Chapter-V

THE HOME AND THE WORLD & FOUR CHAPTERS
Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high:

Where knowledge is free:

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls:

Where words come out from the depth of truth:

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection:

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit:

Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action-

Into that heaven of freedom my Father let my country Awake.
"Nationalism can rouse the noblest sentiment in man as well as basis to propensities of human character. It can be vehicle of culture as well as engine of oppression. It can unify as well as disrupt. Its contribution to the sum total of human welfare has been great but its contribution to human misery has been perhaps greater."¹

Tagore’s novel ‘The Home and The World’ has much to say about this theme. At the time when uninhibited emotionalism of the Swadeshi movement was beginning to reap its bitter harvest, hundreds of young Bengalis were drawn into the boycott and terrorist movement, and the burning of foreign cloth was like a ritual offering to the national self-respect, ‘The Home and The World’ and later Four Chapters emerged right against the political weapons of boycott and terrorist movement under the banner of patriotism.

The novel aroused a storm of controversy in Bengal and the author was mercilessly reviled. Krishna Kripalani wrote of the shattering effect of this novel in the following words:

"The Portrayal of the revolutionary patriot who has no scruples to deceive his friend and seduce his trustful wife was so vividly drawn that the author was accused of being immoral and unpatriotic. For three years after its publication the critics continued to tear the novel to pieces."²

In The Home and the World, Tagore has introduced two themes, ‘the Swadeshi movement and the extra-marital love affair’ – while the first theme has the political overtones where as the second exposes the murky morality of the high society.
"Through this Rabindranath threw a veritable bomb shall on the conservative society."³

Tagore was a champion of national movement, a composer of patriotic songs, writer of our national anthem, an inspiring anticolonial activist, a vigorous critic of western imperialism, he was considered a precursor to Gandhi, Romain Rolland had described a meeting between Tagore and Gandhi as one between “a philosopher and an apostle, a St. Paul and a Plato”⁴. So why has Tagore’s reputation fell when published *The Home and The World* in 1915 and even further when he published *Nationalism* in 1918 and *Four Chapters* in 1934. The reasons are not so much poetical but ideological and philosophical.⁵ Tagore’s vision of universal human unity, of living bonds in society⁶ of spontaneous expression of man as a social being⁷ of his equation of nation with the universe. (*The Home and The World*, p. 37)

Tagore’s vision of human unity and equality, and his critique of modern civilization with its twin principles of materialism and nationalism, is recurrent in all his works. His vision emerges most explicitly and powerfully, however in several of his lectures and Addresses, including ‘My Life’, ‘My School’, ‘My Religion’, ‘Civilization and Progress’, ‘Nationalism in India’, ‘Nationalism in Japan’, ‘Nationalism in the West’, as well as in his novels ‘Gora’, ‘The Home and The World’ and *Four Chapters*. In each of these works, Tagore most engagingly and energetically investigates what has gone wrong with the world and where the remedy lies.

**Back Ground : Human Values Vs. Power Values**

Before discussing the novel, it will be worthwhile to have a look at the historical background of the novel. Like the evolution of Tagore’s religious philosophy, his philosophy of nation too had its own independence and did not fall in tune with the changing moods of Bengal politics.

Tagore’s disenchantment with the national movement grew out of his bitter experiences of the Swadeshi movement. Following Lord Curzon’s peremptory decision to divide Bengal, the epicenter of political unrest in colonized India, on communal basis, a protest movement called Swadeshi was born. It was conceived as a political strategy to resist the British policy of ‘divide and rule’ by arousing the spirit of nationalism in the hearts of the people and boycotting British goods with the
aim of encouraging native crafts and industries. Tagore welcomed the movement and was an active participant – he wrote fiery pamphlets, composed many patriotic songs and poems which fired the imagination of millions of his country men. Tagore’s *Ekla Chalorey*, one of the most popular songs of ‘Tagore (the most favorite Rabindra Sangeet of Gandhiji) was composed during the Swadeshi movement. Ezra Pound was not far from the truth when he said, ‘Tagore has sung Bengal into nation’ and in the days of his enthusiasm, even played a part in establishing a weaving centre and a match stick factory, though he later admitted in his autobiography that the ‘matches refused to light and the loom expired after manufacturing a solitary novel.’ His first disillusionment started at the sight of burning of foreign cloth. The illiterate poor, to whom Swadeshi was a meaningless, abstract term and refused to dance to the Swadeshi tune, since they considered it as upper-caste movement, What was more distressing to Tagore was the poorer sections who could not afford like the rich land owners the luxury of burning cloth, they were forcibly made to burn their cloth at the cost of their jobs and wages and led them to the brink of starvation. There was still another group of protestors, the Muslims. Who refused to participate in the Swadeshi movement since they looked upon Swadeshi as an assertion of aggressive Hindu nationalism promoting Hindu sentiments? The Shivaji festival was an implicit expression of Hindu nationalism. Initiative for Hindu unification was taken by Bal Gangadhar Tilak who started ‘Ganapati Puja’ and established ‘Gorakshini Sabha’ in 1893. Inspite of caste differences the Hindus considered it to be a sacred duty to protect the cow from slaughter. It became a panic both to the Muslims and Britishers and to foil the Hindu unification serious communal riots took place in Bihar, Bombay and many other places. Till then people of both the communities were least concerned in matters of cow but the Britishers to maintain differences between the two communities made it a political issue by exposing danger in Hindu attempt of cow protection. The differences between the two communities increased by leaps and bounds and communal tensions and riots increased numerically and the government abetted infavour of the Muslims.

Among other matters, Muslim’s objection to the song, *Bandemataram*, from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s novel *Anandamath*, was widely used as a national anthem. It was a Bengali, Hindu song, which the Muslim League said the congress was “.... Foisting as a national anthem upon the country in callous disregard of the
feelings of the Muslims.” Ironically it was Tagore who himself set the music to the song, showed aversion to use it as a movement’s theme song alleging it as non-secular. In the novel we see Nikhil’s disregard for Bandemataram is a serious matter to Bimala who says:

And yet it was not that my husband refused to support Swadeshi or was in any way against the cause. Only he had not been able whole-heartedly to accept the spirit of Bandemataram (p.26).

Later song of Tagore’s which was clearly secular and had none of the overtones of Bandemataram was transliterated into Hindi and used as the national anthem. This song “Jana-Gana-Mana” later was also adopted as the national anthem of free India.

“The communal riots of 1906-07 are the tragic consequences of the Hindu dominated movement and perhaps the immediate cause for the decline of this phase of nationalism.” These riots took place in parts of what is now Bangladesh over nationalist movement and boycott. In this novel Tagore voices through Nikhil that the Hindu-dominated movement was some what responsible for communal riots.

A number of Mahomedan preachers are being sent over from Dacca. The Mussulmans in my territory had come to have almost as much of an aversion to the killing of cows as the Hindus. But now cases of cow-killing are cropping up here and there. I had the news first from some of my Mussulman tenants with expressions of their disapproval. (p.217)

The British imperialist forces were greatly responsible for fanning this divisive passion among the Muslims. The British rulers’ divide – and rule policy was aimed at creating hatred among the Muslims against the Hindus. The British foisted an upper-caste character upon the national movement and propagated the theory that the movement was an attempt by high-caste Hindus to establish control over the body-politic. In the in famous Rowlatt Committee Report the ‘badralok’ identity of the terrorists of Bengal was emphasized.
"As soon as the national movement entered the phase of mass struggle in 1905, the colonial administrators, ideologues and publicists began to portray it as a Brahmin and upper-caste movement whose objective was to substitute the benevolent British rule with tyrannical upper-caste rule. The fact that Ranade, Ghokhale, Tilak, Aurobindo Ghosh, Lajpat Roy, Mahatma Gandhi, C.R. Das, Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, C. Rajagopalachari and Subhas Chandra Bose were upper-caste by birth was held out as proof of the theory of the upper-caste character of the national movement. Similarly, the infamous Rowlett Committee report emphasized the Brahralok character of the Revolutionary Terrorists of Bengal.”  

Lord Curzan himself went to Dacca to tell the Muslims that the creation of East Bengal as a separate province would pave the way for Muslim domination over it. The sporadic incidents of communal riots that took place in parts of East Bengal over Swadeshi movement and boycott were alleged by Muslims to be the result of interference by the Hindus (Swadeshi) over their free choices. They were being forced to purchase coarse indigenous clothes and salt and dirty sugar instead of fine British made clothes and white British salt. The government propaganda singled this out as the direct cause of riots.

According to Tagore not only did the Britishers foil the attempts of Hindu-Muslim unity but even the unification of Hindus with their extreme Hindu sentiments kept the Muslims away from their folds. Though the British government maintained a diplomatic role in the Machiavellian way for all these differences, the Britishers were not to be blamed alone. In the first instance he blamed the Hindus who maintained exclusiveness from the Muslims. They were scorned, exploited, injured, provoked and humiliated socially, politically and economically. And ultimately retribution came to us from the Muslim under the British rule.

Through the character of Sandip Tagore exposed the Swadeshi tyranny and Hindu bias in the movement.
We have shouted ourselves hoarse, proclaiming the Mussulmans to be our brethren, we have come to realise that we shall never be able to bring them wholly round to our side. So they must be suppressed altogether and made to understand that we are the masters. (p.158)

Tagore was uniquely complex in his attitude towards nationalism. He inaugurated the meeting of the congress party that was held in Calcutta in 1896 by singing "Bandemataram" to his own tune. He composed his celebrated piece "Shivaji's Utsav" at that time and was inspired by the Shivaji festival introduced by Maharashtra's Balgangadhar's Tilak.

Rabindranath himself was deeply scarred by the outcome of Swadeshi which he had earlier embraced. *The Home and The World*, produced out of the ravages of time, relives some of the poet's own anguish. In a series of essays written shortly after this novel, Tagore would aggressively decry the goals and outcome of nationalist politics. Nationalism in the west, he claimed, had produced a mindless hungering, after material wealth and political power, its ultimate terrifying form being imperialist domination of other people of the world.

