



## AN APPRECIATION OF THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN TAGORE'S *THE HOME AND THE WORLD*

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“ The Universal appeal of these characters is brought out in an American review of the novel: “Its characters are all here in New York, and in London, and in Chicago and in Medicine Hat, as well as in India”. Bimala’s special place is suggested in the following observation: “the emphasis in *The Home and the World* is weighted toward the theme of a sheltered Indian wife’s inability to cope with the intrusion of militant nationalism”.

- Dr.T. Padma

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### INTRODUCTION

The original Bengali story *Ghare Baire* (1916) of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was translated into English by Mr. Surendranath Tagore under the title *The Home and the World*. This translation was revised by the author himself. The novel mainly deals with the movement of ‘Swadeshi’ and ‘Bandemataram’, the liberation of women and the conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims. The characters in the novel appear to be facing this typical contemporary Indian situation. The intellectual and emotional turbulence in Bengal during the period 1910-20 are reflected in this prominent novel. There are three principal characters in the novel *The Home and the World* – Nikhil, the idealistic husband, Bimala, his wife, and Sandip, his friend. Nikhil, as his name indicates stands for the perennial and enduring values of life. Likewise, Bimala is pure. The Bara Rani, a beautiful young widow is Nikhil’s sister-in-law. She is somewhat jealous of the happy lot of Bimala. Amulya is a young lad and an ardent disciple of Sandip. In a way, he hastens Bimala’s self-knowledge by enabling her to perceive the true character of Sandip. Mary Lago comments on *The Home and the World* that the reader is presented “with the

concurrent diaries of three individuals who are memorable as personalities rather than as representatives of a movement”. In fact, **what about the time and action of the novel? What about the number of stories in the novel? What is the role played by the principal characters in the novel? What is the psychology of the characters in the novel? What about the comparison and contrast of the characters? How one character is different from another in the novel? What are the opinions of writers? What is the conclusion? What is needed today?** All these significant issues are discussed, in detail, hereunder.

### DISCUSSION

**What about the time and action of the novel?**

The action of the novel is set in the revolutionary Bengal in 1910s. At the turn of the century, the Indian Independence movement took a significant turn. For the first time, unified attention and awareness was focussed on the question of ‘Swaraj’. The 1900s saw the rise of both moderate and aggressive sentiments. The 1910s set the stage for the Indian freedom movement, which gained momentum in the next decade. The ten years from 1910 to 1920 formally established the beginnings of Indian Nationalism.

**What about the number of stories in the novel?**

There are 12 chapters in the novel divided into 23 autobiographical narratives. Of these 23 stories, 8 are Nikhil's, 10 are Bimala's and 5 Sandip's. Although the narratives are arranged in a zig-zag manner, they add to the interesting and lively development of the action.

**What is the role played by the principal characters?****What is the psychology of the characters in the novel?**

The character of Nikhil is presented without substantial change. Bimala is the household goddess and the queen in the happy limited world of home. She is supremely blissful and joyful in her domestic world. In fact, her husband, Nikhil is absolutely modern in his views and tastes. He brings in Miss Gilby to teach Bimala and to be her companion. He did not mind the consequent criticism at home and outside for the sake of Bimala. Bimala is humble enough to admit that although she is his queen and has her seat by his side, her real joy is in taking her place at his feet. Nikhil's greatness is in not giving Bimala any opportunity for worshipping him. Bimala is happy that she had been educated and introduced to the modern age.

Nikhil is sympathetic towards the Bara Rani. The Bara Rani is somewhat jealous. When Nikhil brings modern garments for Bimala, the Bara Rani shows wrath on Bimala. Nikhil knows all these matters. He requests Bimala to forgive the Bara Rani. Nikhil is sensitive more to the widow's lot of the Bara Rani than to the defects in her character.

Nikhil plays an important role during the new era of 'Swadeshi' in Bengal. The main object of the Nationalist movement is to encourage indigenous industries. Nikhil tries to teach Bimala political economy. He also tries to teach people the need of thrift. He starts a small bank. He has a long list of charities. But Sandip's fleecing Nikhil on the pretext of 'Swadeshi' work annoys Bimala. It is strange that Nikhil and Sandip differ in their views. Nikhil is not in any way against 'Swadeshi'. He is willing to serve his motherland. He reserves his worship for the Right, which was far nobler than any country.

