its central focus was, as Tagore puts it, concerned more with the general well-being of all concerned than with the pursuit of self-interest. It was due to the spiritual strength of this ancient society of ours that we had survived through all vicissitudes. As he says: 'This society had never held high as ideal our own happiness. In all we said, in all we did and in all our relationships, it chanted into our ears the mantras of the well-being of all, virtue and religion. We should consider that society to be our greatest refuge and should accordingly pay our particular attention to it' (Tagore, 'Bharatvarsio Samaj', *Rabindra-Rachanavali*, Vol. 13 1990, 41). In his essay 'Nationalism in India' he writes how he had outgrown the idolatry of nation taught from the childhood as better than reverence for God and humanity (Das, ed., 1996, 456). This conviction that a country is not greater than the ideals of humanity had further deepened in Tagore with time. It found artistic outlet in his novels like *Gora*, *The Home and the World*, *Char Adhyay*, and so on. He, therefore, exhorts us to follow our own destiny: 'And, therefore, I believe that it does India no good to compete with Western civilization in its own field. But we shall be more than compensated if, in spite of the insults heaped upon us, we follow our own destiny' (Ibid., 457).

In other words, our imagining must follow our own history or that part of it where we have our real strength and difference. Anti-colonial nationalism as it consolidated its strength, tried to do it by rediscovering the past glory of the country. It had to be a difference, established through a different cultural and spiritual discourse, where India could claim superiority over Europe. So far as the public domain of material life, law, economy and administration was concerned, difference could not be justified. Europe had already proved its superiority in the material world. Hence it was in the private domain of spirituality that it had to project its difference and

superiority. Eminent scholars like Max Muller who widely studied Indian tradition and culture enhanced the pride of the Indians in the religious tradition of the country. A fresh boost to this image of spiritual superiority also came from the Theosophists like Annie Besant. As a matter of fact, as Partha Chatterjee comments on this paradoxical moment of our history, 'the more nationalism engaged in its contest with the colonial power in the outer domain of politics, the more it insisted on displaying the marks of 'essential' cultural difference so as to keep out colonizer from that inner domain of national life and to proclaim its sovereignty over it' (Chatterjee, 1993, 26). In fact, Chatterjee observes that this mode adopted by the Indian nationalists is indeed 'a fundamental feature of anticolonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa' (Ibid., 6).

This could be called nationalism's first assertion of its autonomous subjectivity within the colonial regime. It declared the domain of the spiritual its sovereign territory and refused the colonial power to intervene in that domain. One impact of this decision was noticeable in the sphere of 'social reforms'. In the earlier phase of reforms, Indian reformers looked to the colonial authorities for state action to bring about radical changes in the existing social and institutional customs and norms. Apart from the state action what impelled the reformers was also their rationality imbibed from the West. But in the later phase, although the need for change was not disputed, there arose among the reformers a decision of strong resistance to allowing the colonial authority to intervene in matters affecting 'national culture'. In other words, the colonial state was kept out of the 'inner' domain. It had several implications. Here nationalism started launching its most powerful, creative and historically significant project: to fashion a 'modern' national culture that is nevertheless not Western. This implies the continued existence of a tension in whatever was produced and practiced in the spheres of literature, art, fashion, manners and cultural life. Obviously it gave rise to a tension due to the coming together of this tradition and modernity. This applied to the production of cultural artifacts and cultural practices. But the first determined move in this nationalist self-assertion was to establish the national identity by rediscovering and redefining its past glory and thereby contesting the colonial representations and stereotypes in numerous

spheres, such as the questions of division **due** to diversity of caste and religion, of superstitions, effeminacy, women oppression, and so on. So far as the last area, that is, the woman question is concerned, the **assertion** of autonomy was the most dramatic. The European criticism of Indian 'tradition' as barbaric had focused to a large extent on religious beliefs and practices, especially those relating to the treatment of women. The early phase of 'social reform' through the agency of the colonial power had also concentrated on the same issues, identifying them as 'essential' to Indian tradition. The nationalist move began by disputing the choice of the agency. Unlike the early reformers, the nationalists were not prepared to allow the colonial state to interfere in the reform of the 'traditional' society. They asserted that only the nation could have the right to **intervene** in such an essential aspect of its cultural identity. Having to counter colonialism on cultural identity, nationalism had to prove to be conservative in its move as **regards** reform, especially of the inner domain where women were at the center. **Speaking** of this phase Sumit Sarkar remarks: "'Middle class" interest in women's **questions** and social reform in general evidently declined from the late 19th century with **the** rise of nationalism. Not only did patriotism at times encourage social conservatism; **participation** in nationalist activity implied social prestige rather than social ostracism, **reducing** the need for **conscious** efforts at inter-personal adjustments within the **family**' (Sarkar 1985, 74). **However**, as Partha Chatterjee shows, the domain **underwent** a **change** by all means under the nationalist middle class. It was not a breakdown of **traditional** order. In his analysis, it was 'a new patriarchy' that was brought into existence by the nationalist middle class. It was 'different from the "traditional" order but also explicitly claiming to be different from the "Western" family. The "new woman" was to be modern, but she would have to display the signs of national tradition and therefore would be essentially different from the "western" woman' (Chatterjee 1993, 9). The veracity of this statement is evidenced in many literary works where this new view was projected. Tagore's works like *Gora*, *The Home and the World*, *Chaturanga*, and so on are the examples some of which we shall take up for discussion later.

However, in the exigency of projecting an 'Indian identity' in a bid to contest the colonial representation, the nationalists had to present a homogenized picture that suppressed and left unresolved many issues related to the traditional patterns of hierarchy across caste, community, class and gender. Still another negotiation was at work; it was their own relation to the modernity of the colonial masters as the English-educated *bhadralok* at the head of the movement. Not surprisingly, as Indira Chowdhury comments, 'the resistance articulated by the English-educated *bhadralok*, therefore, preserved within its structure the division between the ruler and the ruled. Marked by its own ambivalent response to colonialism, the *bhadralok* elaboration of the requisite features of a nationalist identity deployed its modernity hegemonically, silencing in the process numerous fragments of resistance' (Chowdhury,2001,3). Another feature that had great social and cultural impact later was its construction of the Hindu *bhadralok* communal identity as Joya Chatterji has shown in her radical study (Chatterji 1995). A brief view of the process is relevant for the subject of our study, for it was against this trend that had come to a head with the Partition of Bengal that Tagore strongly revolted.

This cultural politics of the nationalists of projecting an oppositional self-image was first initiated by adopting programmes for making the Indian culture visible and in the process to construct the necessary discourses. This was thought to be one way of self-assertion and self-empowerment in the face of a colonial power whose expulsion was yet unthinkable. The concept of the Hindu Mela provided that opportunity. It was a nationalist gathering started by the Tagores of Jorasanko in 1867 and thereafter organized annually for fourteen years till 1880. This Mela was, however, conceived two years after the Tagores had instituted the *Nationalist Paper*, a weekly in English, in 1865. Later it turned out to be also the organ of the annual Hindu Mela. This phenomenon shows the combination of performance and discourse at the same time in the effort to project the national identity.

As Indira Chowdhury informs us (Chowdhury,2001,12ff), from the very early years the Mela commanded immense popular support and by its third year the Mela had

begun attracting as many as 20,000 visitors. It was **first restricted** to different venues in Calcutta but later its *moffusil* counterparts **were** instituted in Baruipur and Dinajpur. Following its example, other national **institutions** were also established, such as the National Society in 1870 and the **National** school in 1872. Apart from regular lectures and songs, the Mela also exhibited **agricultural** produce, animals, birds, machinery and handicraft items. Prizes were **annually** awarded not only for the best essays and songs but also to the best gymnast or **athlete**. Other cultural activities included the staging of plays such as Kiran Chandra **Bandopadhyay's** *Bharat Mata*. One of the objectives of the Mela, as envisaged by **Rajnarayan** Basu in his *Prospect for a Society for the Promotion of National Feeling*, **first** published in 1866 in the *National Paper*, was to prevent the excesses of **the** Young Bengal by promoting through a National Society Hindu music, Hindu **medicine**, cultivation of Sanskrit and the mother tongue. He also advanced the notion of an alternative to Western modernity by proposing a return to indigenous **customs and etiquette after necessary** cleansing. Suffice it to say, this essay provided **the first** inspiration for the Mela and the objectives he proposed for his envisioned Society were soon those of the Mela. The very naming of the Mela was itself an evidence. **The** Mela was initially known as 'Jatiya Mela' or 'Chaitra Mela' but from 1870 **onwards** it came to be called the 'Hindu Mela'. The Hindu identity was thought to **be properly** the national identity and hence the change. The interchangeability of 'Hindu' and 'National' helped form a 'Hindu national identity', as confirmed by what **Dwijendranath** Tagore said in his speech at the 1870 Hindu Mela:

Gentlemen, with the progressive growth of **the Mela** alteration of its name has kept pace. It was originally called the **National Mela** which was subsequently changed to Choitra Mela. But it has now **taken** its true name, the Hindoo Mela. The last name best signifies the aims and objects of the Mela (Quoted in Chowdhury, 14).

Another nationalist enthusiast and one of chief organizers was Manomohan Basu who, too, in the similar vein justified the denomination of the Mela as Hindu Mela.

He said that it was the Hindus who were 'the legitimate children of the Bharat Mata' and deserved 'the adjective "national"'. In his speeches before the National Society and at the Hindu Mela, he upheld Indian superiority in terms of cultural difference by throwing overboard the Enlightenment dichotomy of civilized/barbaric and the idea of progress. He argued that while Europeans saw themselves as progressing towards civilization, Hindus could only view their present in terms of a fall: 'Europeans call their ancient age the iron age and the present one, the golden age. The Hindus refer to their past as the *satya yuga* or the age of truth and the present, the *kali yuga* or the age of immorality' (Quoted in Chowdhury, 16). This suggested a crucial difference in historical perception, the former measuring progress in material terms, while the latter in terms of religious and spiritual progress. This progress having been impeded by colonialism must now be rectified and released. So he pleaded for a space free from colonial interference where the task of re-examining and reinterpreting Hindu customs and religious practices in a bid to reaffirm them could be taken up. Thus through the Hindu Mela the nationalists wanted to create a space from within from which to articulate their cultural difference. This they thought would allow them an autonomy of identity despite a political subordination. By now tradition has already been redefined keeping in mind modernity that they derived from the English and the English tradition. But the Hindu elements were emphasized and they proved to have far-reaching effects in the beginning of the twentieth century.

Within this domain of cultural difference, there was the domain of the family and the women that also needed reaffirmation. In his lecture 'Hindu Customs: Domestic', Monomohan tried to oppose the colonial criticism and clarify the position traditionally granted to women within Hindu society. He argued that Hindu joint family was a part of the patriarchal system but could not be labeled 'primitive' as was done from the colonial standpoint. It rather increased the strength of a community, encouraged individual responsibility, was visually pleasing and a source of bliss. Again, his discussion of the *antahpur* or the 'inner quarters' had as its background the colonial condemnation of Hindu womanhood. The Hindu housewife was often viewed as being no better than a slave woman. Manomohan countered by valorizing

the Indian antiquity over the comparatively recent **European** civilization. He argued that the civilized custom of treating women with respect existed in India since time immemorial. Indeed, as he claimed, the Hindu woman was adored, glorified and esteemed, and the norms ensuring such veneration for women were enshrined in ancient scriptures and conventions.

The qualities for which women earned respect and **veneration** were not merely domestic skills and needlework but also learning and **heroic** ideals they demonstrated. This nationalist rewriting of history led to the formation of the discourse of Mother India or Bharat Mata. The inaugural song of the 1868 **Hindu Mela** was composed by Satyendranath Tagore. It celebrated the virtuous and **heroic** women figures drawn from Puranic lore – Sharmistha, Sita, Sabitri, Damayanti, Arundhati along with legendary ascetics like Vaisistha, Gautama, Atri, Viswamitra and poets like Valmiki, Vyasa, Bhavabhuti and Kalidasa who immortalized **heroic** moments. This refers to the heroic past when Bharat Mata is said to have given **birth** to these great sons and daughters. But this implies at the same time present state of incarceration of Mother India. Satyendranath's song, however, brought together an 'Indian' identity that fused Puranic heroism with Rajput valour, implying that only such an identity could resist British domination.

Clearly, it appears that the modernization of the condition of women initiated in the first half of the nineteenth century in the form of social reforms had all of a sudden disappeared. One of the critiques explains this phenomenon as a retrograde move on the part of the new politics of nationalism that 'glorified India's past and tended to defend everything traditional' (Murshid, quoted in Partha Chatterjee, 1993, 116). Sumit Sarkar's critique on the other hand maintains that the later nationalists' move cannot be seen as a retrogression from an earlier radical reformist phase because that phase itself was not so radical as thought to be. He speaks of the style of reform and its limited application: 'a style of reform through appeal to the *shastras* which sometimes raised additional problems, and the tendency for reform to get confined to change often of a symbolic sort within an enclosed sect' (Sarkar 1985, 74). As

referred to already, Partha Chatterjee thinks that this phenomenon can be better understood if we can frame the nationalist ideology that was at work in resolving the woman's issues as well as others. Working from that ideology, he argues, nationalism did in fact provide an answer to the new social and cultural problems concerning the position of women in 'modern' society, and that answer, he maintains, 'was posited not on an identity but on a difference with the perceived forms of cultural modernity in the West' (Chatterjee 1993, 117). The relative unimportance of the women's question in the last decades of the nineteenth century lies, he says, not in the fact of its being "censored out of the reform agenda or overtaken by the more pressing and emotive issues of political struggle. The reason lies in nationalism's success in situating the 'women's question' in an inner domain of sovereignty, far removed from the arena of political contest with the colonial state. This inner domain of national culture was constituted in the light of the discovery of 'tradition'" (Ibid.).

Indeed, a discovery and affirmation of this tradition helped nationalism reject colonialism's 'civilizing mission' that it declared it undertook to reform India's allegedly degenerate and barbaric tradition. Now it conceded the West to be advanced in only the material aspects of life while claiming at the same time the East's spiritual superiority. The nationalist discourse thus was based on the material/spiritual distinction. It could be condensed into an analogous but ideologically more powerful dichotomy, that of the outer and the inner. The material life is the outer where we are required to follow the West but we are sovereign in the spiritual world which is the true inner world. This was the key ideology to overcome the predicament. The nationalists further applied this divide of the outer/inner to the social space of *ghar/bahir*, the home and the world. The *bahir* is the domain of the material, the outside world, as well as the world of the male, a treacherous terrain of material pursuits, while the *ghar* is that of the inside and of the cultural and thereby of the woman who is its representation. Thus through this dichotomy we also get the social roles by gender. This might appear to be a traditional picture entrenching conservatism but we must not lose sight of the radical content that it had to fight colonialism ideologically. Colonialism was said to have failed to colonize the inner,

essential identity of the East, which lay in its **distinctive** and spiritual culture. So far as the social roles by gender was concerned, it **would** be a mistake to say that the nationalists had dismissed modernity altogether. It **adopted** a principle of selection so that woman could be modern by a 'classicization' of her own tradition rather than by mere imitation of the West, to use Chatterjee's **phrase** (127). In other words, the crucial requirement was to retain the inner **spirituality** of indigenous social life. The home was the principal site for expressing this **spiritual** quality which women must take the responsibility to nurture. This divide, **however**, separated not only the indigenous from the alien, the inner from the **outer** and the feminine from the masculine; it also demanded that Indian women **must** register her difference as much from men as from the Western women.

The new woman envisaged in the nationalist project was undoubtedly subjected to a new patriarchy, as already observed. But it was **not the same** as the old one because woman's identity now was redefined in terms of **classicization** of the **tradition**. The new woman was the reverse of the 'common' **woman**, known to be vulgar, coarse, loud, quarrelsome and devoid of superior moral sense. She would thereby prove to be different from a parody of the Western woman, **represented** by such women as cited above. Attainment by her own efforts of a **superior national** culture was the **mark** of woman's newly acquired freedom, and, as Partha Chatterjee observes, 'this was the central ideological strength of the nationalist **resolution** of the women's question' (Ibid., 127). In other words, it envisaged **cultural refinement** through modern education without jeopardizing her place at home. The femininity that was thus envisioned combined both **cultural refinement** and **also the need** to have some idea of the outside. In fact, once the essential femininity was **fixed**, woman could negotiate the outside as well. This new woman who also **represented** the sovereign side of India's spiritual culture was also the product of the **middle class**. No wonder, it put this new construct of woman into the timely new role, **standing** as a sign for 'nation', serving as an emblem of the spiritual qualities of self-sacrifice, benevolence, devotion, religiosity, and at the same time as the icon of the nation, the *Bharat Mata*, demanding these in her turn from the countrymen.

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But when the positive side of the nationalist project is taken into account, its negative aspects must also be pointed out. As far as the woman question is concerned, it was a hegemonic construction of the new nationalist middle class. Here the women's voice did not much matter. It is in a bid to contest the colonial discourse that the new middle class used fruitfully the dichotomies of spiritual/material, home/world, feminine/masculine for the production of the oppositional nationalist discourse. This was evidenced by the absence of any autonomous struggle on the part of women themselves for equality and freedom. Unlike the women's movement in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe or America, the Indian women's battle for new womanhood in the era of nationalism was waged in the home alone. So far as the gender roles were concerned, it was at home, the principal site, where they tried to normalize the hegemonic new nationalist patriarchy. Thus though the nationalists had definitely advanced the cause of the country and women, their discourses based on dichotomies smacked of essentialism. As Partha Chatterjee opines that 'in the confrontation between colonialist and nationalist discourses, the dichotomies of spiritual/material, home/world, feminine/masculine, while enabling the production of a nationalist discourse which is different from that of colonialism, nonetheless remains trapped within its framework of essentialisms' (Ibid., 134).

This complex relationship of masculinity and femininity in terms of the dichotomy between the home and the world or that of woman and nation in the domain of the nationalist discourse has also been the central preoccupation of Tagore not only in some of his very powerful fictions but also in his contemporary essays. While we will take some of these essays into consideration, we will study Tagore's artistic responses to them in his novels like *Gora*, *The Home and the World* and *Char Adhyay (Four Chapters)* where we believe these issues have been dealt with in all their subtlety and complex nuances. Tagore's writings in general and the novels in particular deal with still another issue central to the contemporary concern that is pluralism and the principle of unity in diversity which is central to the Indian society. As he asserted in his essays, it was not the concept of nation but that of society that was characteristic



of India. He lamented our blind and wrong imitation of Europe in this respect and grew critical of nationalist activities that divided rather than unite society in terms of class, caste and religion. This was evident in the hegemonic nationalist discourse that was not only *bhadralok* and urban in character but at the same time explicitly Hindu. So, not surprisingly, it worked by exclusion, exclusion of the so-called lower castes of the society and the Muslim population. Nationalist politics was almost an exclusive preserve of high caste Hindus and the lower castes as well as Muslims preferred to stay away from it. Tagore was conscious of this failure of the nationalists to effectively include within their discourse the whole mass of people that they claimed to represent. This failure that persists even today is a legacy from this hegemonic nationalist ideology that privileged the concept of an 'essential tradition' in imagining a 'national culture'. Tagore could see the danger of an upper caste Hindu chauvinism in the political and social programmes of the contemporary nationalist leaders and intervened as far as possible both as a writer and as a citizen. But Tagore too had an intellectual career of his own through this eventful national history. We have to trace it for a proper understanding of his views and their artistic presentation in his novels.

