The Portrayal of Intersectional Masculinity in *The Home and The World* (*Ghare Baire*)

Rifat Mahbub

Abstract

This essay takes on Tagore's representation of masculinity in *Ghare Baire* as its main quest, arguing that the novel rightfully challenges any singular representation of native masculinity within a colonial framework, yet at the same time, critically demarcates what constitutes Hindu versus Muslim masculinity within a class-based social order. It argues that Tagore in this novel sees extreme nationalism as an essential negative effect of rigid patriarchy that defines maleness in terms of aggression and extremity. The essay thus furthers the discussions of the novel's critique of nationalism by arguing that Tagore's intersectional portrayal of masculinity and nationalism sheds light on the performative interlink between these two powerful socio-cultural constructs.

Bengali masculinity and its complex experiences of privileges and insecurities are recurrent themes in Rabindranath Tagore's writings. From Hoimonti's young and powerless husband, Apu in the short story 'Hoimonti' to the isolated and despotic king of the play, *Rakta Karabi* (*Red Oleanders*), Tagore used his artistry to expose and question the enduring social and cultural construction of the expected gender roles of both men and women in Bengali Hindu society. It is also important to note that Tagore has never lost sight of the fact that men and masculinities, like most other social categories, are products of particular time and context, and are shaped by myriad of interlocking socio-cultural, economic, and religious factors. There is a systematic intersectional approach present in Tagore's writing that, when explored in detail, can be useful to comment on many complex relationships, such as that of nationalism and masculinity. There is hardly any dispute that Tagore's novel, *Ghare Baire* (1916), is essential to any discussion of his take on early twentieth-century nationalism. The novel's appeal to a twenty-first century audience is often attributed to its complex yet scathing criticism of nationalism. Fakrul Alam, for example, writing in 2012, perceives the importance of Tagore in the Bangladeshi context in examining the tangled relation between nation and nationalism: 'What I feel will make him even more crucial in this stage of our national identity formation is his complex take on nationalism itself.'[1]

In this essay I will revisit Tagore's exploration of men and masculinity in the novel, which situates both nationalism and masculinity at a juncture of British-Indian historiography when there could not be any one single response to colonial experiences, and when freedom from direct British rule seemed to be a possibility, even if the paths were not clearly defined. In doing so, I argue that Tagore's critique of masculinity deserves as much attention as that of nationalism, since for him they go together, perhaps not as clear-cut cause and effect, rather as a complex cycle of power relations, affecting each other. As Radha Chakravarti says, 'in

[1] Fakrul Alam, *Rabindranath Tagore and the National Identity Formation* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2012) 190.

its exploration of gender issues, the text not only charts the changing status of women in society, but also emerges as a strong comment on the ideas of masculinity in the early twentieth-century Bengal.'[2] This essay reads the text closely to explain how the novel breaks the spatial boundaries of gender, allowing men to cross between home and the world, negotiating their emotional-political selves at a turning point of Indian history.

Indian male identity and masculine practices under colonial rule were complex constructs. Macaulay's minute on Indian education was directly aimed at colonised men; men needed to be cultured so that other kinds of social reformation for the natives could be initiated, as he said:

> We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.[3]

Writing in the early years of the twentieth century, Tagore began *The Home and the World* with the apparent normalisation of colonial 'Babu' class that shaped the imagination of young Bengali men of relatively affluent class even beyond the metropolises. Nikhil, the key protagonist of the novel, is not Calcutta born. Rather, he was born in a regional land-owning (*Zamindar*) family in the eastern part of Bengal (now in Bangladesh), where the poor Muslim peasant class constituted the vast majority of his subjects. In a novel written much in the fashion of a Shakespearean tragedy where soliloquies dominate inter-character dialogues, we are introduced to Nikhil by Bimala, his wife and the main character of the novel. Nikhil, as Bimala informs us, is the first-generation colonial 'Babu' of his family. Much younger than his older brothers, Nikhil embraces English education to be an enlightened young man:

> My father-in-law's house was old in dignity from the days of the Badshahs. Some of its manners were of the Moguls and Pathans, some of its customs of Manu and Parashar. But my husband was absolutely modern. He was the first of the house to go through a college course and take his M.A. degree. [4]

Nikhil is a first-generation educated man, with considerable cultural distance from his brothers. He abhors his brothers' unscrupulous lifestyles, and does not want to abuse his power. Even Nikhil's vices emerge from his colonial consciousness. An enlightened social reformer, he spends money in inventing a date-juice extracting machine, invests to start-up a local microcredit bank, but without much success. He is thought to be a 'spend drift' for rational and right causes (19).

