CHAPTER 4

WOMEN AND FREEDOM MOVEMENT

Woman is [. . .] highly valued in nationalist discourse and often symbolizes the spirit of the nation [. . .] national movements transfix women as living boundary makers of the collectively. (Cockburn 43)

Nationalism has always remained an important facet of the Indo-Anglian writings as it is associated with the spirit of self-identification and self-assertion. Many attempts have been made to define ‘nationalism’ in literature but it is quite difficult to draw a clear definition. K. R. Minogue says that the spirit of nationalism in India started in the early nineteenth century. In Nationalism, he holds the view:

The concept of nationalism was alien to India before the 19th century just as it was alien to all other Asian and African countries . . . When the people of a country living under an autocratic or oppressive rule, very often foreign, want to throw off that rule and establish a new political setup of their own choice, the people of that country are said to have been imbued with the spirit of nationalism. (24-5)

Tagore shares similar views in his celebrated essay, “Nationalism”, “This idea drawn upon the Indian horizon in the nineteenth century was an impact of and as a reaction to the British colonial rule in India” (01). Thus, nationalism became the vital aspect of freedom movement and “people took nationalism not as a vehicle of individual liberty, but as adoration of collective power” (Khon 29). Many writers captured the spirit of nationalism through their creative and critical writings such as Govinda Samanta (1874) by Lal Bihari Day, The Young Zamindar (1885) by Sochee Chunder Dutt, The Dive of Death by T. Ramakrishna Pillai, True Tales of Indian Life (1917) and Anecdotes of Indian Life (1920) by Dwijendra Nath Neogi. Similarly Humayun Kabir’s Men and Rivers (1945), Purengu Narayan Sinha’s Chandi or The Great Plan (1922) and Hindu Fairy Tales (1936) by Dewan Sharar are based on the theme of nationalism. Nationalism can also be defined as the attempt or struggle for
political freedom. Historical fiction attempts to make a sense of the “political and historical consciousness of the nation” (Minogue 154). Many men of letters wrote about nationalistic spirit in their writings and Rabindranath Tagore was no exception. He expressed his views quite rationally about freedom movement. His political ideas echo the thoughts of Karl Marx when the latter says, “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it” (115).

Literature has the potential to change the world and Tagore’s writings have proved it. His essay, “Swadeshi Samaj” clearly states that it is useless begging from the government for favours instead of this the need is to revive the traditional Samaj and channelize all constructive work through educated volunteers. He said, “Our endeavour after political ambition seemed to me unreal to the core, and pitiful feeble in their utter helplessness. I felt that it is a blessing of providence that begging should be an unprofitable profession (18-19). During the period of 1904-05, Tagore was temporarily attached to Swadeshi movement. He contributed several passionate patriotic songs and took part in street processions but was disheartened when the movement turned into communal violence. Moreover he was not happy with the ideas of excluding Muslims and low-caste Hindus from its fold. Withdrawing from the political movement, he turned to constructive work of rural reforms and communal harmony.

In order to divide the unity of the people of Bengal, Lord Curson divided the territories of Bengal in the western and eastern part in 1905. Famous historians of Swadeshi movement, Sumit Sarkar avers, “Bengal united is a power, Bengal divided will pull in several different ways” (17). Advocating the need of partition, Minto put forward his views:

The diminution of the power of Bengal popular agitation will assist to remove a serious cause of anxiety . . . It is the growing power of a population with great intellectual gifts and a talent for making itself heard, a population which though it is very far from representing the more manly characteristics of the many races of India, it is not likely to influence public opinion at home most mischievously. Therefore, from a
political point of view alone, putting aside the administrative difficulties of the old province, I believe partition to have been most necessary. (qtd. in Sarkar 20)

The argument of Minto proves that the motive of the partition was much more political than administrative. Britishers adopted divide and rule policy and assumed that “Bengali might ‘howl’, but would be able to do nothing else” (Dasgupta et al. 143). The anti-partition movement set the social and political condition of Bengal on fire. This movement is considered a landmark in the history of Bengal as it led to the reversion of partition. Along with this, the permanent settlement of Zamindari system in the colonial rule in Bengal, described as ‘a permanent blot’ by Bankimchandra Chatterjee, was a matter of deep concern. The outcome of this Zamindari system was that the poor tenants were left to none and Zamindars became representatives of the British rule in Bengal. This led to total chaos in the society and the poor became anti-British. The withdrawal of Ilbert Bill (Indian magistrates were given the right to judge British people but because of the violent opposition of the British community in India this bill was withdrawn in 1880’s) was a cause of deep humiliation even for the British loyal Bengali Bhadralok. Moreover, the economic crisis led to discontentment in educated but unemployed Bengali Bhadralok.

Britishers considered Bengalis cheap, ridiculous and seditious. Undoubtedly, this hurt Rabindranath to a great extant. Though not openly but he was closely linked with the Swadeshi movement. Moreover, in 1919, slaughter of Jaliawala Baag disheartened Tagore so much that he lost all sympathy for the Britishers and returned his Knighthood. Though, the great Tagores including Rabindranath Tagore’s father and grandfather had maintained very cordial relationship with Britishers, but “Tagore’s clarion call, ‘Oh, the Englishman! Come forward, and hold our hands’ went unheeded”. (Roy 06). Forty five years old Tagore already the greatest name in the Bengali literature and belonged to one of the most prestigious and famous families of Bengali Bhadralok, known as a benevolent and philanthropist Zamindar, tried to infuse passion and ardor in people regarding the movement. While talking about Rabindranath Tagore’s enthusiasm, Dasgupta et al. opine:
He composed beautiful nationalist songs, which inspired thousands and became extremely popular. Accompanied by all the adult males of Tagore family through the streets of Calcutta, he tied a rakhi on several people, including a leading Muslim person’s hand, thus signifying harmony between the two main communities of Bengal and a united struggle against the foreign ruler. (145)

Tagore inspired many patriots through his writings but trenchantly declared that he would not follow the path of violence and bloodshed. He expresses his feelings in one of his poems addressed to his former comrades, “Bid me farewell brother/ I shall no longer remain on the path of work” (qtd. in Poddar 143-44). His views about women and their participation in freedom movement were very clear. Women of contemporary Bengal were emerging as a symbol of post-reform, modern ladies imbibing the ideals of the Bengali Renaissance, still tied to the traditional values. They were perceived as inspiration to man, a guiding force, a restrain to his restless energy but participation of women in political independence was a doubly problematic issue not only in the Indian context but also in the Western world. Once the political independence is achieved, they are sent back to the kitchen with children in their laps. Earlier participants in nationalist battle, their duties were resumed to home only. In The Hungry Woman, Cherrie Moraga throws light over this issue through the conversation of Savannah and Mama-Sal:

Mama-Sal: We were content for awhile –

Savannah: Sort of. Until the revolutionaries told the women, put down your guns and pick up your babies...And into the kitchen! (24)

Nothing really has changed for women because the history of nation and nationalism has close link with the history of man and manliness. Women were brought to play supporting roles only in the national struggles. Their duty was to arrange the home and welcome the warriors on their return. Yuval-Davis states, “Women are involved in, or rather delegated the responsibilities for, the ‘biological’ and cultural reproduction of the nation” (202). Terms such as ‘patriotism’, ‘honour’, ‘power’ and ‘courage’ are highly masculinized that
make nationalism a gendered phenomenon and critics believe that gains for women in freedom movement were relatively few. If the question of locating ‘Indian womanhood’ and politics of feminism in colonial India is concerned, it has not been that easy. Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India* exposes the condition of women in colonial period. Mayo in her book discusses the inequalities and cruelties imposed upon women in patriarchal society which have resulted in the social, economical and political ills for which, says Mayo, Hindu culture is responsible. Pandita Ramabai also criticizes the system for not paying attention to the plight of women. Imtiaz Dharker describes the women involved in national movement as freaks, “who aren’t able to give, our loyalty to fat old fools the crooks and thugs” (38) and states that women do not fit in any other mould but as subordinate creatures. However, the contribution of women in Indian freedom movement can never be underestimated. Great reformists like Sarojini Naidu and her contemporaries were identified as “authentic voice of modern Indian womanhood” (v). Tagore’s elder sister, Swarnakumari Devi, was one of the important delegates in the Bombay session of the National Congress in 1889. Mrs. Kadambari Ganguli and Mrs. A. M. Bose were also prominent members of the conference. In Calcutta Congress of 1928, almost hundred girls enrolled themselves as volunteers for freedom movement and Latika Ghose, niece of Aurobindo Ghose, was leading the movement. Gandhi urged women to participate in the freedom struggle whole heartedly as he perceived them the source of immense power and they should give full cooperation to men. Women passionately took part in salt *Satyagraha* of Gandhi. Many teenage girls sung in praise of Bharat Mata, “O break down those iron bars: Burn away all these prison houses” (Sen 299). Apart from this, young girls holding banners came in the streets eager to abolish the British rule. However, Tagore was not in favour of any kind of militant revolution by Indian womanhood. He didn’t believe women inferior to men in any ways but he sincerely believed that the domain of women was different from that of men and they couldn’t play similar role in society. He said, “I don’t think that woman stands to gain in the long run by rushing out into the open as a fellow-scrabble of her mate for the same laurels [. . .] she could never be at home in
the sphere of masculine rough-and-tumble activities” (qtd. in Roy 174-75). Tagore’s views find their place in his creative writings as well.

E. H. Carr opines, “Study the novelist before you begin to read the novel” (23). Thus, it becomes mandatory to understand the social milieu that affected Tagore’s creative sensibility. His predecessor, Bankimchandra Chatterjee portrayed woman as symbol of ‘Shakti’ in Indian tradition during the anti-colonial struggle. His *Anandamath* projects the image of woman as ‘Mother India’ which somehow survives to this day also. Perhaps this was an attempt to genderise the nation. Ashis Nandy remarks, “This iconography has always imaged women in terms of symbols of primal origin: birth, hearth, home, roots and others. In fact, such an iconography of the unchanging, ‘essential’ Indian woman is integral to nationalist discourses” (312). *Home and the World* (*Ghare Baire*) is Tagore’s first novel that imbibes the *Swadeshi* as well as revolutionary movements in equal proportion. This novel is his masterpiece, highlighting the aspects of socio-political changes knocking at the door of Bengal. The extent of the popularity of *Home and the World* can be judged with the fact that in 1919, more than 100,000 copies were sold within a year in England. With the publication of this novel, Tagore has left an indelible stamp on reader’s mind by presenting his radical ideas about Indian freedom struggle and participation of women in it. He was a patriot in real sense but was never comfortable with the contemporary revolutionary politics. He expressed this feeling in many of his poems, one such instance can be found in “Kadi O Komol”

Tell me not to sing, please do not [. . .]
Are we assembled here to seek cheap fame, to get
Applause by weaving mere words,
To pass the night uttering insincere speeches
And earning false fame?

