

Cultural Hybridity and (Dis) location of Female Agency in Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare Baire* or *The Home and the World*

Umme Salma

Abstract

The character Bimala in Tagore's *Ghare Baire* or *The Home and the World* as a symbol of the struggle for the liberation of Bengali woman as well as Bengal is a centre of scholarly discussion since the publication (1916), translation (1919) and the film adaptation (1984) of the novel. This essay focuses on Bimala and interrogates the location of her agency with respect to her relationship with Nikhil and Sandip. Based on Homi Bhabha's concepts of occult instability and cultural hybridity, and Laura M. Ahearn's concept of agency, I investigate how, during the occult moment of the Swadeshi movement, Nikhil and Sandip's hybrid personalities dislocate Bimala from her home and the world and entrap her into a harrowing stasis and melancholy.

Introduction

To write an essay on Rabindranath Tagore, 'a cultural icon [...] for millions of Indians and Bangladeshis',¹ is a difficult task. At least I feel so when I sit to read his *Ghare Baire*,² along with the monumental critical works on it. So many opinions and perspectives have been accumulated on Tagore's works over hundred years that like William Radice I wonder 'What aspects of the book still need to be explored?'.³ The novel is unique in its style, theme, characterisation, and ideas; in particular, the aspect of constant melding of the poetic with the philosophical.⁴ This aspect keeps me fascinated all through my reading of the novel. I have been feeling that the reader in me keeps blurring my critical eye and happily loses herself in lively emotions, gushing passions, supernatural nature and sublime morality, as portrayed in the novel.

This essay is written within this readership anxiety. It aims to focus on the character Bimala, linking the Swadeshi Movement, cultural hybridity and female agency together. The character of Bimala undoubtedly is a unique creation of Tagore. This character, as a symbol

¹ Joseph T O'Connell and Kathleen M O'Connell, 'Introduction: Rabindranath Tagore as "Cultural Icon"', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 77.4 (2008) 961.

² Both the original Bengali version and the English translation of the novel are used for the present essay. Between the Bengali and English versions of Tagore's novel there are some discrepancies. As happens in all translations, nothing cannot be found verbatim. I have therefore translated some phrases and sentences which appear to me important for my discussion and cited directly from the translated version where both Bengali and English versions mostly resemble each other. The references of these editions are respectively a) Rabindranath Tagore, *Ghare Baire* (Dhaka: Nayem Books International, 2010) & b) Rabindranath Tagore. *The Home and the World* translated by Surendranath Tagore (London: Macmillan, 1957). References to these works will be included in parentheses in the text as page numbers prefixed with *GB* for the Bengali edition and *HW* for the English translation.

³ William Radice, Preface, *The Home and the World* by Rabindranath Tagore (New York: Penguin Group, 2005) xiv.

⁴ Anita Desai, Introduction, *The Home and the World* by Rabindranath Tagore (New York: Penguin Group, 2005) xxvi.

of the struggle for the liberation of Bengali woman as well as Bengal, has been a centre of scholarly discussions since publication (1916), translation (1919) and the film adaptation (1984) of the novel. This essay turns the screw slightly, interpreting the time of liberation as an occult time, Nikhil and Sandip as culturally hybrid and the sketch of female *Shakti* as the female agency. It argues that the novel describes its time span as both pre-Swadeshi and during Swadeshi dichotomy and thus can be read in term of stability/instability binary. The time of liberation represents the second part of the binary that disrupts the usual life-flows of the three principal characters. Being colonially educated and locally formed, Nikhil and Sandip become culturally hybrid and with their contrary expectations dislocate Bimala from her home and the world.

I will discuss the above assumptions into two parts: firstly, I highlight the theories on which the whole argument is set; and then I present the textual analysis in the light of those theories.

Part I: The Theoretical Framework

Tagore's *Ghare Baire* or *the Home and the World* is a novel which cannot be interpreted straightforwardly with any existing theories of colonialism and postcolonialism. My reading of the novel, therefore, is based on a mosaic of ideas, taken from several sources. Among these sources, two concepts – interpretation of the time of liberation as occult and the notion of cultural hybridity – have been taken from Homi Bhabha. And the concept of female *Shakti*, as conceived in Hinduism, has been construed as female agency, based on Laura M. Ahearn's general theorisation of agency.