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[2] Radha Chakravarti, *Novelist Tagore: Gender and Modernity in Selected Texts* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2013) 92.

[3] T.B. Macaulay, *Minute by the Hon'ble T.B. Macaulay,* dated the 2nd February 1835. Online. 27 March 2018, http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html.

[4] Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World*, translated by Surendranath Tagore (London: Macmillan, 1919) 4. Subsequent references to the text will be included in parenthesis in the text.

Not unlike many native gentlemen of his time, Nikhil's new manhood is most pronouncedly exercised on his wife. Bimala becomes a new woman because her husband wants her to be. Nikhil wants to transform Bimala to a young woman rich in Bengali middle-class cultural capital, adept in playing the piano and reading literature. Nikhil, in a way, rewrites Bimala's fortune. In her first soliloquy, she recollects the irony of an astrologer's prophecy before her marriage, 'This girl has good signs. She will become an ideal wife' (2). Bimala begins her conjugal life with the traditional exercises of becoming an 'ideal wife' by worshipping her husband. But Nikhil teaches her the egalitarian nature of marriage, where man and woman can be 'equal' in their reciprocity of love. His loyalty to his wife is a matter of feminine jealousy in the Zenana of the house. Nikhil's sisters-in-law are representatives of how women's lives and fates were constructed and controlled by men. Unlike Bimala, who could pride herself to be a wife of a socially powerful and culturally refined man, the sisters-in-law suffered from lives of deprivation and degradation.

While love and respect is at the base of Bimala and Nikhil's conjugal life, there are gaps in their understanding. Nikhil's 'gentleman' nature is part of the problem that creates an unspoken distance between them. Santisudha Mukhopadhyaya defines Nikhil and Bimala's 'home life' as 'complete and happy without blemish'.[5] However, such reading is limited when readers find Bimala and Nikhil hardly ever in conversation about their conjugal life. Married for long nine years, Bimala and Nikhil seem to be a childless couple; yet, Bimala and Nikhil never talk about it. The use of soliloquies makes it clear that the couple is prone to talking to themselves rather than to each other. Nikhil can hardly help it, for his masculine identity is both gentle yet discreet. Nikhil avoids talking to Bimala when he finds Bimala is attracted to Sandip, and blames her for being attracted to Sandip's alpha-masculine qualities: 'Bimala has no patience with patience. She loves to find in men the turbulent, the angry, the unjust. Her respect must have its element of fear' (44).

Nikhil fails to realise that Bimala is attracted to Sandip not because he represents an unchecked virility, but because Sandip gives Bimala the opportunity to talk, to raise her voice on emotive matters such as patriotism, *Swadeshi* and the *Bande Mataram* ideology. Bimala says:

> Never before had I had the opportunity of being present at a discussion between my husband and his men friends. Whenever he argued with me I could see his reluctance to push me into a corner. This arose out of the very love he bore me. Today for the first time I saw his fencer's skill in debate. (50)

Before Bimala meets Sandip, her world, despite Nikhil's effort to make it open, is an enclosed and safe one. She is encouraged to learn new skills, is asked to shun certain old customs, but she is never challenged or pushed to think for herself. Nikhil's love to Bimala is sacrificial; for him, loyalty is the answer to all kinds of love – be it for his wife, or for his motherland. But Bimala asks for more, she wants to be 'pushed into a corner', so that she can be a subject in her own right.

[5] Santisudha Mukhopadhyaya, 'Tagore's *Ghare Baire*: The Conflict of Politics and Ethics', Mohit K. Ray, ed. *Studies on Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol. 2 (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributers, 2004) 36.