Who will wake up today and plunge into action?
Who wants to wipe out our Mother’s shame (of bondage)? (5-11)

The relationship of Tagore and his family with the British Raj was not entirely free from controversies. He always criticized politicians for their mendicant
policies but himself praised Queen Victoria in highly eulogistic manner in the article “Samrajyswari”. He said, “She was the mother of the millions of her subjects and her heart was full of compassion for them” (qtd. in Pal 309). In reality she never had time to come and see poor crying and suffering under the tyranny of the British Raj. That’s why admiration of Tagore “for the first family of the empire” (Pal 62) has always been criticized. His first political novel, Home and the World reflects the position of women in the freedom movement. This novel has two main themes running together and in both the themes, Bimala has complete sway. It is through her character, “Rabindranath Tagore threw a vertical bombshell on the conservative society” (Majumdar 246). The publication of this novel created such an uproar that “three long years after its publication the critics continued to tear the novel to pieces” (Kripalani 252).

Bimala undergoes the traumatic passage into the outside world only after the encouragement of her husband but soon realizes the true face of freedom movement and humanism. Torn between the pulls of home and the world, she feels, “Love could come in conflict more narrowly, more fiercely with politics also” (Iyengar 84). Through the image of Bimala, Tagore highlights the idea that the mutual reconciliation between the home and the world leads to self fulfillment and it is mere foolishness to break the one in order to create another. The major idea of this novel lies in striking a balance between the political strife of the outer world and domestic duties of the home. In the words of G.V. Raj:

The problems raised by the novel are, in fact, of profound significance: The meaning of true patriotism, the correlation of ends and means in any struggle for human emancipation, the pulls and counter pulls of home and the world in women’s consciousness and the perils inherent in her attempts at apprehending the truth of her very being. (55)

The violence and extremity of the political agitation forced Tagore to withdraw from the freedom movement. In an interview to C.F. Andrews, he explained his reason of withdrawal from the Swadeshi movement in Rabindra Rachnavali Vol. 09, “... the anarchy of emptiness never tempts me, even when it is
resorted to as a temporary measure” (72). Like Stephan Verkhovensky of The Devil, Tagore feels disenchanted with any mass action of bloodshed. He watched the havoc caused by passionate nationalists by burning much needed clothes in the name of boycott of foreign goods. He witnessed the anarchy between Hindus and Muslims and gave ample space to this problem in the present novel. This novel also records truthful aspects of the political struggle in Bengal and marks the situation of women who had transcended the purely historical situation and acquired a larger significance. Niharranjan Ray observes:

. . . because of its vivid and ironic indictment of unscrupulous politicians, of its denunciation of violence, aggressive intents and methods and chauvinistic nationalism, and of the humanistic logic of good ends being the product of good means, and equally humanist ideals of love and truth and any given situation. (233)

For Bimala, her husband is her world and she considers her mother as her ideal for she was a devoted wife. She is so much proud and satisfied with her position as the mistress of the home that even after the request of Nikhil, she does not want to come out in the world. As a bird of the cage, she enjoys her smooth and safe life but the arrival of Nikhil’s friend Sandip brings storm in her personal life. The contemporary Bengali society is shown indulging in the freedom struggle movement but being a woman, Bimala is not much affected by it. The entry of over-patriotic Sandip changes her life and she confesses:

My sight and my mind, my hopes and my desires, became red with the passion of this new age. Though, up to this time, the walls of the home—which was the ultimate world to my mind—remained unbroken, yet I stood looking over into the distance, and I heard a voice from the far horizon, whose meaning was not perfectly clear to me, but whose call went straight to my heart. (HW 218)

The novelist shows how the magnetic power of Sandip and false sense of glory of Bimala about her own self force her to move away from Nikhil. Sandip addresses Bimala as ‘Mother India’ which thrills her and she starts perceiving
him as the root of all happenings in the country. It is interesting to note how a simple woman like Bimala becomes the guiding force of all power of a man like Sandip. This realisation fills her mind with the glory of responsibility. Soon, she starts recognizing his philosophy that “the teaching of the whole world is that whatever I can snatch away is mine proper” (HW 240). It is also true that the initial impact of Sandip on Bimala was not good as she feels that the fire in his eyes does not reflect true shine but gradually his thunder like uproar fills her with the passion of nationalism. She accepts:

I was utterly unconscious of myself. I was no longer the lady of the Rajah’s house, but the sole representative of Bengal’s womanhood. And he was the champion of Bengal. As the sky had shed its light over him, so he must receive the concentration of a woman’s benediction . . . Since he had caught sight of me, the fire in his words had flamed up more fiercely . . . his language had caught fire from my eyes; for we women are not only deities of the household fire, but the flame of soul itself. (HW 224)

The novelist highlights how freedom movement brought women out from their homes to the world. They played various roles and their involvement in the boycott of foreign goods in the favour of Swadeshi movement and anti-partition agitation can never be overlooked. Mukunda Das refers to a song, “Throw away your glam bangles, women of Bengal/ don’t wear silken sarees any more” (qtd. in Dasgupta et al. 153). In this novel also under Sandip’s influence, the barrier between the home and the world breaks down for Bimala and she asks Nikhil to let her burn her English clothes in order to prove herself a true patriot but he protests, “Why burn them? . . . You need not wear them as long as you please? . . . Don’t wear them for the rest of your life, but why this bonfire business? . . . You should not waste even a tenth part of your energies in this destructive excitement” (HW 219).

Nikhil represents Tagore’s ideology and believes that it is useless to light the house by setting it to fire. Tagore criticizes the destructive mentality of burning anything in the name of patriotism. Nikhil negates Bimala’s decision of turning down everything that is not Indian. When she wants to get
rid of her English teacher, Miss Gilby, Nikhil replies, “I cannot look upon Miss Gilby through a mist of abstraction, just because she is English. Cannot you get over the barrier of her name after such a long acquaintance? Cannot you realize that she loves you?” (HW 220). Later on, Miss Gilby herself leaves the job after being insulted by Nikhil’s servant, a young fellow working in his house. For this, Nikhil turns him out of his house but nobody forgives Nikhil for his generosity towards English, not even his wife, Bimala. When Miss Gilby bids farewell to her, she shows no mood of benevolence because for her the poor boy is more important. And all this comes with the influence of Sandip. She feels, “Who would forget his daily bath and food in his enthusiasm for Swadeshi?” (HW 220). When Nikhil escorts Miss Gilby to the railway station it gives rise to a public scandal and the news is printed in the newspaper also criticizing him to a great deal but blind in the spirit of Swadeshi movement, Bimala thinks that he has been rightly served. This perceived cowardice in Nikhil forces her to feel shame over her husband. Her husband does not support Swadeshi and the spirit of Bande Mataram whole heartedly and it is a matter of deep remorse for Binodini. She doesn’t like his ‘dull, milk and watery Swadeshi’, whereas the passionate and flamboyant nature of Sandip appeals her. The fiery eloquence of Sandip holds her spellbound.

Sandip and Nikhil exemplify two distinct approaches of Indian emancipation. The former is realistic, constructive and self-declared righteous man, while the latter is emotionally extremist and a man of crude nationalism and brute temperament. Nikhil emerges as the spokesperson of Tagore as his concept of freedom, self-government and leadership are constructive. Through his character, the novelist puts forward his own idea of rejection of militancy in freedom movement, rejection of burning of foreign clothes and position of women in the movement. Krishna Kripalani has a point when he asserts, “Not even in his fiercest outburst of patriotism would Tagore be jingoistic which may partly explain why among his own people he was never popular, whatever the praises sung are after his death” (178). Driving on the chariot of Sandip’s aspirations in a great speed, Bimala thinks, “Would Sandip Babu find the Shakti of Motherland manifest in me? (HW 225). Sandip calls her, “the
Goddess of Country”, “Goddess of Plenty”, “Shakti of Womanhood”, “Queen Bee” and “Beautiful Spirit of Fire”. He praises women in general and Bimala in particular for her powers to save the country very. He cries out:

See, Nikhil, how in the heart of a woman Truth takes flesh and blood. Woman knows how to be cruel: her virulence is like a blind storm. It is beautifully fearful. In man it is ugly, because it harbours in its centre the gnawing worms of reason and thought. I tell you, Nikhil, it is our women who will save the country. This is not the time for nice scruples. We must be unswervingly, unreasoningly brutal. We must sin. We must give our women red sandal paste with which to anoint and enthrone our sin. (HW 232)

A patriot by heart, Nikhil has to face immense problems like Tagore as he also does not entertain the idea of criticizing everything that is related to west. Even his wife is not happy with him as he is not running amuck crying *Bande Mataram*. If on one hand, he is at the receiving end because of his mild protest against Britishers; then on the other hand, the police suspects him for harbouring some hidden design and protest in the cover of his softness. Through this, Tagore comments on the duality of nationalism. The statement of Bimala defines the strange parameters of nationalism:

There were all eyes turned on my husband from whose estates alone foreign sugar and salt and clothes had not been banished. Even the estate officers began to feel awkward and ashamed over it. And yet, some time ago, when my husband began to import country-made articles into our village, he had been secretly and openly twitted for his folly, by old and young alike. When *Swadeshi* had not yet become a boast, we had despised it with all our hearts. (HW 220)

The freedom movement against the British colonial rule did not do sufficient for women’s liberation. In fact, “Nowhere has feminism in its own right been allowed to be more than the maidservant of nationalism, including in India” (McClintock 09). In the novel also, Sandip manipulates Bimala, calls her Queen bee and the centre of his inspiration so that he can use her for his own
purpose. When Bimala calls women weak, Sandip at once protests, “It is you women who are strong. Men make a great outward show of their so-called freedom, but those who know their inner minds are aware of their bondage” (HW 255). Sandip speaks about the importance of women in freedom struggle openly. He tries to make Bimala realize the vitality of women in freedom struggle:

If only women could be set free from the artificial fetters put around them by men, we could see on earth the living image of Kali, the shameless, pitiless goddess. I am a worshipper of Kali, and one day I shall truly worship her, setting Bimala on her altar of Destruction. For this let me get ready. (HW 287)