Occult Time and Cultural Hybridity

In his 'The Commitment to Theory', Homi Bhabha proposes a significant interpretation of the time of liberation as 'the zone of *occult instability* where the people dwell',⁵ along with the notion of cultural hybridity. Bhabha explains both as interrelated phenomena with the help of the familiar semiotic concept of the process of enunciation where a Third Space emerges as a passage to create new cultural meanings.

Bhabha takes the phrase 'the zone of occult instability' from Franz Fanon and describes this 'moving metaphor' in the context of liberatory struggle of the colonised people.⁶ He identifies the time of liberation as occult, that is, paranormal, supernatural and magical, because it is a disruptive and discontinuous period when stable, traditional cultures become instable, and culture emerges as politics. This unsettling time brings the liberation-seeking people into an indeterminate and a volatile zone where national culture loses its synchronicity, totality, and purity, and the subject who claims the authority of cultural knowledge, through its enunciation of cultural difference, becomes split.

To explain the condition of the split in the subject, Bhabha focuses on cultural diversity and cultural difference. He contends, whereas cultural diversity as a liberal approach

⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004) 51. Bhabha quoted these words from Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*.

⁶ Bhabha 55.

considers cultures pre-given, seamless and relative and identifies the limit of culture at their boundaries, cultural difference as an authoritative and discriminatory approach identifies the limit of culture in the act of enunciation. This act of enunciation of cultural difference, like the linguistic difference, is a split and ambivalent.⁷

In Semiotics, the linguistic process of enunciation, the subject is split between the subject of the *énonciation* (the exercise of language), that is, 'I' and the subject of *énoncé* (the statement made), that is, 'You.' Due to this splitting, the 'I,' despite being linked to 'You,' remains distinct from it and keeps the speaker unconscious about the difference between the general systems of language – *langue* and the individual statement – *parole*. Hence, in linguistic performance, the meaning is not produced in the communication between 'I' and the 'You' of the utterance, but in the mode of enunciation of a speaker. The meaning of the utterance lies, not in 'what is being said,' but in 'how it is said' and indicates to the value and status of the speaker.⁸

Bhabha argues that the same thing happens in cultural performance during the time of liberation. The subject, which claims the authority of cultural knowledge, becomes split in its enunciative process. In this split, the subject of *énoncé* does not represent the subject of *énonciation* but acknowledges its presence and its cultural position in a specific time and place. Hence the meaning is not produced in the communication between the 'I' and the 'You,' but in their mobilisation in a new continuum through an indeterminate passage of Third Space. This Third Space, being unconscious about the relation and difference between *langue* and *parole*, represents both and introduces an ambivalence in the meaning and interpretation of the cultural performance. This Space as an in-between space thus asserts that cultures are neither inherently hierarchical nor pure, unitary, total and fixed, and the same cultural signs and symbols can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricised and read anew in another historical context. This Third Space also displaces the claims of cultures as a referent, advanced and evolved through a homogenous, continuous time to a universal form to refer and cross-refer as a resource.

This Third Space as a passage, as an in-between space, stands for the moment of liberation. This moment becomes temporally and spatially an indeterminate zone where occult instability occurs. As this moment represents the disruptive time, which links back to the colonial and forwards to postcolonial periods, it splits the liberation-seeking people and renders them culturally hybrid. The split occurs between their conflicting cultural demands during revolutionary political necessity. In the one hand, they demand conventionally for 'a model, a tradition, community, a stable system of reference' that so far protects them from colonial cultural imposition. On the other hand, they negate that certitude 'in the articulation of new cultural demands, meanings, strategies in the political present, as practice of [...] resistance'. Consequently, the liberation-seeking people unconsciously entangle in the struggle between tradition and modernity, mythical time and displaced time and old and new

⁷ Bhabha 45-52.