Tagore's involvement in nationalism can be said to have two distinct phases of development. The first phase was dominated by a strong nationalist feeling gradually culminating in his throwing himself into what is known in history as the Swadeshi movement. The second phase can be described as the post-Swadeshi one when he grew critical and revisionary of what had happened in the name of Swadeshi. An undercurrent of humanist and universalist ideology was the hallmark of Tagore's thought and poetry from the very beginning. But he did not take much time to see through the imperialist designs of the British or for that matter the Europeans however much the civilizing mission was masqueraded. The first glimpses of this awareness are available in his letters from England published from 1878-80 published in the *Bharati*, a periodical started in 1877 under the editorship of Dwijendranath Tagore. These letters of the young Tagore speak both of his admiration for some sides of the British character and at the same time anger and agony for some others. It revealed to him its two contradictory faces, one of civilization and the other of

imperialism. On a visit to the British Parliament, he was deeply moved by the oratory of Gladstone and Bright and expressed his admiration. But he was equally agonized at the sight of jeers and ridicule hurled at the Irish members who were agitating at that time for Home Rule. Rabindranath was naturally drawn towards the Irish members because India and Ireland were both victims of British hatred, humiliation and exploitation. On his return to the country, he wrote another essay in the same periodical titled 'The Death-trade in China' in which he attacked in strong terms the inhumanity and greed of British imperialism that forced opium into the mouth of China. 'Indeed', as he says, 'it is nothing but that a strong nation is earning profit by selling death to weak nation' (Quoted in Poddar,1977,169). Rabindranath went to England for the second time in 1990, and the letters he sent home revealed that he had grown more critical of the West both in respect of its imperial aggressiveness and the darkness underlying the apparent splendour of its civilization.

In fact, the last decade of the nineteenth century proved to be most eventful and significant for the poet in that it saw his increasing participation in the affairs of the country. He rose to the occasion by writing innumerable essays that expressed his considered views on various issues. One can particularly mention essays written from 1905 onwards and published in collections such as *Atmashakti* (1905), *Bharatvarsa* (1906), *Rajapraja* (1908), *Swadesh* (1908), *Samaj* (1908), *Parichay* (1916), and so on. He addressed so many issues but three issues can broadly be referred to. They are about Indian history and culture, about the English and the Indians as colonizer and colonized, and about what Indians should do for their freedom, development and culture. Some of the important essays are 'Bharatvarsio Samaj', 'Swadeshi Samaj', 'Byabastha o Abastha', 'Bharatvarsa', 'Prachya o Paschatya Sabhyata', 'Brahman', 'Baroari Mangal', 'Ingrej o Bharatvasi', 'Rajnitir Dwidha', 'Ingrejer Atanka', 'Abandoner Pratikar', 'Shikshar Herpher', and so on. In some of these essays he described our history and culture contrasting and comparing them with those of Europe and in others he criticized the Government roles, its highhandedness and racial discrimination as well as the roles of our leaders and intellectuals. Criticism was directed also against the Anglophiles and colonial education in general. Western

education in a colonial setup brought new values and aspirations but produced at the same time a colonized mindset that cherished a rather pathetic faith in the basic goodness of the British leading to an alienation of the English educated *bhadralok* from the masses. In his essay 'Bharatvarser Itihas', Tagore makes this point very succinctly while showing how it also leads India away from its historic mission:

That India, among all civilizations of the world, exists as an ideal committed to uniting the many into one is proved from its history. To realize the one in the universe and in itself and then place it at the center of all diversities, discover it through all knowledges, establish it through all work, realize it through all love and spread it as a message in life –all these in all its trials India has been carrying on. When we will be able to see this inherent tradition of India in all its history, only then will the chasm between our past and the present disappear.

Learning derived from alien nations divides India in terms of its past and present. He who would build the bridge would save us. If that bridge is ever built, then this phase of hesitancy also has its value because the sense of union itself is not enlivened without the shock of separation. If there is some real substance in us, then all the shocks inflicted upon us by the alien powers would themselves wake us up to deeply love our own country (*Rabindra-Rachanavali*, Vol. 13, 125-126).

Tagore has always thought of self-reliance rather than dependence on the favours from the alien rulers as the chief mode of development. Of these he considers education in one's own language to be the basis of development, dignity and Swaraj:

Even if it is crying in wilderness, it must nevertheless be reiterated that we would reap no gain by cultivating English. Permanent development of the country depends on education imparted through the mother tongue. It is not the favours of the English but an awakening of our human dignity that would

increase our glory. Real achievement comes through hard work and great sacrifice, not through clever wheedling ('Ingrej o Bharatvasi', *Rabindra-Rachanavali*, Vol. 13, 202).

Contemporary Congress politics was indeed the target of this two-fold critique: one, its faith in the basic goodness of the British and hence pursuing the policy of petition and the other, alienation of the English educated elite from the culture of the country and the masses. As opposed to prayers and petitions, Tagore talked of self-reliance and *atmashakti* from the last decade of the nineteenth century. Later he gave a definite call to build up our own strength by undertaking constructive economic and educational work – swadeshi and national education. Such efforts at self-help were combined with the efforts of bringing the masses into the national movement. For this purpose, together with the use of vernacular folk institutions like the *mela* were thought to be most useful. It was also thought to be useful for renewing our unity between communities, cultural and religious. Tagore was eloquent about it in his essay *Swadeshi Samaj*, explaining that it has proved to be the throbbing heart of the rural life or for that matter of the country itself, for ours is indeed basically rural. It is here that people open their hearts through cultural and emotional exchanges. He therefore called upon our elite to make proper use of it in the national cause:

If the educated gentlefolk of each district take the initiative to reawaken the melas of their respective districts with new life; if they attach their hearts to them, establish the unity and goodwill between the Hindus and Muslims through them; and keeping all vain politics away, if they look into whatever deficiencies are there in respect of schools, roads, ponds, pastures etc. in the districts and advise on remedies of these, then in a short time they will be able to realize the mission of swadeshi ('Swadeshi Samaj', *Rabindra-Rachanavali*, Vol. 13, 48).

However, things did not happen the way Tagore had initially envisioned them. *Atmashakti* was naturally allied to the Renaissance of one's past, its retrieval and

glorification as against the colonial representation of it as barbaric. Inspiration was sought from the writings of Dayanada in upper India and Bankimchandra and Vivekananda in Bengal, and self-reliance and **atmashakti** became identified with the revivalist approach to the Hindu religious tradition. May it be stated that Partition of Bengal initiated by Curzon all the more intensified the process. As Joya Chatterji analyzes:

The question of identity was arguably at the eye of the intellectual storm which raged in nineteenth-century Bengal. The central quest of much Renaissance thought was to evaluate Hindu society in the light of its encounter with western rationalism and colonial domination. The Bengali response ranged from the Derozian infatuation to the extreme cultural chauvinism of men such as Pandit Sasadhar Tarkachudamani, which proclaimed the 'scientific' basis of Hinduism. Within this broad spectrum fell several more sober intellectual traditions, such as the Brahmoism of Raja Rammohun Roy and the more assertive Hinduism of Bankimchandra and Vivekananda. Their responses to the big issues of reform and revival were complex and ambivalent, but at the level of popular appropriation, lost much of their subtlety. It was at this level that, by the turn of the century Hindu 'revivalism', as it is somewhat loosely described, gained ascendancy. The Young Bengal movement attracted more censure than sympathy, and was always marginal in the bhadralok world; the Brahmo movement, beset by internal schisms since the 1860s, was increasingly the target of ridicule both in the high 'intellectual circles and in the pulp press.... As the rising tide of Hindu nationalism swept Bengal in the early twentieth century, 'revivalism' rapidly outstripped 'reform' in its popular appeal (Chatterji 1995, 156-157).

This shift can be described as a shift from nationalism based on the principle of atmashakti to cultural nationalism that appropriated nationalism into its Hindu communal discourse. Joya Chatterji shows how it became gradually synonymous with 'bhadralok communal identity' as the questions of culture, religion and identity

in bhadrak thought emerged as part of the larger preoccupation with nationhood. 'Culture', in the sense of education and *bhadrata* (cultivatedness), explains Chatterji, 'retained a critical place in the self-image of the nationalist bhadrak: it was now regarded as the essential equipment of the class that would free the nation. The new definition reflected the heightened self-awareness of the bhadrak of their constituting a class, with specific political role and destiny' (Chatterji, 166). This development inevitably resulted in alienation rather than unity between the Hindus and Muslims on the one hand and the bhadrak leadership and the masses or more specifically the so-called lower class/ caste people.

Tagore was at the very center of this historical, political and cultural juncture and reacted intellectually to the happenings. Through speeches, articles as well as creative writings he expressed his strongly formed opinions. They show his involvement in the happenings, his definite nationalist views on India's tradition, culture and society and at the same time his criticism when the movement became lop-sided. In other words, his whole intellectual trajectory during this very significant period of history shows him passing through changing phases of thought and development. To use Ashis Nandy's words, it was an 'intellectual and emotional journey from the Hindu nationalism of his youth and the Brahmanic-liberal humanism of his adulthood to the more radical, anti-statist, almost Gandhian social criticism of his last years. It was a journey made by one who had been a builder of modern consciousness in India, one who ended up – against his own instincts, as we shall see – almost a counter-modernist of the imperial West' (Nandy 1994, 3-4).

As we have seen, swadeshi and self-reliance in terms of constructive work formed the basis of Tagore's thought during the nineties of the nineteenth century with a growing mood of exalting the Hindu past. The balance was still then, as Sumit Sarkar shows, 'heavily tilted against Hindu revivalism' (Sarkar 1973, 53). But the years between 1901 and 1906, to quote Sarkar again, 'are marked by the definite ascendancy of revivalist ideas in Rabindranath's mind' (Sarkar, 53). The stormy political event of the partition of Bengal has to be kept in mind as a major factor in this case. The

traditional samaj is hailed as the real center of Indian life, not the state ('Prachya o pratichya Samaj'). The Hindu past is invoked in poetic language ('Nababarsa'); virtues are discovered in the functional specialization through caste ('Brahman'); unity in diversity is implied to be something already achieved in India in and through Hinduism ('Bharavarser Itihas'). But this period of political turmoil was not important for its historical reasons; it was important for Tagore's own development beyond it. Indeed, Tagore's sharp turn from this phase of cultural nationalism based on Hinduism is a commentary on the wrong direction that the extremist national politics was taking on the one hand, and on the other it also shows a quest for the real Indian identity which lay elsewhere in a secular and cultural diversity. The 1907 Hindu-Muslim riots to which the revivalist ideology and politics led completed his disillusionment. In fact, this realization had already dawned on him even earlier and he started moving away from politicians even at the cost of criticism. This turning point in Tagore's thought was signaled by a number of essays that he published at this time, for example 'Byadhi o Pratikar', 'Pabna Presidential Address', 'Path o Patheyo', 'Sadupay', and so. Commenting on this phase, Sumit Sarkar sums up Tagore's new realization in terms of three interrelated points. First, Tagore accepts the British machination of divide and rule policy which led to the Hindu-Muslim riots, but locates the evil in the social traditions of the Hindus themselves, which made them look upon the Muslims as socially inferior aliens. It is this flaw that helped Satan to widen the rupture. Further, Tagore connected communal barrier with the ever widening gulf that separated the educated elite from the common masses in our country. In fact, as Sarkar analyzes, Tagore came to assert that the very 'tactics adopted to fight the partition ... had paradoxically sometimes contributed to enhance the same danger' (Sarkar, 84). Indeed, Tagore's trenchant criticism came in his essay *Sadupay* where he lamented that we did not take proper care to see that the division designed by the colonial ruler did not divide us from within. We had been so much fixated on the boycott as an end in itself and its victory that we had failed to consider the opinions of the common masses and their disadvantages. As a result, he says, 'We have ourselves by our own doing placed a section of people of the country against ourselves. We do not know how far we succeeded in providing them with our own

cloth, but we have definitely lost their support. We cannot tell how far we have opposed the enemy of the country, but we have definitely wakened the enemy within us ('Sadupay', *Rabindra-Rachanavali*, Vol.13, 283). Tagore deeply grieved the unjust treatment meted out to Muslims and the lower caste people in the name of boycott.

The second concomitant in Tagore's realization was his passionate and sustained development work in a bid to establish real mass contact. Thirdly, Tagore showed a total rethinking of India's cultural identity now. The ideal now was no longer the glorious Hindu past. It was broadened on the basis of a humanism that required a wholesale breaking down of all sectarian, communal and religious barriers. This would imply a soul-searching and a questioning of much that goes in the name of Hindu tradition, as is clear from what he says in 'Byadhi o Pratikar':

We have lived for hundreds of years side by side, fed on crops of the same field, drank the water of the same river, enjoyed the sunlight of the same sun, spoke the same language and shared the same kind of sufferings. Yet the relationship that should exist between the neighbours, as social values demand, did not take roots among us. We have sustained in us for so long such a sin that all our efforts proved vain to resist separation. God can in no way forgive this sin (*Rabindra-Rachanavali*, Vol. 13, 352).

To conclude, Tagore envisions now a great Nation, a Mahajati, based on a view of cultural plurality. Indian reality is the reality of many cultures, many religions and many languages. In order for India to survive as a Mahajati, these diversities have to be recognized. The unity of Indianness must evolve from below from all these diversities, not the other way around from above by a suppression of them by a hegemonic culture. Cultural nationalism based on the tenets of Hindutva proved to be detrimental to the Indian cause. But Tagore was also critical of the European modernity that gave rise to the aggressive nationalism. His celebrated essays on nationalism are cases to the point. This change of perspectives in Tagore's thought also made him scrutinize seriously the related issues of caste, customs, untouchability

and especially gender in Indian Hindu Society. It can be said that his whole critique offers a cultural critique. In the light of this cultural critique, I propose to analyze his three novels – *Gora*, *The Home and the World* and *Char Adhyay* – for further artistic insights and nuances.

Chapter One

***Gora*: Problematizing Identity and Nation**

The issue that had been of utmost importance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was definitely anti-colonial nationalism but more so a search for identity. The endeavour was to establish an identity not only against the Europeans, but also in the multi-religious and multi-cultural situation in India. Tagore addressed this issue in *Gora* (1909). The political situation was already problematic at this time. The partition of Bengal of 1905 brought about communal riots. Tagore addressed this crisis both as an artist and as a thinker. *Gora* addresses the questions of identity as also of nation. The novel with Gourmohan, the hero, as the representative of the nation, goes on to refute the fact that the nation can have a fixed identity and origin.

Gora is a strong critique of the Hindu nationalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which saw the identity of the nation as fixed and of Hindu origin. It was only creating a wide gulf between the high-caste Hindu *bhadrolok* on the one hand and the lower castes as well as the Muslims on the other. Tagore himself was a nationalist at one point of time, but he outgrew its influence when its evil consequences started becoming clear to him. *Gora* suggests this turning point in Tagore's career because it was written in the midst of contemporary social and political turmoil, when the communal riots between the Hindus and the Muslims were going on. So the main theme in *Gora* is to locate the identity of Gourmohan and along with that the identity of the nation, in the context of the cultural and religious multiplicity of India. This novel is a landmark in the Indian context because the discussion which Tagore started in the beginning of the century has still not been resolved. As Meenakshi Mukherjee says in the introduction to the novel, 'The debate about the cultural identity of India, and the place of religion, caste and class in it, which Rabindranath's novel *Gora* (1909) had initiated at the beginning of the century, seems nowhere at a resolution even at the end' (*Gora*, ix). That Bharatvarsa which has been identified in the Hindu nationalist thought as Hindu, is not so, but accommodates a variety of cultures and religions, and it has been very powerfully addressed through the complexities and nuances in *Gora*.

An important trend noted by our historians **towards** the end of the nineteenth century is that the social reform movements started by **reformers** like Raja Rammohan Roy and Vidyasagar, did not excite the same **enthusiasm** in the people as it did **earlier**. Obviously the reform movements started when **India** came in contact with the **West** and when our reformers thought that we needed to **do away** with some of the evils in our tradition. By the end of the nineteenth century a new revival of **cultural nationalism**, with special reference to **Hindu values** occurred. No more was a hue and cry heard when a sati was performed because **this** was now considered to be within our tradition. English education had also lost its **initial** attraction. In an essay called 'Byadhi-o-pratikal', written in the beginning of **the twentieth century**, Tagore notes this and says that introspection is necessary at this **juncture**. As he says:

The time has come to discuss the change **because** an element of doubt has certainly crept in. We seem to be sitting **undecided** at the crossroads of **ancient** India and modern civilization. (quoted by **Mukherjee** in *Gora*, ix)

In the essay he further goes on to say that as **English** education created a chasm between the educated few and the common masses, **in the same manner**, uncritically accepting a monolithic **Hindu tradition** can also **bring about** divisions in the society. Some of these tensions have been dwelt upon in *Gora*. **Like** in *Home and the World*, a large number of arguments have been brought about **together**, so in *Gora* also we find contesting ideologies coming together. In *Gora* he uses an effective irony to dramatize the situation, but Tagore's extraordinary artistic capability lies in his ability to produce strong arguments for both sides of the **problematic**.

Gora represents the side of Hindu orthodoxy in all its **social customs** and religious practices. For him Bharatvarsa's identity lies in these **customs** and rituals. He firmly believes that the western customs and religions are **destroying** them, especially Christianity and Brahmoism, which preach modern and **alien** values. The orthodox Brahmos like Haran babu and Barodasundari represent the **other** side of these values in the book. Characters like Paresh babu and Anandomoyi represent universal love

and values, which transcend religious and other barriers. All actions take place within the bhadrolok society and most of the characters constantly modify their ideas through constant interaction. This thematic pattern is represented through the interaction between two families, one Hindu and the other Brahmo. It is developed against the background of the gradually developing love relationships in the novel. The novel begins with a small incident that brings Binoy in contact with Sucharita and Paresh babu's Brahmo household for the first time. The two friends Gora and Binoy are inseparably tied to each other and they love each other. Both call Anandamayi their mother, Gora knows her to be his real mother and Binoy too, being motherless, calls her mother. They are only apparently identified with each other because their natures are very different. The difference in opinion comes across strongly when they discuss about Paresh babu's Brahmo family.

