

Unfolding of a New Women-Bimala in Tagore's "Home and the World"



Susmita Bhakat, Samapika Das Biswas

Abstract: This essay focuses on Rabindranath Tagore's depiction of feminism and dichotomy portrayed in *Bimala* that is unique in "The Home and the World" unlike other female characters in Indian literature. It denotes how Tagore was found to establish universal humanity to order to understand society and culture in building a woman in era of Swadeshi movement. This chapter explores the complex psychological aspects of the protagonist, Bimala within the political viciousness of the Nationalist Movement yet unfolding her journey to emerge as a new modern woman retreating back to her conjugal life with Nikhil on exploring her emotions to her illusionary love disguised as Sandip.

Key words: Home and the World, Swadeshi movement, Colonialism, New Women.

I. INTRODUCTION

The novel "Home and the World" composed by Rabindra Nath Tagore was set in 20th Century, which was originally published in 1916 in Bengali as "Ghare Baire" is found to remarkably distinguish Tagore's ideals and beliefs has in conjunction with the patriotic nationalist sentiments swayed by the incorporation of western culture by the tyrannical influence of the British rule in the pre independence era enveloped in the deep rooted nationalist sentiments against the insurgency of the westernization of Indian philosophies and values in culture. However, English translations into English of the novel "Ghare Baire" into the making of "The Home and the World" was beautifully done by Surendra Nath Tagore, the nephew of Rabindra Nath Tagore to uphold the history of the reign in Bengal and the contemporary problems faced during these times of the Nationalist Movement in context to the political scenario which irreversibly affects the life of the characters at the domestic front in this novel [5]. This novel drastically sketches the intense battle Tagore was facing within himself with the onset of the Indian Independence Movement as a learned Scholar, polymath, philosophical thinker over the two opposing conflicts of ethics and cultures revolving around the context of the outside

world of aggressive political violence and the home within with its traditional values followed over generations to which his heart feels a deep-seated sense of belongingness. Tagore paves in the novel "The Home and the World" the emerging transformation of the individuals, societies and cultures established by the British regime of rule engulfing the Indian culture from its roots dismantling the identity of individuals, cultures and an entire nation as a whole. This essay explores the manifold quest of the protagonist of the novel, Bimala and her search for identity of her very own self as a nationalist fighter crossing the boundaries of the four walls of her conventional domestic life for the noble cause of freedom of the nation at the macro level wherein deep inside at the micro level the constant quest to overcome her identity crisis by unmaking the primitive confined self of a house wife to reach out a more comprehensive world which is boundless in order to emerge as an individual reshaping their own beliefs and conventions to become a poignant leader in the struggle for Nationalist Movement.

While the all-inclusive novel gyrates at the backdrop of the Swadeshi Movement, the novel's main character Bimala advocates the role as a conveyer of the movement following a radical principle of non-violence and self-reliance based on the central idea of the political cause. In the novel "The Home and the World" Bimala at the beginning is seen as a devoted wife serving in a domestic household setting enjoying idyllic matrimonial life with her husband Nikhil. Nikhil belongs to a traditional family of Landlords receiving a western education leads a rich aristocratic lifestyle yet a radical in approach believes in the philosophies of modern western education and culture henceforth. Whereas Bimala symbolizes as the traditional young glowing bride devoted only to the services of her husband and the household finding it powerful as the ultimate goal of her life serving her beloved husband fills her with immense happiness. It signifies the feminist aspects of the character Bimala in her own words considering devotion towards husband to be the ideal virtue of a wedded women. Again, the strong traditional household cultural upbringing she has been subjected to since her childhood is projected in her words. The strong bond of respect and love Bimala holds for Nikhil is a mark of her female virtues. However, an introspective reading of these lines would signify the conflicts of values Bimala is upholding in the mediocrity of her domestic life in the era of political discourse spreading like fire in the country owing to the Swadeshi Movement or the boycott of the foreign goods movement. She has been found to protest the use of foreign clothes as burning them to uphold the national cause of the Swadeshi Movement at "home".

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* Correspondence Author (s)

Susmita Bhakat*, Assistant Professor, Department of Basic Science and Humanities, Institute of Engineering & Management, Kolkata, University of Engineering and Management, Kolkata. (West Bengal), India. E-mail: Susmita.Bhakat@iem.edu.in, ORCID ID: [0009-0006-7261-4396](https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7261-4396)

Dr. Samapika Das Biswas, Professor, Department of Basic Science and Humanities, Institute of Engineering & Management, Kolkata, University of Engineering and Management, Kolkata. (West Bengal), India. E-mail: samapika.dasbiswas@iem.edu.in, ORCID ID: [0000-0002-1537-5126](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1537-5126)

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She sways in her cultural ideologies in shaping her individuality in a strife or conflict of values between the "Home" her virtuous life and the "world" the call of duty towards societal structure be that serving nation as an ideal of womanhood which is dormant in her till the emergence of the touches of Nationalist fires reaches from the "world" outside to the threshold of her "home".