Bimala wants to be the Muse of Sandip and fails to judge his designs. She tries to persuade Nikhil to help Sandip in his designs by dressing up with utmost care to exercise her charm over her husband. Thus, her inclination to participate in freedom movement increases her dependency on two men of her life. She goes to the extreme of selling her jewellery to raise money for solving the immediate financial crisis and puts the young Amulya in danger. Azad comments, “yet she is not old-fashioned housewife, but a modern woman such as the Western educated Bengali middle class wanted to create a bhadromahila on the model of a Victorian lady” (300-01). The moment she gives money to Sandip, she loses her trust in him and realizes that “the country does not mean the soil, but the men on it” (HW 308). Her blow to Sandip is the symbol of her release from his clutches, she says, “The moment I had stolen my husband’s money and paid it to Sandip the music that in our relations stopped” (HW 393). Her thoughts reveal her state of mind:

Sandip, the wielder of magic spells, is reduced to work. From a King he fell to the level of a bore. Oh! The joy of witnessing his weakness! . . . His snaky coils, with which he used to snare me, are exhausted, -- I am free. I am saved, saved. Be rude to me, insult me, for that shows in your truth; but spare me your songs of praise, which were false. (HW 394)
Bimala returns to home pious and confident. Now, she is a free soul. Exposing the lethal impact of duality and violence, Tagore shows how the fire of militant nationalism engulfs Nikhil as well as Amulya. One loses his life and the other is seriously injured. This novel is Tagore’s attempt to “defense of certain principles but also, in a way, the author’s defense of his own role i.e. in the Swadeshi movement” (Naravane 119). In *Home and the World*, he criticizes “a devastating exposure of those ‘black-hearted patriots’ who shut the door on truth and humanity and right, and for their own utterly selfish ends inflamed immature minds to frenzy in the name of patriotism” (Khanolkar 190). While personifying the personal relationship of husband and wife, this novel becomes the allegorical tale of Indian political upheaval where, “Bimala represents India, Nikhil all that is good and vital in Indian tradition and Sandip personifying the aggressive, Western-type nationalism” (Bhaskar 100). Tagore highlights that force is not the solution of any problem. Sandip meets with violent death and Bimala understands that her falling in love with him was wrong. The self-realization of *Shakti*, only on the provocation of Sandip is not an intelligent act on her part. Through the character of Nikhil, Tagore shows the realization of a new nationalism, as he emerges as the embodiment of a liberated soul, with love for all and hate for none. It also brings to the fore that the novelist is not very comfortable with the nationalistic symbolism of Bimala. Mario Prayer observes:

> He was also a critic of modernism. Its mechanical operation and lifelessness, he thought, constrained the free expression of man’s spirituality. He contrasted these imports from the West with the richness of Indian civilization, which he saw as symbolized by the *Shakti*, the divine female energy giving life and sustaining the world. He criticized the nationalist interpretation of *Shakti* and projected the predicament of Indian civilization through the unhappy story of some of his female characters. (05)

The liberation of many of Tagore’s women such as Charulata in *The Broken Nest*, Binodini in *A Grain of Sand* and Bimala in *Home and the World* remain unfulfilled. Perhaps, he always perceived his own *bou-than*, Kadambari in all
these heroines, who suffered a lot and met with untimely death. The development of patriotism and emancipation that Bimala feels because of Sandip is contradictory as in the end neither patriotism nor feminism is achieved. In a letter to Abala Bose, Tagore wrote, “Patriotism cannot be our spiritual shelter; my refuge is humanity. I will not buy glass for the price of diamonds, and I will never allow patriotism to triumph over humanity as long as I live” (qtd. in Biswas 175). Talking about Tagore’s women and their failures, Amritya Sen expresses his disappointment and believes that with the failure of Bimala, Charu and Binodini, he has lost a chance to strike the balance between feminism, nationalism and humanism. However, his point of view seems more realistic and true, but Tagore’s nationalism is world nationalism and he shows that in their heart of hearts Bimala and Sandip are sure of the failure of their relationship as it is based on the feelings of guilt and fear; while true nationalism is based on the concept of, ‘Where mind is without fear’. While commenting on this, Jennifer Takhar says:

The devil (or goddess) in India is presented as fulfilling many different roles . . . these feminism figures cannot be truly understood without the attachment of the figure of Shakti . . . In a broader sense Shakti is the vital and, the animation factor as illustrated in the fiercely anti-colonial Bengali novel Ghare Baire by Tagore, where the tribune, Sandip, asks the Self-emancipation woman, Bimala to become the Shakti of the nation. (qtd. in Biswas 177)

Tagore’s feminism is not militant as he perceives the issues related to women from their point of view. At the end of the novel, Bimala is not able to cross the threshold of the house and many see this as her failure. Through her character, the novelist presents the image of that woman who moves out of ghare but after a failed extra-matital relationship re-enters again. So, in a way or other, he keeps the strings of his characters in his own hands and enjoys the liberty to control them at any junction. It is not right to read the novel strictly from feminist point of view as Bimala, like Sohini and Mrinal does not leave the home but stands only at the threshold. The moment she realizes the truth, she
comes back to her husband, Nikhil. Bina Biswas presents the crux of Bimala’s involvement in freedom movement in the following words:

Tagore seems to create the idea that women like Bimala were not yet fully ready for the outside world, the space being beyond them in not its contours but in its magnitude. The liberation of the soul is as much important to Tagore as is the physical self. The stirring of Bimala is a protest against the partition of Bengal, as much as Sandip is shown to be a messenger of the nationalistic perception of the early twentieth century mind. However, Bimala cannot be said to be the ‘Shakti’ that Sandip yearns for and thus over-fanatical projects through Bimala. (179)

Tagore’s nationalism imbibes the sense of cosmopolitanism. His nationalism is not related only to the matters of geography but also with the ideal of ‘Vasudhav kutumbcam’/ ‘The Universal Home’. His works beautifully present the dichotomy of the East and the West. Though his primary experience with the West was through the English colonization of India and it also included many trips to foreign but he rejected every kind of mechanism or rigidity in nationalism. Nikhil in Home and the World says that to worship a country as a mere idol is a crime. Tagore has repeats this theme in his epic novel Gora. He focuses on reason without any detachment to humanity. S. Tagore comments on the spirit of Rabindranath as follows:

Tagore’s conception of cosmopolitanism therefore evades the critique of an empty or thin cosmopolitanism, not grounded in reality, while it also evades accusations of an unaccounted favour for one or the other tradition. Tagore’s writings can be classified as simultaneously reasonable and humanitarian with accountability towards the local and its traditions. (176-77)

Krishna Kripalani states, “Tagore [u]nlike many modern thinkers, [. . .] had no blue-print for the world’s salvation. He believed in no ‘ism’” (10). Critics talk about his political writings and ideals but Kriiplani explains, “[n]o sharp lines can be drawn to mark off the political from the moral, the social from the economic aspects of life” (10). Tagore could not distinguish politics from his
social or even philosophical writings. In “Nationalism”, he explains that “neither the colourless vagueness of cosmopolitanism, nor the fierce self-idolatry of nation-worship is the goal of human history” (05). Like Home and the World, Gora also explains the nationalistic philosophy of the writer, his idea about freedom movement and role of women in it. This longest novel of Tagore can be hailed an epic of the modern Bengal as well as India and as a novel of epical sweep, it can compared to Les Miserables and War and Peace. It deals with the theme of nationalism in India, a country famous for its multi-racial and multi-religion tradition. In this novel, Tagore preaches the role of women in creating a new vision of India. He shows how the love and pious company of Sucharita and Anandamoyi transforms the bigoted and xenophobic Hindu nationalist, Gora who undergoes through the process of self-realization and achieves a liberal humanistic approach. Based on the political and patriotic approaches, this novel has contemporary relevance.

The central theme of Gora reflects the patriotic zeal of the protagonist who with the help of three women resolves the conflict of the East and the West and emerges as a universal figure. Through the character of Gora, “Tagore has tried to bring about the fusion of the East and the West” (Mehta 28) and with Sucharita’s character, the novelist tries to search a national identity that can define the image of India which is historical as well as ahistorical. Gora presents “perhaps the most complete picture of the life of Bengal towards the end of the last century” (Kabir 41). It captures the universal emotions and bonding, moreover, it is “the only novel in Bengal which mirrors faithfully the social, political and cultural life of the entire educated Bengali middle class” (Ray 172). It also discusses the idea of the novelist about nationalism polemically and presents the city life of Calcutta and women of contemporary Bengal in its true colours. With the help of massive design, large number of episodes and vast galaxy of life-like characters, Tagore has moved from nationalism to internationalism. Tagore got the idea of the novel from his meeting with Margaret Nobel, an Irish woman and ardent disciple of Swami Vivekananda whom he named sister Nivedita. She also imbibed the customs of Hinduism such as worship of Kali, murti puja etc like Gora. Over this Sarala
Devi comments, “So far, we managed to survive, because there was only a dark Kali. Now that a white Kali (Nivedita) has appeared, it will be impossible to save the country from idolatry” (152). While writing about Tagore’s inspiration of the novel, Krishna Kripalani makes a very interesting comment, “Once, when she was staying as his guest at his Shelidah estate, she would insist, when they set out on the deck of the house-boat in the evening, that he tell her a story. So, he began telling the story of Gora and later he wrote it down” (118).

Though Gora dominates the main action in the novel but becomes a true hero only with the help of Sucharita, Lolita and Anandamoyi. Although, they are not active participants in the freedom movement like Bimala or Ela, still they work as silent force to change the whole concept of nationalism of the protagonist. Gourmohan is the foundling child of an Irish–English couple murdered in the midst of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. Gourmohan is also called Gora by his friends and relatives for his extremely fair complexion. He is adopted by a Hindu Bengali couple living in Banaras. Gora’s mistaken identity is hidden till the very end of the novel.