⁸ John Phillips and Chrissie Tan, 'Langue and Parole', *The Literary Encyclopedia*, first published 08 February 2005 <https://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true&UID=662>, accessed 23 August 2018.

cultural symbols. They face uncertainty and indecision over their cultural signification and fluctuate between the thoughts they so far nurtured and the modern thoughts. In this way, they call into question their ‘*constant principles*’ and undergo radical changes in the cultural practices and signification.⁹

This fluctuating movement helps the liberation-seeking people dialectically reassemble themselves around new forms of cultural practices. They emerge from the very restrictive notion of cultural identity as the way for political change and become bearers of a hybrid identity. They destroy the safeguard of national culture to free themselves and engage in the tasks of translation and negotiation of their cultural identities. They translate their national texts into modern Western forms in every aspect of life, such as technology, language, and dress, and construct their culture, assimilating the contraries in their cultural identities. Bhabha recognises this hybrid identity in the liberatory Third Space as a very productive subject position for the colonised, because this identity produces new meanings in their cultural enunciation, turns people into the Other of themselves and allows them to be a free people in the future.¹⁰

Female Shakti as Female Agency

In her articles on agency, Ahearn reviews the existing notions of agency and finds them underspecified, ambiguous and slippery. For her research on Nepalese love letters she constructs a bare-bones definition of agency as ‘socioculturally mediated capacity to act’¹¹ and proposes some general ways that scholars interested in agency might consider defining agency. The first suggestion is to consider whether agency is the property of individual, supra-individual or sub-individual. She asserts that since society and human beings are shaped by each other, agency must not be explained on the individual level only because it runs the risk of sidestepping the larger social structures and making them invisible. Similarly, when agency exists at the supra-individual level, scholars need to examine how it might exist in the institution and collective form of entities like states, corporations, unions, lineages, families or couples. Again, when agency exists in the sub-individual level, scholars need to analyse the split and fragmented subject and its recourse to interior monologues and dialogues. They also need to investigate how agency manifests and functions and whether unintentional acts, along with intentional acts, can be called agentive. The second suggestion Ahearn gives is to look at agency from a cultural point of view. Referring to her work on Nepalese marriage narrative, she argues that agency is culture-specific and varies according to space and time. Therefore, to examine how agency is conceptualised in non-Western societies is both significant and crucial. Thus, Ahearn emphasises the necessity for researchers to provide a clear definition of agency, both for themselves and for their readers.¹²

⁹ Bhabha 51.

¹⁰ Bhabha 52-56.

¹¹ Laura M. Ahearn, ‘Language and Agency’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001) 112.

¹² Laura M. Ahearn, ‘Agency’, *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 9.1/2 (2000) 12-14.

Being motivated by Ahearn's suggestions, I define female Shakti, as conceived in Hinduism, as form of female agency. The word *Shakti* is a Sanskrit word which means 'power' or 'energy'. It is derived from the root 'shak', which means 'to be able', 'to do', 'to act'. It represents an ability, strength, which manifests itself in both nature and human beings, and its absence in living things turns them impotent and inactive.

In Hinduism, the abstract concept of Shakti is exclusively conceived as a feminine principle. It is believed as synonymous with the Great Devi or the Great Goddess of Hinduism to whom Hindus usually pray for health, relief, and vigour. Various schools of Indian philosophy describe the concept of Shakti in various ways. Among them, the Samkhya School describes Shakti as the primordial matter in the creation of the cosmos. It states that in the creation of the cosmos there existed a dual principle, Prakriti (matter) and Purusha (spirit). Prakriti is the primary matter that is primarily passive and immobile but is the power and potential in nature. And this power is Shakti itself, which as the antecedent of Prakriti existed all the time and made it capable of spawning the cosmos, coming in contact with Purusha. Thus, Shakti is an omnipresent, immutable and indivisible goddess, a part of the Divine Consort.

The concept of Divine Consort implies that Shakti or energy cannot exist in a vacuum. It must reside in someone or function as someone's power and ability. For this reason, every god of Hinduism has a female companion, a consort and a goddess who represents the essential energy and power of the god. Accordingly, Shakti is integral to gods, who cannot exist and work without it. Therefore, to worship the gods ultimately requires worship of the goddesses, the feminine with or within masculine principle, as both are interrelated and interdependent. Gods are thought as 'Shaktiman', the masculine principle as the bearer of Shakti; goddesses are Shakti itself, the feminine. Gods possess the power, and the power gives them the ability to perform their job. Thus, they combine the concept of the able and ability where Shakti represents both the life-force and personification of the power of 'Shaktiman'.

