Chapter 1

The Emerging Nation

Section I - Tagore and Nationalism

Tagore can be aptly described as a pre eminent poet and writer of decolonization who wrote extensively on the ‘nation’ and nationalist issues. As a writer his aim was to reflect and project a civilization that was “still organically integrated as the West no longer was.”¹ For Tagore, as for Gandhi the Western nation was a product of Western civilization. Gandhi described Western civilization as one of ‘irreligion’ that “takes note neither of morality nor of religion.”²

Both are unanimous in condemning commerce and greed as the bane of Western civilization and the forerunner of the ‘nation’. Tagore who describes the nation as “this organization of politics and commerce whose other name is the Nation, becomes all powerful at the cost of the harmony of the higher social life, then it is an evil day for humanity.”³ The reason for India’s abject condition is because, “This abstract being, the Nation, is ruling India.”⁴ Tagore contrasts the mechanical and dehumanized Western civilization and notion of the nation with the local, the indigenous and the diverse living traditions of India.

Before the nation came to rule over us we had other governments which were foreign, and these, like other
governments, had some element of the machine in them. But
the difference between them and the government by the Nation
is like the difference between the hand loom and the power
loom. In the products of the hand loom, the magic of man’s
living fingers finds its expression, and its hum harmonizes with
the magic of life. But the power loom is relentlessly lifeless
and accurate and monotonous in its production.  

His is a clarion call to the east, a warning, to not be mesmerized by the lure of
“an applied science,” that glittered but brought death and destruction in its
wake. He calls upon the world “not merely the subject races, but you who live
under the delusion that you are free, are everyday sacrificing your freedom
and humanity to this fetish of nationalism, living in the dense poisonous
atmosphere of world wide suspicion and greed and panic.”

He admired Japan’s rise as an Asian giant breaking the myth of racial
backwardness but went on to criticize the rise of strong nationalism that
finally resulted in Japan’s imperialistic expansion with disastrous
consequences for its Asian neighbours. “Tagore saw Japanese militarism as
illustrating the way nationalism can mislead even a nation of great
achievement and promise.”

After playing an inspirational role during the protests against the
partition of Bengal where his songs and poems were sung by the protesters,
Tagore withdrew, unhappy with the strongly nationalist form of the independence movement. He was particularly critical of the Swadeshi movement and the spinning of the charkha. He felt that there was no rationale behind the mass burning of foreign cloth. “But if there be anything wrong in wearing a particular kind of cloth, that would be an offence against economics, or hygiene or aesthetics, but certainly not against morality.” The reason to use or not use foreign cloth or spin the charkha for yarn should, according to Tagore, be left to economic science. He denounces the mass fervor, blind obedience and intolerance of dissent as dangerous for the future of India:

The command to burn foreign clothes has been laid on us, I, for one, am unable to obey it. Firstly, because I conceive it to be my very first duty to put up a valiant fight against this terrible habit of blindly obeying orders, and this fight can never be carried on by our people being driven from one injunction to another……But we must refuse to accept as our ally the illusion haunted magic-ridden slave-mentality that is at the root of all the poverty and insult under which our country groans. Here is the enemy itself, on whose defeat alone Swaraj within and without can come to us. This line of thinking is reflected in his novel Ghare Baire, where he warns against “the corruptibility of nationalism, since it is not even handed. Hatred
of one group can lead to hatred of others, no matter how far such feeling may be from the minds of large hearted nationalist leaders like Mahatma Gandhi."\textsuperscript{11} Partha Chaterjee in his article \textit{Rabindrik nation ki}, which can be translated as ‘What is Tagore’s nation?’ points out that Tagore had predicted the impermanence of nations and the emergence of a union of nations and that, as creations of history nations would come and go. From his writings and utterances on nationalism we see an anti-national Tagore, one who disengages himself from power structures and power struggles and one whose distaste for the ‘nation’ arises from the belief that it would crush individual freedom. In \textit{Gora} and \textit{Ghare Baire} we hear Tagore’s dissenting voice on nationalism.

\section*{Section II – \textit{Gora}: The Nation as an Ideational Space}

\textit{Gora} (1909-10) is Rabindranath Tagore’s longest novel and considered “One of the most important novels ever written in British India, for it is an allegory of Indian nationalism, partaking in a large measure Tagore’s own view of it whereby religious division is replaced by worship of India’s natural and cultural diversity.” \textsuperscript{12} It is a novel steeped in the colonial experience that highlights “the resultant crisis of personal identity.”\textsuperscript{13} Lakshmi Subramanian adds that, “The reality of the colonial subjugation with its racist overtones, its shattering cultural appeal and the impact it produced on the western educated middle – class Indian resulted in the fracturing of his
psyche. He emerged unsure, ambivalent and emaciated from the traumatic encounter.”¹⁴

This crisis of identity, as a byproduct of the East – West encounter is taken up by Tagore as the central theme of *Gora*. At the time of the writing of this novel the “Indian intelligentsia was in the grip of a love – hate relationship with the West in the person of their British rulers. Subjugation and humiliation which went with it gave rise to the hate. Love was felt for English literature, English law, the English parliamentary system, Western philosophy, modern science etc.”¹⁵ While a return to the pre-British past was not feasible, like the eponymous hero of *Gora*, “they idealized it for to do so was the only way they could escape the humiliation of the present and bask in imaginary glory.”¹⁶ The impact of western civilization created a growing middle class, that no matter how anglicized it tried to be, had to face “displacement and humiliation with rejection and racial injury.”¹⁷ and “at an individual level, man lost his image, his self-esteem…. At the collective level, the crisis produced a fractured national psyche, traumatized by the loss of independence which was as much an emotional injury as it was a political defeat. The search for self-esteem behind the larger issues of national and social regeneration”¹⁸ became the central theme of *Gora*, Rabindranath Tagore’s most widely acclaimed novel.

At the same time the novel has as its backdrop the period after the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857, a period of rising discontent against oppressive British rule. Nationalism and the idea of freedom fired the imagination of Indians
across all social classes. It was these “stirrings of national consciousness towards the end of the last century” that “created the historical and social setting for Gora.”

“The idea of the modern nation – state entered Indian society in the second half of the nineteenth century, riding piggy – back on western ideology of nationalism.” But some thinkers like Tagore were ambivalent towards the western notions of the nation, particularly the “idea of a mono-cultural nation-state, and towards nationalism itself.” Instead in Gora Tagore dwells on the civilizational aspects of nationalism, one that is needed in a multi–cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious country like India.

