

Tradition and Modernity in work of Rabindra Nath Tagore: The Home and the World

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Abstract: Rabindra Nath Tagore's famous novel The Home and the world has presented the issue of tension between tradition and Modernity in colonial Indian society. Because of tension, there is internal dynamics in Indian society and Indian nation state in general. The tension is primarily seen between the female and male character and male-male characters. As well that represents the tradition and modernity respectively. Moreover, the industrial revolution, colonial mentality and modern hypocrisy has remarkable influence on the characters which further support to add some bricks in the emergence of tension. Tagore also depicted the colonial Indian life.

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Introduction

This research studies the Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore's Bangali novel Ghar Bahire which was translated by Surendranath Tagore as The Home and the World. This research examined through the prospective of modernity. It observes how the Indian people are affected through modern way of life. Modernity affects traditional Indian way of life. They are in a dilemma, either to follow modern way of life or to continue their own tradition and customs. It also focuses how modernity makes man torn between owns and other. This research also attempts to analyze how Tagore presents the characters who represent the dynamic condition of the people's psychology as well their torn condition due to impact of modernity. In Religious and the Status of Women Jyodsana Chatterji says "The people's nation about the proper role of women in the Home and society and the social restrictions on women are all rooted in religious conceptions regarding women" (1) This research highlights the tension between tradition and modernity. When modernity enters in South Asian Countries there was a kind of change in the activities of Indian people. Even women also try to cross the boundary due to the impact of western education. Women started raising their voice for women's right. Tagore presents Bimala as radical character who tries to cross the traditional Indian role of a housewife. Due to her stupidity and submissiveness she is unable to know the trick of Sandip who is totally selfish man. Nikhil is also a modernist character. Due to his over confidence and rationality he died at the end of the novel.

Rabindranath Tagore was born in Calcutta in 7 May 1861 and is known as Gurudev. He was Bangali poet,

Brahmo religionist, visual artist, playwright, novelist 2 and composer whose works reshaped Bengali literature and music in the late 19th and early twentieth centuries.

He is the first Nobel Prize winner of Asia in 1913 in literature. Tagore was the youngest son of Maharishi Debendranath Tagore and Saradha Devi. His father was the religious reformer and scholar. His mother died when he was young. His grandfather prince Dwarkanath Tagore was leading businessman and a man of letters who adopted the Brahmo faith which is taught to worship formless, beneficent, one, alone and absolute Ekamevadityam Param Brahma to promote charity, morality, piety, benevolence virtue and the bounds of union between men of all religions and creeds propagated by his friends, the reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The family followed normal Bangali traditions that make arrangements for the children to be acquainted with both English and Indian Traditions. Tagore's family contributed large amount of money for the introduction of western education including colleges for the study of science and medicine. This peculiar situation explains the combination of tradition and experiment that came to characterize Rabindranath Tagore's attitude to life. His father, Debendranath Tagore was well versed in European philosophy. Though deeply religious, he did not accept all aspects of Hinduism. Tagore, a Pirali Brahmin from Calcutta, Bengal, he wrote first poems at the age of eight. At the age of 16 he published his first substantial poetry under the Pseudonym wrote his first short stories and dramas in 1877. In later life Tagore protested strongly against the British Raj and gave his support to the Indian Independence Movement. Tagore's brothers and

sisters were poets', musicians, playwright and novelist. His homely environment is full of musical, Literary and dramatic pursuit. His family 3 becomes the inspiring materials for his writing career later. His family was also involved in different activities at the national level. He was also sent to different English speaking school but he did not like their teaching style. He gradually withdrew from formal schooling when he was around 14 years old. His remaining education was carried out through his own personal efforts and with the help of tutors in various subjects. When he was twelve after his upanayan, he and his father left for Shantiniketan in 14 February 1873. There, Tagore read biographies, studied history, astronomy, modern science and Sanskrit, and examined the poetry of Kalidas. This education helps him reform religion, explored mountains and forests where he got close proximity to nature.