The main idea of the novel revolves around Gora but in matters of female emancipation, he is double-minded. On one hand, he adores his supposed mother, Anandamoyi and on the other hand, he believes that women should remain at home and only a minimum education is enough for them. Sucharita opens his eyes regarding women emancipation. Bengal of Tagore’s time was very much gender-biased and along with this, there was a vast conflict between Hinduism and Brahmo Samaj. Tagore has made this the background of the novel. Gora and his best friend, Binoy, have passed the University exams, whereas Binoy looks for a job; Gora dedicates his time to social work. Being an extremist, he never does anything half-heartedly. As an “acknowledged leader of the band of little revolutionaries”, Gora always feels, “too delighted if he got a chance in the street of quarrelling with an English man” (G 22). With the passage of time he becomes very strict about rituals, performs ceremonial worship, takes bath in Ganges and stops taking food in his mother’s room who keeps a Christian maid. He even forbids Binoy to have anything in her room. In his typical Indian dress, he looks “an incarnate image
of revolt against modernity” (G 138). While taunting on his orthodoxy, Mohim, his brother says, “Many a bigot has I seen in my day, but this beat them all. You are going one better than even the Benares or Nadia pandits” (G 64). Gora does not entertain Binoy’s practice of visiting Paresh Babu’s house as he is a Bhramo but Binoy under the spell of Paresh Babu’s daughters can’t resist. Immensely angry, Gora warns to snap all ties with him but failing to dissuade, he himself visits Paresh Babu’s house and gives them a shock with his typical Hindu looks and ardent belief in religion. He rejects everything which is against India and declares:

. . . We must not feel apologetic about the country of our birth—whether it be about its tradition, faith or its scriptures neither to others nor even to ourselves. We must save our country and ourselves from insult by manfully bearing the burden of our motherland with all our strength and all our pride. (G 23)

This novel presents various images of women of Hindu as well as Bhramo society. Women of the contemporary Bengali society belonging to white collar middle class were not expected to work for their living but women of Bhramo Samaj were exceptional as they were well educated and enjoyed fresh breath of freedom. This access of education marked a difference in the status of Hindu and Bhramo girls. Binoy is flabbergasted to see Labonya writing poetry. In the age of child marriage, Brahmo society had post-puberty marriages. Gora is surprised to see the teenage daughters of Paresh Babu still unmarried. Lolita wants to dedicate her life for social service and Sucharita also decides to remain unmarried. She reflects the spontaneity of nature and as the novel progresses, Tagore bestows her individuality and decision making powers. Gora, who has always seen women only as mother, homemaker, Shakti or Kali, can’t digest the admiration of Binoy for her and misjudges it for lust. But, the barren heart of Gora feels the tender touch of love when gradually he falls in love with Sucharita. Sucharita, Labonya, Lolita and Lila transform him immensely. The grace of Sucharita’s personality attracts all but initially Gora is very angry to notice his friend reverence to her or even to any women. He declares, “The scriptures tell us that Woman is deserving of
worship because she gives light to the home – the honour which is given her by English custom, because she sets fire to the heart of men, had better not be termed worship” (G 09). He considers only that woman pious who is “right-minded Lady of the House” (G 09). Gora himself goes to Paresh Babu’s house to find out the reason of Binoy’s frequent visits and when he sees the liberal atmosphere of Paresh Babu’s house he feels disgusted. Here, he encounters with Haran/Panu Babu, an ardent follower of Bhramo Samaj and suitor of Sucharita. As a member of Bhramo Samaj, Haran shows his discomfort to Hindu religion and its superstitions but Gora openly rejects his notions and accuses him saying, “You have merely learnt off by heart from English books, – You know nothing at all about the matter at first hand. When you are able to condemn all the evil customs of the English with as much honest indignation you will have a right to talk” (G 44).

Gora’s clear but bitter views surprises Paresh Babu and his family, especially, Sucharita and Lolita; still, Paresh Babu thoroughly rejects Haran’s suggestion of not showing his daughters to any stranger as it would be going back to zenana system. It is not that Gora is unaware of the superstitions, evils and customs of his religion but he has put his heart and soul in his motherland that its thousands of faults and weaknesses seem sweet to him. It is easy to point out the problems but to cure them is the main task. For Gora, the love for his country is all he knows. His love for his nation becomes a self-evident and over-whelming truth and there is no escape from it. He says to Binoy, “How wonderful, how beautiful, how clear, how obvious that true image of my country will be, - how fierce and overpowering will be its pain, its joy, over passing in a movement both life and death by its turbulent flood” (G 70). It is pitiable that even after possessing such a clear understanding of nationalism, Gora is unable to realize the true worth of women. It is not that he does not respect them but still his vision is limited. When Binoy asks him to see the imperfection in any country if its women are not valued, he argues:

Like the English man, you want to see women everywhere, -- in the home and in the world outside; on the land, the water, and in the sky; at our meals, our amusements and our work, -- with that for you the
women will eclipse the men, and your outlook will remain just as one-sided. (G 83)

This statement of Gora highlights the attitude of patriarchal society towards women. The novelist presents his viewpoint through the mouth of Binoy, “No, No. . . . We don’t give the women of our country their rightful place in our consideration . . . for your idea of our country is womanless, and such idea can never be true one” (G 83). Here, Binoy talks in the tone of Nikhil of Home and the World that it is not only home that should be assigned to women but due respect should also be given to them in outside world also. Their familiarities with home only do not give them true knowledge. Binoy adds, “So long our women remain hidden behind the purdah, our country will be a half-truth to us, and will not be able to win our full love and devotion” (G 83). Gora argues that till women remain behind the veil, unseen like night she is natural but the moment she comes out in the light of the day she turns into artificial or unnatural “and what is the result? Night’s secret functioning ceases, fatigue increases progressively, recuperations become impossible, and man carries on only by recourse to intoxication” (G 83). According to Gora if women would step out in open field, the happiness and peace of society would be destroyed and frenzy would spread and “at first sight such frenzy may be mistaken for power, but it is a power which makes for ruin” (G 84).

The impact of Sucharita goes a long way in shaping Binoy’s and Gora’s thinking. She encourages Binoy as well as Gora to reconsider the definition of nationalism. She discusses the pros and cons of Gora’s ardent nationalistic ideas. The intellectual discussion between Sucharita, Binoy and Gora explores Tagore’s viewpoint about nationalism, culture and religion. Influenced by Lolita’s beauty and intelligence, Binoy feels inclined towards her and Gora also succumbs to love Sucharita because of her realistic attitude. She wins his allegiance to conventions and traditions. Sisirkumar Ghose comments on their relationship, “Deeply held beliefs are the index of a personality and Gora has plenty of both. He is not immune from change and love. And it is Sucharita rather than Paresh Babu who helps to brings about the change” (73). One can
easily sense the positive influence of these two sisters on the concept of Indian womenhood.

Gora also makes Sucharita realize however poor Indians are, still we should feel shame in the slavery of the Britishers. To give regard to those who humiliate us time and again is cowardice. He helps Binoy to understand that as long as the English would be our guardians, we will always be minors. Those who consider their own countrymen downgraded are surely doing injustice to it. While attacking Panu Babu, Tagore criticises those who consider English as a fine race in comparison to Indians. Addressing Sucharita, Gora comments:

I want you to remember one thing. If we have the mistaken notion that because the English are strong we can never become strong unless we become exactly like them, then that impossibility will never be achieved, for by mere imitation we shall eventually be neither one thing nor the other. To you, I make only this request: come inside India, accept all her good and her evil. . . (G 102)

Tagore has imparted more strength to the women of the novel. Sucharita questions Gora and surprises him with her intelligence. The memory of her two entrancing eyes with bright understanding thrills him with indescribable joy. Once an ardent Hindu, Binoy’s attitude changes in the company of Lolita and Sucharita. From the very outset, he is more sensitive than Gora but unaware of his own feelings. Sucharita’s sisterly affection and Lotila’s support help him to feel the pitiable condition of Indian women. His conversation with Anandamoyi reveals this change of attitude:

. . . It seemed to me as if there was not a single woman in the whole of Bengal, whether poor or rich, who had any protection against rain or sun. From that moment, I vowed never again to utter the lie that we treat our women folk with great reverence, as our good angels, our goddesses, and so forth! (G 131)

Though, women of the novel don’t participate directly in freedom moment but in courage they are inferior to none. Lolita is a courageous girl with her own rules. She does not want to be a puppet in anybody’s hand. She criticizes Binoy
for being Gora’s satellite. The true strength of her mind is revealed when she quits her decision of performing the play in front of the magistrate after Gora is jailed for no fault. She decides to come to the steamer where Binoy is already present. On being asked the reason of her escape, she cries out, “I don’t care if Haran Babu sides with Magistrate. To me the whole affair only shows Gour Babu’s true nobility of mind!” (G 147). She openly criticizes Haran Babu for his superficial ideas. Tagore touches the height of humanism in highlighting the importance of women not only in freedom struggle but also in family life. They are not weak but owners of the power of truth. Tagore expresses his own feelings through Binoy:

Sucharita had risen on the horizon of Binoy’s life like evening star, radiant with pure sweetness of womanhood, and he had realized how his nature had expanded into completeness with the joy of these wonderful manifestations. . . “I am awake! I am awake!” were the words which rose like a triumphant-blast from the depths of Binoy’s awakening manhood . . . (G 153- 54)

Lolita is not in the least afraid of facing her father because the radiance of truth is brightening her face and she declares, “The relationship between the Magistrate and the people of our country is such that his patronizing hospitality does not honour” (G 167). Even Binoy feels ashamed when “he compared himself with this high-spirited girl and remembered her brave and complete indifference for society” (G 280). The travelling of Lolita with Binoy in the same steamer at the night creates a great uproar in Bhramo Samaj but Lolita’s love gives him strength to marry her by turning into a Bhramo. Again, Lolita forbids him and marries him as a Hindu. After his visit to several villages and release from the jail, Gora returns home and the company of Sucharita gives him solace and peace of mind. When he sees her face, he gets new knowledge of nationality. Tagore writes:

The womanhood of India was revealed to Gora in the figure of Sucharita, and he regarded her as the manifestation of all that was sweet and pure, loving and virtuous in the homes of his motherland. His heart overflowed with happiness as he saw, seated beside his mother,
this incarnation of the grace which shone upon India’s children, served the sick, consoled the afflicted, and consecrated with love even the most insignificant. He saw in her manifestation of the power which never forsakes the meanest of us in our sorrow or misfortunes, which never despises us, and although entitled to worship offers its devotion to even the most unworthy amongst us. She seems to him to be the one whose skilful and beautiful hands put the seal of sacrifice on all our works, and to be like some imperishable gift of ever-patient and all-powerful love which God’s hands have bestowed upon us, and he said to himself, “We have allowed this gracious gift to pass unnoticed – we have put it in the background hidden behind all else – what clearer sign of our misery could there be!” (G 272)

Gora’s attitude reflects Tagore’s concept of nationalism when he addresses Sucharita as a woman who can be hailed as the image of Motherland. He feels that she deserves to be seated on the hundred-petalled lotus, that too in the heart of all Indians. He considers himself mere servitor and her a Goddess. He realizes that to let the women of the country undergo sufferings and neglect is an insult to all the manhood. Gora is amazed at his own thoughts and never in his life he has realized that without women the perfection of India cannot be complete. To consider women as mere shadow and unreal was a mistake on his part. He also gets the idea that the weaker and smaller we think of women, the weaker and smaller manhood will become. He realizes Sucharita’s worth and says, “Your place is in the solar system of India—you belong to my country—it is impossible for you to be swept into void by the tale of some wandering comet!” (G 301). Gora praises Sucharita in the same way as Sandip praises Bimala but his praise is not void and hollow like that of Sandip’s. His words truly reflect his inner feelings. It is the power of her love that changes a man like Gora. He asks for her help for awakening the spirit of self-realization and depth in Hindu religion. He invokes her to imbibe the pride of being an Indian in every countryman. He talks in plain words:

Ever since I first met you a new thought had been surging through my mind, a thought to which all these days I had been oblivious. I keep
thinking that India can never be fully revealed only by looking at her men. Her manifestation will only be complete when she has revealed herself to our women. (G 313)

Gora, who used to think women fit only for household, starts looking at them as the symbol of Shakti. He thinks that without Sucharita’s help, India can never be beautiful. Not only Gora but Binoy also feel balanced and confident with Lolita and accepts, “Today, I stand on my feet!” I can no longer admit the right of society to be pacified like a demon by daily human sacrifice. I am not going to wander about with the noose of its injunctions fastened round my neck” (G 320).