The partition of Bengal in 1905 fueled the fire of nationalism and Rabindranath found himself in the forefront of the movement. But the aggressive and violent dimension of the national movement led him to take up a public position against nationalism. While

Tagore was pleased with the arrival of Gandhi, the programme which Gandhi placed before the country dismayed him. The boycott of foreign goods, the burning of much needed cloth, non-cooperation carried to a point at which cultural ties with the West were apt to snap, seemed to him to be a campaign of hate and exclusion in the worst tradition of the nationalism which he had condemned in his book of that name.
His was the oppositional voice to Swadeshi. “He felt the need of a complete re-thinking as he could not place nationalism above the nation.”\textsuperscript{23} The homogeneous and mono-cultural view of the nation was unacceptable to Tagore. Instead his nationalism “was a distinctive civilizational concept of universalism embedded in the tolerance encoded in various traditional ways of life in a highly diverse, plural society.”\textsuperscript{24}

\textit{Gora} exemplifies this “vision of a new syncretic India, rising above the considerations of caste, community and race.”\textsuperscript{25} As in the case with all Tagore’s novels, the plot of \textit{Gora} is very simple. But here he uses a larger canvas. Set against political and social turmoil it resolves around four major characters, Gora, Sucharita, Binoy and Lolita. Love, religion, duty and patriotism came in conflict with one another. It centers around the two major movements of the time: Brahmo-Hindu conflicts and the nascent nationalism of the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century. The novel which, “mirrors faithfully the social, political and cultural life of the entire educated Bengali middle class,”\textsuperscript{26} is polemical, full of debate and argument. The male protagonists, old and young, are educated in English. All show a dexterity with words, particularly Gora and Binoy, whose main occupation seemed to be debating and journalistic enterprises. For, Gora too, nation building and the preservation of Indian culture was to be achieved through speeches and argument. His ‘Bharatdarshan’ was his only attempt to get to know the real India. So we see in the novel, an educated middle class based in the metropolis, with not much
interest in work, career or income generation. Except for Gora’s father and later his elder brother, who worked for the government, everyone else seemed to be beneficiaries of the Permanent Settlement Act with no worries about earning a livelihood. Hardly anyone from this charmed circle has had any interaction with Indians of a lower social class. Only Anandamoyi shares her space with her Christian maid Lachmiya, a mlechha. Even Gora, the patriot, abhors the inter-mixing of castes, classes, religions and races.

In fact “the themes of nation, nationalism and their problematics”27 are depicted very clearly in Gora. It is “almost a complete allegory of this theme that circumvents not only the modern interest but also pushes the debate to post-modern or post-national borders.”28

Briefly the novel is about Gora, or Gourmohan, who is adopted by the childless Anandamoyi and is brought up by the family. Gora is of European descent, born of Irish parents who do not survive the mutiny of 1857, and grows up to be a fanatic Hindu for whom Hinduism and Bharatvarsha are inextricably one. The final de-linking of Hinduism from the concept of Bharatvarsha is achieved from the knowledge of his birth. “Paradoxically, only the knowledge of his Irish birth could transform Gora into a true Indian wrenching him out of all sectarian identifications.”29

The idea of India, or the concept of Bharatvarsha is a key concept in Gora. It is more than a geographical area. It is identified with faith, religion,
tradition, customs and all manner of indigenous values and ideas.

Bharatvarsha is a mystical ‘entity’ that encompasses time itself, appropriating “the distant past and the even farther future, while weaving a particular thread in a particular pattern in the vast destiny of mankind.” (Gora 135)

“Bharatvarsha is an ideational geographical time – space that exceeds the limits of a particular nation, though this is not immediately apparent to Gora.”30 Bharatvarsha, has to “manifest itself through the materiality of a specific culture,” 31 hence, Bharatvarsha is identified with the Hindu nation. Therefore the flaws, suffering and injustice of Hindu society are naturally transposed into this Bharatvarsha and Gora, the Hindu zealot embraces this Bharatvarsha, warts and all. “I want the Bharatvarsha that I know. You may blame it, abuse it, but I want that and no other. I want to share the seat of dishonor which Bharatvarsha occupies at present, forsaken by the rest of the world, humiliated – this is my Bharatvarsha of caste discrimination, of blind superstition, of idol worship.” (G 324)

Gora is articulating an ideology grounded on a religious community as a weapon of anti-colonial resistance. And as Jasodhara Bagchi points out the paradox, “In the name of fighting colonial domination, the nationalists chose as their weapon precisely the element that the colonial masters had devised as a ruling category: religious identity.” 32
Tagore in “Self Identity” published in the Brahmo journal *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, 1912, says “The fact is that identity itself poses certain problems, even if I say that I am nothing, there is a difference with one who says that he is something. The difference itself may lead to fisticuffs and other violence. There is a difference between what I am and what I am not. Identity invariably spells the identity of difference.”\(^{33}\) Here, what we see is an early pronouncement of a post structuralist, post modernist emphasis on difference rather than commonality.

Gora’s irrational defense of Hinduism and his conceptualization of a Bharatvarsha that is different from the Western ‘nation’ is an attempt to defy the totalitarian attempt of an imperial power to smother identities of individuals, groups, and nations. Gora’s embrace of Hinduism is because it is the only acceptable indigenous identity.

The entire novel revolves around the question of identity. “Tagore tries to pose profound questions regarding identity, selfhood and the question of self – respect when faced with colonial domination.”\(^{34}\) He negotiates the three basic sets of oppositions between that of the East and the West, and between the past and the present through the plot, sub-plot and the cast of actors of the novel. The novel makes use of binaries and works in contraries. It takes a dialectical approach by pitting characters, circumstances, situations, and even dialogue against one another.
Gora, a white Irish orphan of the mutiny is adopted by the childless Anandamoyi. Tagore paints her as Mother India. Her husband, Krishnadayal, on the other hand, who was once the sycophantic, slavish Indian stands for the fossilized, deadening aspect of ritualistic Hinduism. Gora’s entry into the family makes Krishnadayal and Anandamoyi react in sharp contrast to each other. While Anandamoyi embraces Gora and envelopes him with love and affection, Krishnadayal recoils from his touch fearing caste pollution. In the course of time Gora grows to become a militant Hindu, fanatical in his defense of Hinduism. For Gora, Hinduism was synonymous with India.

