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Unit I
FILM AND LITERATURE
HOME AND THE WORLD/GHORE BAIRE -RABINDRANATH TAGORE

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The Home and the World (*Ghôte Baire* or *Ghare Baire*, "At home and outside") is a 1916 novel by Rabindranath Tagore. The book 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, Nikhilesh, 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.

Critical Analysis

There is much controversy over whether or not Tagore was attempting to represent Gandhi with Sandip. This is owing to Gyorgy Lukacs's 1922 review of the novel in the Berlin periodical, *Die rote Fahne* (that is typically translated into English as "Tagore's Gandhi Novel")^[1] where he makes this mistaken suggestion. The novel could not have been based on Gandhi as it was published in 1916 (and written before) when Gandhi had just moved to India from South Africa (1915) and was not a known political figure. Gandhi gained political prominence in India in the context of the Khilafat movement of 1919, which was long after the novel's publication, and took over the leadership of the Indian National Congress in 1920.

The setting of the novel can be identified with the home rule movement or swadeshi movement in Bengal. This novel was originally published in Bengali with a title *Ghare Baire* in 1915. It was further translated in English by Surendra Nath Tagore with some help from the author Rabindra Nath Tagore. When this novel was published it was praised by W.B. Yeats. It is allegorical in nature as the two characters Nikhil and Sandip stand for two different and opposing visions for the whole nation. Bimala is a character who is not sure whom to follow? It seems that she is torn between Nikhil and Sandip. She is in search of her guiding principle. Nikhil represents a global perspective of enlightenment. On the other hand, Sandip's view is radical. His dialogues are fierce and it represents extreme form of nationalism which is a kind of threat for the nation. His visions can be kept under blind fanaticism. It is very unfortunate that Nikhil dies in the end of the novel. Bimala also understands the true colors of patriotism and she is back to her senses. She was infatuated with Sandip and his belligerent nationalism. The condition of Bimala is like the condition of Bengal where there is a great lack of leadership. In the absence of leaders like Nikhil she is unable to take decision. It seems that

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Bengal is also divided and tormented and further it becomes motionless. Tagore's pessimism regarding the future of Bengal can be seen here. Most of the characters in this novel are one dimensional and flat. Nikhil is the embodiment of goodness whereas Sandip is his opposite in all the senses. In the whole narrative we hardly see any change in the characteristic features of these characters. It is interesting to see that the honesty, idealism and altruism stands parallel to his friend's cupidity, cunning and narcissistic behaviour. Thus Nikhil is embodiment of divinity whereas Sandip shows diabolic traits. Nikhil possess all the traits of 'sattvic' as mentioned in Bhagwad Gita. His element of dominance is lighter than Sandip. This is one of the reasons that he is wise and pure. He truly believes in serving the society honestly. Sandip is *rajasik* that is to say a person who has falls fire inside his heart. So, he is destructive, greedy and violent. His character matches with a true Machiavellian character who can think only about his own benefits. He believes in the theory that –

“Every man has a natural right to possess, and therefore greed is natural...what my mind covets, my surrounding must supply”

Tagore and his character Nikhil reflects the ideology that everyone is part and parcel of Brahman that is to say everyone is like strings of the almighty or in another words microcosm is reflected through the macrocosm. We are like the petals of a flower attached to a central stem which can be humanity through the bond of love. So, human kind should work for a global society. It should be further based on the concepts of equality, mutuality and inclusiveness. It should encompass all the human being and we should think beyond nationalism as it cultivates xenophobia, binaries and parochialism. It entraps people in egoism and trifle triumphalism bring entire human community together to search God. Thus there are differences in thinking and approach.

Themes

Political movement

The novel is set in early 20th century India. The story line coincides with the National Independence Movement taking place in the country at the time, which was sparked by the Indian National Congress. There were various national and regional campaigns with both militant and non-violent ideas which all had the common goal of ending British colonial rule. Militant nationalism had a strong showing in the early part of the 20th century, especially

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during the World War I period. Some examples of this movement are the Indo-German Pact and the Ghadar Conspiracy, both of which failed.