The difference between the two friends comes across glaringly when the author describes Gora's unusually large physique. His complexion is unusually white and he has an extraordinarily deep voice. He is authoritative and persuasive in his arguments and when he wants to prove his points, he does that quite strongly. He is deeply committed to Hinduism and he holds on to it not because he has blind faith in it but because he believes that the rules in Hindu Bharatvarsa are immutable. But Binoy is intelligent and modest, though, like any other ordinary Bengali boy, he is frail and indecisive. The first noticeable difference in opinion that takes place between the two is around Binoy's soft stand on Paresh Babu's Brahmo family. Gora objects to the liberty taken by the Brahmos in respect of customs and rituals in the name of modernity. He also objects to the freedom given to the Brahmo women. The Brahmos are said to have imitated the English and that is where his objection lies. Gora is out to defend everything enshrined in the Hindu culture. Binoy referred to his 'respect' for women and tried to save himself from a dig from Gora for his weakness for the Brahmo girls. Gora who believed in the respective places for men and women, obviously would not be carried away by these arguments. He calls it desire which is derived from the West. In our Shastras, women deserved to be worshipped because they light up the house: '*Pujarha grihadiptaya*'. But the way women are thought to

light up the minds of the men in the West, it could **not be 'puja'** in any way but only 'desire'. Gora goes on arguing:

I can assure you all that effusion about women in English books has its basis in nothing else but sexual desire. The proper **place** to worship women is **where** they are installed as Mother- the alter of the **pure-bodied right-minded** mistress of a household. If they have to be **moved** from such a place **before** they are adored, I think there is much insult **implied** in such adoration. The impulse which makes your mind hover around Poresh Babu's house- like the moth around a flame- that impulse is called 'love' in English. But I do hope you won't in monkey-like imitation of the **British**, regard this matter of love as one of the supreme aims of life and worship it as such. (Gora, 11)

Gora's orthodoxy is unrelenting. His strict observance of Hindu rituals and purity is basically ideological. He considered the Western **materialistic** culture and all those people who adhered to it as his opponents. So he **opposed** all of his own people who imitated the west. The country according to Gora **should** not only be freed from imperial colonization but also from cultural colonization. Gora's arguments are not particularly pointed towards foreigners. Through the novel, Tagore represents the Brahmo-Hindu tension in the late nineteenth century **Bengal**. It is through the **Brahmo Samaj** that the social impact of the West could be **felt**. Gora's **Hinduism** is a resistance against this cultural colonialism in a bid to **assert** the nation's true identity. So his views on religious practices, culture and women **are** interrelated. But Gora in the beginning was a reformist. Later he became a **staunch** Hindu. As Meenakshi Mukherjee says:

The novel begins at a point when, after his brief **infatuation** with the Brahmo way of thinking, Gora has turned towards a **loud and flamboyant** brand of Hindu orthodoxy, displaying what may be called 'a colonial anxiety of influence', an anxiety that makes one aggressively **deny** the values that might have once conditioned one's perception and thinking. (Gora, xiv)

His vindictive upholding of Hindu rituals and his attempt to show off Brahmanic symbols only goes on to show his defiance of the West and assertion of cultural superiority. Binoy in fact resents his sometimes very bigoted manners and opinions. Gora refuses to accept food even from his mother because she keeps a Christian workwoman Lachhmia. He would not even allow Binoy to have food on the same ground. He tells his mother that these rules are sacrosanct for the maintenance of the order that holds the society. Binoy knows the issue and he even defends Gora in Paresh babu's house where he has created an impression of a bigot. As he says:

Gora is able to accept everything of the Hindu community without reservation because he is viewing Bharatvarsha from some grand elevation. To him the small and the large have merged in some great song and appear to him as parts of the whole. Not all of us are capable of such comprehensive vision. Therefore we examine a piece here and a piece there of Bharat, compare these with foreign ideals and do justice to the country as a whole. (*Gora*, 41)

The strongest counterpoint is provided by Gora's own mother, Anandamayi. It is the other voice to Gora's, or for that matter any orthodoxy from a standpoint of rationality, the voice of universal humanity and love. It is she and the saintly Paresh babu through whom Tagore projects his own views and values. They are both loving parents and rational human beings. They have been put up as a contrast to Baradasundari, Paresh babu's wife and Krishnadayal, Anandamayi's husband. The former is an orthodox Brahmo and the latter is an orthodox Hindu.

Anandamayi is gifted with not only with the large heart and vision of a universal mother but also with a daring of unconventionality and the necessary rationality to carry it and justify it. It was further nourished by her itinerary with her husband in the western parts of the country. Her habits and dresses in the modern fashion were criticized as 'Christian'. It was because of self-confidence that she could adopt Gora, and thereby was further exposed to the awkward situation of a mother who had to keep the real identity of the unusual child a secret. The irony Tagore wants to clinch

is hinted at in the beginning when this child **questions her** on her neglect of the Hindu customs and rituals referring to her high family **background**. Since she cannot divulge the secret, her answer remains cryptic but revealing. **She** says in reply:

You don't have to explain all this to me so **elaborately**. I know very well the conflicts in my own mind. How can I be **happy** when my husband and my son feel obstructed at every step I take? Yet it **was** only when you landed on my lap that I gave up all customs. Only when you **take** an infant into your arms do you realize that nobody is born on earth **with a caste**. The moment I realised this, from the moment I have been sure **that** if I were to look down upon somebody else because he was of low caste **or a Christian**, then Ishwar would take you away from me. May you always **fill my arms** and light up my home, I prayed, and I would drink water from the **hands** of every caste in the world.
(*Gora*, 15)

Obviously, Gora did not have any idea of what **predicament** Anandamayi was hinting at. He went on arguing and insisting on Binoy's **not having** food from her at the risk of breach of purity of his Brahmanic rituals. Again **Anandamayi** cryptically laments that what Gora is doing is all in ignorance. Only **what he calls religion** can never be religion for her. It can be said that the whole book is **a demonstration** of this vision and insight of Anandamayi, achieved through the **climactic** disillusionment of Gora about his uncompromising pursuit of the Hindu identity.

It is through Binoy who is closest to Gora's heart **that Tagore** posits the other side, and this side is the side of the heart. As against Gora, **Binoy** is more emotional and for him this conflict between relationship and ideology **appeared** to be painful. He could not reconcile himself to the fact that from now, **Anandamayi** would no longer feed him herself. He started suffering from a terrible **conflict**. Yet he must hold fast to the ideals of the *swadesh* they have envisioned, and asks Gora to know where is his Bharatvarsa and how he carries on its vision with him in the midst of everything. Gora points to his heart to show where his Bharatvarsa lies, and compares himself to

a captain of a ship, who, when he goes out on the high sea, keeps always in all his work and rest, feasting and enjoyment, the view of the port of his destination on the other side of the sea. Gora implies that he keeps his vision of Bharatvarsa ever undimmed that way (*Gora*, 21). He spoke of the daily welter of work and self-interest in which the people are lost. What is required is to have the perfect imagination of the true and complete Bharatvarsa and to head for it with complete commitment. Only that way one would be able to sustain one's pursuit and inspiration, he emphasizes. The other argument he finds for himself and his followers is that it is not necessary to prove oneself worthy by comparing each case with that of the West. It would be equivalent to standing as the accused in the dock and be judged in a foreign law-court. We should rather feel proud rather than ashamed for all we have as our own, our customs, rituals, shastras, faiths and all (*Gora*, 28).

The first time that Gora visits Paresh babu's house, he dresses up characteristically. Binoy was already present, talking to the Brahma girls and Barodasundari. As soon as he sees Gora, he realizes that 'Gora had appeared in battle-dress' (*Gora*, 49) He wore a coarse dhoti, a short jacket tied on the side with string, a rough chadar on one shoulder and Ketaki sandals. He also bore a caste mark of Ganga-clay on his forehead. Binoy says, 'he looked like revolt incarnate in modern times' (*Gora*, 47) It is in order to keep his friend from falling into the Brahma influence that he followed him there.

The author explains why he acted the way he did. It was a reaction against what he had encountered immediately before in Chandannagar where he saw a Bengali gentleman enjoying fun in the company of an Englishman at the distress of a number of common folks trying to board a steamer. The Brahmos here serve for him as the substitute opponent for the English. Gora shows all his staunchness with vengeance as regards the Hindu view of God, and especially as regards orthodoxy about caste. But the situation grows more heated in the presence of another truculent Brahma orthodox, Haran Chandra Nag, known as Panubabu. Here the most important episode is the meeting of Gora and Sucharita. It is through the conflict and relationship

between these two families that the author develops **his theme**. This conflict and relationship takes the form of two love relationships: **one of Binoy and Lalita, and the other of Gora and Sucharita**. Both the relations **proved to be embattled**. It is the resolution of the conflict both in respect of marriage **and hence** of social and religious orthodoxy that leads to the closure of the novel. **But before that** the novel shows the whole gamut of the conflict, conventions and complexities involved.

Sucharita was indeed hurt at Gora's aggressive advocacy of Hinduism, especially at his arguments about caste and religious customs. She sided in her mind with him because Gora proved to be the right person to teach **lessons** to the insolent persons like Panubabu who acted as if he were the caretaker of the whole Brahmo sect. Besides, he considered himself as Sucharita's **prospective husband**. But where Sucharita found the closest affinity between herself **and Gora** was in their deep love for the country. She has heard no one speak so firmly **for the country before**; she has never seen before so firm a belief in an inherent **force of the nation**. A few words that he said in reply to Panubabu were still ringing in her ears:

I am on the side of those whom you call **illiterate** – my customs are those which you regard as superstition. So long as you **cannot love your country**, so long as you cannot stand beside your **own people**, I am not prepared to tolerate a single word of criticism uttered by you... Let me assure you we won't tolerate being reformed- whether by you people or by the missionaries... One can tolerate being corrected by one's parents, but to be corrected by policemen causes insult **rather than improvement**. Tolerating such correction means violating those **qualities** which make one human. Before wanting to reform us, be our kinsman first – otherwise even good counsel from you will harm us. (*Gora*, 62)

Obviously, there is an element of absolute authenticity and confidence in what Gora has said, and it is this sincerity and commitment that makes his orthodoxy a power and a virtue. He really echoes the nationalists and their discourses in defence of the

motherland. Here he is uncompromising in holding the self-respect of the country high and would not care for the calls of the so-called reason. Ashis Nandy rightly points out that 'Gora has a touch of Swami Vivekananda (1863 – 1902) and Sister Nivedita in him' (Nandy, 1994, 36), and it is nowhere more manifest than in this patriotism. Meenakshi Mukherjee says,

Gora's 'discovery of India' visits to the rural areas (reminiscent again of Swami Vivekananda's travels as a wandering monk in different parts of India) are emblematic of a desire to reconnect with the masses, a desire for belonging that has always troubled the Indian intelligentsia. (*Gora*, xiv)

His patriotism is an exclusive one. Tagore gives him the most forceful words to express it but by providing the counterpoint from Binoy who talks of the heart hints at their inherent ambiguity also. Binoy refers weakly to the conflict between the injunction of the society and the call of the heart. He questions if having a cup of tea at a Brahmo house means so great a shock to the country. Gora, the single-minded patriot and nationalist, grows more exclusive in his answer, as he retorts:

Heart! Your heart is always at odds because society means so little to you. If you had any idea how far-reaching the pain of society can be when society is hurt, then you would be ashamed to bring up the problems of your heart. You can't bear to hurt even lightly the feelings of Paresh Babu's daughters – and I can't bear it when so easily you can hurt the whole country for so little reason. (*Gora*, 67)

The most interesting thing in their relationship hitherto is that Binoy opposes Gora from the side of love, heart and humanity but as he argues outside, he echoes Gora, so much so that at one stage Lalita said so on his face. Indeed, it was one of Lalita's missions to free him from Gora's influence before marrying him. Since Binoy did not have the inner force and conviction of Gora, he failed to convince people by merely echoing his words. It was Gora's inner force rather than logic itself that sometimes

lent truth to what he said. It was one of **Tagore's** ways to keep things **indeterminate** and open-ended for change. This situation **arose** when once he talked to **Sucharita** about women and indeed repeated **Gora's** views. **Sucharita** expressed her apprehension that **Gora** did not like women **move** into the world outside the **home**, and that perhaps he could not respect them if **they** do anything else than **domestic** chores. **Binoy** found himself in a fix. He could **have** been happy if he could protest it but he could not but accept it and say that in **the opinion** of **Gora** 'if women do not devote themselves wholly to the home, they **will lose** the single-mindedness required in their duty' (*Gora*, 73). The retort from **Sucharita** was that in that case a complete divide between the home and the world would **suggest** itself because if men were allowed into the home, then their duty in **the world** would suffer equally. She enquired if that was his opinion also. **Binoy** had **hitherto** followed **Gora** on the woman question but now he did not like to admit that **that was** his opinion also. He said:

Well, you see, we are slaves to **convention in such** matters. We feel **disturbed** on seeing women outside their homes- and **then** we force ourselves to consider their action as improper and undutiful in **order** to justify our own sense of agitation. Such reasoning is only a **pretext; adherence** to convention, is **the** reality. (*Gora*, 74)

Binoy proves to be an interpreter and follower of **Gora** but he also suffered terrible conflicts because his nature is different and his **quest** is different. As **Tagore** has shown, his freedom comes through love, while that of **Gora** through his commitment to the country. **Gora** would not allow this in his exclusive scheme, but the need for plurality is emphasized by no other person than the **mother Anandamayi** herself, as she says,

Gora, don't be annoyed if I say something. **Bhagwan** has created many kinds of people but he has not set the same norms for everybody to follow. **Binoy** loves you like his own life, that is why he puts up with so much from you. But it can't be good if you force him to always follow your path. (*Gora*, 78)

This led to an episode of sorting out the misunderstanding between the two friends developing over Binoy's relationship with the Brahmo family, especially his growing love for Lalita. Binoy expressed to Gora his newfound realization of what love was. It gives him a fullness. He is as if full to the brim exactly as a beehive is with honey. The world which was before only partially necessary for him is now revealing to him with all its beauty and plenty. This gives him a sense of unusual largeness and oneness with everything that wants to fulfil itself in the totality of beauty through love and service. Gora was yet to pass through a few more phases of experiences for disillusionment and radical change, but this interaction with his closest friend and a recognition of such an object as love itself proved to be a starting point for him to accept the plurality of truths, especially the truth of the heart. As the author comments:

Never before had Gora been confronted with such a powerful revelation of the human heart. He had always been contemptuous of such things as poetic trash – but seeing it from such close quarters now, he could no longer ignore it. Not only that – its force shook his own mind, its rupture streaked through his body like lightning. For an instant the curtain hiding an unknown region of his young manhood was blown away, and this moonlit night of Sharat entered that chamber to spread its enchantment. (*Gora*, 86)

But Gora was yet steeped in his love of the country and he identified it with the ineffable feeling of love described by Binoy. As he came back to himself, he held fast to him. He would not allow him to go away from him. The force that calls him for a great mission would one day unite them in a greater love. He accepts Binoy's love but tells him that ultimately he must step beyond it to join him in the greater love. It is not surprising that he went on opposing Binoy's idea of marrying Lalita and at a stage kept aloof from it altogether. The narrative from here onwards can be said to have proceeded in two directions before their final convergence at the end: the one of Binoy and Lalita, stirring up the whole of the Brahmo and the Hindu societies, and

the other of Gora and his love for the country. Thus, as is made clear to **themselves**, Gora and Binoy are opposed to each other in nature and mission and yet **need each other** in union for any meaningful existence. It is not either Binoy or Gora **but both** Binoy and Gora held together as necessary binaries for their respective **quest for identity**.

This union of opposition is also evidenced in **the process** of including in the **otherwise** homogenized and exclusive view of Gora the **heterogeneity** of the life of the **so-called** lower-class rural people and that of the women. While the former asserts its **place** in the vision of Gora through his visits to the **villages** for direct experiences, the **latter do** so through Binoy's insistence to an extent **and** his growing love relation with Sucharita which he would vainly resist for **some time**. Binoy complains that **there** appears to be shortcoming in their love for the country. Indeed, they appear to see only one half of Bharatvarsa (*Gora*, 106). 'We', **he** continues, 'see **Bharat only** as a country of men. We don't see the women at all' (*Gora*, 106). Gora tries to **counter** Binoy by referring to the English way which **may have** influenced him. But Binoy grows emphatic that they have never given women **a place** in their thought about the country, and as far as Gora is concerned he hardly **ever** thinks of women; **he seems** to know India as womanless. This amounts to **knowing only half the truth**. **In the face of** this criticism from his friend, Gora holds fast to his **usual** view of the ideal divide of the home and the world and refers to the mother **as the ideal** in whom both the country and women are embodied. The authorial **comment** is suggestive in that it points to an element of an ambivalence already **asserting** in the protagonist:

Gora made light of the subject. But a seed, **even** when thrown away, falls upon the ground and, given the opportunity, **sprouts**. Until now Gora had set aside women from his life's area of work, and **never** dreamed that this was a loss or deprivation. But on seeing the present **change** in Binoy, he became more aware of the presence and influence of women in society. He could not, however, determine what the place was of such presence, and what need it fulfilled. He did not wish to debate this with Binoy. (*Gora*, 108)

However, he will come to share Binoy's view only at the fag end of the narrative. In fact, his discovery of woman as individual and the discovery of the country as heterogeneous will occur interactively. It is rather the rebellious Lalita who proves to be the most radical agent to shake the orthodox elements of both the Hindu and Brahma societies. It is through her that Tagore shows the power of love that transcends and even demolishes the so-called social and religious barriers. It is she who boldly asserts herself thereby the distinct identity of women even in the so-called modern Brahma society. It is she who instills courage into the heart of the otherwise meek Binoy to defy the restrictive conventions of both the religious sects and unite as just man and woman in love.