One day Sandip with his followers comes to the neighbourhood of Nikhil to propagate his ideas, aims and objectives of 'Swadeshi'. There are shouts

of 'Bandemataram'. They thrill Bimala. She finds that the light in Sandip's eyes do not shine true. She feels that Sandip is imposing on Nikhil's friendship and taking advantage of him. Sandip's bearing is not that of one sincerely devoted to a cause. Sandip is foppish. But Sandip's speech seems wonderful to Bimala. He seems to her like a messenger from the Gods to the mortal men and women. Suddenly, she feels that she is no longer the Raja's lady but the sole representative of Bengal's womanhood and that Sandip is the Champion of Bengal. She says to herself that his language had caught fire from her eyes. A beginning of sudden change in her character is noticeable here.

**What about comparison and contrast of the characters? How one character is different from another in the novel?**

A comparison and contrast of the characters of Nikhil, Bimala and Sandip is illuminating. Nikhil prefers to know his country in its frank actually and he does not like to make use of hypnotic texts of patriotism. But Sandip calls these very hypnotic texts as truth. His powers are limited. So, his worship of Humanity is limited to the worship of his country. He considers hate also as a part of worship. Nikhil's feelings are outraged, whenever Sandip tries to pass off injustice as a duty or unrighteousness as a moral ideal. Nikhil has self-respect and love of ideals. For Sandip, it is not the time for nice scruples and one must be brutal in order to save. Nikhil notices that Sandip's intellect is keen, that his nature is coarse and so he (Sandip) glorifies selfish lusts under high-sounding names. Sandip praises Bimala that she is the Queen Bee of the hive, that workers will rally round her and that she will be their centre and their inspirator.

At last, Bimala repents. She has passed through fire. She longs to retrace her steps back to her forgotten domestic world. She dedicates herself to the feet of Nikhil. Meanwhile, Chandranath Babu enters and informs of the violence of the Muslims and looting of a fellow-zamindar, Harish Kundu's treasury. Nikhil rushes to the spot without a weapon in his hands. During the process, the domestic and political worlds clash, with the result that Nikhil is wounded and Amulya, the priceless innocence of youth is lost.

**OPINIONS OF WRITERS**

- (1) Bringing out the sharp contrast in the temperaments of the three main characters in the novel, V.S. Narayana says:

Nikhil, a landlord of substantial means, is a man of noble ideals. He is one of those rare aristocrats who can identify themselves with the feelings and aspirations of the common man. Nikhil is gentle, rational and thoughtful. He cannot approve of any political programme based on violence and cunning. His wife, Vimala is devoted to him and shares his ideals until she is swept off her feet by the demagogy of Sandip, the leader of the radicals. Sandip, though ruthless and thoroughly unscrupulous, has a certain magnetism which Vimala finds irresistible. He can sway his audiences by his fiery eloquence. He is a man of action: dynamic, adventurous, experienced in the use of stratagems, a master of sophistry. Sandip is short, is the popular opposite of Nikhil. The difference between the two is not just in their temperaments but in their basic outlook on life.

- (2) About the nature of the main characters in the novel K.R.S. Iyengar explains thus:

If Nikhil's is the sattwik nature, silent, long-suffering, reconciling, and Sandip's is the rajasik nature, voluble, impetuous, violent, then Bimal's is to start with – the tamasik nature. She has to work out her salvation in diligence, through tribulation and experimentation and suffering and disaster; she has verily to go through fire and brimstone before she acquired the discrimination to see the difference between gold and tinsel, between Nikhil who has the innate strength to face a crisis

and Sandip who takes to his heels the moment difficulties start.

**CONCLUSION**

Tagore's *The Home and the World* is a novel with political background and it is about the partition of Bengal in 1905. Yet, it is a fictional work consisting of characters that have individuality of their own. The translation of the novel from Bengali into English is approved by Tagore himself. The translation of the novel gets appreciation from eminent writers in India and abroad. **What is needed today is** : (1) to encourage translations of the works of great writers, from other languages (a) to English and (b) to one's mother tongue, (2) to pay due attention to the observation of Margery Green about the poetical imagery and strong characterisation of the principal figures in *The Home and the World* :

Tagore's own critical views of nationalism are brought out in the story. Throughout the tale, we are caught up in the poetical imagery of the author's style, and the strong characterisation of the principal figures as they tell their stories.

and (3) to remember the words of John Millington Synge about translation:

A translation is no translation unless it will give you the music of a poem along with the words of it.

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