It is quite evident in the 19th Century nationalists to find the "women's respectability" (Reed 200) could be seen in the narrative of Bimala signifying what "household" stand for her.

II. THE MAKING OF A NEW WOMEN

Bimala is resistant to the colonial involvements to shape the dynamics of culture became more profound when she was introduced to Sandip by her husband in a professional rally to make her understand the fine distinction between the invisible boundaries of the home and the world at large. Bimala had a spontaneous magnetic pull for the Swadeshi. Even before she had met Sandip the storm of Swadeshi had created the magical effect on her. As for instances in the novel it has been found she projected to set fire to her foreign clothes a connotation to support the nationalism, but was barred by her husband. He severely stirred her from her household stagnation to face the burning fire of real world. His advice was clear enough to draw her from the home to the world. Nikhil being a radical modern thinker identified himself in his thoughts as refusing to support the tyranny. Bimala portrays herself as conventional women who shapes her roles significantly in the political discourse of the nation beyond her identity of being a women. Her significant contributions to the nation remains etched in the discourses of the historical narratives and nationhood struggles through the novel. Bimala could overcome the clutches of the domestic boundaries set at home to resist the norms of the patriarchy to the complexity of participation in the political campaign of public resistance against the dissertation of modernity induced under the administration of British during the 19th to 20th century. Pertinently, she represented the voice of Tagore in asserting the economic growth of the country imbibing the values of self-reliance against the motives of the perceptions of Colonialism in the historical backdrop of Colonialism. To understand more deeply the motive behind the power of Colonialism, Bipan Chandra (2010) stated, that it was a deliberate act as policy based on discrimination for suppressing the Indians in terms of forcing them to buy manufactured products by purchase of raw materials from India. The very fact the self-reliance ideology is sensitive to the women like Bimala who unknowingly has plunged her domestic space to the greater cause of the call of the nation towards the freedom struggle representing the epitome of new women marching towards the nation of womanhood to seek the freedom of the nation to sense a glimpse of the freedom of the expression of her own thoughts is evident in the course of the novel. Bimala being a modern women has been found to serve as a powerful resisting force to the status of colonialism than to repudiate the growth and development in order to expedite the means of living depending on self-reliance for the villagers in the estate of Nikhilesh (Tagore 1919: 25), as she delineated the fact that during the college

days Nikhilesh was engaged in a philanthropic work of making provisions to reach the things required by the countrymen to be produced in our own country as for instance, owing to the abundance of dates tree on his district he went to the extent of the innovation of an apparatus to facilitate the extraction of the juice easily. Even, he went on the ideas of reviving his industries by taking it to the pivotal authority to pave the way of setting up useful units like small banks in the economic machinery. Despite having the urge to promote nationalism by promoting non-violence or by engaging himself in helping to function the rice-husking machine or new loom upon failures of its operation by the villagers Bimala stated her annoyance upon Sandip on his ways of dominating Nikhil trying to retreat his course of action on the context of the ideals of Swadeshi movement. In unfolding the understanding of Bimala this essay probes into the fact that signifies Tagore's ideas of denoting the cultural clashes through the norms of traditional and modern conventions through Bimala's voice at the historical perspectives. The essay delves deep into the confrontation Bimala undergoes in quest of seeking of self-identity invariably portraying the constraints of patriarchal notions.

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the freedom of the nation to sense a glimpse of the freedom of the expression of her own thoughts is evident in the course of the novel. Bimala being a modern women has been found to serve as a powerful resisting force to the status of colonialism than to repudiate the growth and development in order to expedite the means of living depending on self – reliance for the villagers in the estate of Nikhilesh (Tagore 1919: 25), as she delineated the fact that during the college days Nikhilesh was engaged in a philanthropic work of making provisions to reach the things required by the countrymen to be produced in our own country as for instance, owing to the abundance of dates tree on his district he went to the extent of the innovation of an apparatus to facilitate the extraction of the juice easily. Even, he went on the ideas of reviving his industries by taking it to the pivotal authority to pave the way of setting up useful units like small banks in the economic machinery. Despite having the urge to promote nationalism by promoting non-violence or by engaging himself in helping to function the rice-husking machine or new loom upon failures of its operation by the villagers Bimala stated her annoyance upon Sandip on his ways of dominating Nikhil trying to retreat his course of action on the context of the ideals of Swadeshi movement. In unfolding the understanding of Bimala this essay probes into the fact that signifies Tagore’s ideas of denoting the cultural clashes through the norms of traditional and modern conventions through Bimala’s voice at the historical perspectives. This essay delves deep into the confrontation Bimala undergoes in quest of seeking of self-identity invariably portraying the constraints of patriarchal notions.

