

11

TAGORE'S *THE HOME AND THE WORLD* FOR PROMOTION OF INDIAN CULTURE AND COUNTRY

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Abstract:

Rabindranath Tagore also known by his pen name Bhanu Singha Thakur (Bhonita), and also known by his sobriquets Gurudev, Kabiguru, and Biswakabi, was a polymath, poet, musician, and artist from the Indian subcontinent. He reshaped Bengali literature and music, as well as Indian art with Contextual Modernism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Author of the "profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse" of *Gitanjali*, he became in 1913 the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. The present research paper is a modest attempt to trace how far Tagore succeeds in promoting Indian culture and country in his '*The Home and The World*'.

Key Words: Home, Culture, Western, Violence, Swadeshi.

As a humanist, Universalist, internationalist, and ardent anti-nationalist, Rabindranath Tagore denounced the British Raj and advocated independence from Britain. His novels, stories, songs, dance-dramas, and essays spoke to topics political and personal. *Gitanjali* (*Song Offerings*), *Gora* (*Fair-Faced*) and *Ghare-Baire* (*The Home and the World*) are his best-known works, and his verse, short stories, and novels were acclaimed-or panned-for their lyricism, colloquialism, naturalism, and unnatural contemplation.

The novel *The Home and the World* illustrates the battle Tagore had with himself, between the ideas of Western culture and revolution against the Western culture. These two ideas are portrayed in two of the main characters, Nikhil, who is rational and opposes violence, and Sandip, who will let nothing stand in his way from reaching his goals. These two opposing ideals are very important in understanding the history of the Bengal region and its contemporary problems.

The novel centres on the Swadeshi movement; Tagore is not advocating it but rather warning his audience of the dangers of such a movement. Tagore knows that it is possible for even a seemingly peaceful movement to turn quickly into aggressive nationalism. Such a change would do the country more harm than good. Sandip is the vivacious and ardent leader of Swadeshi. He knows that his movement has the potential to turn ugly. He fervently believes "that freedom must be achieved no matter the cost" (pp 123-4).

Nationalism is also expressed through the rejection of foreign goods, which was a part of the Swadeshi movement. Sandip was strongly against the sale of foreign goods as Bimala stated that "Sandip laid it down that all foreign articles, together with the demon of foreign influence, must be driven out of our territory" (p97). Nikhil on the other hand felt the opposite. He stated that in terms of banishing foreign goods from his Suskar market that he "could not do it" (p101) and he refused to "tyrannize" (p108). Bimala even pleaded with her husband to "order them to be cleared out!" (p108). She also stated that banishing foreign goods "would not be tyranny for selfish gain, but for the sake of the country" (p109).

Another theme in the novel is the importance of religion on the one hand and nationalism on the other. Religion can be seen as the more "spiritual view" while nationalism can be seen more as the "worldly view." Nikhil's main perspective in life is by the moral and intangible, while Sandip is more concerned

about the tangible things, which to him is reality. Sandip believes that this outlook on life, living in a way where one may follow his or her passions and seek immediate gratification, is what gives strength and portrays reality, which is linked to his strong belief in nationalism. From Sandip's point of view, "when reality has to meet the unreal, deception is its principal weapon; for its enemies always try to shame Reality by calling it gross, and so it needs must hide itself, or else put on some disguise" (p55). To Sandip, reality consists of being "gross", "true", "flesh", "passion", "hunger, unashamed and cruel" (p55). Sandip cites a story from the '*Bhagavad Gita*' in support of his own path. Sandip's use of the Hindu epic poetry to support his movement illustrates the tendency of individuals to use religion as a basis for nationalism. The use of excerpts from the Indian epic poem was indicative of the blending traditional elements of Indian culture with the ideals and goals of modern Indian Independence movement.