During the revolutionary movement, there was a goddess-centric imagination which invoked Kali, Durga and Chandi that identified with the energy and action and “Bharat Mata became a critical metaphor of the nationalistic imagination” (Gupta 29). In a painting by Abanindranath Tagore, India/Bharat Mata has been portrayed as a young, desexualized figure with four arms bearing blessings of food, clothes, learning and salvation. But Rabindranath Tagore was not very comfortable with the idea of projecting women as a rhetoric symbol. Though, with the emergence of Gandhi’s movement, women became more involved in mass struggle; however, Tagore questioned the validity of the role of self-sacrifice in women’s lives and noted that those who participated in the national movement could never be the same again. In Personality, he clearly projects his views on women, “Life should be like a lamp where the potentiality of light is far greater in quantity than what appears as the flame. It is in the depth of passiveness in women’s nature that this potentiality of life is stored” (162). Sucharita speaks about India and its freedom but her ideas are rational and balanced. She perceives India as a wonderful country where thousands of gods worked for thousands of years to make it great. She says, “You will have to keep one thing in mind—that you have been born in a great country and with all your soul you will have to work for her . . . I too will take part in this work” (G 361).

After realizing the truth of his birth, Gora feels that only Sucharita and Paresh Babu can give solace to him. He confesses that his efforts have made
his belief in India an unchanging and uncritical one and he remained engaged in preserving his belief. However, now with the truth of his birth, all his illusions have been shattered and he is realizing the ultimate truth. He sets his heart open, “Today, I am real Indian! In me, there is no longer any opposition between Hindu, Mussulam and Christian. Today, every caste in India is my caste; the food of all is my food! … Today, I have become so pure that I can never be afraid of contamination even in the house of the lowest of castes” (G 406).

Change in Gora’s attitude is visible. Earlier, he could not eat the food prepared by Lichmi, as she is a Christian, asks for food from Anandamoyi, “You are my mother, whom I have been wandering about in search of was all the time sitting in my room at home. You have no caste, you make no distinction, and have no hatred—you are the image of our welfare! It is you who are India!” (G 407). Here, the writer has developed a universal human being in the form of new Gora. Tagore also exhorts people through literature like Bankim. The idea of presenting country as Mother in Gora has strong resemblance with Bankim’s concept of portraying India in the similar vein. Bhabanand speaks in Anandamath, “We recognize no other mother. Mother and motherland is greater than Heaven, Motherland is the same as the mother. We have only that land, well-watered, fruitful, cooled by the south wind, abounding in Harvest” (Chatterjee 683). His song in Anandamath is an address and prayer to omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient motherland who is evoked as Mother. The poet offers great praises to her. But, Sandip’s song in Home and the World evokes his nation more as a beloved than the Divine Mother. He says that his watchword has changed since the arrival of Bimala in his life. It is no longer ‘Bande Mataram’ or ‘Hail Mother’; rather it is ‘Hail Beloved’ or ‘Hail Enchantress’.

Sucharita, Lolita and Anandamoyi reflect various images of Tagore’s women. In fact, Sucharita and Lolita represent the best part of modern and emancipated female power of Bengal. They belong to Bhramo Samaj which was quite liberal; still, it was not altogether free from contradictions. Lolita breaks the rule of submission to the colonial rule and emerges as an epitome of
feminine emancipation. Baroda or Barodasundari is also an example of emancipated being but emancipation reaching its extreme and eventually opposed to it. She represents the ardent feminism which Tagore does not prefer. Anandamoyi who “represents the best of both Indian tradition and Western liberalism” (Sarada 74) is the perfect image that Tagore has created in his entire corpus of creative work. In Narayan Gangopadhyay words, “Gora is not simply a novel, but the history of the thought of Rabindranath considering India. Paresh Babu represents the free calm, wise self of India. Anandamoyi is Mother India personified, Gora is Universal man born in the heart of India” (425). Thus, Tagore turns out to be “one of the earliest commentators on gender bias and oppression women faced in India” (Mukhopadhya 286). No pride is assumed by the novelist in segregating women and claiming them only to raise rhetoric symbols, rather he trenchantly declares, “There are perpetual infants who can only whimper and call their country ‘mother’. The nation is not a mother to such senile infants. The nation is Ardhanareshwar – to be realized in the union of man and woman” (12). Such expressions reflect his idea towards the vitality of women in nation building. His vision of women is devoid of any kind of romanticism. In the essay, “Women’s Place in the World”, he highlights:

> For women’s function is the patient and passive function of the soil, which not only helps the tree to grow but keeps its growth within the limits of normality … The future Eve will lure away the future Adam from the wilderness of a masculine dispensation and mingle her talents with those of her partner in a joint creation of a paradise of their own.

(qtd. in Das 677-78)

The equality and rights of women find their proper place in Tagore’s fiction as well as non-fiction, still he emphasizes that the role of women lies in her larger responsibility towards domesticity also. His essays interrogate the gender role and gender responsibilities with wit and humour. Several examples of which are “Indian Marriage”, “Women as Human Beings”, “Women”, “Women’s Education”. In his travelogues and journal Bharati, Tagore debates
regarding women’s liberation. While presenting his views about women and their role in nurturing the society, Partha Chatterjee writes:

But the crucial requirement was to retain the inner spirituality of indigenous social life. The home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture, and women must take the main responsibility for protecting and nurturing this quality. No matter what the changes in the external spiritual (that is feminine) virtues; there would be a marked difference in the degree and manner of Westernization of women, as distinct from men, in the modern world. (126)

Various dimensions of nationalism and role of women in freedom movement are discussed in Tagore’s novels. He had the courage to sketch powerful women characters different from his contemporaries. *Four Chapters (Char Adhyay)* is another political novel that aroused the flames of controversies not only in Bengal but also in India. On one side, Gandhi’s non-co-operation movement and Swaraj drive under Chittranjan Dass and Motilal Nehru’s guidance were stirring the non-violence protest and on the other hand, a smaller stream of violent and armed forces was flowing. Bhagat Singh along with his companions formed Indian Republican Party modeled on the Irish Republican Army in Lahore. Again the most prominent point was the participation of women in the freedom movement. Millions of women followed the footsteps of Bimala and Ela and stepped out from their homes into the world. They participated whole-heartedly in non-co-operation movement, spinning wheel and supporting the *Satyaghrah* of Gandhi. In fact, “Gandhian movement, non-violence, stressing on nature and nurture, was considered by some essential feminine but the masculine or more violent faction of the movement does not lack female cadres either” (Dasgupta et al. 165).

The revolutionaries of earlier generations kept women apart from freedom movement but in 1920’s and 30’s the scenario started changing rapidly. The recruitment of promising school and college girl students was organized by revolutionary societies as earlier they recruited only men.
Rabindranath Tagore was neither enthusiastic nor comfortable with non-co-operation and violent nationalism. This ideology finds its place in his novel, *Four Chapters*. This novel presents the stormy background of Bengal which was burning in the fire of violence in the first decade of the twentieth century. It also portrays the love of Ela and Atin in the historical background of war. In this regard, the theme of *Four Chapters* has close resemblance with Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* that has the setting of Napoleon’s invasion of Russia; still, it evokes the love story of Pierre and Natasha. Tagore emphasizes the vitality of external circumstances in moulding and testing the real spirit of the characters and this experiment is the heart of the love story of Ela and Atin, who are engulfed in the clutches of circumstances. Tagore asserts:

What might be called the only theme of the book is the love of Ela and Atindra. The nature and course of the love between man and woman is determined not only by the individual characters of the lovers; it is influenced also by the impact of their circumstances on them. The river brings down its gushing nature from the mountain that gives it birth, but it acquires its distinctiveness from the contour of the land through which it flows. The same is the case with love. On the one hand, there is the inner feeling, on the other, the conflict with outward circumstances. It is the combination of these two factors that gives the complete picture its individuality. I have tried in this story to body forth that individuality in the love of Ela and Atindra. I have had to show the capital asset of their natures, as well as to render an account of their transactions with the outside world with which they had to deal to the last . . . The revolutionary movement in Bengal has provided their love with its special dramatic setting. Descriptions of the movement are of secondary importance: what matters as literature is the portrayal of the poignance and pain of their love against the stormy background of the revolution. (viii - ix)

Tagore was always against the politics of murder, blood-shed, secrecy and over indulgence of women in freedom movement Leo Tolstoy. He believed that the path of terrorism was sheer wastage of youth’s energy and going to
lead nowhere. However, many men of letters of his time and even of modern
times criticize his aversion to freedom movement and believe that his
portrayal of such characters is no better than mere caricatures and it was an
effort to please the British Government. There were rumours that the British
Government sent copies of *Four Chapters* to the revolutionary prisoners in the
Andamans. In order to give reply to this unspoken accusation, Tagore wrote in
*Prabasi*, “When what stirs in our minds today will recede into the distance
past, becoming the subject of calm historical discussion, only the imagination
of the reader will face the barrier in a passionless acceptance of this story.
That is to say, its literary form will then become clear (qtd. in Ghosh 93). The
revolutionary activities were adopted as a kind of shortcut which have been
debunked since Tagore highlights in *Rabindra Rachnavali Vol. 09*, “Just
because I am in a hurry, the road does not shorten” (157). Leonard A. Gordon,
a chronicler of the freedom struggle in Bengal, gives a penetrating insight into
the writer’s heart in the following words:

In the spring of 1908 after several murders and revolutionary “actions”
had taken place, Tagore felt called upon to make his position known. He
wrote two essays on the situation at the time entitled *Path O Prakeya*
(*The Way and the Means*) and *Samasya (The Problem) . . .*. He
characterized the revolutionary acts in the same way that he described
many other political activities in *Swadeshi* period; they were all attempts
at short cuts. “Just because I am in a hurry” wrote Tagore, “the road
does not shorten.” In a variety of expressions that an artist has at his
command, Tagore desired the revolutionaries and all exclusively
political nationalists as sudden sparks, storms, people who wanted to fly
instead of walk . . . might fall into unfortunate situation . . . Tagore’s
point was not that their action was an evil to be condemned without
reflection, but that it was not the best way to achieve the goals on which
all might agree. (157-58)

The martyrdom of many young boys and girls deeply moved Tagore and he
expressed his disgust through the pathetic life story of Amulya, Atin, Ela and
several other characters. In the preface of the novel, he gives the example of
Brahmabandhav Upadhyay, a noted scholar and childhood friend of Swami Vivekananda, who influenced the mind of many young revolutionaries in Swadeshi movement through his extreme nationalist thoughts but when he met the novelist after a long time, he confessed, “Rabi Babu, I have fallen very low ”, and Tagore understood that “he had been caught in the mesh of his Karma, there was no escaping it . . . it is perhaps worth recording this event at the opening of the novel” (qtd. in Sinha 117-18).