Being a projection of modernity (Chaudhuri 2011: 92) Bimala asserts as a new modern woman who voices to transcend the dichotomy of the contrasting vision of Nikhilesh who passively participates in the struggle to revive the nation from the powerful authoritarian regimes of Colonialism. Additionally, in the course of the novel she critically has been able to understand the self-centred motives of the politics of Sandip which he was plotting in disguise of Swadeshi Movement to pretend for his own means to achieve and sustain the political power and hegemony. Besides, getting into the trap of Sandip being swayed by the incoherence of traditionalism and modernity is not oblivious of the distinctions of her own self as she projects her modernity adequately on the fictional periphery of the finite space of her home to the infinite space of the world. The oratory skills of Sandip fascinate her to arise to a poignantly politically stirred country and the contemplation of the entire nation rests upon her, however, Bimala faces the bitter truth as she becomes aware about Sandip’s ‘realm of reality’ was only to aggravate the power of the colossal man to owe the hearts of women by the falsification of portraying the love of his country (Tagore 1919:47).

According to (Chatterjee 1993: 31)[1] it may be stated that in the institution of Colonialism rigidity was imposed in lieu of traditionalism of the Indian society which paved a way of discrimination or gender biasness leading to free-flowing practices based on certain codes of “customs” and “traditions” practised by the local people of community. As stated, (Bagchi 1995: 3–4) Bimala denoting the patriotic zeal to step outside the confinement of the four wall of her domestic life at home ranging to the massive goal of attaining

freedom from the colonial oppression as well as patriarchal hegemony lead Tagore to portray the inevitable dichotomy of her character as of a Hindu women and wife annotated as the emergence of the modern new women Indian patriot. At instance, (Tagore 2005 [1916]: 8) [4][9][10] states that Bimala is in quest for freedom and identity questions about the atrocities women are imposed in the veil of injustice and gender discrimination prevalent in the society at manifold layers during the Colonialism of Bengal.

By the end of 19th century and at the beginning of 20th century women also claimed their rights to step out to the Nationalist cause of the nation and actively participate in the field of anti-colonial politics as observed by (Mazumdar 2001:135). Bimala at the apposition of the conflicts of her duties and responsibilities at home along with the struggle against colonisation at the outside world signifying the struggle for freedom of a women and the motherland became synonymous with the upsurge of Swadeshi fire. Bimala stated that as early as the Swadeshi storm reached her blood, she said to her husband Nikhilesh that she must burn all her foreign clothes (Tagore 1919: 19). By this instance it may be well noted that Tagore’s perception into the women’s movement ignited the passion of this Swadeshi era or the commencement of a new age. Along these beliefs of the woman question, are basically the fundamental concerns in the novel that are an indispensable part of the struggle for country’s independence which have often been the issues of criticism in the novel as finely observed by Sumit Sarkar in its Times (2003;143-68) [2]. Amartya Seno noted that the novel had many cynics apart from the patriotic nationalists in India (2005:109) [3][8]. However, the extremist nationalists found colonialism imperialism to be an act of threat to disrupter their cultural values while nevertheless Bimala exemplified the conflicts and turned out to be portrayed as the adventurous women in her ordeal of the challenges, she faced to question the society at large on the space occupied by the women at their home and in the outside world. She opposed the servility to traditional customs and subjection to all the means women were facing during the times proving herself to be the ultimate new women with independent thinking and autonomous in her actions as portrayed by Tagore. Tagore reminded the readers by the character of Bimala, that women are not puppets at the hand of God or the society rather they serve as an instrument of social change as Bimala has step of her confined space of monotonous domestic activities to exercise the act of freedom into the ideal world beyond the claustrophobic spaces of conventionality of a traditional hindu wife performing small duties. (Tagore 1919: 43) Bimala as a feminine figure constructive in her approach with her dynamic thinking for the country’s independence is representative of a woman subjective in her opinions despite dealing with two polarities of nationalistic ideals in the form of Nikhil and Sandip respectively one supporting cultural nationalism while the other believer of non-violence in the act of Nationalism. One the one hand while Nikhilesh builds on her ideologies by providing her to feel the essence of modernity yet giving her a secure domestic blissful conjugal life.