Baradasundari wants her daughters to perform an English play in front of the magistrate, Mr. Brownlow. This was also a way to showcase their talents. Binoy was forced by Lalita to play a part. Binoy, after lots of cajoling, agreed to it. Baradasundari was present there with Lalita, Leela, Lavanya and Sucharita. Haran Babu off course was with them and Binoy was forced to join. The day before the performance Mr. Brownlow was walking by the riverside with Haran Babu. They were involved in a serious discussion about the procedures of Brahma Samaj and the reforms of Hindu society. Suddenly they were approached by Gora. Gora had seen how the police were torturing the people at Char Ghospara and more was to follow. He was here to discuss the matter with the magistrate. The magistrate only warned him to go away and not to meddle with the affairs of the police, otherwise he would be in trouble. While in the magistrate's bungalow they come to know that Gora has been arrested and Binoy who till now had shown indecisiveness, for once takes a firm decision and returns to Calcutta by the first steamer. Lolita too shows her first defiance in refusing to participate in a cultural performance given in honour of the magistrate who was responsible for the arrest of Gora. She left the place for Calcutta alone with Binoy, looked upon as a grievous flouting of convention. She became the centre of a scandal, especially monitored by the so-called pillars of the Brahma society. The whole of Brahma society was against her, especially Haran babu who

saw to it that she is pressurized from all quarters of society. Everyday there were reports about her in the newspaper condemning her about her actions. Baradasundari, Leela and Lavanya stopped talking to her. It is only Paresh babu, Sucharita and Anandamayi who supported her actions. But Lalita herself is also a girl with a lot of conviction. If she from the beginning was sure about her decision to get married to Binoy, Binoy floundered many times. She remained steadfast even at times when she herself was not sure about Binoy's decisions to get married to her. In fact her courageous handling of the situation not only proved what she is but transformed Binoy into what he should be. What is equally significant and interesting is that, as Malini Bhattacharya rightly observes, 'Lalita's moment of actual defiance against the norms of womanliness imposed on her by her family and her community coincides with her defiance of colonial norms of servility dressed up as good-fellowship' (Bhattacharya in Dutta, 131). Anandamayi who has already proved the strength of her mind by adopting Gora, does so again by siding with Binoy and arranging his marriage. Gora does not attend the marriage and tells his mother not to attend it either. But Anandamayi who has the right balance of softness and strength does everything possible to make the couple feel at home. Sucharita fights back Harimohini and joins them in their new house to give them company. The way the characters have been paired is very significant. As Meenakshi Mukherjee says:

There is a certain inevitability in the pairing, because Lolita's directness and militancy presents the counterpart of Binoy's malleability, just as Sucharita's calm and unflickering search for truth becomes a foil for Gora's combative logic. (*Gora*, xxi)

Gora kept on opposing the union as much as other orthodox members of both the sects. Lalita and Benoy's moral supporters are Anandamayi, Pareshbabu and Sucharita who themselves were searchers of their own identities across religious and cultural barriers. It is the principles of universal love and humanity that Tagore has preached through them. Anandamayi's very example of adopting Gora on a stormy night of the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857 is itself an evidence of her independent

subjectivity and unconventional nature. Lalita herself was astonished to see such a rational woman outside the so-called modern Brahmo families. It is in fact Baradasundari who is the caricature of a modern woman like Panu babu represents the caricature that a 'modern' man is. Tagore strongly condemns their toadyism. They are staunch Brahmos, and in the guise of being modern and not believing in rituals and idol worship, they are sectarian in their own way. They look down upon anyone who is not a Brahmo. Opposed to them we have characters like Krishnadayal and Harimohini who are staunch Hindus. If Krishnadayal crosses his limits of ritualism by not even sharing food with his wife and children, Harimohini's story is a bit different. Sumit Sarkar, with reference to women in *The Home and the World* and *Gora*, gives a hint at the reform movements of the time, which he says in 1860s and 1870s only meant freeing of women by benevolently motivated men. It did not give them real emancipation or subjectivity. Sumit Sarkar explains it by saying, 'What had been lacking was what Rabindranath, in swadeshi and post-swadeshi times alike, had come to foreground as a supreme value: atmashakti, the need for autonomous self-development' (quoted in Dutta, 164-165) that is lacking in Baradasundari and Panu babu and also in Harimohini. Harimohini's life had been very miserable. She was a child-wife married at a very young age. She was neglected at the house of her in-laws. She spent her time cooking all day and did not even have time to eat her own meals properly. After the death of her husband at a young age, her sly relatives took over the property and pushed her out of her husband's home, leaving her a destitute. It is Paresh babu who gives her shelter in his own house. In her helplessness she abides by the rules of the Brahmo house hold. But as she becomes powerful and starts living with Sucharita in her own house, 'Harimohini soon begins to reproduce on her own the contours of a similarly oppressive domesticity, seeking to impose numerous constraints on Sucharita, trying to get her married off without bothering to ask for her consent' (Dutta, 166). In this novel if there is one character who has developed her atmashakti, that is Anandamayi. She is a balanced character who is a combination of motherly love and rational understanding. She is intelligent and her reactions to the different incidents in the novel shows her mature rational mind. When Gora was arrested, everybody was furious with the magistrate, but Anandamayi took Gora's

imprisonment calmly without ever blaming **him** because, she said, she **knew Gora** never cared for any rules. She was rather **proud of him**. When it came to the **question** of religion and caste, she said to Binoy:

Never mind what he says. All that I **have learnt**, I have learnt from Gora. The day Ishwar gave me Gora he also **made me** understand the truth of **human** beings, and the falsity of pretexts over **which** men quarrel with each **other**. My son, who is a Brahmo and who a Hindu! There is no perception of caste **within** a man's heart- and it is there that Ishwar **brings** men together and also comes there himself. Can we ever set him **aside** and depend on creed and ritual to **bring** together? (*Gora*, 299)

Pareshbabu too echoes the same message as **he** tells Binoy that the only prayer he makes to God is to give him the capability to **bow his head** before the truth **whether** it is in the Brahmo assembly or in the Hindu **temple**. For **him**, bigotry originates from the view that truth depends upon oneself and **not** the other way around (*Gora*, 116). No wonder, it is these figures who struggle for **the union** of Lalita and Binoy in love, while others, including Gora, fight for division.

So far as Gora and Sucharita are concerned, **they had still** to fight more complicated battles both within themselves and with **outside** elements. Sucharita discovered in Gora's interpretation of Hindu religion and **Bharatvarsa** not a theoretical exposition but a creation as he says –

You have to consider the fact that Hinduism **has**, like a mother, tried to **make** place in its lap for people of various **opinions** and views. That is, it has **looked** upon human beings of this world as **human** beings; it has not counted them as members of a group. Hinduism accepts **the** ignorant as well as the wise – accepts not just one form of wisdom but **the** may-sided expression of wisdom. (*Gora*, 357)

Sucharita was deeply engrossed in Gora and his philosophy of Hinduism and the Bharatvarsa of his imagination, so much so that she could defy the orthodox Brahmo followers like Haranbabu and confess to Pareshbabu that she was imbued with a new invigorating consciousness instilled into her by Gora. She holds fast to it despite Pareshbabu's rationalistic analysis of Hinduism and its limitations. She called herself Hindu and Gora her 'Guru'. Gora on the other hand discovered in her for the first time the woman without whom his Bharatvarsa was half, incomplete. Now after this discovery his earlier thought about his country appeared to be all the more incomplete and himself as devoid of the spirit. He had as if only physical strength but no life. Yet he treated Sucharita more as the embodiment of Bharatvarsa herself or the embodiment of the ideal Indian woman who 'would invest every home in the country with grace, affection and purity' (*Gora*, 330). The conflict within him has been however beautifully portrayed by the author as Gora is fighting within him the irresistible attraction for Sucharita herself as the center of love. He repeats to himself over and over again as a *mantra* 'I will not be defeated'. His disillusionment in the end is therefore also paralleled by his progress towards Sucharita as simply a woman, an object of love.

Gora's progress is also marked by his real acquaintance with the rural India where the oppressed and the untouchables lived. A parallelism is envisaged here with Vivekananda's discovery of the real India through his travels across the length and breadth of the country. In his revivalist phase, it was the realization of the greatness of the country, its heritage, its Hindu spirit and of its reaffirmation that was uppermost in his mind. He would make no compromise on this on any ground. He would never accept Binoy's marriage with a Brahmo girl, although no one could be closer to his heart than Binoy. His argument is that what Binoy does is for his self-interest but what he does is impersonal. As he asserts, 'You can do such a thing. I never could. That is the difference between us – not in wisdom or in intelligence. I have an emotional attachment which you lack.... I want the Bharatvarsa that I know. You blame it, abuse it, but I want that and no other. I cannot see myself or any other person greater than it' (*Gora*, 324). This is loving India not only for its great things

but also for all its weaknesses, **superstitions**, poverty, and illiteracy. It is loving its soul. So when Sucharita asks if he **really** respects the idol of a god, his answer is again characteristic:

Look, I'll tell you the truth. I **am not** sure if I respect any of the idol but I do respect the faith of the country **me**. What the entire country has **worshipped** for ages remains worthy of my worship too. I can never like Christian missionaries look at it with **contempt**. (*Gora*, 373)

But Gora projects here his ideology of a **homogenized** view of his Bharatvarsha as against that of the West about India. He comes to see its true picture among the common people in his travels through the **villages**. He sees really two contradictory pictures, one of stark poverty, **superstition** and ignorance, and the other of transcendence of barriers of caste and **religion** for mutual well-being and love. **These** were themselves interrogation of his **reified** views. The author comments:

For the first time in his life Gora was **seeing** what our country was like outside the cultured and affluent segments of **Kolikata** society. How **isolated**, **narrow-minded**, weak – how completely **unaware** of its own strength, **ignorant** of and indifferent to its welfare was this **vast isolated** rural Bharatvarsha! **Great divides** of social difference separated villages **hardly** five or ten miles apart from each other – these differences were entirely **self-imposed**, imaginary and **created** hurdles in their way of finding place in **the wider world** outside! Mere trivialities were treated as significant and **conventions** were regarded as unbreakable! Gora could not have conceived of any of this **unless** he came to live like this among villagers. (*Gora*, 170)

But at the same time he also got enough **evidence** of the hidden strength of the poor rural folk before which his self-projected image **stood** interrogated. He was looking for a Hindu house where he could have **accepted** mid-day hospitality. He and his companion were tired and scorched by the **sun** when they arrived at a Muslim

locality. After some search they were told of only one Hindu house – that of a barber – in the locality. When they sought shelter there, they found that the elderly barber and his wife had adopted a Muslim boy as their son. As Gora chided the barber for such deviance from custom, the barber replied that there was very little difference. Only they call God Allah, while we call Him Hari. This is the voice of popular reason born of confrontation with harsh reality. It shamed Gora himself as he came to see his own contradiction in leaving this man of so noble a heart for an ill-famed tyrant, Madhav Chatturje, to save his caste. He was overcome with hunger and thirst, but the more he thought of this, the more rebellious he grew, questioning his own stand hitherto:

What terrible anti-religious practices we have followed in Bharatvarsa by making purity an external matter! My caste will remain pure if I eat in the house of somebody who oppresses poor Muslims, but my caste will be violated in the house of somebody who risks this oppression and is prepared to face social condemnation in order to give shelter to the son of a Muslim!
(Gora, 174-175)

Further, the story of one Faru Sardar who would rather go to jail than submit to the tyranny of the local indigo planter was for Gora another example of the undying spirit of the ordinary people. Thus the narrative indicates that the growth of Gora's vision about himself and India is directly related with his gradual disaffection with the revivalist euphoria. His gesture immediately afterwards to go back to the barber is significant. Equally significant is his decision to fight the cause of the poor village people against the tyranny of the police. This change is as much signaled by his self-criticism as by his sharp reaction to his erstwhile followers under the leadership of Abinash who came to felicitate him on his release from the jail and announced him as the *Avatar* who descended the earth to liberate Hinduism. Malini Bhattacharya looks for Gora's 'modernity' here in this relation he establishes with the lower class people and in his growing conviction about the 'ineffectuality of the revivalist euphoria' (Bhattacharya, quoted in Dutta, 132). But as the text suggests, all these have yet to be

thoroughly resolved by the protagonist of Tagore. A true Hindu, he must undergo expiation (*prayaschitta*) for his imprisonment. It could not take place but it was used by the narrative as the climactic moment for the disclosure of Gora's true identity that he is not at all Hindu but an Irish adopted by Anandamayi. The moment is symbolic. He had struggled to build up a pure Hindu view of Bharatvarsa. He himself was fully committed to making that increasingly fortified through orthodox observance of all its strictures. Now all of a sudden that 'imagined fort' vanishes like a dream. He himself becomes a *bratya* (untouchable) forbidden to the Hindu temples. But his realization of this irony makes him really free now to realize his dream of envisioning his Bharatvarsa – which he could not achieve earlier due to the inhibitions inherent in the thought. He says to Pareshbabu: 'I am free now, Pareshbabu. No longer do I need to fear that I shall fall from caste or be defiled. I shall no longer have to look at the ground at every step in order to avoid pollution' (*Gora*, 474). By being himself *bratya* he says he has acquired the right to serve now. That which he sought to become day and night but could not, today he has become that, he says to Pareshbabu. Today he feels himself to be truly *Bharatiya*. Within him now there is no conflict between communities, whether Hindu or Muslim or Christian. Today all castes of Bharat are his caste; whatever everybody eats is his food. He admits that he had travelled through the low caste villages, lectured there and even accepted hospitality, but never could become one of them. That gave a sense of emptiness in him in all his efforts and he tried to cover it up in very many ways. He calls his present state 'a new birth'. He says to Paeshbabu, 'I am so pure now that I do not fear being defiled even in a low-caste household, Pareshbabu' (*Gora*, 476). For Gora, this is his attainment of the true identity, his emancipation into a plural view that a *Bharatiya* should have. And if anybody could be considered his Guru along the new liberated path, it is Pareshbabu to whom he says:

Only you have the clue to such freedom. That is why you find no place in any community. Please make me your disciple. Teach me the mantra of that deity who belongs to all – Hindu, Musalman, Christian, Brahma – the doors of

whose temple are never closed to any person of any caste or race – the deity not only of Hindus but of Bharatvarsa (*Gora*, 476).

And for one reborn this way, only Anandamayi could be the mother who has no discrimination of caste and religion and no hatred for any people. He declares kneeling before her – ‘You are the image of benediction. You are my Bharatvasha’ (*Gora*, 477). Lastly, he remains to be united with Sucharita. Tagore shows him to proceed very characteristically as one who is reawakened to see everything from a new angle. He is no longer her ‘guru’ but a companion in love asking her to lead him to her ‘guru’ whom he has meanwhile accepted also as his ‘guru’. As Meenakshi Mukherjee says,

The debate about the cultural identity of India, and the place of religion, caste and class in it, which Rabindranath’s novel *Gora* (1909) had initiated at the beginning of the century, seems nowhere near resolution even at its very end... This novel of colonial India continues to retain its relevance in our postcolonial days - acquiring surprisingly fresh refractions in the light of recent events in India and the world-wide theoretical discourses on the nation. (*Gora*, ix)

Published much later another novel which deals with the same theme and reminds one of *Gora* is Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. This novel too deals with the complexities of nation and its inherent plurality. The fact that the nation cannot have a fixed identity has been shown by Tagore in *The Home and the World* and even more poignantly in *Gora* by making Gora, the representative of the nation Irish, instead of a Hindu Brahmin. Rushdie makes his novel more complex. If in *Gora*, the readers already know about the origin of Gora, in *Midnight’s Children*, that the father of Salim Sinai, who is born at the stroke of midnight in the year 1947 is also not an Indian but an English man comes as a surprise. So the debate raised by Tagore in *Gora* rages on.

Chapter Two

Home and the World: The question of Nationalism and Gender

The *Home and the World* (1915) is one of the most celebrated and controversial novels by Tagore. The novel was criticized by a wide cross-section – from E.M Forster to Lukács. While E.M Forster found it to be a mere romantic novel, the most vituperative of comments came from Lukács, who said that ‘Tagore himself is – as imaginative writer and as a thinker – wholly insignificant figure ... a petit bourgeois yarn of the shoddiest kind.’ (quoted in Nandy, 16) Lukács reveals his own scanty understanding of the Indian Nationalist movement when he says that Sandip is nothing but a caricature of Gandhi. But one can fully grasp the nuances of *Home and the World*, only if one understands Tagore’s conception of nationalism and swadeshi movements. The *Home and the World* can be rightly read as a critique of nationalism and swadeshi. It is in this novel that Tagore breaks his own tradition of writing and gives voice to a woman, though in the short story ‘Streer Patra’ published in 1914, he for the first time used a female narrator. *Home and the World* has been written in the form of diary where the three characters Nikhil, Sandip and Bimala give vent to their feelings, so its form, which is multi-confessional, is an innovation. It is the same story narrated by the three main characters. But the difference in personality shows the difference in perspective. What becomes very problematic is the relationship between nationalism and gender in the novel and the confrontation between the *bhadrolok* community, represented mainly by Sandip and Bimala, and the socially backward community, represented by people like Panchu and Mirjan which leads to the final tragic end of the novel. While Tagore disparages the idea of looking at the nation as mother, he is also against the whole nationalistic discourse represented here through the figure of Sandip, which looks at woman, in this particular case Bimala, as India or Bengal. Moreover, the whole home-world dichotomy has been dealt with by Tagore. As Partha Chatterjee says, the outer and the inner space, the *ghar* and the *bahir* or the ‘home’ and the ‘world’ became a matter of great distinction at this time. The world symbolized the material world and the home the higher spiritual world, a world which will remain untouched by the modernity unleashed in India by the British. The

nationalists of the 19th century wanted to preserve the essence of home and the way women essentially represented it. As Chatterjee rightly says :

The world was where the European power had challenged the non-European peoples and, by virtue of its superior material culture, had subjugated them. But, the nationalists asserted, it had failed to colonise the inner, essential, identity of the East, which lay in its distinctive and superior spiritual culture. (Chatterjee,1993, 121)

This gave rise to the conception of *bhadromahila* or respectable woman in the Indian context, who represented the home. Certain norms of behaviour were expected from the new woman and she was regarded as a goddess, the representation of a nation. So she could be modern but not western. In *The Home and the World*, Bimala is the figure of the new woman. While living within the *andermahal*, Sandip makes her a nationalist icon. Bimala too like her mother wants to be the representative of the ideal tradition bound Hindu woman, who is *pativrata*. In fact, in the first chapter of the novel which begins with Bimala's story, she says that she wants to be the model of the ideal woman. She is also the source of inspiration and the representation of the nation for Sandip. Sandip needs Bimala all the time. P.K Dutta says in the introduction of his book *The Home and the World: A Critical Companion*, that Bimala gives Sandip a sense of self-completion and affirms his sense of manliness. Bimala insists all the time that the nation is in great need of him and that is the reason why he constantly seeks her. In Bimala comes together the erotic and the nationalist. Nationalist discourse for long has equated Mother and country as one, but for Sandip the country is no more Mother but Beloved. As he says, 'It is no longer *Bande Mataram* (Hail Mother), but Hail Beloved, Hail Enchantress. The mother protects, the mistress leads to destruction-but sweet is that destruction' (*Home and the World* [hereafter abbreviated as HW],177). As P.K Dutta says,

In his scheme of values, Sandip gives supreme importance to women for they give 'birth to reality': in other words, they produce the very grounds of reality.

For Sandip, the erotic is a way of mastering women and through them, life...The erotic is also a test of his powers of desire. By attracting women, Sandip proves to himself that as a man he possesses the force and intensity of desire with which he can master reality and make the nation. (Dutta, 13)

Bimala herself was already a nationalist. But Sandip's devotional nationalism allows her to fulfil her desire of becoming the model of a real woman by remaining at a distance, *andermahal* and without compromising her position. Sandip and Bimala represent the middle class *bhadrolok* community. While Sandip lives under Nikhilesh's patronage, Bimala is the wife of the rich zamindar Nikhilesh. As the plot moves forward, the weakness of Sandip's form of nationalism is revealed when it comes face to face with the world of the poor class and the marginalized. The novel ends in a tragedy.

In this respect it is important to look at the story. The novel starts in retrospect. It starts with Bimala remembering her mother. In Tanika Sarkar's words, she evokes her mother's tradition-bound aesthetics of Hindu womanhood, one which cultural nationalists of the time endorsed. It was believed that the Indians could make a better nation because of the Indian family system. The onus to make a happy family and, in turn, a happy nation lay on the Hindu wife. Bimala's mother represents this womanhood and Bimala has inherited this tradition from her. She is a woman capable of love and worship and this was her source of beauty. She is aesthetically described by Bimala in the opening chapter. The vermilion mark at the parting of her mother's hair comes to her mind. She was dark, but she had a certain brightness about her which came from being holy and 'her beauty could put to shame all the vanity of the beautiful'(HW,17) Bimala's complexion was dark like her mother's and as reparation from god, she wanted to grow up 'to be a model of what woman should be, as one reads it in some epic poem'(HW,17) After her marriage she makes sure that she does all to make herself the epitome of that perfect woman. As Bimala says:

I distinctly remember after my **marriage**, when early in the morning, I would cautiously and silently get up and **take the dust of my husband's feet** without waking him, how at such moments I **could** feel the vermilion mark upon my forehead shining out like morning star. (HW, 18)

In this respect it is important to remember that **Bimala** may idealize the domesticity of her mother, but she herself does not want to **be domesticated** and remain confined to that. As against the more ordinary women, **she** wants to become a model of domestic devotion. Nikhilesh gives her the opportunity when he allows her into the drawing room and introduces her to Sandip. Sandip **gives her** the desired status by calling her the Queen Bee of his organization.