These beliefs are very much present in the Bengali Hindu concept of woman.¹³ They regard every woman as a manifestation of the divine feminine principle, Shakti. Mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters are the personification of that Shakti and thus bearers of spiritual energy through their attributes of love, care, nurture, intuition, and charity. Therefore, men and the society must respect, practice, patronise and preserve these feminine principles as the guardians and protectors of their culture.¹⁴

¹³ Tagore's *Ghare Baire* (1916) is set in the then united Bengal which is now Bangladesh (East Bengal) and West Bengal, a part of India.

¹⁴ Frank Morales, 'The Concept of Shakti: Hinduism as a Liberating Force for women', *Dharma Central* 7 Nov 2000. Web. 27 April 2017. <[http://www.adishakti.org/pdf_files/concept_of_shakti_\(dharmacentral.com\).pdf](http://www.adishakti.org/pdf_files/concept_of_shakti_(dharmacentral.com).pdf)>; Sunil Dutt, 'Samkhya Philosophy and Its Importance in Indian Philosophy', *New Man International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 3.8 (2016) 22-25; further references: Theos Bernard, *Hindu Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996); Varadaraja V Raman, 'Science and the Spiritual Vision: A Hindu Perspective', *Zygon*® 37.1 (2002) 83-94; Tracy Pintchman, *The Rise of the Goddess in the Hindu Tradition* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994).

The above discussion on Shakti and its relation to woman registers that Shakti is a form of capacity, that is agency, which solely represents feminine principle and power. Women are the Shakti incarnate who from time immemorial are passively present as the active force in nature, human beings and the concept of gods. They are considered thus goddesses, simultaneously the part and the whole and active and passive in the life of men – the power itself lives inside the men and becomes active when with and within men. Therefore, female Shakti is female agency which women possess as an inherent attribute.

Part II: Textual Analysis

The Stability/Instability Binary

Rabindranath Tagore set *Ghare Baire* (1916) during the historical event of the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1905-1908) when he already had been the first Nobel Laureate in Asia. Though he actively participated in the movement in its beginning, and in 1906 wrote ‘Amar Sonar Bangla’ (O my, Bengal of Gold) to support the protest of the Bengalis against the division of Bengal by Lord Curzon’s government, his narrative delineates a bleak picture of the derailed nationalism of Bengal. He portrays the movement starting with the boycott of British goods and the promotion of the *Swadeshi*, or domestic products, as a form of patriotism, and gradually moving away from the true path of humanity.¹⁵ Though its watchword was *Bande Mataram*, Hail to you Mother, the movement starts a craze that triggers inhumanity, conspiracies, division and communalism between Muslim and Hindu communities. Instead of enlightening human minds with the light of freedom, philanthropy, and harmony, the movement traps them into petty, selfish desires and emotional anarchy.

This portrayal of the *Swadeshi* facilitates the reading of the novel through the stability/instability binary, with respect to its timescale as before and during the Swadeshi Movement.¹⁶ Two interior monologues of Sandip and Nikhil represent the stability/instability dichotomy, where Nikhil personifies the first part and Sandip the second:

Sandip: Still, a thorough shaking up is essential. One must begin by realizing that things supposed to be unshakable can be shaken. (*HW* 73)

Nikhil: My life has only its dumb depths; but no murmuring rush. I can only receive: not impart movement. (*HW* 108)

These quotes reflect the pre-*Swadeshi* time and the period of *Swadeshi* through a characteristic difference between two friends. Sandip, the nationalist leader, in his monologue appears as the agent of transformation. He conceives that for any transformation a thorough shake-up is essential. Nevertheless, the first step to bring change is to realise that things

¹⁵ Poulomi Saha, ‘Singing Bengal into a Nation: Tagore the Colonial Cosmopolitan?’, *Journal of Modern Literature* 36.2 (2013) 6-8.

¹⁶ To read *Ghare Baire* or *The Home and the World* concerning binary is an old practice. Due to its dichotomous title – home/world, many postcolonial scholars read it according to some other binaries, such as man and woman, local and cosmopolitan, nationalism and colonialism, tradition and modernity and nationalism and patriotism (Radice xiv).

people consider fixed and stable are not so. Those things can also be shaken, newly conceived and transformed. On the other hand, Nikhil appears as the symbol of immobility. He thinks that he has a depth of character, but it is mute and motionless. He has no force of current in his nature that can stir and move anything or anyone. He seems to be a receiver, not the actor, who cannot change his surroundings.