Actively distinguishing nationalist ideologies from the true love of one's country, Tagore insisted that, "The thing we in India have to think of is this – to remove those social customs and ideals which have generated a want of self-respect and a complete dependence on those above us."14

As early as 1908 he put his position succinctly in a letter replying to the criticism of Abala Bose, the wife of a great Indian scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose:

"I will not buy a glass for the price of diamonds, and I will never allow patriotism to triumph over humanity as long as I live."15

Tagore withdrew from politics claiming that what India needed was constructive work coming from within. Not only in Santiniketan but also in his family estates he tried to launch schemes of rural reconstruction on lines that he had
thought out and learnt from the experience of agriculture and other field in different countries. Tagore’s plan of action was taken up by Gandhiji years after wards.

The novel is important as it not only revealed the social and political tyranny of the time but also foresighted the present context of terrorism.

“If it (The Home and The World) still reads as highly controversial matter, nearly forty years after the end of colonial rule in India and almost eighty years since the time in which the novel was set, it is because it has remained so astonishingly relevant. Indeed it has become increasingly so as the terrorist movement that Tagore described when it was in its infancy as a movement of romantic idealism, impractical and misdirected, has developed into a tough utterly professional system and a threat in all parts of the world.”

It should be remembered that “this novel is equally a testament of Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence, of love, and truth, of his insistence warning that evil means must vitiate the end, however nobly conceived.”

*The Home and the World* was regarded as popular as unpatriotic because Sandip’s patriotism reveals the nature of the patriotism of those Swadeshi movements. As a political novel, its great merits are obvious to anyone, but Tagore’s as usual blending of lyricism, realism and romance made the novel lack seriousness. The villain in the novel is shown as a hero who looks more like a comedian. Anita Desai is right in pointing out that in his vanity, arrogance, greed and nihilism Sandip “resembles nothing so much as the conventional black guard of the Indian stage or the Bombay cinema, stroking his handle bar moustache as he gloats over a bag of gold and a cowering maiden.”

Upon its publication, the novel was praised by Tagore’s friends William Rothenstein and W.B. Yeats. A friend of Einstein advised him in an upbeat tone, “You must read it – the finest novel I’ve read for a long time.” Hermann Hesse, reviewing it, spoke of its “purity and grandeur”, and Bertolt Brecht observed in his dairy, “A wonderful book, strong and gentle.” However E.M. Forster and George
Lukacs did not find much positive in the novel. In a condescending tone, Forster dismissed the book as a “tragedy... about nothing: a ‘roman a trios’ with all the hackneyed situations from which novelists are trying to emancipate themselves in the west.”

Lukacs’s vehemence against Tagore, derived, not only from the ideological content of the novel, but also from its form and techniques: the characters are stereotyped, the novel is tedious, “propagandistic” and “demagogically one sided”, the hero idealized and white washed, the opponent blackened and caricatured. The novel is not a novel but a pamphlet. “If the Indian novel is to be judged by the same standards as European novels, then Lukacs’ charges have an apparent truth in them. The principles of European literature, however do not apply verbatim to non-European writings. Marxist criticism is inconsistent with its philosophy of class and history if it expects the realism and psychologism of European literature in an Indian novel of an earlier part of this century. Lukacs should have looked at the novel in its own historical perspective and freed himself from European categorization.

The popularity of The Home and The World lies not only in its historical content but also in its social and global content. Tagore was predictably hostile to communal sectarianism, such as a Hindu orthodoxy that was as antagonistic to Christian Islamic and Sikh perspectives. Even nationalism seemed to be a suspect to him because of his attitude towards traditional Indian culture over broad cultural diversity...He wanted Indians to learn what is going on elsewhere, how others lived, what they valued and so on, while remaining interested and involved in their own culture and heritage. Unlike Gandhi, who promoted traditional Indian culture, Tagore was not dismissive to western civilization. This made him unpopular nationally.

Ghare Baire is a product of a more substantive change in the notion of art and culture. He blended the domestic plot with the novel of ideas. The love plots were integrated with incessant debate over public, political and social issues between the protagonists. This form is also represented in Gora.

The narrative is structured in the form of diary entries written by the three characters. This technique allows the reader to see the events in multiple perspectives and comprehend their relative effects on the mind of these characters, but the
psychological probing in these extended diary monologues also slows down the novel’s progress, making it some what repetitive and static, with fewer real incidents and dramatic actions featuring in the narrative. This method of telling also gives rise to long, confessional, descriptive passages, often effusive, sentimental and strung on a high moral key, which might sound false and tedious to the western ear but which was an integral part of the Bengali style, particularly for Tagore who was at once a poet, philosopher and novelist.

Tagore adapted the more colloquial *Chalitbhasa* instead of the formal in the novel. As it is written in the dairy form, *Chalitbhasa* carries a more ambitious significance. This is his first innovation. The second innovation concerned the intensification of a preoccupation already present in Tagore. This was the attention to gender, specially relating to questions of women’s choices and desires. Tagore inherited his concern with women’s condition from his Brahmó background.

Each separate sub-narrative, designed as a soliloquy, contains the words of others and the arguments of others refigured and re-animated by the narrative requirements of each sub-narrative. It is composed as a series of interwoven soliloquies by the three major characters, who sometimes, narrate through flash backs, and some times report on the on-going flow of events. Sandip and Bimala act as two poles that coalesce and come apart at different times which frame Nikhil, lonely and distinctive at all times. As P.K. Datta points out, “Tagore thus provides a heteroglossia as the perspectives are constantly changing.”

There are three principal characters – Nikhil, Bimala (Nikhil’s wife) and Sandip (Nikhil’s friend) whose separate autobiographical narratives intertwine to make the novel. This technique was used earlier by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in his *Rajani*. But Tagore surpassed Bankim as he made his characters register their psychological reactions besides narrating the events of their lives. As Masti Venkatesa Iyengar has aptly put it:

*Rabindranath accomplished the task in the story with extraordinary success making, The Home and The World a master piece of narrative whose achievement is all the greater because of the difficult method adopted.*
The novel deals with the experiences of three characters during the volatile period of Swadeshi: Nikhil, a benevolent, enlightened and progressive Zamindar; his friend Sandip, a charismatic nationalist leader, Nikhil's wife Bimala who is happy at the outset in her traditional role as a Zamindar's wife, but who encouraged by her husband steps out of home to better acquaint herself with the world and find a new identity for the Indian woman. At the sight of Sandip, she emotionally trips, vacillates between him and her husband until she returns home, bruised and humiliated but with a more mature understanding of both the self and the world.

Tagore elevates the simple story of a love triangle to literary hights by making two male characters of different ideologies.

*Nikhil* represents, Tagore's view of patriotism on constructive lines rather than political, emotional and tyrannical approach. While Sandip represents aggressive nationalism rather than ethical or human grounds. Bimala is torn between the two contradictory elements of truth and force, reason and emotion, idealism and opportunism. The book appears to present many of its readers with a transparent statement of Rabindranath's personal distrust of militant nationalism and his hence forth permanent commitment to peaceful social change. Bimala in this allegorical reading is the figure of the nation and the strife of Nikhil and Sandip a battle over competing visions of a sovereign India.27

In this novel the entire theme centres around Bimala who is introduced in the opening chapter itself, where she tells her story in first person.

Bimala, the wife of Nikhil, is a dark, tall, slim 'lanky' woman with lustrous eyes. She is a beauty conscious woman often grieves that God has done her injustice by giving dark complexion to both her husband and herself. But her earlier illusion of physical beauty of her husband is dispelled by the inner beauty of Nikhil's. Later she develops a devotional attitude towards him who in spite of his fabulous wealth is known for his virtuous way of life like non-drinking and abstinence. She often feels proud of Nikhil's sincerity who is far from the long established zamindari's tradition of losing one self in wine and women.

But in spite of this extremely happy conjugal life, there remained a subtle difference; this has its root in their respective natures.
Nikhil is liberal and idealistic where as Bimala is materialistic. Nikhil is noble and generous enough to accept trouble and loss for the sake of his idealism, Nikhil is as much liberal so much calculating is Bimala. She is always conscious of loses and gains, advantages and disadvantages, when Nikhil wants to shift his residence from the village to Calcutta, Bimala opposes his proposal estimating village’s property. Nikhil has deep compassion for the widows of his elder brothers. But Bimala sees his goodness as weakness and lack of courage. Despite these differences, Bimala feels that her husband’s home is paradise and whole world to her. But modern minded Nikhil, who is keen on social reform including women’s liberation, feels that his wife should not be confined within four walls. He suggests her to extend her vision from home to the wider world. In spite of the poison secreted by all the wagging tongues at home and outside (p.12) he arranges for her English education in order to introduce her to modern way of life. He urges her to step into the outside world in order to enjoy more meaningful conjugal life.

Nikhil says:

What I want is that I should have you and you should have me, more fully in the outside world.... I would have you come into the heart of the outer world and meet reality.... If we meet, and recognize each other in the real world then only will our love be true.(P.18)

Here Nikhil's view of life is just opposite to the conservative Hindu’s view of life. He considers that husband and wife are equal in love. According to him there is no place for wife’s devotion for husband since devotion is an obstacle in the way of true equality. Humayun Kabir regards all Nikhil’s attempts are patriarchal attempts to mould his wife.

Nikhil in Ghare Baire is noble minded and yet Tagore hints that all his attempts at reforming his wife are really attempts to mould her according to his own wishes.28

But we see Nikhil’s love for Bimala is wider in its aspect, and unfettered by matrimonial bond. There is no force, no authority, no restriction and no selfishness.
He just wants her to enjoy life with wider vision of mind. His catholicity of approach is expressed by him in the marine image:

'The greedy man who is fond of his fish stew has no compunction in cutting up the fish according to his need. But the man who loves the fish wants to enjoy it in the water... '(P.19)

Here Nikhil’s English minded consideration of wife as a companion rather than inferior testifies his belief in women’s liberation. But Bimala who has been accustomed to domestic life, shows no interest in the world other than her husband and her paradise of home. She opposes Nikhil’s view of equality of husband and wife as she firmly believes that a woman’s salvation lies in surrendering her pride to her husband through devotion.