Bimala turns into a thinking subject when Sandip suddenly asks her, of Nikhil's opposition to nationalism, 'what do you say to this?' (38). She finds her logic to contradict Nikhil since she believes that covetous love for one's motherland is prerequisite to snatch freedom from the British rule. It is true that Sandip's first speech has indoctrinated Bimala to take to the side of the Swadeshi, and she starts to believe that she is 'the sole representative of Bengal's womanhood and he was the champion of Bengal' (25); yet she takes a new pride in giving her opinion on the most happening political issue of her time and place.

Nikhil fails to come to terms with this 'new' Bimala. Rational and perceptive as he is, Nikhil often prepares himself for the worst of the world. As a man, he has feared the change of fortune – 'imprisonment, dishonour, death – even Bimala's' (41); but he never could imagine that Bimala would make him feel unworthy as a man. He expected Bimala to be his 'home-made' (43) mould. Nikhil's self-questioning and self-doubts begin from his painful realisation that he is betrayed by his loyalty for one woman. An emotionally calm and controlled person, Nikhil almost breaks down in despair when he cries out, 'I am unworthy, unworthy, unworthy' (42). He reasons that his sense of despair does not emerge from his inability to exert full control over Bimala as her husband – he does not exercise traditional male power, rather he is in despair, partly because his belief in love falters, and partly because he realises that Bimala fails to understand his principles and his love. His emotion is extremely complex here, for he quickly shifts from Bimala and to his countrymen, and realises that they both worship Sandip's alpha-masculine discourses and his blunt display of male aggressiveness:

> I have been noticing for some time that there is a gross cupidity about Sandip. His fleshy feelings make him harbour delusions about his religion and impel him into a tyrannical attitude in his patriotism. (46)

As mentioned earlier, Nikhil uses his loyalty to one woman at home as a metaphor for his loyalty and love for one country, his motherland, the Bengal. The limit of his liberal masculine ideology is pronounced in his sense of unworthiness, for he realises that he needs to be patient to be valued again by his wife and countrymen. He is an anomaly in the whirlpool of confused time when he feels himself isolated and completely different from people like Bimala and Sandip to whom he has given his unquestioned and unrequited loyalty.

In this situation of emotional vulnerability, Nikhil exaggerates his differences from Sandip. The plot often convinces readers and scholars to consider these two men as polar opposites: Nikhil the benevolent hero and Sandip the Machiavellian anti-hero. But when the novel employs flashback method, in particular in Sandip's soliloquies, we come to know that their friendship was intimate; they have debated on philosophical matters of what constituted human success. They read Robert Browning together and translated English poems into Bangla in college club. Both the young men are products of colonial education and imperial consciousness; both, once again, want to see an end to colonial rule in India. Both want to believe in women's power, and want to see women's emancipation as metaphor and metonymy for that of their motherland.

They differ in their methods and philosophies. While Sandip turns into a 'muscular nationalist',[6] Nikhil, who is modelled on Tagore's own version of translocal humanity, embraces practices of social reform to make his country self-dependent. These political-ideological differences among educated colonial men were not unusual; rather, as the educated native class wanted to strike the Empire back, alternative form of Indianness became a source of men's defiant identity. Ashis Nandy's critical work on the psycho-social impact of colonisation on colonised men is perhaps most pertinent here; as he notes:

> Many nineteenth-century Indian movements of social, religious and political reform – and many literary and art movements as well – tried to make Ksatriyahood the 'true' interface between the rulers and ruled as a new, nearly exclusive indicator of authentic Indianness. The origins and functions of this new stress on Ksatriyahood is best evidenced by the fact that, contrary to the beliefs of those carrying the psychological baggage of colonialism, the search for martial Indianness underwrote one of the most powerful collaborationist strands within the Indian society, represented by a majority of the feudal princelings in India and some of the most impotent forms of protest against colonialism (such as the immensely courageous but ineffective terrorism of Bengal, Maharashtra and Panjab led by semi-Westernized, middleclass, urban youth).[7]

Ksatriyahood was a reactionary response to the colonial construction of 'effeminate Babu' as opposed to manly English man. Mrinalini Sinha argues that the colonial masculinity has been structured within the specific practices of imperial social reformation in Britain and India. This colonial imagination of native masculinity was shaped by many significant societal changes within Britain, making some direct impacts on the colonies:

> The figures of the 'manly Englishman' and 'effeminate Bengali' were [...] constituted in relation to colonial Indian society as well as to some of the following aspects of late nineteenth-century British society: the emergence of 'New Women', the remaking of the working class'; the legacy of 'internal colonisation', and the anti-feminist backlash of 1880s-1890s.[8]

Both Nikhil and Sandip have wanted to break away from the stereotype of effeminate Babu or the class produced to be loyal to the British Raj. After finishing his education in Calcutta, Nikhil has returned to his own constituency to be an active and engaging ruler of his estate. Over time, he has become dependent on his master Chandranath Babu's wisdom and knowledge to solve the situational crises of poor peasants. Nikhil has developed a sense of humility by being the 'master' of common peasant class. He realises that while western education can teach him theoretical ideas of sympathy and compassion, living close to his peasants has given him the opportunity to encounter such humane values every day. In the

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[6] Poulomi Saha, 'Singing Bengal into a Nation: Tagore the Colonial Cosmopolitan?', *Journal of Modern Literature* 36:2 (2013) 2.
[7] Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983) 7.
[8] Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) 2.

text, the juxtaposition of Amiel's[9] journal and Panchu's honesty is an important point of reference here:

> Panchu, the tenant of a neighbouring *zaminder*, came to me with a basket full of coca-nuts and greeted me with a profound obeisance.
>
> 'Well, Panchu', said I. 'What is all this for?' [...]
>
> 'Let me make a clean breast of you, sir. Once, when I was hard pressed, I stole some coca-nuts from the garden here. I am getting old, and may die one day, so I have come to pay them back.' (126)

Nikhil recollects, 'Amiel's journal could not have done me any good that day. But these words of Panchu lightened my heart' (127). Nikhil, taking his master's advice of helping the poor, wants to dedicate his life and that of Bimala to 'removing the root of this sorrow in our country' (*HW* 128). He has realised that by living in a distinct elite 'Babu' class, it would never be possible to find a way to solve the myriad problems of poor people.

If Nikhil is against the wind, yet a prototype of Tagore's philosophy, Sandip represents the typical political fever of Swadeshi. He sheds off his 'Babu' image by being a boisterous, reckless angry young man. He makes fun of their friend, Dakshina, who chooses to have a typical 'Babu Class' job of Salt Inspector (249). A worshipper of goddess *Kali* rather than mother Durga, Sandip has wished to disprove the cultural imagination of the Empire about natives being effeminate and mellowed. He has a dangerous liking for seeing things in black and white categories; for him, ancient Indian is synonymous with ancient Hinduism and other groups, whether Muslims or Christians, are mere immigrants, and ought to be treated with an iron rod. The novel makes an accurate prediction that over time many English educated Bengali youths would choose typical political iconoclasts like Sandip as their role model. The youths of Nikhil's village, many of whom went to Calcutta on Nikhil's scholarships to earn higher education, have been influenced by Sandip's dare-devil attitude that validated proverbs like 'all is fair in love and war' or 'the end justifies the means'. Sandip's gift of the gab has enthralled young men and led them to choose the path of extremism and intolerance, even when their education was expected to predispose them to be tolerant and rational. The novel makes it clear that this kind of reactionary masculinity is particularly dangerous because it is based on false premises of religious extremism and ideological brain washing, and its damaging impact could linger long after decolonisation; even when a nation had to take its own responsibility to rebuild itself.

While both Nikhil and Sandip have tried to bring performative differences to their male identities, they are pushed to their limit in their confrontation of Bimala. The male characters perceive themselves 'weak' in front of Bimala, though both want to mould Bimala according to their individual ideological niche. As argued above, Nikhil wants to see her as a conscious but not necessarily an independent woman; and Sandip wants to put her on high pedestal, she is nature, 'the Queen Bee' and she is the reincarnation of goddess Kali. He sees Bimala as an

[9] Henri Frȅdȅric Amiel (1821-1881) was a Swiss moral philosopher, poet and critic; well-known for his philosophical work, *Amiel's Journal*.