Naturally problem arises when Nikhilesh **breaks the tradition** and brings into play his liberal-humanist visions. He wants his wife to **be educated** and learn the **English** language and be equal to him in all respects **and get equal rights**. As **Bimala** says in her first narrative:

My husband used to say, that man and wife are equal in love because of **equal** claim on each other. I never argued **with him**, but my heart said that **devotion** never stands in the way of true equality; it **only** raises the level of the ground of meeting. Therefore the joy of the **higher** equality remains permanent; it never slides down to the vulgar level of **triviality**. (HW, 20)

Her contention that the duty of a Hindu wife is to love and worship the husband and though this is an act of submission, in a very **paradoxical** sense she remains **equal** to her husband is exactly what had been said by the cultural nationalists in the 19th century. But as Bimala is confronted with the forces of the outside world, she realizes and mentions at the final narrative that the **modernity** that has penetrated the Indian society is not compatible with the figure of the Indian woman. Bimala is faced with difficult choices, she makes mistakes and at the end returns to her original place in the house as an act of penance.

For Bimala, the transcendence from the home to the world is quite literal. She literally steps out from the *andermahal* to the *bahirmahal*. That is she moves out from the inner quarter of the house to the drawing room of the house. Her husband even appoints an English governess Miss Gilby to teach her English and Nikhilesh himself teaches her subjects like economics to make her aware of the outside world. From the very beginning, Bimala is shown to be a woman with a mind of her own and she voices her opinion when necessary. For example, she was already a nationalist and the swadeshi movement had influenced her considerably before she even met Sandip and one day, she even told her husband that she would burn all her foreign clothes. Nikhilesh had said that it would be a mere wastage of her energies in an excitement which is devastating and harmful. She even wanted to get rid of Miss Gilby because she was English. Nikhilesh had then said that Miss Gilby is very affectionate towards Bimala and she should also 'try and get over the barrier of her name' (HW, 28) and look at her only as a human being.

Bimala breaks tradition and meets Sandip. He is an intelligent man and a fiery speaker. He is a nationalist. But basically he is an opportunist. Not that Bimala was attracted towards Sandip from the very beginning, but Sandip does all that is possible to entrap her. In fact she did not get a very good feeling when she saw his picture for the first time. She had said, 'too much of base alloy has gone into its making' (HW, 30). She also did not like the fact that Sandip took undue advantage of her husband's friendship. But everything changed the day Sandip came to preach swadeshi in their area. From the beginning to the end of his speech it was as if a fiery outburst. Bimala in her unconscious moment even moved away the screen to look at his face. The speech moved her completely. She was no more the ordinary woman, Nikhilesh's wife. She felt like the goddess incarnate, the representative of Bengal. She for the first time regretted the fact that she was not surpassingly beautiful, for she thought men find the goddess only in the beautiful. She wanted to invite him for dinner and this was the beginning of an adulterous relationship. They even had long and argumentative discussion on politics when together and separately Tagore presents

each of their voices through soliloquies. Tagore thus provides us a heteroglossia. The reader realizes that one issue can have varied perspectives. If Sandip represents extremist nationalism, Nikhilesh represents the opposite. Moreover this process of writing *atmakatha* allows Bimala to become the self-representing woman and Tanika Sarkar says, not only does she represent herself, but also the other two male characters. This technique also allows the readers to understand the characters in depth since the monologic form allows them to express themselves fully without hiding any facts, though they keep secrets from one another. The very first argument that takes place in front of Bimala is on the cult of *Bande Mataram*. Sandip is aware of the fact that Nikhilesh is against it. He does it only to show off to Bimala his intelligence and brilliance in carrying on a discussion. He emphasizes his point of view by saying that he believes that there should be a place for imagination in patriotic work. But Nikhilesh opposes him by saying that he would like to know his country in stark reality and that he is against any hypnotic text that covers up the truth. Sandip's reply is that he firmly believes his country to be his God and if need be, he can even fill his country's coffers with stolen goods. At this Nikhilesh says that his feelings are outraged whenever Sandip tries to pass off injustice as a duty, and unrighteousness as moral idea. Sandip now seeks Bimala's opinion. Bimala, who is overwhelmed by Sandip's arguments, very emphatically says:

I am only human. I am covetous. I would have good things for my country. If I am obliged, I would snatch them and filch them. I have anger. I would be angry for my country's sake. If necessary, I would smite and slay to avenge her insults. I have my desire to be fascinated, and fascination must be supplied to me in bodily shape by my country. She must have some visible symbol casting its spell upon my mind. I would make my country a person, and call her Mother, Goddess, Durga – for whom I would redden the earth with sacrificial offerings. I am human, not divine. (HW, 38)

Very paradoxically, Sandip, who claims to be a true swadeshi, jumps up to his feet with joy and shouts 'hurrah'! The very next moment he realizes his mistake and cries

Bande Mataram. Sandip and Nikhilesh in *Ghare Baire* have been endowed with fixed ideas. It is Bimala who really moves between the two ideologies. She has already made the physical movement, that is she has emerged from *ghar* to *bahir*, from home to the world. As the novel progresses we will see her returning to *home* totally disillusioned.

Tagore, at this point of time, was already a strong opponent of nationalism. *Home and the World* was serialized in *Sabuj Patra* between May 1915 to February 1916. Many events were taking place in the global and national fronts at this time. The First World War had already broken out, which made Tagore a strong critic of nationalism. He said that the source of nationalism was greed and competition. In a series of lectures in America and Japan he denounced nationalism and nation. About nation he says:

It is the aspect of a whole people as an organized power. This organization incessantly keeps up the insistence of the population on becoming strong and efficient. But this strenuous effort after strength and efficiency drains man's energy from his higher nature where he is self-sacrificing and creative. (*The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol 2, 458)

About nationalism he says that it is a great menace. Moreover, making women the representation of the nation and worshipping them as goddess was not an idea that Tagore would support. The novel very significantly represents two opposed ways of looking at the country. For Sandip the motto of *Bande Mataram* is very important. It is a salute to the nation as mother. Sandip's character is a critique of the Hindu nationalist subject. Tanika Sarkar in her essay 'Country, women and God in *The Home and the World*', analyses the song *Bande Mataram* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in detail. It is important in this respect because the novel stands opposed to this cult. As against Bankim Chandra's *Bande Mataram*, we have Tagore's *Jana Gana Mana* which has been accepted as the national anthem of India. The *Bande Mataram* cult elevates the country above all mundane things. It requires human sacrifice of the people for the country. The country itself is the mother. 'Jana gana

mana' imagines a different form of **patriotic** love. The God imagined here is **one who** presides over all nations equally. **God** conceived here is universal **justice, justice,** goodness and morality. The country is conceived as one which consists of **many kinds** of people, traditions and cultures:

Janagana mana adhinayaka **jaya he**, Bharata bhagya bidhata
Punjab Sindhu Gujrat Maratha **Dravida** Utkala Banga
Vindhya himachala Yamuna **Ganga** uchchhala jaladhi taranga.

Sandip, in elevating the country to the **position** of God, however, makes **nationalist** activity synonymous with divine work. As P.K Dutta says,

Together with Bimala, Sandip **represents** a new personality type of **this period**. They live a life that they feel **simultaneously** a divine drama. **Elevating** the nation to the level of a god also **means that nationalist activity becomes** divine work and the nationalist subject, **an active divine agent**. *The Home and the World* mounts a sustained critique of this notion through Sandip's dilemmas and its resolutions. (Dutta, 12)

Hindu nationalism had tried to visualize **national** identity to be a fixed one since time immemorial. *The Home and the World* only tries to prove otherwise by showing various kinds of identities at logger heads.

Bimala is in awe of Sandip's manliness. She **finds** Nikhilesh feeble. The reason **being** that Nikhilesh, unlike Sandip, does not shout **slogans** like *Bande Mataram*. Bimala fails to appreciate Nikhilesh's own strength **which** is much greater than Sandip's apparent show of forcefulness. Bimala is **angry** because unlike Sandip and all zamindars around, Nikhilesh does not actively **participate** in the freedom movement, nor does he impose swadeshi on his subjects. Nikhilesh is aware of the fact that Bimala feels discontented and is highly resentful of the fact that he does not have the outward show of masculinity. Very candidly he says:

What harm if I confess that I have something lacking in me? Possibly it is that unreasoning forcefulness which women love to find in men. But is strength a mere display of muscularity? Must strength have no scruples in treading the weak underfoot? (HW, 41)

Nikhilesh says that Bimala has failed to understand the fact that he holds all impositions of force as weakness. He says that it is only the weak who do not dare to be fair and just and try to get things by the use of force. So when it comes to choosing between Sandip and him, he gives her the freedom to do so. But he fully realizes why Bimala is attracted towards Sandip, as he says:

Bimala has no patience with patience. She loves to find in men the turbulent, the angry, the unjust. Her respect must have its elements of fear. I had hoped that when Bimala found herself free in the outer world she would be rescued from her infatuation of tyranny. But now I feel sure that this infatuation is deep down in her nature. Her love is for the boisterous. From the tip of her tongue to the pit of her stomach she must tingle with red pepper in order to enjoy the simple fare of life. (HW, 42)

As Sumit Sarkar says, Tagore presents an alternative masculinity in the figure of Nikhilesh. On the one hand, there is Sandip who is ruthless and on the other there is Nikhilesh who respects the autonomy of the Other. In fact, he believes that the difference of opinion between him and Bimala is not due to inequality of intelligence but due to dissimilarity of nature. But he does not impose his decisions on her. Sandip, wily as he is, does everything to win Bimala over to his side. He uses heroic words to show off his heroism. He calls her the Queen Bee of his organization. She becomes for him *Shakti* incarnate. She provides him with all the necessary motivation and enthusiasm needed to serve the country. Nikhilesh sees through all this. He is uncertain about his place in Bimala's heart. He knows she does not have the same admiration and respect for him as she has for Sandip. But he decides to wait patiently. He says: 'When she is familiar with this freedom, then I shall know where my place

is. If I discover that I do not fit in with the arrangement of the outer world, then I shall not quarrel with my fate, but silently take my leave...Use force? But for what? Can force prevail Truth?' (HW, 45) Nikhilesh has the strength and the ability to accept Truth. If the truth is that Bimala loves and respects Sandip more than him, then he is prepared to accept that. But he will not apply force to win over Bimala. In the same manner when it comes to the question of the nation, he looks for the ultimate Truth. So one day when Sandip says that he worships his country as god, Nikhilesh says 'I want to know my country in frank reality, and for this I am both afraid and ashamed to make use of hypnotic texts of patriotism' (HW, 36). Sandip likes to create reality for himself because he is covetous and greedy. For him reality is to own what he is desirous of owning. So Sandip starts his soliloquy characteristically by saying:

The impotent man says: 'That which has come to my share is mine.' And the weak man assents. But the lesson of the whole world is: 'That is really mine which I can snatch away.' My country does not become mine on the day when I am able to win it by force. (HW, 45)

For Sandip, the only truth is to possess that what his mind covets. He would feel contented only in fulfilling his ambitions. He is out to capture and conquer the world; be it Bimala or nature, it is the same for him. As he says: 'Nature surrenders herself, but only to the robber' (HW, 45). Sandip feels that Nikhilesh lives in the world of unreality. But his own life embedded in reality helped him to win the hearts of women. Now he is certain that Bimala is steadily moving into his trap. He says that women find him passionate and his passion 'rolls on, like a flood, with the cry: *I want, I want, I want*' (HW, 48) Sandip's nationalism is rooted in the politics of desire and his mantra is '*I want, I want, I want*'. Desire for him is reality and his control over women allows him to feel powerful and masculine. What we see in Nikhilesh is the representation of an alternative masculinity. For him Bimala is an autonomous individual with her own subjectivity. He even expresses regret that he had tried to make Bimala his own by educating her and making her a model of what he wants. He

realizes that he did not emancipate her fully. Now after Bimala drifts away from him every day, he says:

The time has come when I must divest Bimala of all the ideal decorations with which I decked her. It was owing to my own weakness that I indulged in such idolatry. I was too greedy. I created an angel of Bimala, in order to exaggerate my own enjoyment. But Bimala is what she is. It is preposterous to expect that she should assume the role of an angel for my pleasure. The creator is under no obligation to supply me with angels, just because I have an avidity for imaginary perfection. (HW, 65)

The theory of Sandip's life is individualism and for that he is ready to be cruel. So he says that to be just is to be like ordinary men. The great is cruel, the great is unjust. Sandip says that the primary contradiction between him and Nikhilesh is that though both are in constant search for truth, that is 'know thyself', the way of knowing is contradictory. Nikhilesh had always emphasized that Sandip's success is at the cost of his soul. Nikhilesh compares him to a machine. A machine is something well-defined and mechanical. But life and soul are not so. So a person who is mechanical cannot discover truth. Nikhilesh represents the universal humanism of the East and Sandip represents the Western individualism. Tanika Sarkar says that Sandip sees the country as a 'reified Mother, detached from the land and the people who are subordinated to her. She is a divine icon, her command is supreme over life and death, beyond good and evil, surpassing justice and morality.' (Dutta, 40). For Nikhilesh the country does not have to be an icon. His land belongs to the poor, the low caste and the humiliated. As Tagore again and again has emphasized in his lectures on nationalism, Indian society is itself different from the Western society. The term he uses to describe the East is *samaj* which is diverse and all-inclusive. But the Western conception of nation to which Sandip adheres is exclusive. It believes in the exclusion of all the unnecessary parts or all that comes in its way to preserve itself. It does not have any qualms to become unjust. Sandip understands Nikhilesh's point of view and even

says that the Indian spirituality runs in his blood. He says that the two theories exist side by side in India and one has to choose between the two. As he says:

We must have our religion and also our nationalism; our *Bhagavadgita* and also our *Bande Mataram*. The result is that both of them suffer. It is like performing with an English military band, side by side with our Indian festive pipes. I must make it the purpose of my life to end this confusion. (HW, 81.)

So Sandip Starts the nationalist movement in full swing. The zamindars of all villages impose swadeshi on their poor tenants. Sandip and his followers bully all those who do not have the means to follow swadeshi. It is only in Nikhilesh's estate that foreign cloth, salt and sugar is still used. Nikhilesh adamantly refuses to impose swadeshi on his Muslim tenants. The country made cloth is costly for them. The people who cannot manage to get one square meal daily, how can they buy the costly home spun cloth. Very paradoxically, says Bimala in her first soliloquy, long before this new fervent for swadeshi, Nikhilesh had started swadeshi in his village for which he was both openly and secretly ridiculed. Bimala says, 'When swadeshi had not yet become a boast, we had despised it with all our hearts.' (HW, 95) Nikhilesh still sharpens his Indian-made pencils with his Indian made knife and still writes with reed pens. In fact to help the villagers he had tried to do many innovative things for which he was laughed at. Rather says Bimala, the unfashionable furniture in the drawing room was a source of shame for them. He was mocked at then for his weird ideas and he is ridiculed now for not enforcing swadeshi on his people.

Suskar is one of the biggest trade centers within Nikhil's estate. Sandip wants the removal of all the foreign articles from the territory. But Nikhilesh refuses to impose swadeshi on his subjects. He would allow speeches to be made on swadeshi, but certainly would not apply force. Bimala who now is made to feel important and proud assures Sandip that she would persuade Nikhilesh to start swadeshi in his estate. Nothing is impossible for her. On this day she does her hair in the elaborate English manner that Miss Gilby taught her. All this elaborate dressing up is done to appease

Nikhilesh and get the order, to banish foreign goods from the market, passed. Nikhilesh had always appreciated this hair style since it revealed the neck. A woman's neck is like a lotus stem he had always said. But now he finds it cheap since Bimala has an ulterior motive. All the mystery of her personality is lost. Nikhilesh makes it clear to Bimala that the goods do not belong to him and he cannot do anything about it. Moreover, he refuses to tyrannize his poor tenants. Bimala then says it would not be tyranny for selfish gains, but for the sake of the country. To this Nikhilesh says: 'To tyrannize for the country is to tyrannize over the country. But that I am afraid you will never understand' (HW, 109). In an essay called 'Sadupay', published in *Prabasi*, in July-August 1908, Tagore for the first time expressed his rejection of swadeshi extremism. He refers to a number of Muslims and Namasudras who were using foreign salt and cloth even when the swadeshi goods were cheap. Tagore says that they were purposely being hostile and says that this behaviour from them is justified. He says, 'We have demanded closeness and brotherhood from them without ever having tried to be close to them earlier.... We imagine that the Mother has become real for the whole country through songs and emotional ecstasy alone' (Sarkar in Dutta, 148). This alienation from the Muslims and the peasants is getting aggravated due to the use of force. He categorically says, 'Our misfortune is that we want freedom, but we do not believe in freedom in our hearts' (Sarkar in Dutta, 148) The swadeshi experience made him aware of how oppressive the caste and religious barriers are.

The Panchu episode in *Ghare Baire* deals with this aspect of nationalist and swadeshi movement. Panchu is a poor tenant of the zamindar of the other village, Harish Kundu. He sells cheap imported cloth to the lower caste women of the village and in turn gets grains. It is difficult for him to make ends meet. After bartering goods in this manner, if he still has time, he works in a sweet shop and grinds sugar there. But meanwhile Panchu's wife expires. Panchu now must undergo a purification ceremony. The cost as the community has calculated would be one hundred and twenty three rupees. On hearing this Nikhilesh is highly indignant. Panchu has already sold a part of his land and mortgaged the rest to pay off the bills of the doctor.

But now he cannot evade the offerings that he **has to make** to the Brahmins. On hearing this Nikhilesh says, 'When will come **the time**, I wondered, for the purification of the Brahmins themselves who **can accept** such offerings?' (HW, 99) The swadeshi movement is an additional burden on Panchu. Sandip and his student followers bully him for trading foreign clothes. **His bale** of clothes is burnt. His meagre income at least provided food for him **and his children**. Now he is totally without income. Nikhilesh tries to help him by **buying his piece of land** and making him his own tenant. But Harish Kundu comes up **with new plans** to deter him from doing so. The essential difference between Sandip **and Nikhilesh** as Tanika Sarkar points out is that if Nikhilesh cannot forget the **Muslims** and people like Panchu, Sandip cannot allow himself to remember them. At **this point** of time, Sandip and his group decides to organize a big Durga puja. Harish Kundu levies extra taxes from his poor Muslim tenants. Sandip very strategically plans **out the whole thing**. According to him the Durga puja is very necessary at this **point of time**. The **image of an** important god should be accepted by the people as **the representative** of the country. Durga according to him is the best choice. People **must be able** to relate to a common tradition, history and past. He says, 'True patriotism **will never be roused** in our countrymen unless they can visualize the motherland. **We must make a goddess** of her.' (HW, 120) Tagore reveals Sandip's absolute **styness** or for that matter the true nature of the nationalists. How absolutely self-centred **Sandip** is can be conjectured from the discourse he uses to understand the political **situation** of the country. Unlike Nikhilesh, his endeavour is not to understand the real **situation**. His decisions depend on his political interests. As he says:

But though we have shouted ourselves hoarse, **proclaiming** the Mussulmans to be our brethren, we have come to realize that we **shall never be able** to bring them wholly round to our side. So they must be **suppressed** altogether and made to understand that we are the masters. They **are now showing their teeth**, but one day they shall dance like tame bears to the tune we play.... we must know their place and keep them their, otherwise they will constantly be giving trouble (HW, 120)

The Durga puja that he wants to do only aggravates the distance between the Hindus and the Muslims. The most important factor is that the goddess is a Hindu one to whom the Hindus can relate and then the zamindars levy excess taxes from the poor Muslim peasants. Sandip believes that Durga is a political goddess who was conceived in the form of shakti especially during the time when Hindu Bengal was fighting against the Muslims.