In this respect Bimala represents the traditional class of woman like Asha (Binodini), Kamala (The Wreck), Sarmila (Two sisters) whose extent of thinking is not beyond the world of their husbands. Perfectly content with her domestic life she expresses her gratitude to his magnanimity:

You showed your love by decorating me, by educating me, by giving me what I asked for, what I did not. I have seen what depth of love there was in your eyes when you gazed at me...
You loved my body as if it were a flower of paradise. You loved my whole nature as if it had been given you by some rare providence. (P.14)

But one should wonder how Bimala the epitome of Indian woman hood, who prided herself on the fact that “I was his queen, I had my seat by his side (p.12) is passionately attracted to Sandip. Tagore’s The Home and The World has politics at its core. The entire novel is set against the back drop of the anti-partition movement in Bengal in 1905. The impact of Swadeshi movement is such that it not only brings new excitement in the inner most recesses of every Bengali, but also conflict between the adherents of Swadeshi and the opponents of it. Bimala and Nikhil are the polar opposites in this respect.
Bimala recounts:

*One day there came the new era of Swadeshi in Bengal; but as to how it happened, we had no distinct vision... My sight and my mind, my hopes and my desires, became red with the passion of this new age. Though, upto 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. (P.22)*

When Bimala, newly emergent in the world, outside her home sees Sandip, the charismatic nationalistic leader, she comes under the spell of his fiery eloquence and this admiration turns into an attraction for his vitality. Sandip’s oratory captures her mind and soul.

The arrival of Sandip marks the beginning of conflict between Nikhil and Bimala, conflict between Nikhil’s ideology and Bimala’s emotion. It is Bimala who refused Nikhil’s repeated requests to be introduced into the modern age is now ready to sacrifice her life for her country through boycott and bonfire business as advocated by Sandip. Eager to do some personal sacrifice, she wants to get rid of her English teacher, Miss Gilby appointed by Nikhil.

But Nikhil knows no racial or religious, class prejudice, opposes her intention. When Gilby is humiliated by Sandip’s men who have been indoctrinated into nationalist lunacy, it is Nikhil who extends his love and support to her. To him, Miss Gilby is another flesh and blood human being like himself, not just a European to be perceived through a mist of abstraction or an enemy of Bengal, simply because she happens to be an English woman. Similarly guided by Sandip’s emotion Bimala wants to burn foreign cloth, but Nikhil objects:

*‘why this bonfire business?... why not try to build up some thing? You should not waste even a tenth part of your energies in this destructive excitement’. (P.24)*
In this connection Nikhil is a personification of Tagore who says:

Consider the burning of cloth, heaped up before the very eyes of our mother land shivering and ashamed in her nakedness? What is the nature of the call to do this? Is it not another instance of a magical formula! The question of using or refusing cloth of a particular manufacture belongs mainly to economic science. "The discussion of the matter by our country men should have been in the language of economics..." 29

Bimala’s outlook on life and society undergoes a change with the advent of the Swadesh movement along with Nikhil’s friend Sandip. He seemed to her to be marked out by the gods as their messenger to mortal men and women. (P.28) The reaction is so strong that Bimala, who had never before agreed to step out of boundary walls now willingly comes out of Zenena to meet Sandip. Her home which is her only world is now broken and she is now exposed to a bigger world. Though she fails to comprehend its real meaning she is changed. As Sreenivasa lyengar puts it:

It may be a Krishna calling out the Gopis, it may be Christ calling out the ‘fisher’ (of men) or it may be merely a calculating politician calling men out hoping to make adroit use of them for his own purposes. 30

It is Bara Rani, who is the sister-in-law of Nikhil is the first to notice the infatuation of Bimala for Sandip. She even makes a note of Bimala’s over dressing the day, when she first invites Sandip for dinner. Bararani, is an impressive character who plays a considerable role through-out the novel. She is not only bold and frank but also well concerned about the well being of her brother-in-law Nikhil. She cautions Nikhil that Bimala is his dissipation and would be his ruin also. She makes the pertinent observation that till then, the women of that family used to weep for the immortality of their husbands and wonders whether it is now men’s turn. She brands Bimala as an “artless little Chota Rani.” Bararani has such a keen insight into the working of other women’s minds that she calls Bimala “Robber Queen” much before Bimala steals her money to pay Sandip. Bararani’s sarcastic remarks against Bimala
seem that as if she were already known about her plot of theft. However Bararani’s affection towards Nikhil reminds us of some what, Tagore’s platonic relationship with Kadambari, Jyotirindra’s bride who enters into Tagore’s life as a literary companion almost at the same age of Tagore.

*Ghare Baire* is a major political novel of different type. It is not an exciting political novel like, for example Sarat Chandra’s *Pather Dabi*. Sandip, the activist hero of this novel, cannot be compared with Sabyasachi, an extra ordinary revolutionary hero of *Pather Dabi*. In this novel Sandip, who is gifted with gab and casts a magic spell on his audience and thus wins the heart of Bimala. On the other hand Bimala too insults Nikhil by rejecting his appointed teacher Miss Gilby on the advice of Sandip. She hurls a challenge to her husband by prioritizing Sandip’s option over Nikhil. She questions the nature of her marriage, norms of society and her role as a woman under the magic influence of Sandip.

Ashis Nandy in a fine study of the novel observes, ‘Bimala... is the link between the two forms of patriotism the men represent.’ Not only is she the symbol for which Sandip and Nikhil fight, but her personality incorporates the contesting selves of two protagonists and becomes the battle-field on which the two forms of patriotism fight for supremacy. In this inner battle, ‘Nikhil’s form of patriotism eventually wins, but at enormous social and personal cost’.

Tagore criticizes in humanistic, immoral, violent and religious tendencies of Swadeshi movement through the conflict of opinions between Nikhil and Sandip.

Nikhil and Sandip type of friendship is very different from Mahendra-Bihari in *Binodini*, Gora – Binoy in *Gora*, Sachis – Sribilas in *Chaturanga*, in these pairs, though they have differences to some extent, but no opportunism like Sandip. Nikhil and Sandip are patriots both of them but with a difference.

Nikhil is known for true patriotism. He stands for truth than force, reason than emotion, idealism than opportunism. He believes human values rather than power values. He seeks social freedom than political freedom. To Nikhil the purpose of religion is to maintain peace and harmony but to Sandip, religion is a political tool to success.
Sandip wants to proclaim western military style not the Indian. He believes moral ideals remain merely for those poor anemic creatures of starved desire whose grasp is weak (p.49): to be just is for ordinary men—it is reserved for the great to be unjust (p.99): all is fair in love and political warfare: it is right to “dilute ten percent of the truth with ninety percent of untruth” (p.138)

Sandip is a typical Machiavellian patriot who exhorts the people recklessly to burn British goods and resort to violence when opposed. Though he knows the truth that the destruction of foreign good is only increasing their demand and sending up the foreigner’s profits, but his goal is not truth but success. He hypnotizes the young students by his eloquence and profound patriotism and wins their whole-hearted support for his Bandemataram.

Nikhil believes that violence for freedom is far worse than alien forces. He says to “tyrannises for the country is to tyrannise over the country” (p.142) He considers Sandip’s love of the country is but a different phase of his covetous self-love- Sandip considers Nikhil to be metaphor-monger (p.53) and weak because he will not resort to force. Bimala stands between the two men—fascinated by Sandip, married to Nikhil.

The spell of Sandip is so profound that under his influence, Bimala forgets her individual identity and she identifies herself as a sole representative of Bengal womanhood. She feels that,

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 (p.20)

Bimala’s delusion of being “Sakti of mother land” is cleverly exploited by the unscrupulous Sandip who through clever flattery lays a snare for her mind and body. Though he is familiar with Nikhil’s aversion to the hypnotic text of patriotism, he deliberately points out in the presence of Bimala to win her impression, Bimala records:
Sandip Babu deliberately started a discussion with my husband. He knew that his keen wit flashed to the best effect in an argument. I have often since observed that he never lost an opportunity for a passage at arms whenever I happened to be present......He began in a provoking way: 'So you do not allow that there is room for an appeal to the imagination in patriotic work? (P.36)

However Sandip succeeds in maintaining differences between Bimala and Nikhil who is considered as unpatriotic. Bimala begins to find in Sandip what she feels lacking in her husband i.e. manhood. In no time her passion for nation transforms into her passion for Sandip.

Bimala’s attraction was primarily due to her admiration for the leadership and surprisingly effective speeches he delivered on economic and political nationalism. In contrast to his views the balanced opinion of her husband appeared to be timid and very cowardly. She had always a suspicion that Nikhil did not have the strength of character to punish his opponents. Rabindranath who had himself played a leading part in the Swadeshi movement in its earlier phase, here depicts through Bimala how the women folk of Bengal became stirred heart and soul during Swadeshi Movement.32

Though The Home and The World presents the theme of love, it differs from all the other novels mentioned above as it depicts, perhaps for the first time in Indian literature the extra marital love of a woman and Bimala is the first married woman to make a frank analysis of her conflicting sense of passion.

Bimala’s attraction for Sandip is at first purely intellectual, the element of sensuality soon comes in. Sandip applies his egoistic philosophical view that a strong man has the right to take what he desires not only to political life but also to personal relationships. Now he is fully conscious of the power that he is able to win over women.
Women find in my features, my manner, my gait, my speech, a masterful passion not a passion dried thin with the heat of asceticism... but full blooded passion... It roars and rolls on like a flood (P.53)

Under the pretext of promoting Swadeshi, Sandip stays on with Nikhil and pursues his strategy of seduction extolling Bimala as the “Queen bee” of the Swadeshi workers. She feels exalted when told that all the country is in need of her, all her suggestions are correct and the glory of great responsibility is on her shoulders. To quote Bimala:

Where was that former self of mine?... Sandip’s hungry eyes burnt like the lamps of worship before my shrine. All his gaze proclaimed that I was a wonder in beauty and power: and the loudness of his praise, spoken and unspoken, drowned all other voices in my world. Had the creator created me afresh? I wondered! Did he wish to make up now for neglecting me so long? (P.56)

Nikhil is so tranquil that he does not lose his poise even when his wife flirts with his friend in his own house, in front of his very eyes. His logic is “perfect gain is the best of all: but if that is impossible, then the next best gain is perfect losing.” (p.24) On the other hand Nikhil is fully aware of Bimala’s hero-worship of Sandip whose fiery oration earns him a name as a brave fighter unlike him. Sandip totally forgets the patriotic cause which has drawn Bimala to him. He drags Bimala from the visible symbol of mother India to a woman of glamorous sex appeal. Passion flames out of his eyes in her presence and he does not hesitate to leave on her table an English book in which sex problems are “treated in an audaciously realistic manner” (p.65). On the other hand Bimala is not altogether unaware of Sandip’s designs. Yet she is unable to distinguish between his worship of the country or of herself or of passion. Some times even if so, her inner self cannot deny his passion, but her sense of justice cannot accept it. She undergoes conflict between her loyalty to her unassertive husband and her passion for assertive Sandip.
When, in Sandip’s appeals, his worship of the country gets to be subtly interwoven with his worship of me, and then does my blood dance indeed and the barriers of my hesitation totter. His talks about Art and sex, his distinctions between real and unreal, had but clogged my attempts at response with some revolting nastiness. (P.92)

The “flavour of revolutionary nationalism is unique – it is romantic rather than analytical, it exalts the mystique of the nation... it creates an ambience of blurred fraternity.”33 The battle cries of Swadeshi and Bandemataram rend the air when love is in conflict with politics.