The novel sketches the story of a fictional village in Bengal named Suksar. Before the stirrings of the *Swadeshi*, it has been a place of peace and harmony under the benevolent rule of Nikhil, the Zamindar. During this time, Nikhil and Bimala are a happy couple. They are both satisfied and settled in their poem-like disciplined conjugal life. Nikhil places ‘the fullest trust upon love’ (HW 44) of Bimala and she in her turn feels her home contains so much ‘that there was not room for it in the universe’ (HW 19). Then the *Swadeshi* comes and, through its revolutionary zeal to boycott the British, changes everything in the home and the world. The storm rages in the outer world through processions, meetings, conspiracies, and communalism and in the inner world through stirring up of new emotions in the minds of Bimala, Sandip, and Nikhil. So far, what has been harmonious becomes anarchic and turns the time, space and minds into the zones of occult instability, as Bhabha states.

The Zone(s) of Occult Instability

This time of the liberation of Bengal is occult, that is, paranormal, magical and supernatural, especially for Bimala, caught in the binary of Nikhil/Sandip, stability/instability. All through the narrative Bimala identifies the *Swadeshi* era as a disruptive and discontinuous time that changes Bengal magically and unsettles her mind:

One day there came the new era of *Swadeshi* in Bengal; but as to how it happened, we had no distinct vision. There was no gradual slope connecting the past with the present. For that reason, I imagine, the new epoch came in like a flood, breaking down the dykes and sweeping all our prudence and fear before it. We had no time even to think about, or understand, what had happened, or what was about to happen. (HW 22)

The *Swadeshi* is presented here as a sudden event in Bengal that has no continuous connection to the past. No one can grasp clearly how it comes and how it happens. It comes like a devastating flood that breaks down all former barriers and carries away reason and discretion. People become so engrossed with its call that none has the time to think or consider its consequences and consequences of their acts.

Bimala identifies the era several times as a new epoch: ‘another epoch’ (GB 6), ‘the new epoch’ (GB 14) or ‘the modern age’ (GB 6). She claims that the *Swadeshi* separates her teenage years from her youth: ‘But no sooner had I reached my youth from the teenage, it seems to me that I arrived in another epoch’ (GB 6). She constantly compares the traits of the past age with that of the present and asserts that if she ‘had never have to struggle with the present age’ (GB 6), she would never understand ‘the drama of the new epoch [...] clearly’ (GB 14). Bimala recognises the period as a new epoch, a magical time, because it is a special gift from a god for Bengal: ‘How could we help thinking that it was all supernatural. This moment of our history seemed to have dropped into our hand like a jewel from the crown of some drunken god’ (HW 116). She hopes that this ‘auspicious moment’ with ‘the spell of

some magic charm' (HW 116) will eliminate all the miseries of Bengal. Hence, she becomes ready to welcome 'the unthought-of, the unknown, the importunate Stranger' (HW 120).

This new epoch has a drastic impact on Bimala's being. So far, she has been inside her home with all its duties and responsibilities, well-ordered and stable. The call of Swadeshi, like a mysterious call from a faraway horizon, makes her restless. Bimala neither realises nor deciphers the meaning of that call, but feels a kind of disturbance inside her:

My sight and my mind, my hopes and my desires, became red with the passion of this new age. Though, up to this time, the walls of the home – which was the ultimate world to my mind – remained unbroken, yet I stood looking over into the distance, and I hear a voice from the far horizon, whose meaning was not perfectly clear to me, but whose call went straight to my heart. (HW 22-23)

Sandip's first preaching in Suksar adds fuel to Bimala's already restless mind. The narrative describes Bimala's hypnotic state of mind and its projection around her during Sandip's speech with hyperbolic expressions. Bimala feels, when Sandip utters '*Bande Mataram!*' three times and delivers his speech like 'a stormy outburst', the skies are 'rent and scattered into a thousand fragments!' (HW 27-28). She also feels that everything is undergoing a supernatural change. Sandip is no longer a flawed mortal man but embodies heaven and becomes a messenger of immortal gods. His revolution is also a sacred rebellion which flashes out a divine power at every word. Bimala also feels that she is an inspiration to this power, 'the flame of the soul itself'. Her presence turns Sandip's divine power into a 'fire', and makes it spark like 'the flash of lightning'.