Gora finds his culture threatened by the colonial masters, missionaries and also from Indians. His aggressive nationalism is directed more against the Indians in the form of the Brahmo Samaj. He accuses the Brahmos of surrendering to the colonial masters. He feels that the Indian reformers were the hand maidens of the missionaries. “The all important question for a patriot was whether such reforms were aimed at giving back to the people a purer form of religion without teaching them to disrespect it.”35 A large part of the novel is taken up by heated exchanges between Gora and the others. In fact Gora is in conflict with everyone in the novel, beginning with his own family. He, like Tagore, is the perennial dissenter. Of course he has Irish blood coursing through his veins and so dissent and an anti – British stance was natural.
As mentioned earlier, *Gora* is a paradoxical novel with characters, who are opposite sets as well as pairs. This gives rise to an ongoing dialectic of its own. Contrary points of view, contrasting characters, conflicting attitudes make the characters multi-dimensional and give the novel greater moral and intellectual depth and emotional and aesthetic appeal. Harimohini and Krishnadayal are the opposite of Anandamoyi and Poresh babu as are Baradasundari and Panubabu. Lalita and Sucharita parallel Gora and Binoy. Gora-Sucharita, Binoy-Lolita are opposites that attract. Each help the other and in discovering each other find themselves. Panubabu is as fanatical a Brahmo as Gora is a militant Hindu, and Baradasundari is at the other end of the spectrum from Anandamoyi.

The central paradox is Gora’s birth which is hidden from him but not from the readers. And therein lies the inherent irony of Gora’s speech and actions. The revelation that he is white, a mlechha, comes to him at the end of the novel. Gora who protested Lachamiya’s presence and refused to be served food by Anandamoyi, who would not accept the barber’s hospitality is himself an outcaste. “He felt he was floating like a momentary dewdrop on a lotus leaf. He had no father, no mother, no country, no race, no name, no lineage and no god. All of them constituted a ‘no’. What could he do? Hold on to what? Start from where?” (*G* 471)
The revelation of Gora’s identity takes place before he is about to be proclaimed as “that brahman of Bharatvarsha” (G 453), the upholder of “sanatan dharma” (G 469). At the same time just as his love for Sucharita seemed to be doomed, by her being about to be given away in marriage to an older widower, comes the news that he is Irish, not a Brahmin. He is at once lost and found. He loses his caste but finds himself as an Indian, above caste, creed and religion. In losing kinship ties he could forge new bonds of love and mutual respect.

That which I sought day and night to become but could not, today I have indeed become that. Today I am Bharatiya. Within me there is no conflict between communities, whether Hindu or Muslim or Krishtan. Today all the castes of Bharat are my caste, whatever everybody eats is my food. It was as if I carried around with me some invisible gap of separation, which I could not cross. Because of this there was a great void in my mind. (G 476)

At the end of the novel Gora asks to be taught the mantra of “that deity who belongs to all – Hindu, Muslim, Khrishtan, Brahmo – the doors of whose temple are never closed to any person of any caste or race – the deity not only of the Hindus but of Bharatvarsha.” (G 470) The novel then is not just a search for self-identity but for secularism that is “inclusive and indigenous at the same time.”36
It is interesting that the novel opens with a song from Lalan Fakir whose blending of Hinduism and Islam constituted an indigenous secularism that existed before the British created communal divisions. That Lalan Fakir, a poor wandering minstrel, representing the voice of the subaltern should open a novel based on metropolitan middle class lives, indicates also Tagore’s search for a national identity that rejected caste, class, religions and gender barriers. Gora’s movement from being exclusivist to inclusiveness echoes Tagore’s critique of militant Swadeshi, Hindutva and Nationalism. Gora is a call to “Form yourself into a nation and resist this encroachment of the ‘Nation’.”37 Like Gandhi, Tagore looks at the traditions and values of Indic civilization, to work with difference and seek unity in diversity. A nationalism circumscribed by a moral universe brings Gora closer to his mother, and by implication, his motherland.

Gora “who is both centre and circumference”38 of the novel is the oppositional voice which resolves tensions and conflicts and brings about the unity of the novel.

Section III - Ghare Baire: The Laxman Rekha and Beyond

In colonial Bengal there was no unique discourse, no single voice articulating the attitude and viewpoint of a subjugated people, but always a diversity of responses. A multiplicity of voices including those of Ram Mohan Roy, Bankim Chandra, Madhusudan Dutt, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and Swami Vivekananda emerged from the colonial space. If there was a
consensus, it was that the west was materially superior while the east was spiritually superior. The consensus was on creating a “cultural ideal in which the industries and the sciences of the West can be learnt and emulated while retaining the spiritual greatness of Eastern culture.”

A certain ambivalence marked the educated middle class Bengali’s response to colonial rule. Attacks on western culture and efforts to glorify Hindu civilization went hand in hand with a desire for approval and acceptance by colonial masters. This ambivalence permeated every strata of society and more so the newly emerging middle classes. It is important to note that the ‘Bhadralok’, a representative of the middle class was a creation of colonial rule, who in turn moulded the ‘Bhadramahila’. The ‘Bhadralok’ and his counterpart were a result of the middle class effort to redefine for themselves their roles within and outside a new social system.

Social scientists like Partha Chatterjee have argued that the “domain of culture” was split up into “two spheres – the material and the spiritual” and into “ghar and bahir, the home and the world.” Prolonged colonial rule and political subjugation bred a sense of inferiority in the Bengali male. Coupled with this subject status was a desire for freedom from the colonial yoke fueled by reading literary, political and philosophical texts of English and European origin. This created further ambivalence and produced an unstable relationship not only between ruler and ruled but between colonial subjects themselves.
Not only did caste, class and religious groups set out to acquire new identities but also produced a volatile ideological context in which the man-woman relationship had to be redefined. The modernization programme of the British was supported by the elite and the growing middle class who saw western education and industrialization as a means to move up socially and secure economic benefits. The introduction of women’s education and social reform movements brought colonial rule into households. The desire for political autonomy had to also take this into account and percolate down to familial relationships.

Tagore’s *Ghare Baire (Home and the World)* is a product of the crisis of that time, and as a colonial artifact it echoes through its narration a large number of attitudes, not always compatible with the colonial experience. The novel deals with the experience of modernity and the price one has to pay for it. In this novel Tagore makes a departure from the conventional narrative mode. He abandons the device of an omnipresent narrator and instead the three main characters, Bimala, Nikhilesh and Sandip alternately tell their own stories.

*Home and the World* is a mirror of its time. That the colonial project fashioned a new woman strikes us when we encounter Bimala’s speaking voice in the opening pages of the novel. By beginning with Bimala’s story Tagore not only puts her at par with the male protagonists but actually
privileges her story over theirs. In the original Bangla she is attributed ten stories while Nikhilesh has eight and Sandip five respectively. Tagore gives her more space because she undertakes the longest journey of self discovery. She alone traverses from inner to outer and then back to the inner world. Her narrative is the longest not only because the plot revolves around her journey from innocence to experience, but also because she is constituted and reconstituted by the gaze of the other. Hers is therefore the most complex and compelling character in the novel.