Bimala is conscious about the change in Sandip. She is conscious about the path on which she is rushing headlong towards her doom. Yet she feels hypnotized by him. Nikhil’s love of her individual freedom, his concern for her well-being, his respect for her identity and all the more regard for one’s partner loses all importance in confrontation with Sandip’s heady praise. The loud jests of her sister-in-law, reproaches of homeguards could not touch her any longer.

In this self-created hallowed position, Bimala is willing to break all bonds of family, marriage and morality, for even she stoops to the level of stealing in order to appease the demands of Sandip in the name of the country. As Bimala reflects:

What do I care what people may think of me? Of what value are that orchid and that niche in my bedroom? What power has they to belittle me, to put me to shame? The primal fire of creation burns in me.(P.97)

Ghare-baire had been the target of passionate controversy; orthodox critics had accused it of obscenity. The moderates had been aggrieved that the non-cooperation movement had been projected in a distorted way. E.M. Forster underrates the novel as a “boarding-house flirtation that masks itself in mystic or patriotic talk.”34 Forster’s flawed perception of the Indian society in the turbulent Swadeshi movement days make him interpret Tagore on the superficial plane and lose sight of the dialectical interplay of the essential values symbolized in The Home and The World under the stress of the upheaval. The novel was written with a view to
define the inter-relatedness between the home and the world, between family life and outside with a view to emphasizing the dangers of the outside world to immature and impetuous minds.35

After all these years, it seems that it is not the responsibility of the novelist to hold up a comprehensive history of any political movement. If some deep corruption enters into segments of such a movement, and some honest artist exposes this, then this only evidences his patriotism, and not seditiousness. Tagore had exposed his own perceptions in the novel.

*He projected the conflict of ethics and politics as it had appeared to him. As a result he had lost popularity. embraced blames and accusations, yet was not afraid to go against the current. Therefore, in the context of today's unethical politics Ghare Baire seems to have acquired a new relevance.*36

The crucial question posed by Rabindranath in *Ghare Baire* long before Mahatma Gandhiji's Satyagraha movement was whether the ethical ideas have a place in a political struggle. Much before Gandhi, Tagore realized the importance of society and social ideals than political freedom.

*Our social ideals create the human world, but when our mind is diverted from them to greed of power then in that state of intoxication we live in a world of abnormality where our strength is not health and our liberty is not freedom.*37

Thus *The Home and The World* is an important social document, more than that it is a universal document. As we see the actual trouble starts with Miss Gilby, Nikhil appointed teacher for Bimala. Nikhil sees her as a human being but Bimala drives away just because she is a foreigner. Nikhil supposes Miss Gilby guidance for Bimala. But Bimala rejects his option and joins the school of Sandip's nationalism.

Nowhere in the novel Nikhil shows his contempt for British people, as he showed against his own people who opposed them. Nikhil himself says:
"For the matter of that, I have become un popular with all
my countrymen, because I have not joined them in their
carousals. They are certain that either I have a longing for
some title or else that I am afraid of the police". (p.45)

No doubt, Bimala too considers him as an unpatriotic and a traitor, and falls
for Sandip. Nikhil lets her to her own realization, to her own conscience. Many
critics have found fault with Nikhil’s permissive attitude. As Niharranjan Ray points
out “Bimala fell for him (Sandip) was no fault of her.”\textsuperscript{38} Mastivenkatesa Iyengar too
is of the same opinion that Nikhil’s permissive attitude is partly responsible for her
doom.

If a husband who loves his wife, objects to her doing some thing wrong, it
cannot be entirely selfish, he may be doing it in her interest. One may guide a young
woman who is one’s friend, may one not guide a wife?\textsuperscript{39}

But apart from these critics, The Home and The World as Bhaskar says is thus
some thing like an allegorical novel where,

\textit{Bimala represents India. Sandip with his aggressive western-
style nationalism pulling her with a fierce charm in one
direction, while Nikhil more sedately and with a peculiar
calm trying to recall to her whatever was best in her own
tradition.}\textsuperscript{40}

Nikhil’s liberal attitude towards Bimala proves some what his deeper
understanding of the nation. Here Nikhil’s strong conviction, is that Bimala’s
realization comes only through India’s realization of truth, since he identifies Bimala
with India. Here Nikhil’s decision to liberate passionate Bimala seems to be
interwoven with his decision to liberate India from its passion for political freedom.
In this context Bimala’s final realization symbolically represents Tagore’s final hope
of India’s realization of true path of progress.

It may be recalled here that Pramatho Choudhury, Rabindranath’s close
associate and the editor of Sabuj Patra where Ghare Baire was being published in
serialized form 1915-16, some what whimsically described the novel as an allegory
with Nikhilesh representing ‘ancient India’ and Sandip ‘Modern Europe’ while Bimala, ‘India today’ is poised between them and suffers from their opposing pulls on her life. Of course Rabindranath did not accept this interpretation, which generated a storm of controversy; he said it was made in ‘lighter vein’ and asserted that the novel was ‘merely a narrative with no conscious allegorical intention’. Yet it cannot be denied that Rabindranath’s critique of modern western nationalism, voiced in the 1916 lecture ‘The Cult of Nationalism’ and delivered during his tour of the US, is anticipated in the characterization of Sandip. Nikhilesh, with his quiescent humanism, on the other hand represents true indigeneity. Nationalism as modern-phenomenon, as a derivative category that does not have its roots in the Indian soil, is implicitly critiqued through the characterization of Sandip.

Nikhil’s social ideals derived from the biography of Tagore. In his classic essay Swadeshisamaj read in Calcutta in 1904, he asked the national leaders to concentrate their energy on social reconstruction rather than political.

*If the leaders of the country will abjure empty politics and make it their business to give new life and objective to these melas, putting their own heart into the work and bringing together the hearts of Hindu and Muslim, and then confer about the real wants of the people—Schools, roads, water reservoirs, grazing commons and the like then the country will soon awaken.*

Nikhil adopts similar programmes in his estate. Long before the advent of the Swadeshi movement, he had done his best to encourage indigenous manufacture in his estates, but did not flourish. He provides Sandip a living allowances for Swadeshi cause. He grants students scholarship and funds for further education. He finances swadeshi papers, swadeshi manufacturers, and uses swadeshi articles but averse to burning of foreign cloth. Bimala recollects;

*They were all eyes turned on my husband from whose estates alone foreign sugar and salt and cloths had not been banished. Even the estate officers began to feel awkward and ashamed over it.... My husband still sharpens his Indian-
made pencils, with his Indian-made knife...But this dull, milk
and watery Swadeshi of his never appealed to us.(P.122)

Nikhil’s honesty, altruism and idealism is however matched by his friend’s
cunning, cupidity and flagrant narcissism. In Nikhil one can find an idealized portrait
of an enlightened humanist. Sandip represents all that Tagore detested in the terrorist
movement, he is selfish, arrogant, greedy, lustful and nihilistic. His philosophy is as
simple as it can be for Machiavellian: “There is not the time for nice scruples. We
must be unswervingly, unreasoningly brutal. We must sin” (p.39) he admonishes
Nikhil, and adds matter of factly, “Every man has a natural right to possess, and
therefore greed is natural... what my mind covets, my surrounding must supply”
(p.45) Else where he argues, “we are the flesh-eaters of the world: we have teeth and
nails: we pursue and grab and tear. We are not satisfied with chewing in the evening
the cud of grass we have eaten in the morning... In that case we shall steal or rob, for
we must live” (p.47).

Nikhil’s refusal to banish foreign articles from the markets in his estates
provokes Sandip and his followers to resort to violence. According to Nikhil,
boycotting and burning is nothing but the economic exploitation of the poor. More
over he does not like slavish submission to this single cause. He argues:

“The freedom that exists in any country! May be measured
by the extent of this reign of fear... But if fear is to regulate
how people are to dress, where they shall trade, or what they
must eat, then is man’s freedom of will utterly ignored, and
manhood destroyed at the root!” (p.172)

Tagore shows how Swadeshi a nobly conceived national movement intended
to resist the divide and rule policy of the British government degenerated into an
organized self-interest of some people for self-profit which involves loot, theft, arson,
murder, economic exploitation, ethical collapse and communal violence.

The boycott and bonfire brand of Sandip’s nationalism brings untold miseries
on innocent people like the trader Panchu and boat man Mirjan.
Panchu, an extremely poor peasant suffers at the hands of wealthy landlords and unscrupulous revolutionaries who profess to be his redeemers. Panchu after his wife’s death begins to earn living by buying cheap foreign cloth and peddling it about the villages. Just then the full shock of Swadeshi flood on him. He is insisted on burning the foreign stuff that brought with borrowed money. Panchu protests:

*I can’t afford it! You are rich: why not buy it up and burn it?* (P.134)

The bundle which is his only capital is ceremoniously burnt as a token of Swadeshi vow that drives Panchu and his children into the jaws of starvation. In order to make the success of Swadeshi, Sandip resort to unethical political activities like bribing, threatening, and tyrannizes over the protestors. Sandip also uses Amulya, true patriot for his false idealism, when Mirjan, a Muslim boatman refuses to stop carrying foreign good as it will take away his livelihood, Sandip arranges to sink his boat in midstream. Instead of showing any compunction for his hideous deed, he advises his followers:

*If they go to law we must retaliate by burning down their granaries! What startled you Amulya? …. you must remember this is war. If you are afraid of causing, suffering, go in for love-making* (p.113).