incarnation of the motherland, but gradually, he sexualises both Bimala and her *desh* (homeland) calling them his amorous beloved. He has firm belief that Bimala will fall for his charismatic display of manliness, something that she has missed out on with Nikhil. While Bimala, like most others, is initially blinded by Sandip, as the novel progresses, she understands that Sandip is not a god, rather, a human being with his own share of vices. In this regard, Bimala and Amulya work as each other's catalyst. Tagore uses Amulya as a 'surrogate' son to childless Bimala to bring her back to 'home'. In the following extract, Bimala becomes the real and metaphorical mother of young and vulnerable men like Amulya:

> I seemed to see the sin of the parents visited on the innocent child. The sight of his great big eyes shining with faith and enthusiasm touched me to the quick. He was going, in his fascination, straight to the jaws of the python, from which, once in, there was no return. How was he to be saved? Why does not my country become, for once, a real Mother – clasp him to her bosom and cry out: 'Oh, my child, what profits it that you should save me, if so be it I should fail to save you?' (219)

Bimala tears down the patrilineal order of extremist nationalism – Amulya no longer continues to be the blind disciple of Sandip, the patriarch. Bimala and Sandip are caught in a complex power game, each adamant to prove the other weak. If Nikhil sees himself 'unworthy', Bimala makes Sandip 'weak' and takes on a frantic pleasure when she says, 'Oh, the weak! The weak! At last Sandip has realised that he was weak before me!' (246). In both cases, the male characters find it difficult to cope with a ruptured masculinity at a time when nationalism champions male power and its virile superiority.

Subir Dhar argues that the novel's male characters and their complex sense of maleness need to be read within the changing social order of Bengal:

> Deep feelings of male inferiority bred by the fact of political subjugation, coupled with the desire for freedom largely fed by the educated Bengali's readings of socio-literary and politico-philosophical texts in English, produced an unstable and volatile ideological context in which man's social relationship with woman had necessarily to be redefined.[10]

While Dhar emphasises the social context where men struggled to cope with changes, Tanika Sarkar argues that the gender subversion of the novel is played upon the male characters' emotional investment. She sees both Nikhil and Sandip as Bengali heroes without prototypes, since both suffer from the medieval Indian feminine emotion of *Viraha*, where women typically suffer from the need to be loved:

> [*GhareBaire*] is the first major Bengali work of fiction where the man suffers from viraha, from sexual disregard from a beloved, the wife, the woman. It is, moreover, a viraha born out of a proximity unillumined by love or need rather than separation. There was no available literary prototype of Nikhilesh, nor had he a place, as the husband betrayed, in conventional notions of masculinity. [...] On the other hand

[10] Subir Dahr, '*The Home and the World* as a Postcolonial Text', *Studies on Rabindranath Tagore* edited by Mohit K. Ray, Vol. ii. (New Delhi: Atlantic, 2004) 48.

> Sandip, almost archetypically the virile and ruthless lover bent on conquest, becomes hesitant and tender – a state that he perplexedly describes as an uncharacteristic weakness in himself – when he falls in love with Bimala.[11]

Self-conscious and proud of their (gentle)manliness, both Nikhil and Sandip have complex confrontations with Bimala, who, however they want to consider her as a new-doll-in-making, or a goddess, proves that she is a flesh-and-blood human being, whose identity is a work in progress, subject to unpredicted changes.

HW is a unique novel where the personal gives way to the political; just as the first half of the plot guides the readers to concentrate on the love-triangle of Nikhil, Bimala and Sandip, in the similar way, the second part engages us with the complex and murky condition of the world in transition. Here, personal and political are not separate units, unaffected by each other; rather here personal is political. Sandip anchors his revolutionary self in Nikhil's estate after he wins over Bimala; he knows that Bimala will be his strongest ally from home, working for the change of their 'world'. But the plot is also extraordinary as it shifts its focus, and thereby that of ours, from the main characters to the peripheral ones. Historically, East Bengal was a hotbed of political, religious, material turmoil; the division between Hindu landowners and merchant class and the Muslim labourers and poor class became even wider as the 1905 division of Bengal and its annulment in 1911 symbolised the triumph of the Hindus, who protested against the Partition, and the defeat of the Muslims, who largely saw the Partition as beacon of hope for their underdeveloped eastern part. Poulomi Saha notes the complex history of the early twentieth-century Bengal:

> [W]ith a population greater than any other province in colonial India, Bengal was an unruly charge for colonial administration. The line drawn by Lord Curzon's government bisected Bengal on the basis of religious difference: the region designated East Bengal had a majority Muslim population, while West Bengal was predominately Hindu. The decision was the result of a colonial policy intended to isolate the eastern portion of the province from the outspoken nationalist agitation that was largely centred in Calcutta (in West Bengal). However, the plan backfired when the partition unleashed a torrent of revivified nationalist sentiment, outrage by the legal and symbolic violence that had lacerated the body of the Bengali motherland.[12]

Sandip is clearly the representative of the 'revivified nationalist' who instigated the *Swadeshi* spur in the novel's geography. The novel follows the traditional axiom that when powerful wage war against each other, the powerless suffer the most. It is not the Muslim peasant class only, but also low caste Hindu landless labourers such as Panchu had to bear the brunt of the *Swadeshi* zealot.

A character like Panchu represents the change of traditional agro-based livelihood, where some old customs and professions became obsolete. Bimala observes the changes:

> In Bengal the machinery of time thus suddenly runs at full pressure, one following soon after another. Nothing could be held back any more, even in our corner of the country.

[11] Tanika Sarkar, *Rebels, Wives, Saints: Designing Selves and Nation in Colonial Time* (Chicago: UCP, 2009) 259.
[12] Saha, 6.

> In the beginning, our country was backward, for my husband was unwilling to put any compulsions on the villagers. (132)

A seller of agricultural produce such as betel-nut, Panchu has turned into a petty merchant, buying foreign clothes and other fancy goods from local market and selling them across villages. But for the *Swadeshi* followers, motherland turns into an abstract concept, where the soil matters more than the people who inhabit the soil. Panchu loses his livelihood when his Zaminder, Harish Kundu, the *Swadeshi* nationalist, bars him from selling 'foreign clothes' (154). When Panchu is fined a hefty sum, he finds his voice. Panchu's voice, like that of Bimala's unsettles the power of the tyrant like Harish Kundu. 'Panchu in his desperation blurted out defiantly, 'I can't afford it. You're rich; why not buy it up and burn it?' (154). Panchu is punished; but he has not suffered it silently. Tanika Sarkar emphasises the significance of the voice of the marginal characters:

> The inclusion of a peasant within this sparse cast of central characters is rare and immensely significant in Rabindranath's fiction: the peasant was never before endowed with so much space and narrative function.[13]

But Panchu, a poor Hindu, is not the key aim of the *Swadeshi* anger. The aim is to reclaim *Bharat* as a Hindu nation, where the Muslims should always be at the mercy of the Hindus. Sandip finds success in conquering a Muslim male. This is where the Panchu case is different from that of Mirjan. Mirjan, the chief of the boatmen carrying foreign goods, represents the historical-contemporary discourse of a dangerous Muslim man, who, if let loose, can ravish both the mother (woman) and the motherland. The defiant Mirjan is brought under control when Sandip successfully plots to sink his boat. Mirjan surrenders to Sandip:

> Mirjan understood the whole thing [the plot of sinking the boat]. He came to me in tears to beg for mercy. 'I was wrong, sir [...]' he began.
>
> 'What makes you realise that all of a sudden?' I sneered.
>
> He made no direct reply. 'The boat was worth RS. 2000', he said. 'I now see my mistake, and if excused this time I will never [...]' with which he threw himself at my feet.
>
> I asked him to come ten days later. If only we could pay him that RS. 2000 at once, we could buy him up *body and soul.* This is just the sort of man who could render us immense service, if won over. (172-173, emphasis added.)