Bimala was a product of the age. “I am educated. I am acquainted with this day and age in today’s language.” (Home and the World 3) So she is most suited for the Bhadralok project. Both Nikhilesh and Sandip try to fashion her according to their world views. Nikhilesh wishes to emancipate her and mould her into an ideal companion, stepping out into the world yet with one foot in the home. Sandip projects his wishes on to her by making her an icon of the nation. Yet Bimala becomes neither. She first moves away from her husband and flirts with nationalism of the Swadeshi variety only to realize that it is physical intimacy with a passionate and ruthless man that she actually craves. She had snubbed her husband when he declared that “The world outside may be in need of you” (HW 10) yet when she catches her first glimpse of Sandip she is mesmerized “by the compelling aura of the man!” (HW19) She “was past caring. At that moment I was no longer the daughter-in-law of this aristocratic household. I was the sole representative of all the women in
Bengal and he was its hero”. (HW 20) But having spent all her life in the Antapur she is plagued by self-doubt. Her lack of beauty worries her. Without beauty what would get her noticed? “But would male eyes be able to perceive the goddess unless there was surface beauty? Would Sandip babu be able to glimpse in me the life force of the nation? Or would he think of me as an ordinary woman, his friend’s wife and the mistress of the house?” (HW 21) She wants to be more than what she is, to be seen beyond the confines of traditional roles but uses feminine wiles, dresses up for Sandip but justifies it by saying that “If I don’t appear decently dressed before Sandipbabu, my husband will be upset- after all, women are supposed to uphold the social prestige for the household.” (HW 22) Bimala’s problem is that she is unable to define her role in the world, She is between two worlds. “Under the colorful jackets, saris, blouses, petticoats and all other accessories,” (HW 7) she was not only the spitting image of her mother but believed like her that chastity, devotion and reverence towards her husband elevates a woman. “I placed my conceit in my chastity. I knew that even my husband would have to bow before it.” (HW 10)

Bimala’s failure to redefine her role within the liberated space of her home is emblematic of Tagore’s apprehension about the new power equations between the sexes in a modernizing world. She internalizes the myth that woman is either Lakshmi, the benign goddess of good fortune or the incarnation of the powerful Shakti. She tries to play these roles within her
household. At the same time western ways have impacted her but in superficial ways such as in her attire, her hair style and accessories. All the three protagonists have been influenced by the west, but only in Nikhilesh is there a balance between tradition and modernity. He is a post graduate who completed his education in the city but returned to dwell in the village living in an orthodox household where “some rules were as old as the Mughals and some were even older set by Manu and Parashar” (HW 3). Yet “he dared to transgress the bounds of conformity” (HW 3) by appointing Miss Gilby as Bimala’s companion and tutor. He also believed that “men and women have equal rights over one another…” (HW 5)

Sandip too has supped from the high table of the west but has partaken the fascist doctrine of might is right, of the Nietzschean doctrine of will for power. Behind Sandip’s brand of narrow chauvinistic nationalism was the dreaded shadow of the West on the East. Nikhilesh too is a product of western education but Tagore makes him the representative of all that is good in both east and west. He combines a love of freedom, rational thought and restrained behavior. As landlord, he is trustee of family property as well as that of his tenants. He is benevolent and generous to a fault. Nikhilesh is believed to be Tagore’s alter ego. Both were zamindars, subservient to the British government, yet both were genuine swadeshis. Both had tried their best to promote indigenous industry long before the upsurge of Swadeshi hit the country. Both had to face hostility and were much misunderstood.
In *Home and the World* Tagore, through the political dynamics created, articulates a nationalism that is humane and in which all Indians could participate as equals, where men and women would be tied together by trust, truth and love.

**Section IV - Woman Imagining the Nation**

Early and mid-nineteenth century Bengal witnessed what has been popularly called the Bengal Renaissance. This was an outcome of the Indo-British encounter whereby social and economic structures were shaken at the foundations and traditional institutions and value systems were questioned and overturned. The ‘renaissance’ paid special attention to education and religious beliefs and practices. Stalwarts of the movement like Raja Rammohun Roy took upon themselves the task of purging society of social evils and making it reach acceptable western standards. It was but natural that the woman’s question would become the central issue in the social reform movement since the backwardness of Indian society was inextricably measured by the oppressed status of its women. So heated was the debate between the traditionalists and the reformers that it polarized society and twice split Rammohun Roy’s Brahmo Samaj over the question of marriage laws and the ‘age of consent.’ According to Partha Chatterjee, “The question of the ‘new woman’ was, like other contemporary issues formulated …. As a question of coping with change.” Refashioning of women was the avowed aim of the
project of social reform. The ‘new woman’ was a male construct and as Bankimchandra Chatterjee pointed out, “Self-interested men are mindful of the improvement of women only to the extent that it furthers their self-interest; not for any other reason.” Thus we see that in nineteenth century Bengal, the ‘new woman’ was subjected to a new patriarchy, one that was defined by notions of ‘modernity’ imbibed from the colonial masters. However, while the early nineteenth century was consumed by the reform movement the issue took a backseat towards the end of the century when political and nationalistic issues took over. The outcome is a problematic relationship between nationalism, modernity and the ‘woman’s question.’

Tagore’s novels, Gora and Home and the World can be studied in this light. In Gora we see the impact of the social reform movements and the central position accorded to religion as well as the ‘woman’s question.’ However in Home and the World, Tagore problematises this issue by placing Bimala at the crossroads. The depiction of home and the world could be understood as conflicting ways of constructing the ‘new woman’ by the reformers and the nationalists. Both the reformists and nationalist ideologies subjected women to a new patriarchy and we see the women in Tagore’s novels being shaped by it. At the same time, Lolita, Sucharita, Anandamoyi and Bimala emerge as individuals in their own right and contribute to the discourse of the ‘nation’. In an essay comparing the virtues and faults of
women of the earlier and modern times Bankimchandra lists their virtues and defects.

In the past, women were uneducated, and therefore coarse, vulgar, and quarrelsome. By comparison, modern women have more refined tastes. On the other hand, whereas women were once hardworking and strong, they were now lazy and fond of luxury, unmindful of housework, and prone to all sorts of illnesses. Further, in the olden days women were religious. They were faithful to their husbands, hospitable to guests, and charitable to the needy. They genuinely believed in the norms of right conduct. Today, if women do these things, they do so more because of fear of criticism than because they have faith in dharma.  

However we see that Anandamoyi, Lolita, Sucharita and even Bimala combine in their persona both modern and traditional values of refinement and strength. They are religious, dutiful, defer to male authority, are caring and compassionate. Yet they are intelligent, articulate, have a mind of their own and emerge as independent individuals. From within the home they contribute to the discourse of the nation.

In all of Tagore’s novels, except Gora, women are the protagonists. But here too they play a crucial role in moving the plot forward. Sucharita and Lolita are products of western liberalism and represent the new class of
emancipated women. Anandamoyi, the daughter of a Benares pundit represents tradition but is a blend of the best of both. She is the bridge that connects the girls with Gora and Binoy. Though steeped in tradition, Anandamoyi does not allow any man-made law to come in the way of doing right. Gora gets his strength from her.