Sandip also cheats Bimala by taking her jewellery and then compelling her to steal another six thousand rupees by moving her emotionally. Sandip almost hypnotises Bimala and she lives in the unreal world created by him. He calls her the Goddess or Shakti and only on seeing Bimala can he conceive the nation as one. She is his source of inspiration and all that the organization is doing is only because of her, though she never attends any of their meetings and does no work. In fact, at one point in the text he says, 'This is hypnotism indeed – the charm which can subdue the world! No materials, no weapons – but just the delusion of irresistible suggestion. Who says 'Truth shall triumph'? Delusion shall win in the end.' (HW, 125) In fact, Bimala is aware of Sandip's real character and many times she had decided to stop meeting him. But whenever Sandip even sensed it he tried to bring her back to his world by using high sounding words in her praise. As Bimala says,

These words of Sandip echo in my heart-beats like a war drum. They shame into silence all my conflicts with myself. What do I care what people may think of me? Of what value are that orchid and that niche in my bedroom? What power have they to belittle me, to put me to shame? The primal fire of creation burns in me. (HW, 78)

If Nikhilesh is a spiritualist, then Sandip is a materialist. He wants the money from Bimala for his own material satisfaction. He says that he is a born nawab and that it is his great dream to get rid of his disguise of poverty. He believes that though desire is a cardinal sin, it is for the real man. People with all-sacrificing ideology are cowards. The slimy part of his swadeshi movement is held in stark nakedness in his workings.

In the name of swadeshi, he inflicts pain on **all sections** of society, **including the poorest sections**. All the boat men in Nikhil's **estate** who used to ferry foreign goods are compelled to stop in fear of Sandip and his **allies**. It is only Mirjan, a Muslim boatman, who refuses to do so. To teach him a **lesson**, Sandip gives orders to sink his boat. The police gets to know about it, so **the police** now must be bribed and compensation must be paid to Mirjan to silence him. As Sandip says:

Underneath the cult of *Bande Materam*, as indeed at the bottom of all mundane affairs, there is a region of slime, whose absorbing power must be reckoned with.... These lesser wants form a part of the wants of the great Cause – the horse must be fed and the **wheels** must be oiled if the best progress is to be made. (HW, 119)

Meanwhile Nikhilesh is held in ignominy in all **the newspapers** and Harish Kundu and Chakravarty zamindars are extolled. Nikhilesh **even** gets threat letters in blood red ink, threatening that his treasury will be **burnt down** if he fails to support the cause. Sandip's student allies support all the **violence** that is inflicted on the poor peasants for the sake of swadeshi. This is because **they have stopped thinking on their own**. It is Sandip who influences their innocent **minds** through his wily **discourses**. Nikhilesh is given many instances by these young **freedom** fighters about how with an iron hand the other zamindars are ruling over **their** subjects. All atrocities are forgivable if it is done for the sake of swadeshi. **Nikhilesh** is told how when one of Kundu's tenants was found with nothing that could **be sold up** to pay his rent, he was made to sell his young wife. In another instance **another** of Chakravarti's tenant was reduced to utter destitution. Sandip has supported and **justified** these actions by the other zamindars by saying that cruelty is necessary for **the freedom of the country**. One problem which had cropped up for Sandip and his **allies** is that after ruthlessly burning foreign articles, they also had to fight law suits. Sandip says that to handle such a situation one has to be even more merciless. Since it is not possible to replace the burnt foreign clothes with Indian ones every time, if the victims go to court, retaliation should be taken by burning down their granaries. He tells Amulya, 'You

must remember, this is War. If you are afraid of causing suffering, go in for love making, you will never do for this work!' (HW, 113) This is a comment by Tagore in utter condemnation of extremist political ideology.

Amulya, one of Sandip's innocent student nationalists, is an important figure in the novel. His relationship with Bimala is very important in this respect. It is Amulya who reveals the true character of Sandip to Bimala. When Bimala did not know where to get the money which Sandip had demanded, Amulya readily wants to help her out. He is ready to loot the bazaar or the treasury for her. Innocent as he is, he only repeats Sandip's hollow words. He is ready to kill because the *Gita* says – *Who kills the body kills naught!* Bimala develops a motherly feeling towards him and she is shocked to hear him mouth Sandip's phrases. As she says, 'So delightfully immature was he – of that age when the good may still be believed in as good, of that age when one really lives and grows. The Mother in me awoke.' (HW, 139) Amulya is a revolutionary terrorist, but unlike Sandip is truly patriotic and genuine. Tanika Sarkar says that the maternal feelings that Bimala experiences for Amulya allows her to get over the politics of passion of Sandip. She realizes how Sandip has entrapped innocent boys like Amulya in his magic rhetoric. Bimala herself says, 'The door to the mother's chamber in my woman's heart once opened, I thought it would always remain open. But this pathway to the supreme good was closed when the mistress took the place of the mother and locked it again.' (HW, 141) Bimala has promised to give money to Sandip. Every year during the Durga puja Nikhilesh gives Bimala's sister-in-law a gift of six thousand rupees. This year also the gift has been given but has not been sent to the bank in Calcutta. Sandip's hypnotic words come to her mind. The money is not being really stolen. The money belongs to the country and to no one else. All the time after stealing the money she chants *Bande Mataram*, the magic word which allows one to rise above petty morality and do anything – from theft to violence. Sandip came next day to collect the money. The gold was covered in paper rolls. At the sight of the paper rolls, Sandip's face darkened. He did not realize that the paper rolls contain gold coins. Bimala is astounded at Sandip's utter disgust and contemptuous looks. Bimala almost feels that he would snatch up the rolls and declare that he is no beggar but a king

claiming tribute. Amulya could sense Bimala's **humiliation** and in order to save her from further disgrace, exclaims that the money is **more than enough** for them. Saying this he opens one of the paper rolls and the gold **sovereigns** shine out. On seeing the gold, Sandip's gloomy face light up. He jumps **up in great excitement** and moves towards Bimala. Immediately Bimala pushes **him away** from her. His head strike the corner of the marble table and he lies there without **moving** for sometime. Amulya then requests Sandip to return two thousand five hundred **rupees** to Bimala since so much money is not needed. But Sandip, greedy as **he is** wants to appropriate all of it. Moreover, to justify his actions and to remove any **feelings** of displeasure that Bimala may harbour in her mind, he says that women are **goddesses** and possess the **capability** to sacrifice everything. But Bimala by now has **got over** all the deluding talks of Sandip. She says that one part of her knows that **Sandip** is trying to delude her, the other part of her is content to be deluded. As she **says**, 'he has the unfailing quiver of the gods, but the shafts in them are of the **demons**.' (HW, 149) Even at **this point** of time Bimala is not sure whether she had **misunderstood him** or if Sandip is **really full** of reverence for her. A series of incidents are **unleashed** because of this one act of theft. Anxious to replace the money that she has stolen, **she now** wants sell her jewellery. Since she has already seen the real side of Sandip's **character**, she can trust him no more. She gives her jewellery box secretly to **Amulya** and tells him to **sell or pawn** them and get six thousand rupees for her. Amulya **who now** respects her as his real sister, promises to get her the money. Sandip gets **the wind** of the special relationship between them and is now highly jealous. Since he is a **power-hungry** man, he wants to enjoy a powerful relationship over Amulya, over **Bimala** and over all his men. He considers Amulya his own shadow without a mind of **his own**. That Amulya could have the power to remove him from his position and enjoy it **himself** is unbearable to him. Amulya tells Bimala that he feels ashamed that Sandip **has taken** six thousand rupees from her. But Sandip had said that one must be able to **give up** one's shame also for one's country. Money does not belong to the one **whose** box it is in. It is for the country. Sandip had also said that the patriots are the **kings** of the people and it is important to keep up their stature. So Sandip always travels by first class. Sandip has

told all his allies that 'the greatest weapon of all those who rule the world is the hypnotism of their display' (HW, 154).

This special relationship between Amulya and Bimala makes Sandip highly envious. His jealousy knows no bounds. He expresses it in all grotesqueness and Bimala realizes for the first time how weak Sandip actually is. When Sandip realizes that the spell that he has cast over Amulya is slowly breaking and that Amulya is developing a special respect and loyalty for Bimala, he can no longer hide his anger. He says, 'Amulya, there would die a happy death if I deigned to trample him under foot. I will never, so long as I live, allow you to bring him to your feet!' (HW, 155) Bimala knows that this uncontrollable anger stems from the fact that Sandip feels weak and now she feels that she is much above him and in this way Bimala's lost dignity is restored. Meanwhile news comes that Muslim preachers from Dhaka are instigating the local Muslims against Sandip. They are all angry with him and may attack him anytime. Nikhilesh clearly tells Sandip that since he and his followers are oppressing his tenants, Nikhilesh cannot allow Sandip to live in his estate any longer. The Hindus and the Muslims who till now had been living peacefully in Nikhilesh's estate, become suspicious of one another. Cow killing was absent in Nikhilesh's estate. But now such instances start cropping up. The Hindus start believing that the Muslims must be suppressed with a strong hand. Nikhilesh tries to reason with them. But once religious fanaticism is unleashed, reason stops playing in the people's minds. All this has been Sandip's doing. Nikhilesh decides that Sandip can no longer be allowed to live in his estate. Nikhilesh's treasury is looted at this time and surprisingly only six thousand rupees is taken. Amulya who loves Bimala very much, does not sell her jewellery. Instead he loots the bank. Bimala tells Amulya to return the money. The situation now has almost gone out of hand. Chandranath Babu has advised Nikhilesh to leave for Calcutta since it is no more safe to stay in the estate.

The last chapter reminds us of the first one. In the first chapter Bimala's love for her husband was synonymous with worship. It was blind worship. Nikhilesh had told her that for Bimala her husband is her world since she has not seen the world adequately

or met any other men. But in the last chapter she says the same again, 'Now is the time to set sail towards the great confluence, where the river of love meets the sea of worship.... I now fear nothing – neither myself, nor anybody else. I have passed through fire.' (HW, 199)

She now returns to her own husband, a wise woman who has seen the 'world'. The choice that she now makes is a conscious one. It is not merely the kind of devotion that she has inherited from her mother. Now she has really perceived the worth of her husband. But the communal fire started by Sandip will not stop so easily. Chandranath babu brings news that the Muslims are looting the treasury of Harish Kundu. Sandip, wily as he is, escapes to save his life after really starting the communal tension. Nikhilesh gallops away on his horse and goes in the direction of the riot to stop it. Late at night Nikhilesh is brought back in a palanquin. He is mortally wounded and Bimala overhears the doctor saying that the wound in his head is a serious one and Amulya is dead.

The narrative problem in the text for critics like Michael Sprinker is determined by the extent to which Bimala can be brought out of the traditional home into the modern world without destroying her female virtues. Or if Bimala is read as a figure for the nation itself, then it boils down to what the nationalist discourse as a whole sets for itself: the possibility for the strengths of indigenous culture to be maintained while altering the traditional functions and forms of female identity in order to signify the resistance to colonial rule. The difficulty here for Sprinker lies in the irresolvable conflict between the honourable but ineffectual Nikhilesh and the powerful but unprincipled Sandip. Bimala's initial choice in favour of the latter signifies on one level Tagore's negative judgement on the Nationalist movement's turn towards extremism. At a deeper level her choice is to some extent unavoidable. For Sprinker, 'The text cries out for but cannot produce the combination of power and justice, that is the ideal figure demanded by the semiotic system: the authoritative, wise and powerful patriarch' (Sprinker in Dutta, 121). In other words, as Sprinker sees it, the text shows uncertainties in its effort to produce the benevolent and enlightened

patriarch under whose authority a new social order may be instituted or Bimala may be emancipated. Nikhilesh comes closest to this moral ideal but he remains ineffectual. Sandip on the other hand is shown as an anarchist.

In fact, Nikhilesh in the beginning appears to be, as Sumit Sarkar says, one of those benevolently motivated men who want *stri-swadhinata*, not really the emancipation as fully autonomous human subjects. But as the story progresses we see Nikhilesh clearly changes stand. He accepts the fact that he actually did not give Bimala real autonomy. He wanted to adorn her in his own way. So, later in the novel he accepts his mistake and says, 'Bimala is what she is'. On the other hand Bimala realizes that she had failed to emotionally respond to Nikhilesh's insistence on equality. As she says, her woman's heart expresses its love through worship. Sumit Sarkar says that the spontaneity that compels her to merge love with worship also makes her fall into the trap of Sandip. Tagore questions this un-reflective devotion. He emphasizes the need for *atmashakti* which is the autonomous development of self through reason which perhaps is lacking in Bimala. *Atmashakti*, according to Tagore is necessary for genuine freedom. But the extent to which Tagore wanted to give autonomy to women can be further studied in his other novels like *Gora*, *Char Adhyay* and his *Sabuj Patra* stories. In *Ghare Baire*, Nikhilesh always wanted to give autonomy to Bimala. His way of looking at women autonomy also underwent a change. He was like the 19th century nationalists whose home/world divide gave rise to a new patriarchy. He tried to give real autonomy to Bimala. As Sumit Sarkar says, 'Autonomy as a moral value, combined, however, with the other central theme in Tagore, the need for self-development, *atmashakti*, becoming worthy of true independence through one's efforts, including, crucially, cultivation of intellect'(Sarkar in Dutta,167). Perhaps Bimala was not ready for the freedom given to her by Nikhilesh. She developed her *atmashakti* only after all the tragedy that unfortunately took place. When it comes to the question of nation, Tagore has similar views. In his essay 'Nationalism in India', he says that we may throw out the British from the country, but India will be colonized by another country if we do not recognize the weaknesses within our social organization. As suggested in *Ghare Baire*, in this essay he more directly says that the

concept of nationalism is a western **idea** and is incongruous with the **Indian system**. If we try to imbibe that it will be **detrimental** for our society. Instead we must try to remove the ills of our society like the **caste** system and the **religious conflicts**. Tagore perhaps did not use the word *atmashakti* at this point of time. But there was **definitely** a hint to develop it. Extreme nationalism as advocated by Sandip will **only lead** to disunity and we will not get freedom in **the true** sense of the term.

Chapter Three

Four Chapters: Violence Violating the Self

Like *Home and the World*, *Four Chapters* (1934) is also a critique of extremist nationalist movement. If in the case of *Home and the World*, it is extremist Swadeshi movement, in the case of *Four Chapters*, it is terrorist movement itself which is critiqued. *Four Chapters* can also be seen as a reply to Sharatchandra Chattopadhyay's very popular novel of the time, *Pather Dabi*. *Pather Dabi* was published in 1926, eight years before *Char Adhyay*, which was published in 1934. Within a week of its publication, it was banned. There were extensive protests against the ban. Sharatchandra requested Tagore to take part in the protests. Tagore declined and the reasons he gave were not those of political ideology, but Sharatchandra's literary genius. He wrote:

...What a writer like you tells in the form of a story will have permanent influence.... From immature boys and girls to the elderly, all will come under its influence. Under the circumstances, if the English did not stop the circulation of your book, it would have shown their total contempt and ignorance about your literary powers and your status in this country. (quoted in Nandy, 1994 ,27.)

Ashish Nandy in his book *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism* compares the two books insightfully. Even if the ideological stands of the two authors are very different, the heroes are comparable. Indranath of *Four Chapters* and Savyasachi of *Pather Dabi* are similar characters. The character of Savyasachi caught the imagination of many young nationalists of the time. He became everyone's role model. People even took enormous risks to read the banned book. It aroused great patriotic feelings in the minds of the people. It is important to note the striking similarities between Savyasachi and Indranath. One can see without difficulty that the character of Indranath is inspired by Savyasachi. Savyasachi is a powerful man. He is a superb shot, he can swim in the torrential rivers and can fight single-handed an entire group

of people. He knows at least ten languages **and** has been educated in **Europe and** North America. Indranath has also lived in **Europe** for many years and has studied science. Savyasachi has studied medicine in **Germany**, engineering in France, law in England and a discipline in United States **which** is not clearly mentioned. **Moreover**, the source of both the names are similar. **The name** Savyasachi is another name of Arjuna. Indranath also means one whose **father is Indra**. So in one way Indranath is also Arjuna. Nandi says that Tagore makes an **anti-hero** of Savyasachi in Indranath. If Savyasachi is a 'ruthless, firm-hearted, fearless, **unpitying**' revolutionary then Indranath is 'a passionless, calculating industrialist of **violence**, to whom violence is a matter of assembly-line deaths, geared to the production of **political results**' (Nandy, 1994,34).

Four Chapters was written in 1934 by Tagore. It is a critique of the new kind of violence that was emerging in society. The **novel was** written just before the Second World War when the Nazis had already **taken over** Germany and **violence was** increasing every day in the Indian political life. **The nature** of violence by then **had** obviously undergone a change. As Nandy says, 'Char Adhyay begins by recognizing that the propagation of violent revolt **against** colonialism in India was an "appropriate" transition to the violence **associated** with the modern scientific worldview – from the language of sacrifice and **feud that** a traditional society uses, to the language of vivisection or scientized violence' (Nandy, 20). Colonialism played a special role in the growth of this kind of violence. Colonialism is the source of this violence and the colonized actually mimic the **violence** practised upon them by their oppressors. As Nandy says,

Colonialism was not merely the product of a theory of progress that hierarchized races, cultures, and civilizations: it was also a by product of the Baconian theory of objective, scientific, 'true' knowledge which strictly partitioned off the observer from the observed, the subject from the object of knowledge, the enlightened agents of history from the passive ahistorical laity, rational from the nonrational (Nandy, 20).

Tagore was the first one to perceive the development of this new kind of violence in society. Through *Four Chapters*, he has shown his own disapproval of violence and the terrorist movement. Through the depiction of the inner struggle of the characters, Tagore gives a scathing critique of terrorist violence and the total loss of morality involved with it. Tagore in the three novels, *Home and the World*, *Gora* and *Four Chapters*, has rightly expressed his moral doubts, as to whether it is at all necessary to give up one's morality for the sake of freedom.

In the preface to *Four Chapters* he says that Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907) was the source of inspiration for this novel. He encouraged terrorist organizations in Bengal. Upadhyay and Tagore were born in the same year (1861) and though the two had different political ideologies, through regular contact with each other, they had shared their political beliefs. Upadhyay was a Hindu Brahmin who converted to Christianity. He became a Catholic theologian and a Vedantist scholar. He was also a social worker and the editor of a magazine called *Sandhya*, which was started by him. He was one of the most important figures of the late nineteenth century. Upadhyay unleashed terrorist movement in Bengal. It was in *Sandhya* that 'the first subtle hints of the beginning of terrorism in Bengal appeared' (Nandy, 51). In fact, Nandy goes on to say that Brahmabandhab Upadhyay 'served as Tagore's other self in matters of nationalist politics' (Nandy, 51). Upadhyay's political beliefs were also a representation of Tagore's own inner conflicts and he had struggled with it for much of his life. So, in the novel, Atin could be the more emotional and creative other self of Indranath as Tagore himself was of Upadhyay, for Tagore identified with Upadhyay's pre-swadeshi self. The novel really explores the world of political extremists and the absolute loss of self for those who are caught in mindless violence. Indranath is a machine who has completely lost his human side. Atin, the young revolutionary who was full of creative emotions loses his soul. He himself says that he has fallen from his *dharma*. The absolutely murky side of power play has been portrayed in the novel. The novel *Char Adhyay* originally started with a preface which describes Upadhyay's last visit to Tagore:

At the time I had not met him for a long time. I thought, having sensed my difference with him on the method (pranali) of the nationalist movement, he had become hostile and contemptuous towards me.