Consequently, Bimala undergoes a drastic transformation. She feels she is glowing with 'a new pride and glory' (HW 29). The '*Swadeshi* storm' (HW 24) is inside her and turns her wild and impatient. The storm plays with her place and identity. She can no longer remain 'the lady of the Rajah's house' (HW 28), a woman cocooned at her safe home. She is now the representative of Bengal's womanhood who must do something, any extreme form of sacrifice, for the champion of Bengal, Sandip. Accordingly, she wants to cut her hair for her hero and glorify him with a garland. She wants to burn all her favourite foreign clothes and demands Miss Gilby's expulsion from her home. She supports Noren's blind rage towards all the British and his malicious attack on Miss Gilby. She feels ashamed of Nikhil's failure to accept the Swadeshi spirit and to understand her or Noren's patriotic zeal. She also becomes angry with Nikhil for his compassion to Miss Gilby and refusal to look after Noren any more.

When these positive feelings of Bimala turn negative upon her realisation of the real face of Sandip and the *Swadeshi*, Bimala still describes the time as magical. She calls Sandip a snake-charmer and a demon that in the guise of the nation appears at her door and charms and possesses her true self. She admits that, due to Sandip's eulogy of her as Queen Bee and then an incarnation of the country-goddess, her mind becomes 'fully clouded with fumes of intoxicating gas' (HW 58). Whenever she meets Sandip, she feels a type of 'madness, naked and rampant' (HW 189) dances on her heart and 'her sight is clouded over like an opium-eater's eyes' (HW 200).

Although Nikhil, the repudiator of this intoxication, remains untouched ideologically by the charm of *Swadeshi*, he identifies the period as a paranormal time. He finds in the ideas of the *Swadeshi* the reflection of the ‘gross cupidity’ and ‘fleshy feelings’ of Sandip, who underneath ‘some hypnotic stimulus’ (*HW* 45-46) hides his greed and lust. He regrets Bimala’s hero-worship and asserts that the way to the nation of Sandip and Bimala is nothing but ‘frantic impetuosity, helped on by the fiery liquor of excitement’ (*HW* 44). Bimala and Sandip do not accept Nikhil’s attitude towards the *Swadeshi*. Sandip mockingly tells Bimala that to Nikhil the *Swadeshi* is like a poem whose metre is to keep correct at every step. But Sandip is here only to break the poetic rule. Bimala also argues with Nikhil about his judgement of the excitement over *Swadeshi* as a ‘destructive excitement’ (*HW* 24) and ‘a fire of drunkenness’ (*HW* 117).

Despite his ideological distance from the *Swadeshi*, Nikhil cannot remain unagitated emotionally. He feels isolated and unrequited. He becomes sad, seeing that his beloved is emerging into a new world of excitement and behaving like a stranger day by day. These situations compel him to review, revise and rethink his old views of love and life according to the new perceptions of time. He looks at himself from outside, from Bimala’s point of view. He understands the dynamic qualities in Sandip and finds himself worthless: ‘I am unworthy, unworthy, unworthy’ (*HW* 43).

Sandip is the agent who creates this condition of occult instability with his hedonistic motto ‘*I want, I want, I want*’ (*HW* 53). He is a perfect ideological acrobat who rejects the taken-for-granted moral values and prefers passion to reason, illusion to truth, sin to good deeds, destruction to construction and the concept of ‘seize the day’ to the future. He is also a successful womaniser with practical knowledge of seduction. That is why he lays plans to win both Bimala and money. He at first hypnotises Bimala, eulogising her as a nation-goddess, and then wakes her up violently from that doze as if she, in a sleepy state, can break all her old bonds and become his consort. Sandip also describes his approach towards the nation and Bimala as ‘hypnotism’, ‘charm’, and ‘delusion’ (*HW* 165) that win in the long run. He defines Bimala’s condition as ‘not conscious [...] living in a dream’ (*HW* 64) and describes her as a ‘sleep-walker’ (*HW* 68), ‘a snared deer’ (*HW* 104), ‘one [...] on fire’ (*HW* 74) and ‘a captive balloon’ (*HW* 169). He justifies his agitation as necessary for Bimala to achieve her freedom from the traditional bondage of shame, reason, identity, and home. And he contrives that, through his establishment of Bimala as a Goddess, he will bring her in the open world: ‘The turbulent west wind, which has swept away the country’s veil of conscience, will sweep away the veil of the wife from Bimala’s face, and in that uncovering there will be no shame’ (*HW* 106).