Anandamoyi is the Hindu counterpart of Poreshbabu. Though they are on opposite sides of the religious spectrum both are non-sectarian and possess a liberal outlook. Free from fanaticism, they are humanists to the core and are hence ideally suited to be mentors to their respective wards. Anandamoyi appears to be a symbol of Tagore’s vision of life. She stands for universal love and embodies in her life and conduct the ideal of ‘heaven of freedom’, where there is no barrier between man and man. Though born in an age of tradition and taboo, Anandamoyi is not a docile woman. She is independent, an individualist who does not support nor follow any of her husband’s religious fads. By her actions she proves that individualism is not a masculine preserve. Sucharita and Lalita speak from the standpoint of the ‘new woman’. Each is paired with a man who is exactly opposite in nature and temperament. Lolita is bold, independent, fiery, rebellious, self-willed and outspoken while Binoy is reticent, mild, conservative but not orthodox. Sucharita is sweet tempered, calm, quiet, mature and wise beyond her years while Gora is orthodox, sectarian, aggressive, outspoken to the point of being rude. Though poles apart they complement each other and journey together towards self discovery.
Sucharita administers the necessary dose of liberalism to his narrow sectarian views and guides him towards a more universal perception of India. Gora’s identity is tested in the crucible of love. Gora, who had always kept afar from women was transformed by Sucharita.

He had not known earlier how incomplete his understanding of Bharatvarsha was so long as he did not acknowledge the presence of its women. So long as woman was a shadowy creature to him, there was something lacking in his sense of duty towards his country, as if there was power but no life, muscles but no nerves. Gora realized in a moment that the farther we keep women, the more dismissive we are of their value, and our manhood grows weaker in the same proportion.

(G 330)

Sucharita too expands her horizons after her acquaintance with Gora and Binoy. For the first time, she comes in contact with people outside her Brahmo community and through Gora gets a glimpse of another India beyond closed confines of home and community. “Sucharita was made painfully aware of the realization that life was not something confined within four walls or restricted to a community.”(G 137) Binoy was always left dumbstruck by the fiery Lolita.
When Lolita raises her eyebrows and says, ‘If you imagine that you men will work for the world while we women work for you, let me tell you this won’t happen….If only you allowed women to move about, whether at home or out on the road, there would be no need to leave them out;’ when she said this, I couldn’t reply and kept quiet. Lolita does not always speak out, but when she does, one has to be very careful in answering her. (G 127-128)

Gora fights against the colonial system that created the hierarchy of ruler and ruled. He fights this hierarchy and the resultant oppression as seen in his crusade for the poor uneducated villagers of Ghoshpura. Like Gora, Lolita confronts not only colonial hierarchy but social hierarchy as well when she refuses to perform before the magistrate and runs away to Kolkata alone with Binoy. When her family and community was vilifying Gora she felt that “the Char Ghoshpura affair only showed up Gourmohan Babu’s true nobility.” (G 187) Her defense of Gora and defiance of social conventions amazed Binoy. “The more he dwelt on all this the more his admiration grew for Lalita’s heedless courage of conviction and her utter intolerance of wrong-doing.”(G 193) Binoy humbly conceded that “Lolita was far superior to him by virtue of her independence of mind.” (G 193) Though neither Anandamoyi, Sucharita nor Lalita set out to prove their equality to men, Gora and Binoy acknowledge them to be superior. Poreshbabu, in his description of Lolita actually conveys the essence of all three: “That beauty was not a matter of
tender grace but had the force of independent thinking and firmness and strength.” (G 211)

Modernity and nationalism are key components in the ideological matrix based on which Tagore explores the idea of the ‘nation’ and national identity. Gora and Home and the World were written after Tagore became disillusioned with the violent and exclusivist nature of Swadeshi nationalism. Both can be read as critiques of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal in the early twentieth century. Though he may be considered as one of the major builders of national identity, he was also a dissenter. He was not only a critic of Hindu orthodoxy but also questioned a nationalism that thrived on violence, realpolitik and exclusion of Muslims and lower castes.

While he threw himself wholeheartedly into the Swadeshi movement to protest the partition of Bengal, he was dismayed at the communal turn of events and made public his reservation about nationalism. According to Tagore resistance to colonial rule had to be rooted in India’s cultural heritage and plural ways of life. His idea of the nation and patriotism is imagined in the song Jana Gana Mana which he wrote in 1913. According to Tanika Sarkar, “The country is evoked as an entity made up of many people, many landscapes, many histories and cultures …. The nation ...... is a space of dispersion of identities, a field where differences are displayed ..... and plurality harmonize.”

44
Disillusioned by the sectarian and militant turn of events Tagore withdrew from active participation in the Swadeshi movement. He went into self imposed exile to his estates where he experimented like Nikilesh in *Ghare Baire*, in constructive Swadeshi. On his estates he realized the class bias and insensitivity of the nationalist ideology that forced the poor peasants who were chiefly Muslims and low caste Hindus to continue to suffer hardship in the name of Swadeshi. The proponents of Swadeshi were not only indifferent to their suffering but exploited the poor to further their movement against the British. Jasodhara Bagchi also points out that it was in the aftermath of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal that “Rabindranath Tagore turned seriously to the question of identity and selfhood in matters relating to possible national identity.”

Mulling over these issues and the barbs and jibes of his critics Tagore responded with *Ghare Baire*, the Bengali original of *Home and the World*, which was first serialized in the avant garde journal *Sabuj Patra* from May 1915 to February 1916. *Home and the World*, was written in the more colloquial chalit bhasha instead the formal Sanskritised sadhu bhasha. It is written in a personalized diary form with three narratives that constitute the novel’s text. The diary form with its first person account provided a kind of interiority that is ideally suited to the exploration of selfhood and identity.
Home and the World, located in a crucial moment in the history of Bengal and India, works at several levels. At one level “it involves a debate between intensely ideational protagonists about the individual, society and nation.” At another level it is preoccupied with women’s choices and desires. With its basis in society and history the novel is a psychological exploration of womanhood, manhood and what constitute the nation. The novel dwells on duality and complementarities. Home and World, Inside and Outside, Truth and Illusion, Man and Woman, Love and Loss, Chastity and Desire, Fidelity and Adultery, Old and New. Neither can exist without the other.