The novel also rejects the utilitarian quest of political leaders. Tagore was highly critical of political and commercial aggressiveness and surely never believed in the utilitarian spirit of the West as in Nationalism he states that “Europe . . . in former days organized and plundered; in the present age the same spirit continuous—and they organize and exploit the whole world” (39). The novel opens with the conversation of Ela and Indranath, the leader of the revolutionary party, a self-lover of ignoble ideas who in order to release his personal frustration follows the path of terrorism and uses Ela, a beautiful lady, as an instrument to execute his plans. Indranath has his own ideas of women and considers them bait to trap young boys. In this sense, he is as amoral as Sandip of Home and the World but a bit sophisticated. Man of practical ideas, Indranath has no respect for any emotional bond between man and woman; still, he has no objection to love until it turns into marriage and get tamed in domesticity. His conversation with Ela exposes his attitude:

The women must go amongst them, must go into their very dens of intoxication, even at the risk of being themselves laid open to the fate of political suspects. You women are of the mother sex, you have said, and if you can save these hapless misguided boys by taking their punishment on yourselves, such sacrifice, even unto death, would be worthwhile. You know Ela, how often you put forward your claim to belong to the mother sex . . . (FC 05)

A potential scientist, Indranath fails in the colonial country and “his talents, thereby, turn in a destructive direction- Shiva takes the form of Rudra” (Dasgupta et al 169). He wants to exploit Ela using her as the symbol of Mother India so that a number of young men come forward to save their
country from slavery. A parallel can be seen between Sabyasachi of *The Claim of the Road* (*Pather Daabi*) by Saratchandra Chatterjee and Indranath. Ela is an exceptional figure in the contemporary Bengali society. In her character, Tagore has filled various colours of feminine sensibility, over which Majumdar comments on her character, “Ela is the bravest of all the heroines drawn by Rabindranath . . . No other heroine of Rabindranath is so outspoken and analytical as Ela” (282). She is living an alone and dissociated life in Bengal except her political connections. Like Bimala, she also has high spirits for nationalism. Her uncle is supportive but her aunt can’t digest the idea of women participating in national movement. Ela does not support the idea of militancy in nationalism and clearly tells Indranath, “Let me tell you the truth, Master. The more we go on, the more does our purpose cease to be purpose and become mere intoxication. These splendid boys are being sacrificed at the altar of some blind, monstrous idol. It is breaking my heart” (FC 07).

Projecting women as ‘Shakti’ is a patriarchal conspiracy to snatch their human rights, which the novelist never advocates. He was against making women the guardian of nation’s morality. P. K. Nayar states, “By bestowing her with spirituality – the notion of ‘Shakti’ in the Hindu tradition, for instance – the woman’s sexuality is effectively erased in favour of a ‘pure’ ideal” (125). Indranath is developed as a manipulative figure who advises Ela to take pride in belonging to the mother sex. Like Sandip, he tries to infuse the air of superiority in Ela saying, “Much the bigger thing is that your sex is the embodiment of power. You have to prove this. Give strength, give men strength” (FC 08). The writer was not in favour of the loss of faith in humanity since barbarianism can’t be contended with barbarism.

The stormy background of the Bengali revolutionary movement is used as a touchstone to testify the bond of Ela and Atin’s love. Their deep love comes under the disapproving gaze of Indranath, who forbids Ela to indulge in emotional or familial relationships. It is his plan to keep under his clutches. He strictly instructs Ela, “The promise I ask of you is never to become entangled in any relationship. You are not for society, but for your country alone” (FC 15). Still, her heart longs for Atin, whom she rejects on the basis of her over-age for
marriage, but he disapproves the idea. When Ela expresses her dilemma to Indra, he consoles her saying, “Love as much as you like. Only the incurably immature revel in calling their country “Mother” (FC 16). His calculated ideas know how to use the charm of Ela to trap Atin, who joins the movement only for her, while she is drawn into the movement because of her love for the country and her idealism. She has been given the charge of a high school for girls established by Indranath but her main goal is to attract the young and impressionable boys in the movement. When Ela complains for not getting any revolutionary work, she receives the reply:

   It is 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 red sandal-paste of imitation. How can the dry rewards I have to offer evoke the same quality of work? Where sex works I put woman on a pedestal. (FC 16)

Many hints are available highlighting the wicked politicians like Indranath, who try to trap over-enthusiastic women like Ela by using mythological symbols. He also cites example of Krishna and Arjuna from *Mahabharata*, when Lord Krishna advises Arjuna to fight against his near and dear ones. He says that the advice of Krishna does not mean that he was cruel but the ultimate thing was that he was aware that there is no place of pity in carrying out high purposes. Tagore’s views about politicians are very relevant and interesting, as in “Crisis in Civilisation”, he says, “The standard of conduct followed by the class called politicians is not one of high ideals . . . They have no compunction in vitally hurting other people for the aggrandizement of their own” (142-43).

Soon, Ela realizes the wrong motives of Indranath and begs to release Atin, but now he is bound to his own resolves and his conscience can’t permit him to quit the revolution.

This novel projects writer’s view that once young and enthusiastic men and women like Atin and Ela enter in the fatal trap of violence, there is no return. Atin enters into the revolutionary party not for his blind love for country, but primarily for Ela. He is well aware of the false designs of
Indranath and can see the facade of patriotic work still he sticks to the movement because of his love for Ela. Once a properly dressed gentleman, he renounces his trunk filled with clothes at her feet, as she believes when the country’s women lack even a single garment, it is shame for those who keep excess of clothes than they require. This incident reminds us of bone-fire that Bimala ignites to celebrate nationalism under Sandip’s charm in *Home and the World*. Through the conversation of Ela and Atin, Tagore exposes those revolutionary leaders who provoke nationalist activists to burn foreign clothes in the name of *Swadeshi* movement. Time and again, Atin confesses his love for Ela and proposes her but she states, “I had no choice, Ontu. I had already sworn to devote myself to my country, not to keep anything for myself alone. My betrothal was to my country” (FC 37). When she surrenders Atin in the name of country, he cries out in anger, “What right have you, let me ask, to deliver me up to the country, or to any one else” (FC 45). Tagore shows how the possessive attitude of Ela and her party for the Nation is no attitude at all. It is a cage for them and all their personal and natural powers are turning unhealthy because of it. The author despises all wrong that was going on in the name of nationalism. He accuses the wrong ideals of Ela and his master for the murder of many young boys and girls. Soon, her shaken trust on Indranath breaks completely and she wants to reciprocate her love to Atin. This sudden change in her attitude, strengths Tagore’s ideas of not letting women participate in any violent activity. She is shocked at the terrible tragedy caused by the violent activities and this cynical nationalism irritates her all the time. The depth of her love compels her to urge to Atin, “Take me, Take me, Take me” (FC 51). On this, Atin makes a very befitting remark that defines the hollowness of revolutionary movement:

I’ll confess to you for the first time to-day; what you call a patriot that I am not. 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 drags them into mud at the bottom. That the life of the country can be saved by its soul, is the monstrously
false doctrine that nationalists all over the world are bellowing forth stridently. (FC 77)

Disillusioned like Bimala with the sham revolutionary activities and violence, Ela puts her arms around Atin’s neck and exclaims, “Turn back, Ontu... rescue me and take me back with you” (FC 78). Perhaps for Atin, there is no way out as the path of battlefield is closed now and he accepts it as his Karma. He does not want to desert his comrades. His debacle is the failure of the whole system and now, there is no escape from it, as he puts it, “There is no way out now. The arrow can miss the mark but it can’t return to the quiver” (FC 66). Now, he is not ready to betray his Master and his self-respect forbid him of any treachery. He cautions Ela, “Don’t tempt me, Ela. My way is not yours” (FC 79).