...In those days of blinding madness, one day when I was sitting alone in the third floor room at Jorasanko, suddenly came Upadhyay. In our conversation we recapitulated some of the issues we had discussed earlier. After the chat he bid me goodbye and got up. He went up to the door, turned towards me and stood. Then said, 'Rabibabu, I have fallen very low.' After this he did not wait any longer. I clearly understood that it was only to say these heart-rending words that he had come in the first place. But by then he had been caught in the web of his actions (*karmajal*), there was no means of escape. That was my last meeting and last words with him. (quoted in Nandy, 21)

When this novel was written, the people of Bengal were still fervently following the ideals of nationalism. The sparks of a violent nationalism were burning in Bengal. The detrimental side of terrorism that Tagore was trying to portray through the novel was unacceptable to the people. There was a hue and cry following the publication of the novel. Tagore withdrew the preface and proclaimed that it was purely a love story.

Four Chapters is the story of a group of revolutionary terrorists of Bengal. Indranath is the head of this terrorist organization. Ela too belongs to this revolutionary group. When the novel starts, Ela is already part of the group for five years. Atin is also part of this organization. Ela and Atin are in love with each other and Atin has joined the group for his love for Ela. The story of this novel deals with the lives of the three characters – Indranath, Atin and Ela – but the story revolves mainly around the relationship between Ela and Atin. The novel starts with a foreword, which gives Ela's background. Ela has lost both her parents. Her father was a professor of psychology. But he was a submissive and a soft-spoken man. Her mother was a domineering woman. All through her life, she has seen her father being dominated by her mother. Several times she has seen her mother's absolutely unjust behaviour towards her father. Her circumstances at home compelled her to become totally

intolerant towards injustice in any form. Moreover, the constant quarrels at home only increased her aversion towards marriage, so much so that she decides to stay single. After a certain point of time, when she could not stand the unhealthy atmosphere at home any longer, she requested her father to send her to a boarding school. By the time she reached college, she had lost both her parents. She had grown up to be a beautiful woman. Her uncle now took charge of her. After the completion of her M.A., she went to live in her uncle's house. She was soon disillusioned. Her aunt proved to be a petty and jealous woman. She wanted to marry her off soon. There was no dearth of good marriage proposals but Ela rejected all of them. At this point of time, she met Indranath at her uncle's place. He appeared to be a brilliant man with an attractive personality. He was a nationalist and was committed to bring freedom to the country. Ela begged him to give her some work. Indranath could at once perceive that Ela was no ordinary woman. He offered to make her the head of a girls' school in Calcutta. Ela said she was ready for the task but only if Indranath puts his faith in her. Indranath had replied that Ela is the ray of light of the new age and through her, the new age will be ushered in. But he asked her to give the word that she would never be involved in any social relationship, for she is not for the society but for the country. After that, five years pass with Ela working for Indranath and his organization.

Indranath was a brilliant student who studied in Europe. He is reported to know many languages and is skilled in armed and unarmed combat. He had terrific career possibilities. But while in Europe, on few rare occasions he had met an Indian political suspect. When he at last came back, all doors to progress were closed on him. At last, when an eminent English scientist recommended him, he secured a job in a college but under a superior who was incompetent. This man was envious of Indranath's brilliance. All types of barriers were placed in his way so as to hinder him from making any kind of progress in his scientific research. Finally, he was shifted to an obscure college without a laboratory. Indranath realized with a sense of bitterness that his own country would not give him the scope to rise in his career. He was unprepared to submit to this condemnation of his talents. So he started a school where he started teaching French and German. He also started helping out the science

students with their botany and zoology. But 'in some fissure in the depths of this little institution of his, there lodged a seed of secret purpose, which spread its underground ramifications, across prison yards, far and wide through the country' (*Four Chapters* [hereinafter abbreviated as FC], 3). An underground terrorist movement also soon started under Indranath. Indranath turned out to be totally devoid of emotions and sentiments. Cruelty and violence did not affect him. He had become completely soulless and mechanical. Ashish Nandy says that the most striking characteristic of Indranath is his 'dispassionate, fully scientific, ruthless commitment to what can only be called instrumental rationality' (Nandy, 22). Students all over the country look up to him as an uncrowned king. Like Sandip of *Home and the World*, his character is also very attractive and passionate. But Indranath's presence cannot be felt as much in this novel as Sandip's in the other. Indranath is handsome and as Tagore says, 'From him radiated a tense, inflexible attraction. It was as if there was a thunderbolt in the depths of his being, of which the rumblings could not be heard, but only the cruel flashes sometimes seen' (FC, 9). He was polished and sophisticated and, even when angry, he never raised his voice but only changed the characteristic of his laugh. He could speak very harsh words and make impossible claims without any qualms. If, for some, he was a figure of admiration and respect, others were in constant dread of him. If in the *Home and the World*, Sandip for once recognizes his own weakness and mentions it in one of his soliloquies, Indranath never does so. What Sandip does for the country is also a representation of his greed and self-love. Indranath's reason for taking part in the freedom struggle is also the same, it is revenge and self-love. He wants to take revenge for his personal frustrations. His brilliant career was thwarted by the Government. Now he is bent on taking revenge and the path to terrorism offers him the right opportunity. Indranath is aware of his charisma and intellect. His path to greatness was frustrated by the British Government. Now he is determined to prove his greatness. As he tells Kanai:

As a leader in a grand enterprise I'm here because it becomes me; either victory or defeat will be equally great. They tried to make me petty by closing the doors on every side. I'm determined to show them that I'm great, even if

that entails disaster at every step. You can see for yourself, Kanai, how these followers have come round me at my call, recking nothing of life and death. Why? Because I know how to call. That's what I want to make clear to myself and to others: and after that, I don't care what happens. (FC, 26)

That he does not care about victory and defeat itself shows that he must be aware of the fate of his organization. He says that on a historical view the epic may end in a vast devastation or destruction. But still it is an epic. That men were feeling emasculated and humiliated everyday due to the colonial rule is also evident from what Indranath tells Kanai. He tells him that, 'For the curtailed manhood of this slave-ridden country, isn't it the greatest of opportunities to die the death of a hero?'(FC, 26) As far as his attitude towards the organization is concerned, he says, 'it is the dispassionate scientific attitude which tells me that if the reasons for decay are left uncured, death must ensue.'(FC, 27) Indranath likes intelligent people like Atin in his group. The others are rejected mercilessly. He uses beautiful women like Ela to attract men like Atin into the group. It is important to say here how Atin joined this organization, which ultimately led to his doom.

Atin belongs to the family of rich zamindars. Though the family wealth has been squandered by his forefathers, Atin's way of life reflected his luxurious past. One day, while travelling by a steamer, Ela met Atin. Atin was travelling by first class. He wore a silk tunic with a scarf neatly folded on his shoulders. From her place in the third class in the steamer, Ela could see Atin. It was love at first sight. Ela went directly to him and asked him, 'Why don't you wear khadi?'(FC, 35). Ela's personality thrilled Atin. When the steamer had stopped and Atin was waiting for a coolie, Ela went up to him and asked him if he was waiting for a coolie and readily carried his suitcase and told him if he was feeling embarrassed he should carry her trunk, which Atin realized was much heavier than his own suitcase. Thus began their relationship with Atin joining the revolutionary group. Indranath trained Atin and it left Atin disillusioned after a certain point of time. He realized that like Indranath he too was losing his humanity. His love for Ela was the only source of escape for him.

Though a full-fledged affair started between the two, yet Ela refused to marry him. Ela had promised Indranath to remain celibate all her life and sacrifice herself for the service of the country.

As the title of the story goes, there are four chapters in the novel. All the four chapters begin with a brief narrative by the author. The first chapter begins with a brief comment about Indranath and his background and what led to his setting up of the terrorist organization. The four chapters are a series of scenes which shift from one to the other. The first scene is at a Calcutta tea shop. The shop is run by one of Indranath's men, Kanai. There is a little room on one side of the shop where some second hand school and college text books are kept for sale. There are hardly any chairs and stools for the customers but packing cases marked 'Darjeeling Tea' serve the purpose. Similarly there is paucity of cups and plates also. In other words the whole place looks ordinary and apolitical. But this apparently inconspicuous place is the hub of all the underground work done by Indranath's organization. It is only a front put up by them to show to the police informers who are in plenty. In the first chapter, we see that a meeting has been arranged between Indranath and Ela in the tea shop. We come to know that Indranath has already written an article in the newspaper in Ela's name and it is a message to the police that she is no more involved with the group. This gives us hints that Ela is already under suspicion. This is important because in the last chapter, Ela will be killed for the same reason. The first chapter also acquaints the reader with the way Indranath works. Indranath exterminates any member of the group who he thinks is useless. That it leads to nothing constructive is hinted at the very beginning when Ela says, 'Let me tell you the truth, Master. The more we go on, the more does our purpose cease to be purpose, and becomes mere intoxication. These splendid boys are being sacrificed at the alter of our blind, monstrous idol. It's breaking my heart!' (FC, 7) He tells her that in the struggle for power, the cult of cruelty is very important. Ela seems to be very distressed by the fact that Indranath is forcing Uma, one of the members of the group, to marry someone she does not love. Sukumar whom Uma loves is an important member of the group and cannot be bound by worldly affairs. So Uma has to get married to someone

who is useless to the group, whom Indranath considers spineless and as he says, the most suitable dustbin for such people is marriage. Indranath's highhandedness comes to the fore when he tells Ela that though she practically does no work for the organization, yet she is important to it because Indranath does not want her merely for her work. As he says:

It's not work I want of you. Of course, it is hardly possible for you yourself to know of the glory that lights up the hearts of the boys at the touch of your fingers when you anoint their foreheads with the red sandal-paste of initiation. How can the dry rewards I have to offer evoke the same quality work? Where sex works I put woman on a pedestal. (FC, 16)

This very clearly reveals the fact that Ela has been kept in the group to attract men like Atin. Indranath does not mind using Ela for this purpose. Moreover, like Sandip calls Bimala the Queen Bee of their hive and all men around her worker bees, in the same way, Ela who is extremely beautiful will do the work of inspiring the men in the organization. Ela considers all the boys in the organization as her younger brothers. Her motherly instincts are aroused when she sees them. This mother figure is very important for Indranath. The men in the group get to see the embodiment of the country in the form of a human figure and that gives them constant inspiration. Partha Chatterjee says that the nationalists considered the inner domain or the 'home' sovereign or free from colonization and this sphere is represented by women. Their mission had always been to preserve this site which is also representative of our spiritual side. Ela represents this side for Indranath and his group. But now Ela is in love with Atin and Indranath knows about it. He complains that it is making Atin break away from the group and clearly tells Ela that if the need arises Ela may have to be removed from the group. Ela only says that if her disappearance becomes a requirement, she will silently and willingly vanish.

The second scene is in Ela's house. Atin comes to meet Ela. He seems to be extremely perturbed. The very fact that he loves Ela, but union with her is not

possible, disturbs him. He recounts the **day when he had met her for the first time in a steamer**. His was a different kind of a life. **He was the son of a zamindar and his lifestyle represented that**. From the way **Atin speaks**, it becomes very evident that Indranath and his group holds no special **attraction** for him. In fact, **hopelessness** is what he feels everyday. He tells Ela that **he has chosen this crooked path only to be with her**. But now she defies her own pure **instincts** of love and refuses to **marry him**. When Ela tells him that she has sacrificed **him** to the altar of the country, **Atin says** that the place that she calls country is nothing **but a country that her band has created**. His natural powers and emotions are dying **every day** and he feels ashamed of **what he does**, but there is no way out for him. **He only feels like a caged animal**. As he goes on to say:

You don't seem to realize how my **wings have been clipped**, my **limbs shackled**. I had the responsibility, as **well as the capacity**, to **take my own true place** in my country's service. You **made me forget it**. (FC, 45)

In very potent words he describes the work **done by the other members of the band**, who are nothing **but mere puppets in Indranath's hands**. Giving a moving **description** of the relationship between Indranath and his **followers**, he says:

Our Supreme Counsellor decreed that **our whole duty was to take hold of a thick rope and keep pulling with closed eyes**. Thousands of boys caught hold of the ropes. Some were crushed under **the wheels**, others crippled for life. Then came the order to turn back. **The car began its return journey**. But the broken bones did not become whole, and **the cripples were swept out of the way on to the dust heaps**. Independent **thinking** was knocked on the head from the very start and the boys came **strutting up**, ready and proud to be moulded into puppets. When they all began to dance to the same tune, at the wire-pulling of the Master, they were struck with admiration at their own performance. (FC, 47)

He states the reason behind the slow disintegration of Indranath's group by saying that it is impossible for live men to work as puppets for long. He also says that it is mere foolishness to ignore a man's nature and make him a mere puppet. Ela should have drawn him to her heart and not to the group. This he says will only lead to his death. In this chapter is introduced Batu. Formerly Batu was a member of the group. Now he has become an informer of the police. In this chapter, Batu is shown to be spying on Atin and Ela. On receiving a note from Indranath on a red paper, which obviously is a danger signal, Atin leaves Ela's home without informing her.

The setting of the third chapter is Atin's hide out. We see Kanai Gupta has come to meet him. His tea shop, being the hub of the terrorist organization, is under the strict eyes of the authorities. As a last resort he entered his name in their spy register. Since real news has to be supplied to the authorities, he traps only those who are already trapped. He himself gives an example of his way of working. For example, when the police had already got ninety nine percent of the information about Haren, Kanai Gupta gave the superfluous remainder. About Atin, Batu has already forwarded most of the information, the rest will be done by Kanai. Kanai has come only to caution him about his impending arrest. Atin asks him if Indranath was aware of his latest profession. Kanai says he is not sure for one can only make reports to him but not open one's heart. He says:

I may be Indranath's chief adviser, but I don't know all about what he is doing. There are things I don't even dare guess at. It's my belief that when Indranath wishes to get rid of any one of his own traitors he gets him buried in police refuse heap. (FC, 59)

Kanai warns Atin and gives him twenty-four hours time to clear out of the place. At this point of time, Ela comes to meet him. Ela herself is now full of disillusionment and, in great desperation, wants to marry Atin. But it is too late. She is shocked to see the utter penury that Atin is living in and holds herself responsible for it. Her efforts to make reparations comes to no good. Atin has gone against his own natural self and

joined the terrorist movement. Though **trained by Indranath**, his **training could not be complete** in the true sense of the term **because he was going against his nature**. By now Ela's delusions about the freedom **movement** has also vanished. As Atin has rightly understood, 'To oppose **overwhelming strength** by brute force can but brutalize one's very soul' (FC, 76). Ela too **says that she had joined the organization** for the glory of it. But now only **increasing shame** is overpowering her. Very movingly Atin now sums up the present **condition of the movement**. As he says:

The patriotism of those who have no **faith in that which is above patriotism** is like a crocodile's back used as a **ferry** to cross the river. **Meanness, unfaithfulness, mutual mistrust, secret machination, plotting for leadership-** sooner or later these drag them into the **mud** at the bottom. That, the life of the country can be saved by killing its soul, is the **monstrously false doctrine that nationalists all over the world are bellowing forth stridently**. (FC, 77)

A sound of whistle suddenly interrupts their **discussion**. It is an alarm for Atin. Immediately he leaves the place leaving Ela alone.

The final chapter shows Atin going to Ela's **house** to kill her. In this chapter, **Atin** reminisces the journey of his life and how he **has reached that stage**. It is with his birthday party that Ela celebrated three years **ago that he was initiated into the group**. Ela had given him a bouquet of tuberose, and **gave him her first kiss**. As Atin says, 'That was the moment of Atin's new birth, **ushered in by these shy flowers**. And little by little all Mr. Atindra's gravity, learning and **logic were drowned in profound self-forgetfulness**' (FC, 99). In this last chapter, **Atin reiterates the fact again and again** that he has fallen from grace. He says how his **attraction** towards Ela was so strong that he was ready to accept any kind of insult for **her**. Now when Ela herself is full of disillusionment and offers herself in marriage to **Atin**, he says. 'I've slain my soul, the biggest sin of all. Not a single evil have I been able to **uproot from our country** – I've only uprooted myself. For that sin I'm condemned not to take you even when you're giving yourself. Accept your hand? With this hand!' (FC. 92) While talking about his

utter fall and degradation, he says the moment of his fall from his ideals is near at hand and will happen when he will be sent to jail for robbing a poor and helpless old woman. Then he goes on to narrate how the other day the band members robbed a weak and helpless old widow of everything that she had. Manmatha, one of the band members, knew her well. They belong to the same village. But it is Manmatha himself who led the others to her house. She tried to plead with him, but to no avail. The band members instantly killed her. Atin with great resentment says,

For the purpose of what we call the country's need – the need for murdering our own souls! – that widow's money passed through my hands to headquarters. Part of that money helped to break my recent fast. I end my career branded as a thief- receiver and user of stolen money. (FC , 102)

Batu is the one who will act as the police informer in this case. Batu is in love with Ela and is jealous of Atin. But he does not mind being petty enough to become a police informer. Meanness, secret plotting for leadership are what abounds the job. This reminds me of that episode in *The Home and the World* where, after taking six thousand rupees from Bimala, which itself is stolen money, Sandip tells Amulya that the money is for the country. It does not matter whether it is with the owner or somebody else. Amulya later tells Bimala that Sandip babu even told him to give up shame for the sake of the country.

After relating to Ela his utter state of degradation Atin tells her that her patriotic brothers whom she loves a lot and had anointed with sandal paste on each Brother's day are of the opinion that she is not fit to live any longer. They have got the secret news that at dawn the police will come to get her and she may reveal the secrets of the organization under torture. Indranath has given Atin the task to execute her. So Atin says towards the beginning of the last chapter that he has come to claim his last kiss today. Ela already knows about her arrest, since Batu has given her an option either to get caught or marry him. Ela kisses Atin and entreats him to kill her.

Kill me, Ontu, kill me with your **own hands**. I couldn't wish for a **happier** end... Don't have any qualms, Ela **continued**. Am I not yours, wholly yours even in death? Take me. Don't let their **unclean** hands touch my body, for **this** body belongs to you. (FC, 104)

Ela is willing to die at Atin's hands and she **even** refuses anaesthesia. This is because it also has some erotic significance for her. **After** killing Ela, Atin finally realizes that his degradation is complete. As Nandy says,

For Atin this is the final revelation that **he** has fallen from his own distinctive *svadharma* (code of conduct) and *svabhava* (individual specificity). He recognizes that Ela is willing to be **sacrificed** not because she accepts the meaning given to it by Indranath's **modern** nationalism but because of a privatized meaning, derived from her **relationship** with him, Atin. (Nandy, 23)

Tagore's view is perfectly expressed here. He **makes** it very clear that violence leads to loss of self. Indranath preaches the violence of **the** new age. Like Krishna he is the *mantradata*. Atin is his disciple. But it is **impossible** for Atin to give up his **self** completely. Indranath's training does not **transform** him fully because Atin is **also** a poet and a lover. Indranath can from the **beginning** **feel** Atin's sense of discomfort in his theory of violence. Atin on his part can feel how **Indranath** goes against society in propagating violence. But neither can disown the **other**. As has already been said before, Atin and Indranath are each other's double, **just** like Tagore and Upadhyay are each other's double. They cannot disown each other. If Ela's death signifies the final destruction of Atin's selfhood, it also signifies **Indranath's** final defeat and fall, and a critique of Indranath's theory of ruthless and **impersonal** violence. Like in his other novels, *Home and the World* and *Gora*, here too Tagore extols the superior principles of human love and morality. Tagore strongly critiques the effect of terrorism not only on the larger political life, but also on the individual lives. Atin and Ela are trapped and there is no escape for them. Tagore condemns this political culture of violence that comes from the West and its appropriation by the Indian political leaders.