The story of Home and the World is simply told: Bimala an intelligent but uneducated girl is married into a rich and aristocratic family not on the strength of her beauty but because she had “all the signs of good fortune” and would “make a virtuous wife.” (HW 1) Her husband is a scholarly English educated modern man. He is a do-gooder who believes that actions speak louder than words. Bimala is much loved and cared for in the household. As the wife of the landlord she enjoys a privileged status and is busy with her domestic life. But Nikhilesh who dotes on her has other plans for her. He wants to educate her and engages an English governess Miss Gilby to instruct her in the language and ways of the English speaking world. This is the first incursion of the outside world into the home. Nikhilesh also introduces her to
western style dressing and wants to take her out of the andarmahal which she
refuses at first. He wants a companion in marriage. She wants to worship him.

The household is run by the matriarch, Nikhilesh’s grandmother and
his two widowed sisters-in-law. The women remain in the andarmahal and
much as Nikhilesh would wish to, he cannot break all the orthodox rules of
the inner chambers. Then one day Nikhilesh’s friend Sandip arrives at the
house “to spread the Swadeshi message.” (HW 19) Bimala had heard about
him from Nikhilesh, and also seen his photograph which she didn’t much like,
but she is swept off her feet by his fiery nationalism. While all the women
watched from behind the screen she chooses to thrust her face out and gaze
steadily at him. Sandip’s eyes too settle on her face and it is the moment of
transformation. She is “no longer the daughter-in-law of this aristocratic
household….” but “the sole representative of all the women in Bengal and he
was the hero.” (HW 20) It is at this moment that she identifies her newly
awakened desires with that of a newly awakened country. Like its women, a
country subjugated, exploited and passive comes alive. Woman becomes the
nation. It is important to note that even before Sandip invests in her the
attributes of a goddess, she herself becomes Lakshmi, Bharati and Jagadhatri.
She sees in herself the “life force of the nation” (HW 21) and moves from
bhakti to shakti.

Bimala is no mute pawn in nationalist history but acts of her own
volition. She directs Sandip’s gaze towards her and declares her wish to serve
him lunch herself. Earlier Nikhilesh had tried to get Bimala to meet his friends but had failed. She had even refused to go to Calcutta with him for fear that her sisters-in-law would usurp her position. But now she invites the outside world inside. As if Swadeshi and nationalism is her true calling. She stands on the threshold of modernity. Though schooled by her husband, it is her decision to move from the inner quarters into the drawing room. It is interesting that she never goes beyond the drawing room. All discussions, debates, meetings and transgressions take place here. As if she is like the nation in the making not yet ready to fully step out. She stands as it were, in hyphenated space between tradition and modernity, between chastity and adultery, between innocence and experience.

The home and the world had been described by E. M. Forster as a roman a trois. A triangular love story where two men are in love with the same woman. But I suggest that it is a triangle whose locus is constantly shifting from Nikhilesh to Bimala, to Sandeep, and back again. Each of them sees the other in their own image and each complements the other.

Bimala’s story is central to the novel because she becomes the contested site of both the personal and the political. Sandip addresses her as Queen Bee and assures her that she will be the rallying force of all nationalists. Bimala joins hand with Sandip and goes all out to help him in his work. She, who was shy and hesitant to appear before men, who did not
reciprocate Nikhilesh’s desire for a companionate marriage based on equal partnership, was now ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with Sandip. In the process she neglects her husband and home. Too late, she realizes the hollowness of Sandip’s rhetoric, his love of power and base passions. By then communal fires have been lit by Sandip’s brand of militant nationalism. Sandip flees the scene. Nikhilesh who Bimala had earlier accused of cowardice rushes into the maelstrom maybe never to return. The end foreshadows the violence of partition and the resultant human tragedy.

How did Nikhilesh’s noble and liberal intentions of education and women’s upliftment go awry? Why does his love for Bimala push her away from him? Why does she worship but can not love the better man?

It is perhaps because both inhabit different worlds simultaneously. Both are caught up in the conflict between the material and spiritual. Both wish to preserve the sanctity of colonized space yet are tempted to enter the colonizer’s world. They are trapped in the predicament of modernity. Sandip is merely the catalyst that forces Bimala and Nikhilesh towards self-realization. Both journey from innocence to experience as they grapple with ethical questions.

The novel is deliberately left open ended because the discourses of gender and nation are continuously evolving. Tagore spells out quite clearly through the conduct and utterances of Lalita and Sucharita that the modern
woman is not one who imitates western ways and rejects Indian customs but one who protests injustice and is not afraid to act on her convictions. Their modernity lies in reaching out, engaging with the outer world. Both the novels deal with the evolution of women as social, political and sexual beings.

Reading *The Home and the World* side by side with *Gora* helps us to understand that ‘ghar’ and ‘bahir’ in the novels do not only refer to the question of woman’s emancipation from the patriarchal system within her family, with the anti-colonial movement providing a kind of background to it; it is also about a woman’s awareness of the anti-colonial struggle and the evolution of her political as well as sexual subjectivity as a participant in it. ⁴⁷

**Section V - Waiting for the Mahatma**

A biography of the modern nation – state in India cannot be written without examining the key role played by two of its most distinguished sons, Rabindranath Tagore and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. They spent their lives in creating and working towards specific imaginings of the self, society and the world.
Western notions of nation and nationalism gave the impetus to a
nationalist movement which in turn began to question and probe the issues of
nation, nationalism and identity. By the 1920s, doubts and questions about
nationalism had appeared within the Indian freedom struggle. “And this
ambivalence was often expressed by some of the most important figures in the
movement, by those very persons who could be considered the major builders
of India’s national identity.” This section focuses on the two seminal
thinkers who explored and tried to reconcile the inherent contradictions of an
emerging nation. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Mohandas
Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) faced and tried to reconcile the oppositions
between the East and the West, between tradition and modernity and between
past and present. While both respected and influenced each other they did
differ in their world views.

In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru:

Tagore and Gandhi have undoubtedly been the two outstanding
and dominating figures of India in this first half of the
twentieth century. It is instructive to compare and contrast
them….Tagore, the aristocratic artist, turned democrat with
proletarian sympathies, represented essentially the cultural
tradition of India…… Gandhi, more a man of the people,
amongst the embodiment of the Indian peasant, represented the
other ancient tradition of India, that of renunciation and
asceticism. And yet Tagore was primarily the man of thought, Gandhi, of concentrated and ceaseless activity. Both, in their different ways, had a world outlook, and both were at the same time wholly Indian. They seemed to represent different but harmonious aspects of India and to complement each other.\textsuperscript{49}

They were unanimous in not wanting “their society to be caught in a situation where the idea of the Indian nation would supersede that of Indian Civilization”\textsuperscript{50} and that a national ideology of India was necessary for its cultural survival. This common vision of India was to become the basis of a modern consciousness. The Gurudev and the Mahatma, titles they gave each other, not only helped strengthen the foundations of the Indian nation but ultimately went beyond the narrow confines of nationalism.