Tagore and His Writing Style

Tagore's writing style focuses on revolutionary terrorist movements of Bengal. When he was writing he was more concerned on characters rather than the events. The subject of love is his recurring motif and he often wrote about patriotism. His songs have been chosen as national anthems of two nations; Jana gana mana in India and aamar sonar baangla in Bangladesh. His novels also deal with socio-political, patriotic and nationalistic issues and his vision of the universal brotherhood of man. Tagore places man above all living beings, nature and sometimes above god too. 4 Tagore presents the idea of Visvamnava principle in his writing music and art that humanity must offer and receive. This is the basis of his humanism that can clearly be seen in Tagore's writing. Elements of nature can clearly be found in his creations. His verse, short stories and novels often presented rhythmic lyricism, colloquial language, meditative naturalism and philosophical contemplation. He often writes Indians "abnormal caste consciousness" and untouchability and gives voice its evils through his writing of poems and dramas presents with untouchable protagonists. His writing is deeply simple.

The subject matter is the lives of ordinary people. Tagore blends his theme and style, uses simple diction that mirrors the daily life of the middle class people of India. He has projected his world of values juxtaposing tradition and modernity in its different aspects. Even if he studied western culture, he is deeply attached with his Hindu religion and tradition which are clearly visualized in his writings. In that respect, he also mixes certain spiritual and secular ideas with which Indians are normally familiar. William Walsh observes "The religious sense of Indian myth is a part of Tagore's grip of reality and

his reticular view of human life and his individual way of placing and ordering human experience" (14). Tagore's poetry is varied in style from classical formalism to comic visionary and ecstatic which was established by 15th and 16th century Vaisnav poets. Tagore's close friend Romain Rolland states that "he is abdicating his role as moral guide of the independent spirits of Europe and India" (115). John Rothenstein observes that Tagore presents "the life style of Bengali, especially village people and life by using irony and emotional wrights" (13). Similarly W.B. Yeats praises him saying that he always reads his works and forgets his pain and sufferings as he says "I read 5 Rabindranath every day, to read one line of his is to forget all the troubles of the world" (W.B. Yeats 263). He has given vivid picture of South Indian life style in most of these novels. His presentation of life is realistic. E.M. Foster and George Lukas comment his novel *The Home and the World* as "tragedy. . .", 'a roman a trios' with all the situations form which novelists are trying to emancipate themselves the wet.' Lukas is also more vitriolic and he condemned the novels as "libelous pamphlet" and "petty bourgeoisie yarn of the shoddiest kind". Lukas also added that Tagore was an "intellectual agent against the Indian freedom movement".

Some of the post colonial critics comment on the novel *The Home and the World* which presents nationalist sentiments which cultivate irrationality. Earnest Gullne, Benedict Anderson and Tom Nairn have pointed out the nationalism that cultivates prejudice and hatred in people and Leela Gandhi has spoken of its attendant racism and loathing, and the alacrity with which citizens are willing to kill. Another critic Frantz Fanon has explained that although the objective of nationalism is to create a horizontal relationship and fraternity within its people. In reality the nation never speaks of the hopes and aspirations of the entire "imagined community", and hierarchy, factional hegemony, in quality and exploitation remain a daily occurrence 6 in its body. In Sandip's actions, Tagore has insightfully and shrewdly anticipated all these pitfalls of nationalism pointed out by later literary cultural critics. Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World*, which is the focus of this research, is one of the most famous novels in Bengali literature. In the novel, he deeply analyzes the twentieth century Indian society. Here he depicts the two modes of life of Indian people – one is traditional and another is modern. The story of the novel mainly revolves around the main characters Bimala, Nikhil and Sandip who are in some way traditional and modern at the same time that is what creates a kind of tension in the novel.