Mirjan becomes a badge of honour for the *Swadeshi* ideology; Mirjan is a metaphor of the normalisation of violence against Muslim minorities in India in the name of 'personal, communal, national', and increasingly in our contemporary life, 'international security'.[14]

Sandip momentarily lives up to his ideology of Hindu supremacy. But Tagore warns us that the rift of religion can never be controlled by violence; rather violence gives it more

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[13] Sarkar 265

[14] Dibyesh Anand, 'The Violence of Security: Hindu Nationalism and the Politics of Representing 'the Muslim' as a Danger', *The Round Table* 94:379 (2007) 203. Online. 03 August 2018, DOI: 10.1080/00358530500099076

destructive power and takes it to a perpetually dark tunnel of hatred. Sandip, a foreigner in east Bengal, miscalculates the trans-local network of the Muslims. Tagore's portrayal foreshadows our present-day transnational and Pan-Islamic solidarities. The Mahamedan (Muslim) Preachers 'stirred the local Muslims' (250) and thus begins the novel's riotous route. Just as Sandip is an outsider who enters Nikhil's estate and instigates the *Swadeshi* zealot, in the similar way, the Muslim preachers from Dacca (present day Dhaka) (253) come to stir up the local Muslims to take control of the situation, to wage an 'an eye for an eye' war. The poor Muslim peasants of Nikhil's territory are portrayed as peace-loving and loyal. While discussing the grave issue of Hindu-Muslim rift, Nikhil observes, 'The Mussulmans in my territory had come to have almost as much an aversion to the killing of cows as the Hindus' (256). But the preachers divide the Muslims from the Hindus. Thus, the spark of fire that Sandip with his heroic masculinity instigates to terrorise the locals turns into an inextinguishable bonfire destroying everything in its path.

The narrative trope of the novel falls short of being subversive when it, unwittingly or otherwise, reproduces the grand narrative of the fear of the collective Muslim masculinity, ravishing the material, bodily and affective territories of the Hindu Zaminders. The staunch *Swadishi* follower Zaminder Harish Kundu turns into an emasculated Hindu when the angry Muslims attack his treasury and home. The women of his home become the metaphor of motherland, waiting to be rescued by conscientious Hindu ruler like Nikhil. Chandranath Babu, the novel's stalwart symbol of principle and righteousness, becomes the messenger of the news of angry Muslim men's violence:

> The Mussulmans are out of hand. They are looting Harish Kundu's treasury. That does not so much matter. But what is intolerable is the violence that is being done to the women of their house. (342)

The incidents of religion-based riots that Tagore describes in the novel are borne out in the historical evidence, as Poulomi Saha writes:

> The 1907 riots in Comilla, East Bengal ignited communal violence across the region, gaining attention in the House of Commons. There, John Morley, Secretary of State for India, was interrogated about 'whether, seeing that rioting or disturbance between Mahomedans and Hindus was of rare occurrence prior to the partition of Bengal, steps [would] be taken to prevent incitement to disorder by the Nawab of Dacca's agitation in favor of the continued partition of Bengal.[15]

Although Chandranath Babu downplays the severity of material looting in the incident (treasury looting is nothing compared to the looting of women's honour), historical evidences confirmed that in the riots of East Bengal (namely in Mymonsingh) in 1906-7, where Muslim rioters invaded Hindu landlords and mahajons, 'the economic dimension was to the fore, despite the role played by itinerant mullas'.[16] There is hardly any doubt that Tagore was making reference to the series of riots that occurred just after the Bengal Partition in 1905;

[15] Saha 5

[16] Peter Robb, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947* by Suranjan Das [Book Review], *South Asia Research* 15:1 (1995) 131.

and his contemporary readers could have readily recognised the textual references. Yet what is at stake in the novel's textual-imaginative territory is the inscription of the masculine stereotyping. Sandip, the melodramatic macho man leaves the scene stealthily. Nikhil, the seeker of truth and justice, became the solo unarmed warrior. There is a tragic irony in Nikhil's heroic but ineffectual attempt to oppose those forces beyond his control. When Nikhil is deadly injured, Amulya is dead, and Sandip is off the scene, Tagore leaves the text open-ended, critiquing both the nationalism and the masculine expectations on which such mass emotion is played out.

The novel gives a clear message that while we may quarrel over any particular collective standpoint such as religiously divided nationalism, we also need to pay attention to the performative agents of such ideologies. *HW* is a prototypical novel about men's affective relationship with the home and the world; their emotional vulnerabilities are as much subject of contemplation as their political activism. Tagore invites us to take men's personal and political selves seriously. Breaking away from the traditional demarcation of gender that establishes masculinity as a domain of the public or the world, Tagore explores the intersectionality of masculinity and nationalism within the grey spaces of 'home' and the 'world', in relation to each other, and with women.

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