Ashish Nandy explains it to be a transition associated with modern scientific worldview. It is a transition says he from the language of sacrifice and feud of a traditional society to a language of sanitized violence which has developed with the coming of modern scientific equipments which allowed 'distant violence'. In his travelogue *Parasye* (1932), Tagore says that this form of violence reified not only individual humanity of their targets, but also reality of violence itself. By the time he wrote *Four Chapters*, Tagore was already aware of this innately Western conception of violence that was emerging in the Indian society. Unlike *Home and the World*, which dealt with extreme nationalism, *Four Chapters*, recognizes and deals with this kind of sanitized violence and its effects on human society. Indranath compares himself to Arjuna and reinforces his arguments by quoting Ron the *Gita*, but there is a difference between violence spoken of in ancient Indian tradition and the new scientific violence. Our folklore and tradition talks of legitimate violence or *dharmayuddha*. The *Gita* talks of it as the fight for *dharma* as against fight for gain. Tagore became aware of the fact that our revolutionaries were not maintaining this tradition, but like Indranath were justifying their actions of self-aggrandizement by using the language of the *Gita*. *Four Chapters* recognizes this newly emerging political consciousness in India and cautions us against its detrimental effects.

Conclusion

The three books of Tagore discussed in the preceding three sections span a period of at least fifty years if we take into consideration the actual historical context narrativized in them. From publication dates also the books appear to be timely responses to the historical situations: *Gora* published in 1909, *The Home and the World* in 1916 and *Char Adhyay* in 1934. However, the period was a crucial one in the history of India in general and Bengal in particular. It charts the history of our response to the colonial rule through the different phases of acceptance, resistance and ultimately assertion of cultural and political autonomy. Ashis Nandy in trying to analyse the political context of the three novels says:

All three of Tagore's novels deal with the fragility and resilience of political authority and the birth, survival and the death of moral dissent. All show how the division between the public and the private- and, by implication, the secular and non-secular- domains of morality are not ultimately sustainable. The subversion of morality in the public sphere after a while distorts primary human relationships and the very core of one's cultural selfhood. (Nandy, 1994, 47)

It is needless to say that it is a period that witnessed a great complexity of sensibility, emotion, perception and responses so far as the political, social and cultural confrontation and exchange with the colonial regime was concerned. But in all the three novels colonialism is not very visible. Very rarely we come across a police officer, a magistrate or an informer etc., who represent the colonial rulers. But the novels are written keeping in perspective the British rule. So the presence of colonialism is strongly felt, though not really visible in the stories. All the three novels show how an imported brand of nationalism was trying to destroy the harmony of the people. Sandip and Indranath follow a very strong brand of Hindu nationalism as a reply to colonial cultural influence. They consider their task as divine because they have given their country a divine existence. But the irony of the situation as

Nandy puts it is that they themselves **cannot break free from their target**. In an Oedipal twist they remain linked to the **British** not only on account of the **discourses** that they use which come from the west **but also** because of the **scientized violence** which is also borrowed from the West. Sandip, Indranath and Gora are **strongly masculine** characters and all of them try to **get their apparent vigor from denying** anything that is effeminate. If for Sandip and Indranath women merely **become** objects of desire, for Gora women do **not have an existence**. But **ironically the strongest resistance** that they get is also from women. Bimala utterly **exposes** Sandip's weakness when she wins over Amulya by her motherly love. Ela realizes the utter inhumanity of Indranath's nationalism. **Anandamayi's** resistance is the **strongest** among all because she is Gora's mother.

What is very interesting to note is that the **three novels** have a continuity between them. The characters are an extension of **one another**. All the three characters **have** divided self and the two selves represent two **different** ideologies – be it Nikhil and Sandip, Atin and Indranath or Gora's split self. If Nikhil and Sandip and Atin and Indranath represent two different ideologies, then **Gora's** personality itself represents the two sides. Chandranath babu tells Nikhilesh in *The Home and the World*, that he often wondered how Nikhil could put up with **Sandip all the time**. He himself **gives** the reason as he says, 'I now see that though you **two do not rhyme, your rhythm is the same**'(HW,106) In the same manner, Indranath **who** is not as wily as Sandip, but who is almost like a machine and treats the members of his group as puppets, cannot get rid of Atin. Atin is Indranath's other creative **self**. If Indranath is devoid of emotions, Atin is full of emotions and his creativity **and emotion** are sustained by his love for Ela. Gora who vindictively followed **orthodox Hinduism** in the beginning becomes a more tolerant person later. In real life **Brahmabandhab Upadhyay** was Tagore's other self and the representation in the **characters** are also a result of Tagore's life long inner conflicts with the different discourses.

The three novels not only represent Tagore's political beliefs, but also his doubts and ambivalence towards the swadeshi movement. In all the novels, and especially in

Gora, Tagore gives both sides of the arguments very strongly. Arguments, counter arguments and debates form the major parts of the novels. Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly says in her introduction to *Gora* that words play a very important part in the novel because the young generation, Gora, Binoy, Haran, Abinash are writers with access to the periodical press. This is not only true for *Gora* but also true for *The Home and the World* and *Four Chapters*. In *The Home and the World*, all the characters are writing their diary and Sandip in one of his soliloquies characteristically cries out, 'Am I made of words? Am I merely a book with a covering of flesh and blood?' (HW, 78). In *Four Chapters* we see that both Indranath writes and Atin is almost a creative writer. To choose the 'right' path from among the different ideologies is difficult for the characters in the novel. Bimala is misled by Sandip, and Sucharita, though a Brahmo, is influenced by Gora. Perhaps the time was so full of turmoil and things were so very hazy and the discourses and counter discourses were so very conflicting that it became increasingly difficult for people to choose the right path. If in *The Home and the World*, Tagore allows his readers the chance of an interpretation, *Gora* ends more definitely by explicitly giving Tagore's views about nation, and in *Four Chapters*, he openly condemns the militant Hindu nationalist movement of the time.

No wonder, varied and often opposed views, interests and activities came to dominate the scenario, more so because the colonial rulers had been equally active in playing a divisive role in order to entrench their rule. They were conscious in a renewed way after the Great Revolt of 1857. They always knew India to be divided in terms of caste, religion, community and language, and ever to remain so, never forming a nation. The Great Revolt was a great shock for them and they adopted their new policy accordingly. The important point here was division or diversity. If the colonial rulers wanted to exploit it negatively to rule India as a divided entity, Tagore discovered it to be India's basic characteristic requiring proper reckoning to forge its unity. His is not the European idea of nation passed on to the rest of the world from the days of Enlightenment. This idea of nation is one of imposition of a hegemonic homogeneity upon the people in the name of the nation. It therefore proves to be

exclusionary of the fragments and the marginalized. Tagore was also against this kind of European modernity. His is rather like the latter-day postmodernity that privileges heterogeneity or diversity held together not so much by the concept of the nation but by the concept of society, Indian society which sustains itself through an ever-evolving process of adjustment. It does not mean that he accepted the society with all its ills. The criticism of the ills of casteism and bigotry that we find so articulate and well-directed in *Gora* is evidence enough how he thought of its progress through rational reforms. But what was emphasized in *Gora* was the rejection of the rising ideology of Hindu nationalism. Indian identity has to be instead realized in terms of its age-old principle of accommodation and plurality. This does not however imply cultures existing side by side in their respective insularity. A process of toleration and religious syncretism has already given rise to a broad sense of unity which proved to have at its base the values of a universal humanity for which Tagore has always struggled in his life. His great poem 'Bharat Tirtha' in which he envisioned India to have been a place or rather a pilgrimage where peoples from all over the world and ages had come to, creating a great cultural exchange and synthesis, is a case in point. Moreover, he referred to the great contribution of such figures as Kabir, Nanak, Lalan and a host of other Sufi and devotional figures who carried on this tradition of synthesis and syncretism. It was this perception of the Indian entity or for that matter Indian unity that inhered in the social fact rather than in the political agenda that could lead Tagore to think of a patriotism without nationalism. Hence, as Ashis Nandy has it, Tagore could reject 'the idea of nationalism but practised anti-imperialist politics all his life' (Nandy, 80). Tagore refused to give primacy to politics in his vision although sometimes he had to be associated with politics. Here, to draw on Nandy again, Tagore differed from Gandhi who made politics 'a means of testing the ethics appropriate to our times' (Nandy, 81).

But where the two met was providing the appropriate vision for a postcolonial India: emphasizing an Indian society that embraces cultural, religious and linguistic diversity; need for rural development and empowerment; ensuring the participation of the masses and fragments in the politics of the country and governance; reaffirming a

moral universe where politics must be located. This refers to one important shared ground between them: that of the notion that society rather than the state was the central focus of Indian life. As Tapan Raychaudhuri observes:

Like Gandhi, [Tagore] too was extremely suspicious of centralized state power. Only, he went further to reject the need for nationhood which raised barriers between man and man and led to vicious conflict. The fact that the idea was alien was for him a plus point. His agenda for national reconstruction, like Gandhi's, emphasized the rural unit rather than the grand edifice of the state (Raychaudhuri: 1999, 148)

It was by this principle that both Gandhi and Tagore were guided, and it was buttressed by their belief in one's own inner strength, called *atmashakti* by Tagore. Indeed, Tagore's emphasis was not on agitation but on building this *atmashakti* required for reconstruction work as much as *swadeshi* and its spirit of self-reliance. The other expression that Tagore used was *kalyan*, that is, material and spiritual well-being. It is an expression with resonances which encompass the body and the spirit, the individual and wider humanity. Here too the two great minds meet. Tagore's idea of *kalyan* bears close resemblance to Gandhi's idea of *sarvodaya*.

Tagore who was not a politician but an artist and, as a thinker, could see the progress of politics as well as its aberration. In *The Home and the World*, he grew critical of the *Swadeshi* and Boycott movement because it gave rise to militant nationalism and caused misery to the poor people. Tagore always spoke of a close bond between the elites and the masses, but it did not happen, and hence the sense of alienation caused by the political programmes among the poor in general and among the Hindus and the Muslims in particular. He very poignantly shows that Sandip's discourse which works in the *bhadralok* community, fails to work outside it, especially in the world of Panchu and Mirjan. The alienation that it created between the two religious communities was further aggravated due to the cultural domination of the Hindu *bhadralok* sections and their exploitation of the Hindu myths and goddesses in their

nationalist vocabulary. Tagore makes his view of the complexity involved in the situation clear through the opposition of Nikhilesh and Sandip in the novel. He shows how Nikhilesh can be modern and yet remain true to Indian ideals; how he can follow swadeshi without ever resorting to the Western view of nationalism. He would unlike Sandip never exploit the concept of Bharat Mata thereby exploiting woman as the source of inspiration. He would not place the country above God or even equate them. His response to the gender question is therefore different. While Sandip wears the guise of an emancipator of woman but proves actually to be a flagrant male chauvinist out to win her, exploit her and make her his object of desire by using cleverly the appropriate discourse of idolization, Nikhilesh allows her freedom through education and association to choose her ways. He was ready either to be accepted or rejected on the merit of the terms of her own judgment. Nothing could be farther from his intention than imposing himself on her. If Sandip believes in power and possession, he believes in the spiritual strength of love and the freedom it ensures. Through the characters of Sandip and Indranath, Tagore shows how women can be used as an object of desire. Apparently they consider women as mother but that only increases their bondage. Both of them ultimately need the women for their own satisfaction.

In fact with age, Tagore became much more radical when he was above fifty, a time when people accept the norms of the society. It was at this time in 1915 that Tagore started serializing *The Home and the World* and wrote his *Sabuj Patra* stories. *Sabuj Patra* was a radical magazine of the time and claimed that its aim was to 'shock' and 'jolt' the readers mind. Tagore wrote many stories in *Sabuj Patra* and one of them is 'Streer Patra'. It is an epistolary short story which shows Mrinal rejecting her husband and family. It is for the first time here that he used a female narrator. The whole letter expresses extreme anger and Mrinal makes it clear that it is due to her intelligence that she could resist subjugation and that she has a world of her own. She writes poetry which she till now had kept secret. The story rightly represents the inhuman suffering that a woman has to pass through only on the virtue of being a woman. Sumit Sarkar says that this tone of anger in the voice of the woman is a new

trend that Tagore started, otherwise depiction of the woes of women was a standard theme of the time. Mrinal tries to alleviate the utter suffering that Bindu has to pass through. When Bindu is subjected to so much torture, her own sister, though hurt at her plight, cannot stand by her because she does not have enough courage to go against her husband. Bindu is not good-looking and she does not have any extraordinary qualities. So she never got any importance from any one. She developed an extreme sense of diffidence. Bindu is married off to a mad man. When she runs away from her husband's house she is not given shelter and she commits suicide by setting her clothes on fire. Bindu's case is very much reminiscent of the Snehalata case of 30th January 1914. Snehalata, a girl from Calcutta, burned herself to death two weeks before her marriage because she realized that it would be impossible for her parents to pay the dowry demanded by the groom's family. Referring to Bindu's suicide, Mrinal talks about the general reaction among men and says,

They started saying: 'It has become a fashion among girls to die by setting clothes on fire.' You said: 'All this is play acting'... Maybe so, but why is it so that what gets burnt are always the saris of Bengali girls, and never the dhotis of the brave men of Bengal? (Sarkar in Dutta, 161)

Bindu's death disturbs her so much that she decides to reject her insensitive husband and his family. Sumit Sarkar rightly says that an important reason for starting the reform movement in Bengal had been the sense of middle class male guilt. However, the reform movements which concentrated on the 'woman question' suddenly lost all importance and no more hue and cry was heard when a sati occurred. As Partha Chatterjee explains the 'woman question' at this time was relegated to the inner domain of culture. Sumit Sarkar makes a very significant comment in this respect and says that Tagore's *Sabuj Patra* stories and especially *The Home and the World* brings back into the forefront 'women's questions'. If for Mrinal the relationship with Bindu becomes the point of anti-patriarchal rebellion, for Bimala of *The Home and the World* her sisterly relationship with Amulya gives her a better understanding of what Sandip really is. Tagore's view on the lot of Hindu widows is clear from the

conversation between Nikhilesh and his sister-in-law. When Nikhilesh feels nostalgic and tells his sister-in-law that he wants to **return to former days**, she replies ‘with a deep sigh’: ‘No, brother, never again a life as a woman! Let this one life be sufficient for what I have had to endure, I cannot stand any more.’

In *The Home and the World*, *Gora* and *Four Chapters*, Tagore represents a wide range of women characters – Bimala, Sucharita, Lolita, Harimohini, Baradasundari and Anandamoyi. All these characters only allow us to perceive Tagore’s views on women. Sumit Sarkar says that ‘the dominant note in *Ghare Baire*, surely remains Nikhilesh’s agonized determination to respect the autonomy of Bimala.’ (Sarkar in Dutta, 167). But one important criticism against Tagore is that he did not allow Bimala to experiment with her sexuality. It seems he was apprehensive about it and brought her back to ‘home’. But by now Bimala had developed her *atmashakti*. Perhaps Tagore wanted to strike a balance between tradition and modernity. He wanted women to be modern but not western. In fact, later on he develops an aversion for activist women. But the fact that Tagore wanted women to be educated and emancipated is evident from characters like Bimala, Lolita and Sucharita. All of them are educated and different from other women of that time. Lolita and Sucharita belong to a Brahmo household and talk very freely to male guests in the house. But Barodasundari who makes much effort to be modern and practices sectarianism by looking down at Hindus is almost a laughing stock. Lolita is outright rebellious and does only what she thinks is right. Sucharita who is much milder is open to all kinds of interpretation of religion. She distinctly understands the reason behind Gora’s orthodoxy and respects him for his conviction. Tagore has also created characters like Harimohini who perhaps would never be able to unlearn what she has internalized. Her life has been a life of utter misery. She was married at a very young age and widowed also at a very young age. All her property was taken away by her in-laws. Pareshebabu gave her shelter. But now she herself starts imposing and restraining Sucharita in several ways. She even wants her to marry her brother-in-law. Through Harimohini, Tagore shows the plight of women. But it is also a comment on how the state of women will not change if women like Harimohini do not attain a realization.

Women themselves should be able to think rationally. Perhaps the woman who really is the ideal one for Tagore is Anandamoyi. She has already proved the strength of her mind by adopting Gora against all odds. It proves beyond doubt that she is not affected by the societal norms and superstitions. She has a mind of her own and she prefers taking her own decisions. Anandamoyi's character itself gives an answer to the gender question. Her character has the balance between tradition and modernity and she is rational and progressive minded. She even single handedly prepares for Binoy and Lolita's marriage when the whole community is opposed to them. She fearlessly takes their side and tries to make them comfortable. So when Gora comes to know about his true identity he first goes to his mother and says, 'The mother for whom I have looked every where all this time she was sitting in my house. You have no caste, you do not discriminate against people, you do not hate- you are the image of benediction. You are my Bharatvarsha...?' (*Gora*, 477) In an essay written almost twelve years after the publication of *The Home and the World*, Tagore says:

All over the world women today are coming out of the confines of their households into the open arena of the world...Let us hope for a new age in the building of civilization...(he appealed to women) to open their hearts, cultivate their intellect, pursue knowledge with determination. They have to remember that unexamined blind conservatism is opposed to creativity. (Sarkar in Dutta, 168)

Tagore, through the three novels, also shows the tragic consequences that nationalism unleashed through the likes of Sandip and Indranath. In *Char Adhyay*, he shows the destructive element inherent in this politics in its extremist or 'terrorist' form. Indranath as the leader of an extremist group is portrayed as different from Sandip who creates his reality through his words and he does it consciously. Indranath is gifted with all sterling qualities and idealism of a leader, shown to be towering over others by his intelligence, personality and learning – learning acquired not here in his own country but from different universities of the world. It is this heroism that attracted and moved the young hearts and made them ready for sacrifice. While

apparently this heroism was so laudable, Tagore showed how it can exceed all bounds of morality and human values – all in the name of the country. There was nothing sacrosanct – no relationship was valuable enough to escape destruction, if its annihilation was deemed necessary by the leader. Indranath's treatment of women is different from Nikhilesh's. Unlike Nikhilesh, he would use women for the purpose of his organization, not as the icon of the nation. Ela was used to capture a brilliant young man like Atin. The most glaring opposition that Tagore shows here is between cruelty of the cause upheld by the leader on the one hand and the intense love of Atin and Ela on the other. By making Atin kill Ela, Tagore shows the unbelievable limit to which nationalist ideology can go. Once again for Tagore the situation is deeply tragic. Here the end justifies the means. Tagore could not approve of this. No wonder, he could not approve of Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's *Pather Dabi* that extolled this heroism as the need of the hour. Tagore was misunderstood at that time as he refused to plead with the colonial government for lifting the ban on the book. But Tagore was convinced of the justness of his moral stand. *Char Adhyay* may be his artistic intervention to set the right course of thinking and action. Thus these three novels as well some others written during this period were serious attempts on the part of the author to understand the history of the nation at that time in the true light of our tradition and thereby to rewrite and change it. After more than half a century of his death, the postcolonial mind as it has started rethinking the whole issue regarding Indian nationhood has now to think over what Tagore had once thought and tried hard to make others pay heed to.

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