The Home and the World mainly revolves around the main characters Nikhil, Sandip and Bimala. Bimala is presented previously as a traditional Hindu woman. Later on she changes as a modern character. Here the minor characters, Nikhil's grandmother, mother and sister-in-law (Bara Rani) represents traditional characters. Nikhil is benevolent, calm, general, forgiving liberal, rational, enlightened and regressive Zamindar who encourages his wife, Bimala to step out of home to better acquaint her with the world and find a new identity for the Indian woman. Bimla is submissive, obedient, timid, silent, sacrificing wife. She is previously innocent, acts according to the wishes of her husband. She is the epitome of traditional Indian woman who takes her husband as a God. She worships her husband and thinks that this is her duty and responsibility. She also thinks that her home and her husband are the world for her. As she remarks: "I distinctly remember after my marriage, when early in the morning would cautiously and silently get up and take the dust of husband's feet without walking him, how at such moments I could feel the vermilion mark my forehead shining out like the morning star"(11). She is totally traditional only tries to decorate her body rather than to develop her 7 inner talent. Innocence, submissiveness are some of the qualities of traditional mores which is the obstacles for the development. She is an obedient, loyal and responsible. These are the qualities of traditional woman. She herself says, "After finishing the days work and taking my afternoon bath, I would do up my hair and renew my vermilion mark put my sari carefully crinkled [. . .] I would delicate if at this special hour, with special ceremonies, to one individual " (13). Bimla believes in sacrifice, which is the great love towards her husband and her family members. So, she herself remarks "To surrender one's pride in devotion is woman's only salvation" (14).

Tension between Tradition and modernity in The Home and the world

The main trust of Tagore's The Home and the world is the tension between tradition and modernity. It is story of an aristocratic Bangali family. There are main three characters; they are Bimala, Nikhil and Sandip who represent dual mentality in their practical life. Traditional and another is modern. This novel is written on autobiographical form. Nikhil is an idealistic husband, Bimala is his wife who is typical Hindu woman and Sandip is his friend. Bimala is happy in serving her husband as a God and devoting her life in household activities. She is ideal Hindu wife. She looks a typical Indian woman and traditionally dresses in a sari. She regards her husband as a prince of her world. She says, "I had the prince of my real world enthroned in my heart. I

was his queen. I had my seat by his side. But my real job was that my true place was at his feet". (12) Tagore's writing is the reflection of Indian society where we can find two ways of life that are traditional and modern. Tagore presents the dynamic effects of modernization, progress on the village, caste system, rural poverty, male dominated society, conflict between ancestral orthodox and rebellious individualism, modern hypocrisy, scientific development and its effects in modern society, various exploitation in the modern world especially in Indian society before and after colonial period. Tagore presents his writing by reflecting Indianness. He wrote many novels and short stories addressing humanity as a central theme. His main concern is representing middle class society and influence on modern way of life. His theme is the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity. He criticizes the colonizer who invaded the local culture and tradition. So we can find the confrontation between Indian tradition and western forms of life. So Tagore presents such kind of dual state of 34 condition of Indian people through his novel. The Home and the world presents the characters like Nikhil, Bimala, Sandip and others to depict such tension between tradition and modernity. Tagore presents a character named Nikhil who is educated modern man, inspires his wife to come out from the narrow boundary of household duties and involve in the outside world. He wants her to be modern and adjust her in environment not with the help of his name rather her own name. His vision is enlightened, humanitarian and global prospective, based on true equality and harmony of individuals and nations. Nikhil is calm, gentle understanding, forgiving liberal, rational. He never changes in this novel. Here we find contradiction because on the one hand Tagore presents characters who adopt modernity and on the other hand, they are in diasporic situation of their tradition. Nikhil represents modern characteristics. But he is also in favor of Indian traditions and culture. Nikhil tries to educate his wife and change her state. He wants to be very docile, submissive and obedient. He disregards her when she participates in national movements and her friendship with Sandip. Her leaving home in night is also objectionable for him. Nikhil is rational which represents modernity. He had enough wealth.

So he tries to win the heart of people through his so called teaching the people. Though Tagore favors Indian culture, he seems to be modern in his concept. So in this novel he wants to take Bimala out of 'purdah' taking the help of Nikhil. Bimala says, "My husband was very eager to take me out of purdah, One day I said to him: What do I want with the outside world? The outside world may want you, he