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Sandip elevated the position of Bimala to be like a goddess or the Queen Bee to the outside world. Upon the call of Sandip, the "Queen Bee" Bimala was torn apart between the conventional life at home to that glorious idea of embarrassing the touch of modernity to which Tagore portrays her as the making of a new woman to venture in the "ideal world" (Das 1996: 741).

Bimala found it challenging to subdue her deep urge to arise, awake and respond to the slogan of the nation—"Bande Mataram"! As Jasodhara Bagchi stated that as if the home of a women faced challenges drawn by the world suddenly (Bagchi 2003: 181). As a stream of consciousness technique in invading of the social space absorbed in making of Bimala as a modern woman in relevance to the stream was perhaps the most inevitable call upon her transformation over the radicalism Swadeshi views of Nikhil to that of the political Swadeshi hegemony of Sandip.

III. CONCLUSION

Bimala is a conveyer in her struggle for 'freedom' confronts conflicts of the home and the outer world in the threshold of colonial imperialism to assert her rights as a women vocal in her thoughts and beliefs introspecting like any patriarchal figure on future of the country (Tagore 1919: 16) Confined within the boundaries of her home she supports Sandip's call to make her the women of the world although the deceitfulness of Sandip came to surface as Bimala realised later in the course of the novel. Tagore states that women are not inferior to men and cannot be held captives in four walls of home as they are infused with divine energy as they symbolise "Shakti" (Tagore 'Women's Place in the World' 1933: 676), as women tend to redefine men who would otherwise remain insubstantial. Hence, the only way to build a civilization would be to educate women. Bimala is keen to formulate her opinions and beliefs as having the exposure to the political upheavals and gaining momentum for the freedom struggle to the cause of imperialism and colonisation. Being the new women, she advocates for women's liberation in bringing social reformation against the existing traditional approach in the society. Bimala was sensitive to retort to the call for modernism by imbibing the art of mastering English language and learned certain contemporary cosmopolitan etiquette from Miss Gilby which she read in English to Nikhil's grandmother until the fire of Swadeshi movement constructed her radical beliefs. "The principal of the project of nationalism was hegemonic," according to Chatterjee (35). As he states in the "Home and the World", the nationalistic views of the Home and the World are hegemonic apparently upon the fact of obsession with colonialism while the fact is same as colonial imperialism is actively engaged with nationalism.

In the course of the novel, the dichotomy of "The Home and the World" shapes constructive approaches to the fact of demarcation of the ideals of nationalisms of the "Home" reaching out to the "World" to sets mile stones in shaping liberal independent thinker in the society within the context of imposed colonial imperialism.

During the course of the novel at the end, Bimala has been found to feel guilty of her virtues of being a respectable woman which she has developed as her self-identity as she

converges to the act of treachery to her beloved husband, Nikhil whose money she gives to Sandip. The discourse encompasses the notion of dilemma of the nationalist projections to be shattered in order to envisage the in apt hybridity of supposed modernity and insubstantial intellectual abilities in of the new formed women. Consequently, the ideals of Nationalism fail to shield the Home – the crux of self and the distinctiveness of the nationhood, which is employed by a dual hegemonic power as for instance of "tradition" (women's virtues upon participating in Nationalist Movement) and "colonialism" (the resonance of modernity). Simultaneously, the ideals of transporting women to the World – the outside – becomes improbable, prosaic and sensitive.

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AUTHORS PROFILE



Susmita Bhakat is an academician in teaching English Literature and Language. After passing M.A and B.Ed from Calcutta University. She served as Assistant Professor in Techno India University, Pailan College of Education and now Institute of Engineering & Management affiliated to University of Engineering and Management. She is appointed as external examiner for state level private University. She has worked in renowned school as well as Media and Publication House. Her area of interest are Indian writing in English, Religious studies and Post-Modern literature. She has authored book on issues of Women Empowerment, Literature, Language and National Development. She is actively involved as convener in Conference, Seminar, Symposium, Workshops and International English Olympiad related to Education and social welfare.



Dr. Samapika Das Biswas is an outstanding educationist and efficient administrator. She is a well-known teacher and Counsellor. She has authored books & research papers on Psychology, Education as well as Management and Administration. She is convener and organizer as well as eminent member of reputed Journals, Conferences and Seminars. She is presently working as Assistant H.O.D and Professor in the Department of Basic Science and Humanities in Institute of Engineering & Management affiliated to University of Engineering and Management. She is well-known for her excellent contribution for receiving many distinguished awards in her field of study.

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