The intellectual conflict in the novel is concerned with the use of violence, lack of ethical values, and secular feelings. Nikhil’s patriotism is least concerned with religion where as Sandip’s nationalism based on Hindutva agenda considering Muslims as religious minorities. If Sandip proposes unification of Hindus by promoting Hindu sentiments while Nikhil opposes it on the basis of unification of India. He believes that:

*If the idea of a United India is a true one, Mussulmans are a necessary part of it!* (p.158) Sandip finds fault with cow-slaughter, but Nikhil sees no difference between a cow and buffalo on humanitarian grounds, he says:
‘Buffaloes in this country ‘like wise give milk and are used for ploughing. And therefore, so long as we dance frantic dances on our temple pavements smeared with their blood, their severed heads carried on our shoulders, religion only laugh at us if we quarrel with Mussulmans in her name,...If the cow alone is to be held sacred from slaughter and not the buffalo then that is bigotry, not religion.’ (P.218)

Just as the differences between Nikhil and Sandip grow stronger so the relationship between Bimala and Sandip also grow deeper. Hypnotized by Sandip’s poetic recitations Bimala elevates herself from the level of docile wife to that of Goddess of energy and an embodiment of universal joy.

Nikhil’s elderly master who watches her infatuation for Sandip with pain and Nikhil’s widowed sister-in-law urges him to send Sandip away before more harm is done. Nikhil loves Bimala whole heartedly, but Bimala must appraise that on her own and reciprocate his love voluntarily. If she decides other-wise, it will be devastating for Nikhil but he must allow her free choice, especially since he loves her: In love there should be no place for tyranny, no element of force. All the more he considers Bimala’s final stand as a testimony to his truthfulness.

I must not lose my faith: I should wait... The passage from the narrow to the larger world is stormy, when she is familiar with this freedom, then I shall know where my place is. If I discover that I do not fit in with the arrangement of the outer world, then I shall not quarrel with my fate, but silently take my leave...use force? But for what? can force prevail against truth? (P.49)

It is Sandip after having exploited Bimala’s domestic harmony by conceiving her as a visual symbol of mother India, is again gets ready to degrade the call of Bandemataram, using it as a key to unlock Nikhil’s property. Sandip puts forth his demand of fifty thousand rupees from Bimala from her husband’s wealth – the purpose of which is not noble cause – but for secret compensation for his deliberate act of sinking Mirjan, a Muslim protestor’s boat and for his personal comfort.
I should love to have just for once, the chance to fling about fifty thousand rupees in the service of my country and to the satisfaction of myself. I am a nabob born and it is a great dream of mine to get rid of this disguise of poverty, though it be for a day only, and to see myself in my true character.

(P.154)

Through the narration of above incident Tagore wants to show how Swadeshi was led by aiming at unethical success and profit-making, forgetting, the real cause.

According to Santosh Chakraborty what Rabindranath wants to show is that this kind of a false patriot is nothing but a self-interested hedonist behind his patriot’s mask. Under the leadership of such patriots the freedom movement of the country is doomed to failure.46

Bimala, in an impassioned delusion of sacrificing for the country’s cause, she steals Bara Rani’s money from Nikhil’s locker. But the indignity of stealing from her own house sets her on the path of self-introspection.

The burden of the theft crushed my heart to the dust...
I could not think of my house as separate from my country; I had robbed my house, I had robbed my country. For this sin my house had ceased to be mine, my country also was estranged from me. Had I died begging for my country, even unsuccessfully, that would have been worship, acceptable to the gods? But theft is never worship. (p.193)

Bimala sees the true colour of Sandip, when she is about to give the money that he demanded. Sandip is unable to restrain his greed for money and women and springs forwards as if to embrace Bimala in congratulation. Bimala pushes him away with a force of hitting his head on the edge of a marble table and drops to the floor. Bimala’s regular interaction with Sandip makes her to realize the true colour of him. Till now Bimala is under the impression that Sandip loves her as a shakti of motherland, as the giver of light, of life, of immortality (p.196). But now she realizes the truth that his greed for money is greater than his love for herself: his passion for nation is nothing but his passion for grabbing grabbing nothing but eternal grabbing.
Now she sees in Sandip an injustice, irresponsible, opportunistic leader who never mind to use the foolishness and ignorance of innocent people under high sounded names. Bimala repents for her later realization:

Sandip has power, but no strength of righteousness...
Sandip is such an adept in setting music to his chant of praise that I cannot argue; I lose my power of seeing truth; my sight is clouded over like an opium eater’s eyes (P.200)

Bimala with her first sin of love with Sandip not only entangled herself in a series of blunders but also drags innocent Amulya headlong. One mistake to recover it another mistake. Amulya’s romantic adoration of Bimala complicate the matters, there are thefts, restorations, moves and counter moves.

Bimala wants to replace the stolen money either by pledging or by selling her jewels through Amulya. But magic power of Sandip who owns her jewels and claims that it is her gift to the Goddess Bengal. Bimala sees an eternal robber in Sandip who robs money in the name of the Goddess, of religion, of nation. The moment she realizes his weakness she gains new strength. To Bimala, now he is no more a Swadeshi hero, but merely a villain that too a comic villain who stoops to any level at the moment of crisis. He appears to her as a force of destruction in her personal life, he looks like a snake charmer, and a stage hero of melodrama whose eloquence is mere bluster and all his songs of praise are false, Bimala records:

Sandip, the wielder of magic spells, is reduced to utter powerlessness, whenever his spell refuses to work. From a king he fell to the level of a boor. 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. (P.240)

Bimala feels liberated from the world of passion to love, of illusion to truth. She has passed through a fire of passion. Though she comes out unaffected, the guilty of her disastrous journey into the world of desire questioning her all along the genuinity of nine years of fruitful married life.
Regarding the home-coming of Bimala, critics have expressed different opinions. B.C. Chakravorthy reasoned thus:

*When she retracts her steps and comes back to her husband, she does so not on account of her love for her husband but on account of revulsion of feelings towards her lover.*

Similarly Nihar Ranjan Ray felt that "It is not Nikhil's love but other things that restore Bimala." According to Vinita Dhondiyal Bhatnagar:

*Perhaps there might be some justification for seeing her as a symbol of India itself, wedded to spiritual righteousness but temporarily fascinated by the rhetoric of fervent nationalism.*

Of the three principal characters, neither Nikhil nor Sandip changes much in the course of the novel: it is Bimala alone that changes under the stress of trial and error and failure. In the words of Sreenivasa Iyengar:

*For Bimala (and for India too in so far as she is symbolized in Bimala) it is a double education, the moving towards the vortex that is the Sandip brand of revolutionary action and the return to the old safe moorings, though now enriched and chastened by the experience of the 'world'*.  

According to Vinoda, "Nikhil's modern ideas have failed in the novel because of Tagore's preconceptions about woman's nature. Bimala character is moulded in accordance with these preconceptions. Tagore is unsuccessful in the creation of this character as well as the related events because of the unconvincing nature of these preconceptions."

Bimala misunderstands Nikhil's concept of true freedom of mind and is driven by passion. Later she becomes an individual and gains mastery over Sandip. Her home-coming is not her tradition-d dictated place but another attempt to show the world with broader vision. In this connection Nikhil’s master Chandranath’s words are relevant:
Take Bimala away to Calcutta. She is getting too narrow a view of the outside world from here; she cannot see men and things in their true proportions. Let her see the world – men and their work – give her broad vision! ’That is exactly what I was thinking’ Nikhil says (P.224)

The plot of the novel ends on a circular note with a plan and arrangement to relocate the family in Calcutta, rounding off Nikhil’s idea of taking Bimala out into the world to meet reality. Bimala too who has changed her western conception of modernism, agrees Nikhil’s proposal. But the union of Bimala and her husband does not last long for the last incident of the novel. The Hindu – Muslim riot and the resultant head injury of Nikhil. It is Sandip who knows only how to light a fire, creates a fire of communalism and escapes from the scene.

Mitra points out:

*The fictional rendering of the author’s own distrust of extremism is the communal violence at the end of the novel, a direct consequence of Sandip’s thoughtlessness and his inability to read the mood of a down trodden and dispossessed peasantry. In contrast, we have Nikhil’s goal of constructive Swadeshi, a philosophy Rabindranath himself espoused following the religious carnage of 1907-08.*

On a report that the mob is looting a fellow Zamindar’s house and molesting the woman, Nikhil rushes to the place “with not a weapon in his hands”. A little later he is brought back in a palanquin, seriously wounded in the head and Amulya is ‘done for’ with a bullet in his heart.

Reason and emotion in double harness would work wonders. Unbridled emotionalism is like a run away horse – a menace and a disaster Tagore says. Nikhil pays the penalty for Sandip’s sin.

In this novel Nikhil is Tagore’s individual self where as Sandip Tagore’s divided self. Nikhil wants India (Bimala as well) to be free. While Sandip leads her to destruction with force. With Nikhil, Tagore shares his voice of protest, of human
values, of sanity, of despair, of reason, of after-effects and even of isolation. Nikhil is attacked in the end as some extremists had attacked the poet and accused him of deserting the nation’s cause. ‘Ghare Baire’ is not only a defense of certain principles but also, in a way the author’s defense of his own role.53

As Sreenivasa Iyengar said,

Nationalism alone is not enough; patriotism is not in itself enough either. Tagore saw this very clearly during the ‘Partition of Bengal’ agitation, although he was himself deeply stirred by the march of events. If bureaucratic tyranny roused him, the tyranny of fanaticism be it religious or political – moved him no less, and he raised his voice boldly against it.54

According to Tagore, aggressive nationalism breeds parochialism, intolerance, bigotry, persecution of minorities, racialism and finally imperialism. “What we call theft lie, cheating, murder and robbery in personal life receives the nomenclature of imperialism in politics.”55

Tagore’s contempt against nationalism and national leaders rooted from his love for universalism. “Tagore’s attempt to conceal his impotent hatred of the Indian freedom fighters is his profound philosophy of ‘Universally human’.”56

As we see in this novel Tagore repeatedly expresses his global vision through Nikhil and his teacher Chandranath Babu who acts as a Nikhil’s moral guide and philosopher.

I tell you Nikhil, man’s history has to be built by the united efforts of all the races in the world, and therefore this selling of conscience for political reasons – this making a fetish of one’s country won’t do... Here in this land of India, amid the mocking laughter of Satan piercing the sky, may the feeling for this truth become real! What a terrible epidemic of sin has been brought into our country from foreign lands.