replies” (17). 35 Bimala, devoted wife of Nikhil is submissive and docile wife. Previously she represents traditional Indian wife. Later on she changes herself as modern by adopting modern dress, reading English books and leaving home by rejecting her previous condition and participates in national movements. She does futile works to maintain good relationship with her husband. She worships her husband daily in the morning. She drinks water of her husband’s feet. But Nikhil, being a modern character rejects such kind of behaviors from her side. He does not like to confine her within home. Bimala wants to maintain social relations. So she rejects the proposal of her husband to leave home after the death of her grandmother. Bimala turned into submissive woman due to the social structure. She is ideal wife without any rejection. She follows patriarchal norms and values of Hindu culture. As Bimala steps outside of her home, she changes slowly. After reading English books, she disregards her husband’s wishes and often she ignores her family members. She also disregards the customs of the society having extra affair with Sandip. She starts wearing foreign dresses like jacket, paint, perfumes, slippers, hair- pins etc rejecting her traditional Hindu dress sari. This dress shows her modern and younger as well. She starts reading English books. Being modern, she started talking frankly about different subjects. She talks about modern sex problems frankly outside the home. Nikhil and Sandip represent two opposing vision for the nation. Bimala is torn between two. Sandip is greedy, violent and destructive. His philosophy is as simple as Machiavellian. “There is not the time for nice scruples. We must be unswerving brutal we must sin” (39). He is modern, materialist and capitalist. He shows his greed in earning money as he remarks “we are the flesh eaters of the world; we have teeth and nails; we pursue and grab the tears. we are not satisfied with chewing in evening 36 the cud of grass we have eaten in the morning [...] in that case we shall steal or rob, for we must live” (47). Sandip, selfish fellow does not hesitate to woo his friends’ wife and he provokes the youths of Nikhil’s village to quarrel with their neighbors in the name of nationalism. Being modern, even he does not hesitate to have a sex with his friend’s wife. His modern thinking makes him extra marital sexual relationship is simple and normal. As Anita Desai rightly comments and points his characteristics. As she says, “his vanity, arrogance, greed and nihilism he resembles nothing so much as the conventional background of the Indian stage of the Bombay cinema, stroking his handlebar moustache as he gloats over a bag of gold and a cowering maiden” (345). Though Nikhil respects global prospective

does not reject the spirit of Indian which does not reject anything, reject any race and culture. It always proclaims the ideal of unity. Nikhil loves his country as much as Sandip. He says, “To serve my country; but my worship I reserve for right which is far greater than my country. To worship my country as god is bringing curse upon it” (29).

Even Bimala his wife goes outside with Sandip in night; he does not take it seriously as the traditional husband think. On the one hand he is modern as well as on the other hand he seems traditional. During the time of Bimala’s going outside he feels uneasy as well. As he says, “It was palpable that she had specially dressed herself up to coax that order out of me” (143). Thus, this feeling shows he is in duel situations. Here is the tension between tradition and modernity.

Conclusion

It is calculated that Tagore’s novel *The Home and the World* holds the Tension between tradition and modernity in Indian colonial society. Tagore is in favour of Tradition and Indian myths. He was regarded as Indian genius but with the passage of time and degradation of culture, customs also underwent change due to modernity consciousness of women arises tension in society. Thus here, arises tension within the society. Because of tension, there is internal dynamics in Indian society and Indian status, the tradition and modernity respectively. Not only male and female tension rather higher and lower caste and tension between male- male as well. Moreover, the industrial revolution, colonial mentality and modern hypocrisy have remarkable influence on the characters which further support to emergence of tension. My research in this novel is from modernity. Here all the characters represent the tension between tradition and modernity. Especially female characters represent tradition and male characters represent modernity. Bimala being a female character later on changed as male. She represents tradition and modernity herself. Bimala, first as an epitome of Indian traditional wife believes in worshipping her husband as God, familial responsibility as her duty and responsibility. She refuses to come out of her home. But after Nikhil's supports she comes out of the home and searches her own identity. As she comes out of her traditional home she engages with Sandip. Tagore’s characters represent the Indian society and culture. So he has treated male dominated world where Bimala becomes failure in this modern male dominated world. Not only Bimala, Nikhil as well becomes failure in this world because he is the modernist but not completely modernist. In contrary Sandip is totally modernist selfish who is able to exist in this world, though

slightly he is traditional. Amulya who is traditional can not adjust in the selfish modern world.

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