Particularly important to the novel is an understanding of the Swadeshi movement as a part of the Indian Nationalist Movement.

Traditional Indian household

The Home and the World tells us 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 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". 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.

Characterisation

Nikhil

Nikhil is seen and described as an educated and gentle man. He is from kulin aristocratic family of landlords, and his family prides themselves in beautiful women. However, Nikhil is different in that he married not only a poor woman, but also one who was not particularly attractive. In reality, Nikhil considers himself to be more aware of his country's role in a broader sense, and refuses to take part in Swadeshi.

Bimala

Bimala is the wife of Nikhil. She is described as not very pretty and from a much humbler background than Nikhil. She loves her husband dearly, and enjoys being completely devoted to him. At the beginning of the novel, she seems to be confined to the traditional female role, and has no thoughts of entering the real world, even with persuasion from her husband. Her feelings make a rapid change with the occurrence of the Swadeshi movement, due to Sandip's radical influence.

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Sandip

Sandip is the third major character in the novel, completing the love triangle. He is a guest in the home of Nikhil and Bimala and his revolutionary ideas and speeches have a significant impact on Bimala. He is very vocal in his anti-imperialistic views and is a skilled orator. Sandip represents characteristics that are directly opposite to those Nikhil possesses, thus drawing Bimala to Sandip. Bimala gets caught up in the ideas that Sandip presents as well as the man himself. Her seemingly increasing patriotism causes her to spend more and more time with Sandip, thereby solidifying the love triangle conflict. Sandip's first name is translated to "with dipa (light fire flame)".

Bara Rani

Bara Rani is Bimala's sister in law. Her relationship with Bimala is strained at best. She causes a lot of tension in the household. She also uses Nikhil to get the material items that she desires. Bimala constantly complains about her to Nikhil. Bara Rani taunts Bimala for her mingling with Sandip Babu.

Amulya

Bimala considers Amulya to be her adoptive son, whom she met from the Swadeshi Movement. When first they meet, Bimala asks him to acquire money for their cause. He lists wild schemes and plans, to which Bimala replies "you must not be childish" (138). After pondering their situation, Amulya resolves to murder the cashier for the money. Tagore uses him to symbolise the raw emotion and passion, yet lack of sympathy for others often encompassed by group or riot mentality. Amulya struggles, as any youth, between completing the goals of the movement and developing strong relationships on an individual level, such as with Bimala; this is made extremely difficult by Sandip's powerful influence.

Major events

The Rally

Near the beginning of the novel, Nikhil brings his wife Bimala to a political rally in an attempt to get her to join the outside world and get in touch better with "reality." Though Bimala had heard of Sandip before this time, and developed a somewhat negative opinion of him, this was the first time she heard Sandip speak. This event not only changes her opinion of Sandip, but

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affects her entire outlook on her life both at home and in the outside world. "I was no longer the lady of the Rajah's house, but the sole representative of Bengal's womanhood," Bimala says.

Bimala's realisation

Towards the end of the book Sandip convinces Bimala to steal from her husband, Nikhil. While in the act of stealing 6,000 rupees, she comes to a realisation of the terrible crime she is committing. This represents a character turning point for Bimala: While in the act of thieving, she realises that Sandip is not only corrupting and robbing the nation, but encouraging her and others to do the same. Ultimately, she ends up giving the money to Sandip and receives unceasing praise from both Sandip and Amulya for her newly recognised sin.

However, Bimala realises that she has made a mistake by stealing the money from Nikhil and attempts to have Amulya pawn off some of her jewellery to replace the money. Amulya attempts to give the box back, but Sandip steals it and gives it back himself. This event allows both Amulya and Bimala to see that Sandip is concerned only with himself, thus allowing them to break free from part of his web. It is during this time that Bimala realises her power over Sandip by being able to easily make him jealous.

Nationalism

While the entire novel centres around the Swadeshi movement, the author of the novel 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. The character named Sandip is the vivacious and ardent leader of Swadeshi. He knows that his movement has the potential to turn ugly.

Tradition vs modernism

As the title suggests, a major theme 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

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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. This theme ties in with the nationalism theme because it is another way that Tagore is warning against the possibility that nationalism can do more harm than good.