(p.225)
Tagore's lectures on nationalism drew many angry responses, even from those of kindred spirit, such as D.H. Lawrence, who spitefully declared Tagore, 'horribly decadent and reverting to all forms of barbarisms in all sorts of ugly ways' and denounced the 'wretched worship of — Tagore attitude as disgustingly'. However, not all were offended: not every one misunderstood him. The French Nobel Laureate, Romain Rolland, greeted him in a salubrious personal letter:

_The reading of Nationalism has been a great joy for me: for I entirely agree with your thoughts, and I love them even more now that I have heard them expressed by you with this noble and harmonious wisdom which, being your own, is so dear to us._

Tagore's animosity to nationalism should not make us think that he was not patriotic or that he was anti-west. He believed in a symbiosis of the East and West, a 'deep association' or a living relationship between two cultures: a creative unity that was possible only when the East had discovered its soul and its separate identity. Moreover, his profound love for Bengal and India is manifest in his many immortal songs and poems. His love and intensity for the land transcended the bounds of a narrow, selfish and self-aggrandising nationalism and carried such a depth, generosity and broadness that his compositions were adopted as national anthems in three countries. Despite the fervour, Tagore never allowed his love for his country to stand in the way of his love for truth, justice, and humanity he was not given to a national consciousness but a world-consciousness, a Visvavod in which every country would keep alight its own lamp of mind as its part in the illumination of the world. As Nikhil says, "I am willing to serve my country: but my worship I reserve for right which is far greater than my country. to worship my country as a god is to bring a curse upon it (p.26) and as Atin says to Ela:

_You claim desperate courage for winning the country, why not for winning your glorious self? (Four Chapter, p.41)_

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NOTES


10. Indrani Mitra, I will make Bimala one with my country; Gender and Nationalism in Tagore’s ‘The Home and The World’ (Modern Fiction Studies, Vol.41, No.2 Summer, 1995), pp.244-45.


37. Rabindranath Tagore, Nationalism, p.120.


42. Letter to Amiya Chakraborty, 29 Phalgun, 1322, translated Malini Bhattacharya from Original at Rabindra Bhavan archives.


56. George Lukas, p.1.


FOUR CHAPTERS

The Period of terrorism was an arid episode in Indian politics and its impact on Bengal in particular proved to be disastrous as Tagore had foreseen. Uninhibited emotionalism of the Swadeshi movement was beginning to reap its bitter harvest. Hundreds of impressionable young Bengalis – Men and Women were drawn into the terrorist movement, which meant that scores of families were totally ruined, many young men paying the penalty with their lives. Other wasted their youth in penal servitude or long periods of detention. Their sacrifices were destined to come to nothing...Tagore always spoke of them with respect.¹

Background:

The time span between 1870 and 1910 saw diverse trends on the socio-political scene of Bengal. In the last half of the 19th century, especially when Keshub Chandra Sen’s Propagation of Brahmoism was in the ascendant, Hindu revivalists became active in order to counter the onslaught of the nascent Brahmoism. Slowly this Hindu revivalism evolved into Hindu Nationalism as British oppression and tyranny were on the increase.

Inspired by Bal Gangadhar Tilak’s organization of Ganapati and Shivaji festivals, the Hindu revivalists of Bengal introduced Sivaji festival, Pratapaditya festival etc. It was an age of blind Nationalism in the wake of the British policy of the division of Bengal. Patriotic feelings were roused to a high pitch – through songs, lectures, and plays, etc.

But the movement for rescinding division of Bengal (1905) that created such fume and flame did not follow any politico economic line as it should have. On the other hand, it based itself on the Hindu revivalist line, resulting in alienation of Muslims, creation of the Muslim league by the efforts of Sir Salimullah and other Muslim leaders of the then East Bengal in 1906 and Hindu-Muslim riots.
The middle-class Bengali Hindus had a respectful attitude to the British in the 19th century, but the division of Bengal angered this section of the Bengalees and hence this movement quite naturally the movement for rescinding the division of Bengal snowballed into direct action, but it had severe limitations for: It was not all-pervasive, as it was limited to the intellectual and middle-class Bengalees, secondly it took the form of militant Hindu Nationalism, thirdly it alienated the Muslims and gave birth to such exhibitionist – adventurist activities as boycott, bonfire of foreign cloth and terrorism etc.

The Patriotic feelings that aroused during the Swadeshi movement were synonymous with Hinduism as in Gora, symbolized by aggressive form as in The Home and The World and resulted in bitter fruits of terrorism as in Four Chapters.

These three novels Gora (1910) Ghare Baire (1916) and Char Adhayay (1934) published about some ten decades earlier are astonishingly relevant to Indian today.

There has been a controversy whether Four Chapters is a political novel or love story. In his prefatory note Tagore himself testifies. What might be called the only theme of the book are the 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 top that gives its 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, in the love of Ela and Atindra... The revolutionary movement in Bengal had provided their love with its special dramatic setting. Descriptions of the movement are of secondary importance.
But the Poet’s critics never spared him yet gave more importance to the background of the story namely revolutionary activities which had already taken a deep root in Bengal and Province had started paying penalty for it.

According to Sisir Kumar Ghosh

Four chapters, undoubtedly dealt with the extremist activities which had never appealed to Tagore. As in Ghare-Baire, but in darker Colours, Tagore showed, the dangers of the underground. He called it the path of nightmare.¹

According to Sukumar Sen

There is an attempt here to analyse the real motives and values of the revolutionary activities of violence in Bengal that followed the Non-Cooperation movement and Tagore shows that however exalted a patriotic or philanthropic motive there may be, it is never a man’s duty to follow it if it goes against his conscience or good sense.²

Tagore’s deep sympathy for the independence movement and his admiration for the young men and women who sacrificed themselves for the cause of independence have found glowing expression in this last novel of his. At the same time his acute insight and far-reaching vision have not missed the lurking pitfalls of a bloody revolution.

If Char-adhyay is merely a love story, what is the need of the Preface which provides a clue to the origin of the novel, and where Tagore had made a passing reference to a personal meeting with Brahma Bandhav Upadhyay, one of the front-rank leaders in the early revolutionary movement who was one of Tagore’s Chief assistants when the Santiniketan school was first started. However Tagore withdrew the Preface before the first edition was sold out.

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A translation is given below:

On the one hand he was a Roman Catholic ascetic and on the other a vedantist – fiery, fearless, unattached, widely known, immensely influential. I was drawn to him by profound respect for his extraordinary spiritual zeal and intellect. He was the first to join me as a colleague at the founding of my educational institution at Santiniketan. Even now I am amazed to recall, in this connection, how he used to unravel for me all those abstruse problems that in our talks during the many walks we took on the nearby village roads.

At this juncture, Lord Curzon had firmly resolved to partition Bengal. Hindu-Muslim discord, arising out of this decision, had already cast its blood-red shadow on the political scene. The country was convulsed by the deep apprehension that this cleavage would gradually divide our language, our culture, and enfeeble the Bengali race. Constitutional agitation had yielded no result. What was settled, could not be unsettled. Lord Morely had declared. Just then, this ascetic hurled himself into the Vortex that had been stirred up by the countrywide churning of the emotions. He himself brought out an evening paper – Sandhya. The intoxicating wine that he had started pouring into it in vigorous language set the country's blood on fire. One could detect in its columns oblique references to the first beginnings of the cult of violence in Bengal. Such a tremendous transformation in an ascetic Vedantist I could never have imagined.

I had not met him for a long time in this period. I thought that he had perhaps been avoiding me out of contempt for my views on political method which were different from his. Mean while, various symptoms of trouble could be seen on all sides. In those days of blind madness, once as I was sitting by myself in my room on the second floor at Jorasanko, Upadhyay appeared suddenly. Our talk sometimes took us back to topics of former conversations. In the end, he rose to say good bye. He walked up to the threshold but turned round once more.

"Rabi Babu, he said "I have failed miserably"...
I understood perfectly that he had come just to make this heart-rending admission. He had by then 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. 

Structurally Char Adhyay consists of a prelude and four chapters. The first chapter introduces the mechanics of the movement through the conversations between Indranath and Kanai-Gupta and between Indranath and Ela. It also hints at how members of the movement are mere puppets, bound to the cause and controlled and eliminated as necessary. This idea is developed further in the second chapter where Atin argues that being betrothed to the nation goes against Ela’s Swadharma, goes against a higher truth, and says the only job of all the revolutionaries was to dance “the same steps at their leaders’ command”. He himself appears to belong to their ranks as he walks out of the room as soon as he gets a coded message from the leadership telling him to do so.

The third chapter describes the bitter realization of Atin and Ela that revolution is a corrupting and rotting process – but yet they are pawns in their leader’s hands. In the last chapter we see Atin and Ela again – now once more in her room. They conclude that their sacrifices that they call for their country’s cause are nothing but – thepts – murders – threatening by killing their own souls and their own ethics.

In Atin’s words:

“I’ve slain my soul, the biggest sin of all. Not a single evil have I been able to uproot from our country – I’ve only uprooted myself. For that sin I’m condemned not to take you even when you’re giving your self. Accept your hand? With this hand! But why all this?” (Four Chapters, p.76)

... 

Sandip of the The Home and The World is reincarnated as Indranath. Sandip is an opportunistic fire brand whereas Indranath is a extremist fire worshipper. He adds fuel to the fire that is lit up by Sandip. As the blazing fire lures insects, such like the power of Indranath and Sandip, of whom Bimala writes half in terror half in fascination:
From some realm of calamity has Sandip come as its messenger: and as he stalks the land, muttering unholy incantations, to him flock all the boys and youths. The mother, seated in the lotus heart of the country, is wailing her heart out: for they have broken open her store-room, there to hold their drunken revelry... True, I feel with her but at the same time I can't help being infected with their excitement (The Home and the World, P244)

The disillusion of the Atin too is the same as he tells Ela bluntly:

The patriotism of those who have no faith in that which is above patriotism is like a crocodile's back used as a ferry to cross the river. Meanness, unfaithfulness mutual mistrust, secret machination, plotting for leadership - sooner or later these drag them into the mud at the bottom. That the life of the country can be saved by killing its soul, is the monstrously false doctrine that nationalists all over the world are bellowing forth stridently. My heart groans to give it effective contradiction, (p.63)

The story opens in Kanai’s Teashop at Calcutta where Ela aged 26 meets Indranath the leader of the revolutionary group. Unlike Sandip, who is merely selfish windbag, here Indranath, the leader of the secret organization is a gifted scientist, master of several European languages, a self possessed man of a high-order of intelligence. When he comes back to India after intensive research abroad, he thinks of an academic career, but he soon discovers to his dismay that his endowment has only fed the envy of his unworthy European superiors. At last through the special recommendation of an eminent English scientist, he secures the post of a teacher but is sent to a college which is without a laboratory. To such prostitution of his talents he was utterly unprepared to submit (p.3). Frustration does not crush him but thrusts him to launch a bloody campaign of violence. He uses terrorism as a weapon of personal power to eliminate by whatever means this cruel, indifferent, vicious, foreign power. He resigns his job and starts an institution for teaching French and German which serves as a front for his revolutionary activity. He boasts to Kanai;
They tried to make me petty by closing the doors on every side. I'm great, even if that entails disaster at every step. You can see for yourself. Kanai, how these followers have come round me at my call, reckoning nothing of life or death. Why? Because I know how to call. That's what I want to make clear to myself and to others; and, after that, I don't care what happens. (p.20)

Ironically, Indranath, himself a victim of vicious political power, adopts more powerful, heavy handed, tyrannical dictatorship as against democratic cult, in which his secret society is his own world: and he is the supreme: he is the law; he is the dictator.