There is a high degree of commitment of Atin, who acknowledges his love for Ela, yet ready to break the relation with her for whose sake he has thrown himself into the vortex of terrorism. Eventually, Indranath feels that love of Ela and Atin has become a threat to his movement and finding no escape he resolves to liquidate Ela and entrusts the task to Atin himself who informs her, “Your beloved, patriotic brothers, whom you have anointed with sandal-paste on each Brother’s Day that you are not fit to live any longer” (FC 102). The fire with which Ela was playing eventually engulfs her. Atin’s confession to Ela of killing the old helpless widow for money is enough to prove Tagore’s aversion to the movement. The novel ends with Ela requesting Atin for their last eternal kiss and “from far came the thin sound of whistle” (FC 105). Like many of his novels and short-stories, Tagore has left the story open-ended with many questions unanswered, like, whether Atin has saved Ela from Indranath or he has killed her or has escaped with her to a safe place. Undoubtedly, this novel presents a love story of different genre, where revolution is intermingled with emotions. There is a mixture of story revolutionary moment with the tender emotion of love story of Atin and Ela. K. R. Srinivasa Iyenger aptly compares the lovers to Yuri and Lara and states, “They are trapped pair, these doomed lovers; but they do not wince. Nothing in their lives became them so well as their end” (91).
While talking about violence, Frantz Fanon says, “National liberation, national reawakening, restoration of the nation to the people or Commonwealth, whatever the name used, whatever the latest expression, decolonization is always a violent event” (1). For Tagore, the path of violence always leads to the loss of self-worth and through the image of Ela, he has proved this. He believed the mode of resistance adopted by extremists is nothing but aping the West which would lead to aggressive nationalism. In *Nationalism*, he opines:

Nationalism is a great menace. It is ther particular thing which for years has been at the bottom of India’s troubles. And inasmuch as we have been ruled and dominated by a nation that is strictly political in its attitude, we have tried to develop within ourselves, despite our inheritance from the past, a belief in our eventual destiny. (45)

Passion loaded with rigorous reason is cherished by the novelist but the naked truth of terrorism in the guise of nationalism is stripped off. With the love story of Ela and Atin, Tagore pictures how frenzy nationalism destroys the life of many like Ela and Atin by crushing their fine and noble emotions of life for the blind and inhumane nationalism. Through Atin, Tagore questions, “Where was the truth, the valour, the glory in it? From the mire of masked robberies and murder into which the movement had progressively been drawn, no pillar of light would ever rise to illumine the pages of history” (FC 50). *Four Chapters* can be viewed as a novel depicting the nationalist perspective through three main characters and parallel growth of terrorist activities in the country, but ultimately sacrifice defeats greed. This novel also registers Tagore’s intervention on the gender question. Only Ela can countr Indranath and has the courage to show him the mirror. In Home and the World, Sandiploses the battle to Bimala and in Four Chapters, Indra loses it to Ela. He can only introduce her into the group but can’t take over her mind. Chandra Mohanty gives a very systematic and detailed introduction to three symptomatic characteristics of the British rule in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*:

The ideological construction and consolidation of white masculinity as normative and the corresponding racialization and sexualization of
colonized people; the effects of colonial institutions and politics in transforming indigenous patriarchies and consolidating hegemonic middle–class cultures in metropolitan and colonized areas; and the rise of feminist politics and consciousness in this historical context within and against the framework of national liberation movements. (62)

Tagore was criticized in the West and countries like Japan for denunciating nationalism. But today, the world needs to understand his views on nationalism in a larger perspective. His nationalism doesn’t perceive the world broken up into fragments of narrow domestic walls; rather, his idea about the nation is based on rationality and reality. As a denizen of the world, he was concerned not only for Bengal or India but for the whole world. In the novels of Tagore, one can find ample evidences of the importance of women in the freedom movement of India. In his short-stories also, he has given due importance to women and their vitality in the nationalistic movement. Though, they are not active force behind the movement but act as Muse to encourage men to recognize the real worth of freedom. Although it is not always women who guide men, sometimes men also help them to realize the truth. Tagore doesn’t hesitate in the least to criticize what is negative in them. Kanika and Anila are the example of such women who are taken into task by the novelist. “Purification” is one such short-story of Tagore which deals with the pathos of a man not woman. The narrator of the story, Garindra confesses his crime to lessen its offence as he has committed a sin by neglecting his duties for the nation. Here, Tagore doesn’t glorify Kalika, who fails to understand the real meaning of patriotism rather he registers his disgust against the hypocrites like her who use nationalism as per their own convenience. Though, Kalika means ‘a bud’, but the protagonist says, “It does not describe my wife’s personality, which is actually a bold bloom, as one might say. So vigorously did she picket the selling of British cloth in Burrabazar not long ago that her devotees decided to rename her Dhruba Brata, she of unwavering vows” (SST 220).

The superficial modernization of Kalika has strong resemblance with the modernization of Barodasundri of Gora, who has only extremes but no balance. Garindra means ‘lord of mountains’ but he has little significance in the eyes his
wife’s followers. He feels marital harmony is best when husband and wife differ in characters. He states, “I am by nature easygoing, inclined to take life as it comes. My wife, by contrasts, is very determined, and likes to get grip on life” (SST 225). Kalika believes that her husband is not patriotic and this thought is unbearable to her. Like Bimala, she is also not happy with the thin nationalism of her husband. Since Garindra does not wear the particular badge vetted by the party, his wife never believes his nationalistic instincts.His love for books is also not Digestible to these patriots as they regard him a turncoat. For them, his printed material is the proof of his sedition and treason. Kalika forces him to wear home-spun khaddar but he does not enjoy the suggestion. He declares:

    My clothes are as a rule shabby and baggy, my general appearance somewhat disheveled. In the days before Kalika’s modern transformation, I used to wear broad-toes shoes made by Chinese cobblers, which I would forge to have regularly polished; and I preferred loose Punjabis to proper shirts, not minding in the least if they lacked a button or two. Indeed at one point these habits threatened to destroy our marriage. (SST 222-23)

The writer mocks the double standards of nationalistic leaders who are confined to petty objects and not with the real spirit of India. Nation lovers like Kalika believes that to wear khaddar or badge is more important than having real love for the nation and its citizens. While going to party, Garindra wears his usual attire and Kalika launches her assault on his non-khaddar outfit. Almost fanatical in fury, she shouts about the sanctity of khaddar. While going to a tea-party, they chance upon a real hullaballoo as an old municipality sweeper is harshly attacked. The son of the sweeper is crying to see the pitiable condition of his father. Garindra feels sympathy for the sweeper but Kalika accuses the old man for coming in front of the holy procession. She also argues that it is because of the touch of his broom to the offerings, the mob has beaten him. Thus, she justifies the action of the mob. Garindra tries to save the sweeper who is lying unconscious and bleeding on the road side but he fails as Kalika rejects the idea for the sweeper is an untouchable. The narrator argues
that the sweeper is neat and clean as he had just washed his body but she is
determined and she cannot bear the idea of taking a sweeper in her car and asks
the driver to move.

Tagore emphasises that true nationalism is not in wearing *khaddar* or
putting *tilak* on the forehead, it is in helping the needy ones. Through the
character of Kalika, the novelist criticizes imposters who sing of brotherhood
but cannot help the poor. Kalika rebukes her husband for not living a patriotic
life but does not understand the real meaning of humanity. Though, Garindra
does not wear *khadda* but lives a Gandhian way of life. He also criticizes those
who worship idols but hate human beings. Narrow minded people like Kalika
believe in untouchability and Tagore thoroughly rejects the idea of caste
system, as he states in “Creative Unity” in *Rabindra Rachnavali Vol. 06*, “The
caste idea is not creative; it is merely institutional. It adjusts human beings
according to some mechanical arrangements. It hurts the complete truth in
man” (11).

Tagore renounced his title of Knighthood conferred by the British
Government after the massacre of Jaliyavala Baag, as he knew that there is no
bravery in praising the tyranny. He was certainly not in favour of ‘babu’
culture and ridicules its sham ostentations and formalities. However like
Dickens, even in his ridicule, there is a certain feeling of sympathy for the
objects of ridicule. Dickens illustrates the craving of his characters to get
modernized in order to become a gentleman. Pip of *Great Expectations* wants
to go London to become a gentleman so that he can impress the sophisticated
Estella. Later on, he feels shame talking to his rustic but greatest well-wisher,
Joe. Likewise, Madhusudan of *Relationships* also feels honoured in the
company of his English friends and doesn't hesitate in humiliating his brother-
in-law, Bipradas. In “The Royal Mark”, Tagore highlights the lethal impact of
colonialism on Indian mind who believes that whatever is English must be
superior. Great deals of events come into play for landing of so-called
sophisticated gentleman on the grounds of reality. Tagore seems to enjoy this
moment of bringing back his ‘gentleman’ face to face with reality in the short-
story, “The Royal Mark” Pramathanath comes back home as a photocopy of the
Englishman, but his conscience awakens the moment he finds his countrymen being humiliated by the Britishers. Returning home, he throws all his English clothes in fire and with that burns his English pride.

Women protagonists in the present story are well aware that licking the feet of the British Government is an act of utter cowardice. Tagore uses the genial humour with sharp satire in presenting the upheavals of a family that “devoted to the Raj, marries into one active in the cause of freedom and the Indian National Congress” (Ghosh 17). The story deals with Nabendu Shekhar, who belongs to a famous family in the British Government circles. Nabendu also dreams to be an important name in British circle but eventually becomes a Congress supporter because of the presence of four women in his life. As Tagore opines, “The more general sycophancy and feeble spirit of British-loving Indians at home from the substance of “The Royal Mark” and Nabendu’s young head kept bobbling up and down at the doors of British officials like a gourd tosses in the waves” (SST 162).

All sisters of Pramathanath are greatly inspired by their elder brother and his nationalism. They all possess resentment for the supporters and salaaming respect for the British crown. But, Nabendu Shekhar has a shallow respect for his British officers that his sisters-in-law determine to alter. He tries to show the letters of appreciation from various British officers but receives an altogether different response as all of them mock him. Tagore writes, “When a sharp and pointed smile lit up their delicate lips, like a bright dagger drawn from a red velvet sheath, the poor man woke up to his situation and realized his mistake” (SST 164). The station turns comic when he receives the news of getting the honour of Rai Bhadur title from the British Raj. Being a true patriot, his wife, Arunlekha, rejects the importance of news and with her sisters makes plan to show the mirror to her husband. Very smartly, Labanya makes Nabendu contribute one thousand rupees for annual Congress session. Though, he fears lest his name should appear in papers but the charm of Labanya forces him to take the risk. K.V. Dominic makes a very interesting remark, “Labanya, with the aim of changing Nabendu’s mind, frightened him telling sarcastically that the Sahibs would be angry with him for supporting Congress, but, all her taunts
and remarks aroused the patriotic feelings in him” (106).

Labanya’s prank leads Nabendu to receive humiliations from a British Magistrate and it breaks his charm for the British Raj. The real Indian in him feels the passion for the nation and he repents his actions. Nabendu along with his sister-in-law Labanya and Nil Ratan receive a royal welcome by the supporters in Congress session. That evening each of his sisters-in-law offer him new clothes, decorate his forehead with blood red tilak, put flower-garland around his neck and his wife waits for him decked in red sari with jewels. Nabendu realizes the contrast between the real and fake nationalism. One of his sisters-in-law tells him, “The country can have no future if leaders like you don’t join the National Movement. You can’t deny the truth of the statement, amid this turmoil; you have become a leader of the nation. We have anointed you King today. Nobody else in India will ever be so honoured” (SST 171).