It is necessary to highlight the role they played and more importantly how Rabindranath Tagore prophesied the arrival of the Mahatma and in his novels \textit{Gora} and \textit{Home and the World} created Gandhian heroes and gave expression to Gandhi’s philosophy of self reliance, ahimsa and satyagraha much before Gandhi took India by storm. Writing in 1902 when he had no knowledge of Gandhi, Tagore wrote “It appears that the advent of a mahapurush (a great man) is imminent amongst us. He will show us the way, he will make us feel proud of our heritage, and he will lead us to our desired goal.”\textsuperscript{51} The desired goal was of course freedom and it would be through the
nationalist movement led by Gandhi that independence would come at the stroke of the midnight hour.

We need to quickly look at the idea of nation and nationalism that gave the impetus to the national movement and the role of Tagore and Gandhi in formulating and taking these ideas forward. In the words of Hans Kohn, nationalism is “a product of the growth of social and intellectual factors at a certain stage of history.” Through British intervention the western nation and western civilization came to dominate India. Along with the all pervading power of a modern western type government was the influence of modern industrialization. The economic policy of the British government destroyed the traditional village economy and upset social stability. At the same time the British education system began to take the youth away from traditional systems of occupations creating intellectual disorientation in the process. Western education in the form of information and instruction was at variance with the traditional skills, knowledge and wisdom of the family and community. This served to create not only disorientation but confusion and rootlessness among the youth. It is this aspect of western education and economy that Tagore critiques in Gora. Tagore along with Gandhi was deeply disturbed by the debilitating impact of westernization on Indian social and cultural life.
A study of post-colonial consciousness requires an enquiry into the psychological structures and cultural forces which supported or resisted the culture of colonialism in India. Though colonialism entered India in 1757 after the Battle of Plassey, the actual colonization of the mind can be taken to have begun in the late 1820s when a race based colonial theory of culture was first implemented. The colonized Indians engaged the colonial rulers in creating an alternative language of discourse. Tagore and Gandhi focused on the living traditions of India as opposed to the modernism of colonial ideology. They formulated a new idiom to battle colonialism and to counter the racial domination on Indian culture. It was unacceptable to Tagore and Gandhi that an imposed ‘high culture’, a product of colonial rule, would subsume indigenous cultures.

Benedict Anderson analyzes the concept of the nation as an imagined community and Partha Chatterjee discusses its relevance to Indian Nationalism. In their seminal works *Imagined Communities* and *The Nation and its Fragments* Anderson and Chatterjee point out to the role played by culture, language and capitalism in the formation of nation and nationalism. They strongly propounded the role of culture in the creation of nation and nationalism. In order to understand where Tagore and Gandhi are located in the construction of the Indian nationality we may turn to Partha Chatterjee’s modified application of Gramsci’s framework of three movements. Chatterjee’s model has three stages or moments ---the moment of departure,
manoeuvre and arrival. The moment of departure was the awareness of the essential difference between the East and the West, the excellence of western materialism and superiority of eastern spiritualism. The moment of manoeuvre was when a direct attack on the state took place alongside guerilla tactics and the moment of arrival is when nationalist thought attains its fullest development.

Tagore can be located, though Chatterjee does not bring him into the picture, in the latter half of the first moment and the beginning of the second period while Gandhi defines the second period, i.e. the moment of manoeuvre. In locating Tagore at the cusp of two historic moments, the moments of departure and manoeuvre it becomes possible to study his views and literary works in the light of the emergence of Swadeshi, Swaraj and Gandhi. References to *Gora* and *Home and the World* will highlight why I chose to call them Tagore’s Gandhi novels.

*Gora* was first serialized in the Bangla monthly *Probasi* and appeared as a book in 1909. During the partition of Bengal in 1905 Rabindranath found himself in the forefront of the movement. But he soon took up a public position against nationalism and played a contrarian role in the Swadeshi movement and this can be seen in his major works of this period, namely, *Gora, Ghare Baire* and *Char Adhyay*. The search for self esteem behind the larger issues of national and social regeneration became the central theme of
Gora. Gora, a white, Irish orphan of the Mutiny is adopted by the childless Anandamoyi. Her husband Krishnadayal became anglicized to further his career in government service but as he approached retirement turned to orthodox Hinduism to redeem himself. Anandamoyi, on the other hand, though a daughter of a Benares pundit and brought up amidst Hindu conventions moves away from orthodoxy without abandoning the basic tenets such as compassion, tolerance and understanding. It is her nobility and quiet dignity that makes Gora equate her with the motherland. “The mother whom I have been wandering about in search of, was all the time sitting in my room at home. You have no caste, you make no distinction and have no hatred-you are only the image of our welfare. It is you who are India.” (G 477) Tagore paints her as Mother India and through Gora’s proclamation seems to be saying that the real India can only be seen by Indian eyes. That India is not a western construct, but is in the image of Indians. It cannot be constructed from the outside but can only be imagined from within. India is to be constructed in the image of Indians, especially in the image of Indian women, both in Gora and Ghare Baire.

Tagore’s search for a national identity that rejected caste, class, religious and gender barriers and Gora’s movement from exclusivism to inclusiveness echoes Tagore’s critique of militant Swadeshi, Hindutva and nationalism. Like Gandhi, Tagore looks at the traditions and values of Indian civilization, to work with difference and seek unity in diversity. A nationalism
circumscribed by a moral universe brings Gora closer to his mother and by implication, motherland. While the characterization of Gora is said to be based on Vivekananda or even Sister Nivedita he could equally be foretelling the coming of Gandhi the messiah of the Indian masses, a man, strong of conviction, firm in resolve and not afraid to walk alone.

*Ghare Baire* is an explicitly political novel while *Gora* was a journey of self exploration and search for identity with the Mutiny and Swadeshi as a backdrop. First serialized in the literary periodical *Sabuj Patra* during 1915-16 it was published in 1916. If *Gora* takes the form of a bildungsroman then *Ghare Baire* problematises both self and patriotism, issues that were rife both in Europe during World War I and in its aftermath during the Swadeshi movement in India. In *Ghare Baire*, social and political movements play upon interior subjectivities. The protagonists are shown trying to cope with the political upheavals in an unevenly modernizing society. The impact of colonialism is seen not only in the outside world but also behind closed doors.

The three main protagonists of the novel are Bimala, Nikhilesh and Sandip. Bimala’s aristocratic husband Nikhilesh adores her and decides to bring her out of the andarmahal. He engages an English governess and Bimala becomes part of the colonial project of female education and emancipation. As in *Gora*, in *Ghare Baire* too the woman is identified with the mother goddess and by extension with the motherland. She is deified and worshipped as the symbol of the nation-state. Tagore critiques the idolatry of the modern idol, the nation state. This idolatry gained momentum after Anandamath, when Vande
Mataram became the rallying cry of revolutionaries. Through Sandip, militant nationalism enters the household and spreads the canker of violence and communal disharmony in that village society. Bimala’s infatuation with Sandip’s brand of nationalism blinds her to its dangers leading to tragic consequences. Her husband Nikhilesh’s life is endangered while trying to contain the communal fires lit by Sandip and his followers.