He is a manufacturing machine of man's hunting militant. If the output is undeterred by human sentiment he is sure to meet his doom. He has no particular agenda, his only one hidden agenda is individuals cease to exist as individuals, they are mere puppets. They should not exercise their own conscience. No hope of love. No human sentiment, no women sentiment, not even a sentiment of a kid. In his words to Ela;

When I asked you to shoot a kid the other day, you said you couldn't. The other girl, your cousin did it to show off. She laughed when the kid rolled over with a broken leg, to make out she didn't care. But her laugh was hysterical, and she had no sleep that night... to fight did not mean that he was to be cruel, but simply to be undeterred by softer sentiments in carrying out his high purpose (p.15).

His magnetic personality and unyielding resolve, his art of making impossible possible, his impersonal attitude, reckless of victory and defeat, his piercing eyes, his sweet voiced command are enough to assume the command of the movement. The novelist records;

Some believed that his intelligence was unusual, others that his power was supernatural: so that some had limit less veneration for him; others an unaccountable dread.
Students all over the country looked on him as an uncrowned king. (p.8)

But Indranath's leadership of the revolutionary group is seriously flawed. The dispassionate, scientific and ruthless commitment to rationality succeeds in dehumanizing him. What makes him detestable is that he very well knows that his 'enterprise' is doomed to failure and yet persists in exposing the lives of innocent young men and women to danger to gain personal ends. He declares:

I've long given up thinking in terms of victory and defeat. As leader in a grand enterprise I'm here because it becomes me; either victory or defeat will be equally great... on a historical view, the epic may seem to end in a vast burial ground of defeat. Still it would be an epic. For the curtailed manhood of this slave-ridden country, isn't it the greatest of opportunities to be able to die the death of a hero? (p.21, 22)

As soon as the book was published, Char Adhyay invited criticism leveled against Tagore that his stress is exclusively on the negative aspects. In a country reduced to a state of subjugation, his critics maintain that the primary objective is deliverance from the foreign yoke and to emphasize instances of aberration is to harm the cause.

Sisir Kumar Ghose frankly questions:

Tagore claimed that Char Adhyay is not a political novel but about two star-crossed young lovers. But where was the need for murky background of a secret society of which Tagore had little personal knowledge and of which he had given dismal, distorted picture? 8

Srikumar Benerjee replies:

There is a charge leveled against Rabindranath that he has not given a true picture of the revolutionary cult. If true, it
is beside his purpose... Rabindranath's poetic standard of values makes him choose the inherent weakness of terrorism as his main theme not its outward strength.  

According to Bhabatosh Chatterjee:

Tagore's work it has to be admitted is univocal. He concentrates on the debasement of values and shows how the original ideal degenerates into soulless despotism. The well-knit anarchist organization is like a seamless beehive. It uses its young members like pawns on the chess-board, has recourse to unethical, unconscionable stratagems, suppresses pitilessly any sign of independent thinking and sows the seeds of a regimented polity. This concentration and certainty of direction explains the novel's intensity, but there is also a shrinkage in comprehension.

The harsh tone of condemnation has the quality of prophetic ire, but it goes against the aesthetic ideal. Such a reading however does not do full justice to the narrative: it views the experience as a logical formula and overlooks the disparate features. It is true that in presenting the activity of extremists, the narrator presents only one angle: we miss the other point of view. This fragmentation is a serious flaw and has an oppressive effect. Whether the portrait is authentic or represents partial truth is of secondary importance in the specific circumstances: what chills the mind of the reader is the severity of the narrator's hate. Perhaps all organizations are mechanized monsters: but if an artist paints this monster, he should be able to enter into it.

Four Chapters is not anti patriotic novel, nor has Tagore any personal ire on extremists. But Four Chapters is an authentic testament of bitter experienced, misguided patriots. From those experiences, his characters are moulded.

"From the writings of the youngmen (who were young no more by the time they had regained their freedom)." Writes Tagore, "who have come back out of the valley of the shadow of death, I feel sure some such thoughts must
have occurred to them. And so they must have realized the necessity of yoga as of primary importance: - that from which is the union in common endeavour of all the human faculties. This cannot be attained by any outside blind obedience, but only by the realization of self in the light of intellect."^{12}

The futile martyrdom of the young, idealistic patriots at the altar of terrorism deeply moved Tagore. He laments for their futile sacrifices and dramatizes through the roles of Atin and Ela how the claims of revolution distort their individuality when there is an in-built-flaw in revolutionary leadership.

***

The heroine of the novel Ela a beautiful, intelligent girl is drawn to politics due to some unique circumstances. Since childhood she gets love and understanding from her father, but her mother is very quarrelsome and suspicious.

Due to tension at home, she prefers to stay in hostel, gets her Master's degree and later goes to her Uncle's house when her father died. There also her aunt is jealous of her beauty might stand in the way of marriage of her own daughter. For a time she stays in her uncle's house and engages herself in research. It is in her uncle's house she meets Indranath, the revolutionary leader and asks him "to give her some of his work to do".

The attraction of Ela towards Indranath is parallel to Bimala towards Sandip. Here Ela is another Bimala, more enthusiastic, more matured, more analytical young lady who seems to have moved a step beyond Bimala. Ela is a beautiful, highly talented, adventurist, idealist, and sentimentalist. Through the figure of Indranath, the megalomaniacal leader of the terrorist organization, Tagore offers his critique of the terrorist stream of the nationalist struggle in the opening years of the twentieth century. Ela and Atin caught up in the convulsions of political struggles; represent the sacrifice of human lives and happiness at the altar of terrorism. Through their story he dramatizes the tragic impact of militant nationalism on human lives. To that extent it is great and classic indictment of "terrorism"^{13}
The plot of the novel is simple. With a deep sense of patriotic spirit, Ela joins Indranath’s party on the condition that she never entangles in any social relationship and dedicates her whole life to the nation; Ela quite readily takes the oath of celibacy and takes the charge of high school for girls established by Indranath. But her main role is to act as a magnet to attract impressionable young boys into the movement; she is to safeguard party’s interests and to maximize the gravity of the mass. She does all this whole heartedly what she considers it exclusively for nation’s purpose. She is only confident building measure of the party. When she complains that she has not given any revolutionary work, Indranath retorts:

'It’s not work I want of you, of course, it is hardly possible for you yourself to know of the glory that lights up the hearts of the boys at the touch of your fingers when you anoint their foreheads with the red Sandal paste of initiation. How can the dry rewards I have to offer evoke the same quality of work? Where sex works I put woman on a pedestal. (p.13)

If Sandip in the The Home and the World is an unethical politician, Indranath is an ethical sadist. He never allows mutual attraction between man and woman, nor even their cordial meetings. At the very beginning itself he instructs Ela:

'The only promise I ask of you is never to become entangled in any social relationship, you are not for society but for your country alone! (p.12)

Ela is an epitome of sacrifice. It is not at all difficult for her to take the oath of loyalty to the party. To this Ela simply replies “I promise” not realizing that this very promise would kill her individuality, kill her love and claim her life at last?

Very soon Ela realizes that his sense of fight is not against cruelty and injustice but against simple human emotions. His main objective is only to show his supremacy, to expand his network.
As Rajendra Verma puts it:

*Here is the psychology of a frustrated man who is out to avenge it on society. His megalomania, like that of the modern dictators, is the result of inner and outer maladjustment in the personal life which seeks a certain rationalization in abnormal or dramatic conduct.*

The ramifications of the revolutionary organization of Indranath are depicted by Tagore with convincing accuracy to the situation in Bengal in the opening years of this century. Indranath’s relations with his followers overstep the claims of politics and in fact intrude into their emotional and personal lives. In the novel, he is often referred to as the “master” who holds complete sway over his followers and demands implicit obedience from them. Describing the terrorist leaders, known in Bengal as ‘dadas’, Gordon writes:

*In addition to his primary function as a political leader, the data seems to hold something of the neoparental authority which the older brother would exercise in a Bengali family... The relationship also seems to reflect an important religious concept: the guru-shishya relationship where the disciple is to give his complete loyalty, devotion, and respect to his teacher.*

Ela remains in the revolutionary camp of Indranath for five years. In the course of time she meets Atindra, a highly educated young man belonging to Zamindari family in a ferry steamer while crossing the river Ganga, at Mokamals. At the very first sight, she feels a wonderful life long intimacy with Atin and falls in love. But she refrains from exhibiting her feelings towards Atin in order to keep her promise with Indranath. She tells Atin:

*I had already sworn to devote myself to my country, not to keep anything for myself alone. My betrothal was to my country* (p.31)
Indranath's master minded calculations prove right when Atin joins the terrorist movement because of his love for Ela. After bagging Atin into his party Indranath frankly warns Ela to be away from Atin or else she is eliminated from the party out of trace. It is Indranath who strongly believes that romantic spirit weakens the fighting temperament, tells Ela:

*I have no use either for ascetics who mortify their bodies
with sackcloth and ashes or for sub-immolators who
reduce to ashes their natural passions. We want fire-
worshippers, but if any of these kindle the fire within
themselves, they have to be got rid of.* (p.11)

Ela is a wonderful creation of the poet when we see Ela for the first time we see her as a proud individualist, not yielding to any one. She even wins the impression of Indranath that “you are not the girl to sink your pledge by over loading it with love affairs (p.13). She is a brave outspoken person she tells the much venerated and dreaded Indranath:

You have done me a grievous wrong! As the novelist says “only Ela could venture to say such a thing straight to Indranath”(p.7)

Similarly when Indranath breaks the love of Uma and Sukumar, fearing that Uma might weaken the dedicating spirit of valiant like Sukumar, Ela admonishes:

*Punishment for love is nonsense. You might as well talk of
punishing a person for getting small pox* (p.10)

At early in the novel itself, she expresses her despair for these “splendid boys are being sacrificed at the altar of some blind monstrous idol, its breaking my heart”. (p.6) Now that she realizes the conflict in her mind, she frankly tells Indranath that her new love is day by day overshadowing her love for all else.