This incident turns the British fearing Nabendu into a proud Indian. The author highlights the powerful impact of women on protagonist’s life who teach him the greatest lesson of nationalism that it is foolish to seek favour from the sahibs. He highlights that the pain to flatter the British Government is never rewarded. The ingenuity of Nabendu’s sisters-in-law to change him into a patriotic is remarkable. In the words of Dutta and Robinson:

Although the world of Raj politicking that Tagore depicts in this story has long since passed into history, “The Royal Mark” shows that Tagore was actually alive to the visible and corrupt character of the politics that might easily replace the Raj, once his countrymen had free hand in government. (qtd. in Dominic 266)

Tagore celebrates the freedom of women, their coming out from the bruised and maimed world to the normal and open spheres of life. In Personality, his wish to see them as the ‘free birds of civilization’ can be well traced:

It is not that woman is merely seeking her freedom of livelihood, struggling against man’s monopoly of business, but against man’s monopoly of civilization where he is breaking her heart everyday and distorting her life. She must restore the lost social balance by putting the
full weight of woman into the creation of the human world . . . The time has come when woman’s responsibility has become greater than ever before, where her field of work has far transcended the domestic sphere of life. (163)

This idea of woman empowerment in the conflict of the East and the West is evident in “Woman-Unknown” also where Anupam readily agrees to leave his reserved berth for the English man but it is Kalyani who enforces her right and makes the boy aware that if they have paid for the berth, they have every right over it. Unlike Kalyani, the women of the family have never participated in the freedom moment actively and never go out from ghare to bahir, still the impact of their loyalty towards the nation is strong enough to change the weak hero into a true patriot. These women are not mere caricatures, but the living ideals of Tagore’s mind who believe that it is not necessary to kill people and shed blood to be a true nationalist. Compassion and harmony are the greatest traits of a real hero. Though, the writer was not directly involved in the freedom movement but he was well aware of the pain and sufferings of the freedom fighters. He was not at all comfortable with the sadist attitude of the Britishers towards the young freedom fighters. In “The Unapproved Story”, he not only brings to the fore the pathetic and horrible conditions of the freedom fighters in colonial India but also draws our attention towards the problem of casteism. It is the story of an unnamed patriot whose father was a big name in the British Raj and had acquired the title of Rai Bhadur. But, his son becomes an ardent freedom fighter and is sentenced to rigorous punishment with “lack of comfort, respect, courtesy, friendliness and good food” (SST 246). His only comfort is his Pisima, who is the symbol of motherhood for him as she is also taking care of her husband’s daughter from a young servant of kahar caste. The name of the girl is Amiya, who does not even know that Pisima is not her real mother. The author highlights how Amiya becomes an enthusiastic patriot in the absence of her brother. She leaves her college due to the irrepresible urge of the non-co-operation movement. While commenting on the courageous and modern traits of the girl, the author says:
She did not tremble at the thought of lecturing before a crowd. She visited the house of completely unknown people to collect subscription for an orphanage. I also noticed that Anil had started worshipping her as a goddess because of her stern resolution. He also wrote as much in a eulogy in halting meter, had it printed in gold lettering, and presented it to Amiya on her birthday. (SST 249)

Tagore adds that in order to carry out her nationalistic duties Amiya forgets her responsibilities towards her household and brother. In fact, even after asking many times, she remains unaware of her sick dada’s requirements who has fallen ill due to the extreme tortures in the jail. It cannot be a mere coincidence that many of Tagore’s heroines who are active in nationalistic movement act as baits for young boys to join the movement. Amiya too, like Ela, enchants Anil to take active participation in the freedom movement. The arrival of Anil adds fresh wind of zeal in her and she needs no persuasion from her brother.

The women who neglect their duties towards their husbands, children and family are not favoured by Tagore. He also does not approve young boys and girls who quit their studies to join the movement. He refuses the idea of intelligent Amiya renouncing studies for the non-co-operation movement, when he says, “She long remained a devoted worshipper of the goddess of examinations. Then, she uttered the demonic creed of the non-co-operation movement and became an ardent violator of the same goddess” (SST 251). That’s why Tagore never let any student from Shantinikatan to participate in the freedom struggle. Not only Anil but a large group of highly motivated school dropout boys gather in the house of the narrator and call Amiya, “the Goddess of the New Age” (SST 249). This title reminds the readers of several colourful titles that Sandip dedicates to Bimala in order to exploit her in the name of freedom struggle. Tagore also makes a sharp satire on the hypocrite leaders who display false enthusiasm to show off their supreme powers:

Amiya had to wear a hyper-enthusiastic expression all the time. She had, quite ceremonially, to lack time to eat or sleep . . . when someone said, ‘How can you survive in this way?’, she gave a smile—a very strange smile. If her admirers said, ‘Why don’t you take a little rest, we’ll
manage somehow’, she felt hurt. . . (SST 250)

Double faced politicians who take pride in showing off their busy schedule and pretend that they are sacrificing all their leisure for the mother India are exposed by the writer. Amiya has devoted all her time for the revolutionary activities and has a little time to see her brother who is the real patriot. Her brother also tries to encourage her saying that personal relation is not for her, she belongs to the entire country and the whole age is waiting for her. Failed on the front of familial relationships, the narrator searches solace in the spiritual books. When he finds that a servant girl, Harimati, is pressing his feet to make him relax from the body-aches, he contemplates, “She had come as the representative of all the women of my country to acknowledge it . . . . I have received many garlands many gathering after coming out of prison, but this little show of honour from an unknown girl touched my heart” (SST 250-51).

The freedom fighter Amiya who is working for the emancipation of Mother India does not have any respect for the girls of village whom Pisima gives shelter. She can’t bear that a low caste woman is tending her dada’s feet and turns her out of the house. She argues with the author that the girls like Harimati are growing up in rich household and snatching the share of those poor girls who are really in need. In her blind enthusiasm, Amiya doesn’t care for her brother’s illness and makes him translate her writing for the festival of Brother’s Day, which reads, “With the advent of the present age, brother’s brow, waiting for its auspicious anointment from the sisters of Bengal, has grown immensely beyond the narrowness of domestic privacy, beyond the boundaries of the individual home” (SST 252).

Anil, who is secretly in love with Amiya, expresses his desire to the narrator to marry her, who is “his idol, the Goddess of the new Age” (SST 254). He also mentions that she is also willing to marry him. But, when the narrator exposes the secret of her birth to Anil, he changes his mind altogether. Though, the narrator tries to make him understand that “The sins of the ancestors are washed away at birth. You can see that clearly in Amiya’s instance. She is like a lotus without any mark of the slime from it sprang” (SST 254). Disillusioned Anil leaves Calcutta to preach Swaraj in Kumilla. Tagore
writes that after the discloser of Amiya’s secret, The Brothers’ Day Committee of the New Bengal never worked in the same way it used to be. Thus, the writer makes a sarcastic comment on the false nationalism and fake attachment of Anil and youth like him whose love evaporates with the slightest heat of casteism. The writer criticizes the mock nationalism of Anil as well as Amiya as both don’t realize the truth behind it and uses it according to their own comfort. Tagore’s nationalism has a universal appeal and it is free from narrow dogmatic boundaries. He perceives women as pious creations of God, source of truth and serenity. Any violence is sure to ruin them and their feminine supremacy.

The freedom movement was only a short activity period for Tagore; after which, he was disillusioned by its ways. Though, he had been taken to task by his contemporaries and rivals for his attitude but he put himself aside after some initial active participation. Tagore was not the first writer who was against the false notion related to nationalistic activities. Leo Tolstoy, Herman Manville, Walt Whitman, W. B. Yeats and Ernest Hemingway were also not in favour of unnecessary bloodshed and violence related to nationalistic conflict. In fact, Hemingway called the decadent, dissolute and damaged generation after World War I as ‘The Lost Generation’. Similar notion can be heard in the voice of G. B. Shaw, when he sarcastically and comically dissolves the mist of pseudo bravery around nationalism and war in *Arms and the Man* and mocks the romantic ideas associated with it. He is quite realistic, when he makes Sergius confess to Raina, “Soldering, my dear Madam, is the coward’s art of attacking mercilessly when you are strong and keeping out of harm’s way when you are weak” (Act II, 29). Not only this, Shaw makes Captain Bluntschli propound the similar views, when he pricks the bubble of bravery and says that war must be based on values not on romantic ideas. He speaks to Sergius, “I am a professional soldier! I fight when I have to and am very glad to get out of it, when I have not to. You are only an amateur; you think fighting is an amusement.” (Act III, 63). Tagore was not in favour of loss of humanity at any level turning human hearts into deserts; he trenchantly states again and again
that dignity of human soul is in compassion which brings it near to God than anything else.

It seems that Tagore was highly influenced by his Irish friend and poet, W. B. Yeats, who was also against the intellectual hatred in women. He was also not in favour of the participation of women in freedom struggle and in “No Second Troy”, he accuses Maud Gonne for inciting the ignorant men of Ireland for the violence against the British rule. He also laments for her beauty that has been wasted in the political activities. He warns his daughter Anne against all types of intellectual hatreds and over-involvements. In “A Prayer to My Daughter”, Yeats writes:

An intellectual hatred is the worst,

So let her think opinions are accursed.

Have I not seen the loveliest woman born
Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn,
Because of her opinionated mind
Barter that horn and every good
By quiet natures understood

For an old bellows full of angry wind? (57-64)

Tagore also doesn’t approve the trait of hatred in his women. Most of his heroines, whether it is Bimala, Ela, Labanya, Lolita, Sucharita or Amiya are awarded the images of Shakti, to be worshiped, but rarely followed. They are forced to remain on the pedestal of inspiration rather than being accepted as leaders of the freedom movement. Sooner or later, the women of his fiction come to understand the reality of their roles and are compelled to step back due to one reason or the other. Dasgupta et al. have rightly opined:

Rabindranath seems to think, as Yeats did, that beautiful, emancipated, talented women are only degraded by taking part in modern politics . . . Like his friend Yeats he distrusted above all the role of women in politics. Not only Bimala and Ela in his fiction, but political women in real life and his own circle did not please him – for example, his niece Sarala or Sister Nibedita whom he both respected and opposed. (172- 73)
Tagore moved ahead in the journey of life for building a new nation embellished with powerful intellectuals having capacity to choose between right and wrong. For this purpose, he established *Shantinikaten* as a centre of culture and intellect in pre-independence Bengal. The result of this conflict goes more on the side of personal arena debunking idealism of the political leaders of that time. He has always been charged with positive energy and attitude while awarding a respectable position to Indian women in the well defined space and freedom struggle cannot be termed as a well defined space because it is informed with all kinds of complexities of the political life and dangers for women.
Works Cited


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