Illusions

The constant forming of illusions in the novel grows to be a major recurring theme. Sandip tends to create illusions that almost always have negative effects on his followers and on the nation of Bengal. He builds an illusion of his beliefs that sucks the people of Bengal into a sort of cult. His illusion is complete sovereignty, free of all other worlds, and an endless supply of wealth and self-enjoyment. This illusion, as many are, is a fake and a lie. It ultimately sells these people a front row ticket to watch their nation fall into complete chaos and civil war between people with different beliefs. He constructs an illusion for Bimala to believe, saying she is the future, women are the future, they are the chosen path to salvation. Bimala builds an illusion that she is to blame for this war, it is solely her doing.

Truth

In more than one way, this novel is a comparison of different views of truth. Which reality is truer is up to the reader's interpretation. Nikhil maintains an idealistic view of the world while Sandip takes a radical, nature-worshipping view. He feels Nikhil's view of the world is inferior to the real, raw world in which he lives as a radical leader. Bimala as well must compare truths. Through her interactions with Sandip, she is introduced to the truth of "shakti" (female power), yet her life with Nikhil is centred on the truth of conjugality. Each of these instances is a comparison of truth as being something simply objective to being something with a more spiritual or moral dimension. While the story ends in tragedy, both views of truth are important

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players in the story's outcome, and it is left to the reader to ponder with which he or she agrees or disagrees.

Love and union

From the first page of the novel, the love and union between Nikhil and Bimala is illustrated as something sacred. Nikhil proved throughout the story that he was undeniably devoted to his wife. He proved this first by marrying a woman who hailed from a poor family, along with accepting her darker skin. He made great effort to not only educate her, but also for her to understand her place in the world and not just her place in the captivity of their house. He shows his love by giving her freedom. Bimala also adores her husband, but in a less material manner. This is demonstrated in Bimala's daily ritual of "taking the dust", an Indian ritual of reverence not usually performed by a wife to her husband.

The tale clearly presents the theme of love and union time and time again, going from Nikhil and Bimala's marriage, through the love triangle created by Sandip, and once again returning to Bimala's love for Nikhil at the very end. This story tests the boundaries of the union of marriage. It stretches and twists it to the point where a 9-year marriage is nearly destroyed simply because of a raw temptation. In addition to the idea of romantic love, there is a sense of love of one's own country depicted throughout the novel.

The role of women

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 this novel also, in a very subtle manner. In the society described, Bimala, like most women, blindly worships her husband.

Another one of the many scenes that alludes to a woman's place in this society is when Nikhil and Sandip argue and Bimala is asked her opinion, which she finds unusual, in addition to "Never before had I [Bimala] had an opportunity of being present at a discussion between my husband and his men friends" (38). This line shows how there is a strong disconnect and there is no place, usually, for a woman in real world conversations.

Religion versus nationalism

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One major theme in the novel is the importance of religion on the one hand and nationalism on the other. In this novel, religion can be seen as the more "spiritual view" while nationalism can be seen more as the "worldly view"

The Film

The film *Ghare Baire* was first released at the Cannes Film Festival in France on 22 May 1984, under the direction of Satyajit Ray. It was also nominated for the Golden Palm award, one of the highest awards received at the Cannes Film Festival. It was later released in the United States on 21 June 1985. The scriptwriters were Satyajit Ray (writer) and Rabindranath Tagore (novel). Sandip was played by Soumitra Chatterjee, Nikhilesh was played by Victor Banerjee and Bimala was played by Swatilekha Sengupta.

Film review

Ghare Baire (The Home and the World) is a 1984 Indian Bengali romantic drama film by director Satyajit Ray, based upon the novel *Ghare Baire* by Rabindranath Tagore. It features Soumitra Chatterjee, Victor Banerjee, Jennifer Kendal (in her last film appearance) and Swatilekha Chatterjee (Sengupta). Ray prepared a script for it in the 1940s, long before he made his first film *Pather Panchali*. It deals with a subject that has often appeared in Ray's work: the emancipation of women and what it does to them and to the men who love them.