On the other hand, Nikhil's view is more concerned with controlling one's passions and living life in a moral way. He believes that it is, "a part of human nature to try and rise superior to itself", rather than living recklessly by acting on instinct and fleshly desires (p57). Nikhil argues that a person must learn to control his or her passions and "recognize the truth of restraint" and that "by pressing what we want to see right into our eyes we only injure them: we do not see" (p60). All these moral precepts tie in with his faith. Nikhil also speaks from a more religious perspective when he speaks of how "all at once my heart was full with the thought that my Eternal Love was steadfastly waiting for me through the ages, behind the veil of material things" (p66). This shows that Nikhil does not live morally just for the sake of trying to be good, but that it is grounded in his religious views. Sandip reiterates the fact that in their country, they have both "religion and also our nationalism" and that "the result is that both of them suffer" (p80). As both have the potential to yield individuals claiming an unshakable fervor for their cause, this can be a rather dangerous combination, a fact clearly acknowledged by Tagore.

As the title suggests, another aspect of the novel is the relationship of the home with the outside world. Nikhil enjoys the modern, western goods and clothing and lavishes Bimala with them. However, Bimala, in the Hindu tradition, never goes outside of the house complex. Her world is a clash of western and traditional Indian life. She enjoys the modern things that Nikhil brings to her, but when Sandip comes and speaks of nationalism with such fire, she sees these things as a threat to her way of life. Bimala's struggle is with identity. She is part of the country, but only knows the home and her home is a mix of cultures. She is torn between supporting the ideal of a country that she knows she should love, or working toward ensuring that her home, her whole world, is free from strife and supporting her husband like a traditional Indian woman should. Bimala is forced to try to understand how her traditional life can mix with a modern world and not be undermined.

A family structure in traditional India consists of not only the nuclear family but also grandparents, parents-in-law, and unmarried sisters-in-law as well. Though the joint-family is linked to ancient India, it is still prevalent in modern-day India. Traditionally, baby boys were preferable to baby girls since boys were able to earn money and support the family, whereas girls were expensive to raise. In addition to being unable to work for a living, the girl's marriage dowry required a hefty amount of money and other luxury goods such as valuable jewelry and saris. Once girls were married off to the other families, they would have to address their new parents-in-law as "father" and "mother". As home maker of the family, the wife's duty was to supervise the household and take care of the children, as well as to please her new in-laws.

The novel puts in the picture not only of the personal struggles of the three main characters, but also little details of the family structure and what traditional Indian households were like. At the opening of the novel, Bimala is a traditional, obedient house wife of Nikhil, who is faithful to her husband, even forcing herself to be respectful towards her nagging sister-in-law. "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 the morning star" (p11). However, as she falls "in love" with Sandip, she

slowly weans herself from her traditional housewife role. She becomes more daring, more confidently brushing off her sister-in-law's criticisms, crossing outside the women's quarter of the house, and easily conversing with a man, Sandip, who is not her husband. Through her change from the good house wife to an independent, more modern woman.

Throughout the novel, as stated earlier, a strong sense of devotion is seen in the relationship between Bimala and Nikhil. It is key to notice that an indirect evaluation of the role of women is seen in a very subtle manner. In the society described, Bimala, like most women, blindly worships her husband. When she is caught of showing her reverence, her reaction is, "That had nothing to do with merit. It was a woman's heart, which must worship in order to love." (p18). It shows the average woman in the society who believes love will happen and worship is a given in a marriage. She blindly respects her husband without understanding or having a grasp of who he is.

To sum up, Tagore explains and justifies the East-West encounter based on India's indigenous culture and postmodern culture of the West in the novel. It is the traditional value-system in which the people of India rely upon does not suit the Western way of life as depicted in the novel. As a result of such contrasted value-systems there occurs tension between the East and the West. The various aspects of Eastern culture as reflected through the major characters. Sometimes it was irritating for the Westerners or those who imitate the Western culture whereas the Indians observe those with keen interests. Mulk Raj Anand has rightly said that: "He (Rabindranath Tagore) penetrated the delicate sensibility of an Indian woman by daring to evoke the vicarious impulses of Bimala in *The Home and the World*" (Anand 9). Thus Rabindranath Tagore is successful in his incessant effort in depicting Indian values in his work *The Home and the World* and its subsequent clash with the Western culture.

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