After being spent for years in a loveless, joyless, fruitless barren path of violence, she realizes that her heart too is not made of stone. Despite Indranath's warnings, she loves Atin. But it is double tragic that Indranath cashes her love. Atin too falls into the sentimental trap of loyalty to the party. The more worrisome is she
loves Atin and drags him into the party but she can’t break the pledge that she gave to Indranath five years ago. She undergoes conflict between her love and her pledge. She humbly begs Indranath to release her or atleast Atin. But Indranath is a monster in human form. He spies on her to eliminate at the point of violating his order. Ela realizes her mistake and injustice that she had done to Atindra by drawing him into the party. She repents:

“For heaven’s sake... I’ll never be able to forgive myself
for drawing you away from your own way of living,
uprooting you from your normal life. (p.56)

Eventually she loses her power of controlling feelings. She is over powered by her emotions. She craves for normal human life. She desperately tries to win unaccessible love. Unable to control her emotions, her grief, her passion, Ela cries:

‘Oh, my barbarian! You won’t have to snatch me – take me, take me, take me! ‘... oh look!’ ‘He’s there!’ ...It’s Batu (p.42)

Prof. Buddhadev Bose says that,

Tagore has frankly admitted in his “Four Chapters” that ‘love is barbarous’ and for this single reason it is entitled to special recognition in Tagorean as well as Bengali literature.¹⁸

Niharranjan Roy too opines the same,

On reaching the end of his life Rabindranath discovered that love is barbaric and in the frank, unhesitating exposition of this barbaric love lies the main attraction. Of Four Chapters.¹⁹

But B.C. Chakravorty does not agree with the above criticism. It is not for the first time that Tagore has delineated the physical side of passionate love. We find it in his poem, Parishod written in his early life, which was later on transformed into Shyama, a dance-drama. We also find it in Chitrangada. It is my contention that
Tagore is not a visionary idealist as many critics take him to be: he is a realist who recognizes that physical appetite is a part of human love. But to say that at the end of his life he discovered that love is barbaric is a grave mistake.²⁰

It can't be denied that under Indranath's leadership, Atin becomes competent at his revolutionary tasks but loses his humanity. Ela's terming him as barbarian symbolically reveals the intensity of her craving for normal human love life which is being denied by Atin fearing barbarous Indranath. In the words of Atin:

_Afraid! Cried Atin! in the depths of me I'm a man an impetuous barbarian...I'd have crushed you in my embrace, making your ribs ache... But the road on which I've actually arrived is narrow as a razor's edge, with no room for two, side by side..._' (p.42)

_Four Chapters_ look like four-acts in a play, Dialogue has a prominent place in it. But it has the soul of a lyric. Leaving aside the first chapter, which does the work of exposition, the other, three chapters are full of lyrical outbursts and the whole book may be called a love-song of Ela and Atindra.²¹

Nikhil is reincarnated as Atin in the _Four Chapters_. Nikhil has matured, balanced mind, but Atin is inexperienced, adventurist, reckless of life or death. He joins the terrorist party only because of his love for Ela. Later he repents with Ela:

_'Had you respected me for my own individuality you would have drawn me not to your group but to your heart!'_ (P.40).

The movement of awareness comes early to Atin, but despite his disillusions, he retains his loyalty to the cause. As Indranth informs Ela, when she asks him to release him:

_'Who am I to release him? He remains bound by his own resolve. I know he'll never be rid of his doubts. At every step his finer feelings will be hurt. And yet his self-respect will keep him on till the end!'_ (p.16)
Atin very well knows that it is his own folly to join the party and to take the oath. He discusses the hopelessness of his situation. Atin and Ela are together, yet there is a barrier between them. They strain to come close, to break the bars of the cage, but they find they are helpless. If their conscience protests their blind obedience their critical situation reassures their loyalty to the leader. Atin frowns at Ela, who is an initiator.

"This pledge of yours was a crime and every day you keep it, you commit a fresh outrage against your own nature. To crush under the heels of your party a feeling which is of the purest which comes by command of the creator Himself, is a sin for which you'll have to take punishment!" (p.31)

Atin blames Ela for dragging him from the real service of the country, for diverting his mind only to take the futile path of violence, for making him to forget even his manhood. He repents for thousands of people are caught, in the coils of the revolution, crushing under the wheels of the party. He annoys wasting the creativity of thousands of innocent youth by being moulded into puppets. He knows well that he himself is a puppet. He has no escape. He has no way to go out, with a sense of frustration he says Ela:

"But the place you've assigned me, calling it country—which after all is nothing but a country of your hand's own make—it whatever it may mean to others, it's nothing but a cage for me. My natural powers do not find full scope in it. They are becoming unhealthy and perverted. I'm ashamed of what I'm doing but I find the way out blocked. You don't seem to realize how my wings have been clipped, my limbs shackled. I had the responsibility, as well as the capacity, to take my own true place in my country's service, you made me forget it!" (p.38)

Ela's implicit faith in Indranath is shaken by Atin's revelations of the nature of terrorist activities. Indranath's close surveillance of them reveals that both are
disenchanted with the movement. Ela is obviously violating his mandate, Indranath is certain that Atin too follows the same path sooner or later, she is making Atin breaking away from the party. That one break will break some thing else. To avoid any uncertainty – to keep them apart. Nothing but death alone would keep them apart.

Indranath with his clench man exercises his master mind to eliminate Ela. It is not at all difficult for him to get rid of anyone who he wishes to get rid of. Simply he gets them buried in the police refuge heap. (p.48). That may be betrayal and not a crime.

Indranath sets a stage to get her eliminated by Atin’s own hands. Earlier he asks Ela whether she is prepared to kill Atin in a case he betrays the party. She evades the answer by replying that such a situation will never arise. Now it is Atin’s turn. He asks Atin to kill Ela as she is going to be arrested by the police and she may reveal the secrets of the party when the police torture her. Atin feels deeply hurt over the cruel betrayal. He informs Ela ........

‘The word has gone forth from your own band – your beloved, patriotic brothers, whom you’ve anointed with sandal-paste on each Brother’s Day – that you’re not fit to live any longer. (p.84)

Finally Ela is given twisting option to marry Batu, clench man of the leader so that she is saved. No! She no longer wants to live in a crocodile hole. She seeks happy death in the hands of Atin. She implores:

‘Kill me, Onlo, kill me with your own hands. I couldn’t wish for A happier end!’ ... ‘Am I not yours, wholly yours. even in death? Take me. Don’t let their unclean hands touch my body, for this Body belongs to you!’ (p. 86)

Asis Nandy comments:

Both are aware that the meeting must end in Ela’s execution. Ela is a willing victim: she refuses the anesthesia that Atin offers her not only because she wants
to die fully self-aware but because to die at Atin's hands has an erotic significance for her. Further she has a sense of guilt over Atin's penury and devastated health.\textsuperscript{22}

The novel ends on a moving note:

Atin took hold of her arm and drew her down with him to her bedroom. 'Get into bed at once', he repeated, 'and go off to sleep'.

I can't, sleep won't come!

I've brought medicine that I'll put you to sleep!

What is the use of that Ontu? Let the last bit of my consciousness be for you. Is it chloroform that you have? Throw it away. I'm not a coward. Let me die awake, in your arms. Let our last kiss be eternal, Ontu!

From afar came the thin sound of a whistle.

Sreenivasa Iyengar summed up his assessment of the novel in these words:

\textit{Four Chapters was Tagore's, great gesture of protest, but it is also a benediction, born of compassion and love. Tagore seems to say in so many words: The end does not justify the means. The needs of collectivity do not justify the suppression of the individual. Not only power corrupts, but the ways of achieving power also corrupt, and corrupt more and more: Politics and revolution are the commodities in Caesar's mart: but humanity, love and compassion are the gifts of God himself. Love is great reality, for only love can defeat death. Like Yuri and Lara in Doctor Zhivago, Atin and Ela too but articulate the bitter-sweet Testament of love. Four Chapters is Tagore's Doctor Zhivago - no more than a miniature, no more than a seed, yet the seed of a mighty banyan.}\textsuperscript{23}

In this novel Ela and Atin are not political opportunists like Sandip nor tyrannical dictators like Indranath. They are compassionate human beings, faithful
lovers, and true patriots but misguided. They are victims of blind obedience, while obeying the command; they undergo tremendous conflict between their conscience and commitment. They distinguish between true service and barbaric action. They analyse life threatening and life pouring activities. There are in no way inferior to their leader who is by no means a patriot; yet they are puppets. Can they turn back now? “The arrow can miss the mark but it cannot return to the quiver”. No way now for them, except to reap the fruits of their past Karma, past deeds. (p.63)

Some times blaming, then consoling each other, sharing their grief, they repent for their folly act. In this respect like Gora, Four Chapters seems like heart - rending introspection of misguided young patriots.

Char Adhyay quite clearly condemns political terrorism, hence it is surprising, he should have worried about the possibility of its being banned by the British government of India. In actual fact, the British hardly noticed its first publication in a relatively unknown American magazine under the strange title “Novelette of Young India – Four Chapters.” Where as when original was published in Kolkata, it was that prefatory “Abhash” more than what followed which raised such an outcry from nationalist circles in Bengal that Robindranath felt compelled to sought to direct future readers to a different kind of reading by asserting “The only thing that may properly be called the theme of this narrative is the love between Ela and Atindra.”

Four Chapters is a great novel, for it tells us thrilling story of love between Ela and Atindra and gives us a successful portrayal of the poignance and pain of their love against the stormy background of the terrorism.
NOTES


3. Author’s Note, Four Chapters, p.vi.


5. Sukumar Sen, History of Bengali Literature (Sahitya – Akademi, New Delhi, 1960) P. 286.


11. Ibid, p.98.


15. Raj G.V.; *Tagore, the Novelist*, (Sterling publishers, Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 1983) p.102.