The Hungarian critic George Lukacs wrote a scathing review of the novel, calling it Tagore’s Gandhi novel. Lukacs’s criticism is based on a misreading and misunderstanding of the facts. Yes, Ghare Baire is Tagore’s Gandhi novel but it “was not influenced by the non cooperation movement of Gandhi but by the terrorist politics unleashed by the Bengal partition movement of 1905.” It is not Sandip but Nikhilesh who is the Gandhian hero. Sandip represents the extremist, hardline, inflexible position whereas Nikhilesh is the epitome of Gandhian values of goodness, generosity, ahimsa and sacrifice. Nikhilesh believes in village industries and the true spirit of Swadeshi rather than the symbolic burning of cloth. His is a restrained patriotism instead of the flamboyance of the professional politician Sandip. Nikhilesh stands for inclusiveness whereas Sandip makes use of an exclusivist cultural and religious idiom. Tagore critiques real politik and violent nationalism. His is a plea for patriotism where India, the Bharatvarsha of Gora is placed higher than the modern nation state. So Sandip is definitely not a caricature of Gandhi as Lukacs believes but is a parody of the rabble rousing
revolutionary for whom the end justifies the means. In fact Tagore was an admirer of Gandhi’s South African satyagraha and the two met for the first time only in March 1915. “Sandip, is if anything, anti-Gandhi and criticism of him is an oblique defense of Gandhian politics before such a politics had taken shape.”\textsuperscript{54} Both Nikhilesh and Gora embody Gandhian values even before they gained wide currency. Rural service, education of the masses, ahimsa and satyagraha, refusal to compromise with the truth, unflinching faith in India and its traditions, yet against differences of caste, creed and religion, Nikhilesh and Gora anticipate the “low key, unheroic consensual nationalism which Gandhi wanted a multi ethnic society like India to have.”\textsuperscript{55}

During his long career as a writer and public figure, Tagore was both venerated and vilified. His penchant for controversy and provocative debate and his radical social and political views did not endear him to many. Not least the nationalists who were the targets of his incisive views. He was committed to the truth and questioned all forms of authoritarian frameworks of thought. This made him a life long critic of sectarianism and orthodoxy across the social and religious spectrum. He held orthodoxy responsible for oppression and social divisions. As a contributor to the avant garde journal \textit{Sabuj Patra}, he shared its aim to “really jolt the reader’s mind and shake it.”\textsuperscript{56}
Tagore had a problematic relationship with nationalism. His questioning of the Swadeshi movement because of its communal color earned him the ridicule of many. His commitment to truth and the nature of his convictions called for introspection and the need to move away from the West’s version of nationalism to one that is rooted in India and her diverse traditions. Tagore’s break with Swadeshi and his reservations about nationalism are crystallized in Gora and Home and the World. Both the novels mark a major step in his critique of a pure national identity as well as competitive nationalism. Instead he proposed a universalism based on truth, justice and human relationships. At the same time this belief in universal values also made him indict colonial oppression and force. Colonial rule and its political economy led to the exploitation of various sections of society, more so the poor and marginalized. The abject poverty of the peasants was clear to him when he began taking a direct interest in the running of his estates in East Bengal.

The peasant rebellion in Patna in 1873, the Bengal tenancy amendment bill of 1885, the plight of Indigo farmers provides historical referents to Gora and Home and the World. By alluding to Sister Nivedita, Vivekananda, Gandhi and himself, Tagore sets up a historical referent that adds metaphorical resonance to the novels. Tagore uses history as a backdrop to his major preoccupations, that of self identity and questions of women’s choices and desires. The depiction of the lives of the urban and rural elite, the rise of
Indian nationalism, the Hindu revivalist movement, the social reform movement, the rise and impact of Brahmo Samaj and the ‘woman’s question’ reveal Tagore’s insider view of historical and social movements. He was both a participant and keen observer and critique of the history of his time. As a socially conscious writer he offers an internal critique of Indian society, its oppression, exploitation of women, the lower castes and poorer classes.

Tagore’s novels are based in the late colonial and early nationalistic phases of Indian history and written in the contexts of history and dialectic, help us to understand the culture and politics that went into the making of the ‘nation’. By making Gora a hybrid figure, Tagore deliberately blurs the dividing line between the nation and the world. The depiction of the ‘universal man’ is at the same time “implicated in the politics of race, caste, religion and class.” While Gora is about an India in transition the Home and the World crystallizes Tagore’s universalist philosophy as a synthesis of Indian and Western modes of thought, a coming together of ‘Home’ and ‘World’. Tagore rejects both defiant Indianness and blind Westernization. The question of identity and self-definition is paramount in both novels. Just as the secret of Gora’s birth serves as a final emphatic moment in his life, so also the Swadeshi movement and Jallianwala Baug massacre mark epiphanic moments in Tagore’s life, when he turns his back on militant nationalism and colonial rule.
Tagore stresses the decolonization of the mind and pits a universalist utopia with a sectarian anti-utopia. Both Gora and Sandeep exhibit narrow Brahministic sectarian nationalism in the creation of India. Haren propounds a narrow sectarian vision of the Brahma Samaj in his vision of modernity. Nikhilesh tries to create a universalist utopia with a blend of tradition and modernity. However all fail. In a colonial environment all efforts of the colonized only serve the ends of the colonizer. “Thus the history of colonialism forecloses the possibility of free choice in any direction.”

In Gora and Home and the World, Tagore is advocating a middle ground, a more habitable space where questions of choice, equality, truth and self-identity predominate for both men and women.

Notes


4. ibid 422.

5. ibid 424.

6. ibid 424.

7. ibid 427.


10. ibid 226.


14. ibid 449.


16. ibid 76.


18. ibid 450.


21. ibid X.


28. ibid 76.


31. ibid 63.
32. Jasodhara Bagchi. “Secularism as Identity: The Case of Tagore’s
34. Jasodhara Bagchi. “Secularism as Identity: The Case of Tagore’s
   Literature*, 227, Sahitya Academy, 187.
36. Jasodhara Bagchi. “Secularism as Identity: The Case of Tagore’s
37. Ashis Nandy. The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore
38. K R Srinivasa Iyengar. quoted in “Tagore’s Gora: A Study in the
39. Partha Chatterjee. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, (New
42. ibid 135.
43. ibid 135 – 136.


55. ibid 19.


58. ibid 208.