Cultural Hybridity

This moment of occult instability in Bengal, as a Third Space, as a passage towards a postcolonial future, sheds significant light on Nikhil and Sandip and reveals them as culturally hybrid in their enunciation of cultural difference from the British.

Although the novel represents Nikhil and Sandip opposite to each other, in many ways they are alike. Nikhil’s master observes those similarities and comments that despite they do

not ‘rhyme,’ their ‘rhythm is the same’ (*HW* 139). Nikhil and Sandip also feel their similarities to each other. Nikhil considers Sandip his equal and rival: ‘on the whole he is not superior to me’ (*GB* 40) and cannot blame Bimala for her infatuation. In the similar way, Sandip acknowledges that he and Nikhil are the same in nature: ‘But I cannot bear hypocrisy as like as Nikhil—at this point we are alike’ (*GB* 52). Consequently, we see that the motto of both friends is ‘know thyself’ (*HW* 100). They read voraciously across disciplines and can argue with each other with the same rhetorical zeal. They equally nourish modern sensibilities within themselves and are ready to work for the cause of Nation.

However, Nikhil and Sandip occupy specific positions in their enunciation of cultural difference from the British and unconsciously introduce a split in Bengal cultural purity and totality. In the one hand, they articulate the need to preserve the Bengal culture regarding the land and women, on the other hand, they demand a new cultural manifestation in Bengal where women and land will enjoy unbound freedom. In their similar aspirations, they are found continuously translating and negotiating Bengal cultural codes into modern Western ones and absorbing contradictions in their thoughts and actions.

The two key terms, *Swadeshi* and *Bande Mataram* – frequently used in the narrative in the triadic arguments, both overt and covert, among Nikhil, Sandip and Bimala – are the best example of this split and hybridity. The word ‘Swadeshi’ means ‘of one’s own country.’ According to Prindhita and Fariha, ‘any action, any product or service produced domestically in the country qualifies to be called *Swadeshi*’.¹⁷ The Bengal *Swadeshi* Movement advocates the revival of cultural authenticity through production and consumption of indigenous goods and rejection of everything British. It also calls for the restoration of the sense of self-sufficiency in the Bengalis, shunning all correspondences with British official bodies and observing a nation-wide mourning day.¹⁸

The second key word ‘Bande Mataram’ becomes a *mantra*, the sacred cultural articulation of the Hindu-Bengali faith and cultures, during the *Swadeshi*. Introduced by the Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in *Anandamath* (1873) and taken up by the nationalist leaders as their buzzword in 1905, ‘Bande Mataram’ conceives the motherland Bengal as the Divine Mother. The Bengal becomes an icon of motherhood in its beauty and bounty whom her children not only worship but also protect from all predicaments.¹⁹ Therefore, the Bengalis take the British Partition of the Bengal as an attack on their mother and become ready to defend her honour at any cost, even by crooked means. They continuously mutter the term and circulate it all around as if they can internalise the fervour of patriotism and nationalism.

¹⁷ Riza Sovia Nur Priandhita and Inayatul Fariha, ‘The Representation of Indian Nationalism in Rabindranath Tagore’s *The Home and the World*’, *SKRIPSI Jurusan Sastra Inggris-Fakultas Sastra UM* (2013) 1. <http://karya-ilmiah.um.ac.id/index.php/sastra-inggris/article/view/27443>

¹⁸ Biswas, A. ‘Paradox of Anti-Partition Agitation and Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1905).’ *Social scientist* 23.4-6 (1995): 38-39.

¹⁹ Bagchi, Jasodhara. ‘Representing Nationalism: Ideology of Motherhood in Colonial Bengal.’ *Economic and Political Weekly* (1990): WS65-WS69.

However, these two concepts, as practised by the colonially-educated Sandip, represent a vision of hybridity. During the *Swadeshi* Sandip often asserts that *Bande Mataram* is his buzzword. But when he speaks in favour of nationalism, he spontaneously utters 'Hurrah!' instead of '*Bande Mataram*' (HW 40). He claims falsely to Bimala that he is so attached to Bengal that without *swadeshi* medicines he cannot recover from sickness. But we know from Nikhil that he cannot recover without foreign medications. Again, we see that Sandip is very fond of English literature, philosophy, and science. He shows a thorough command of modern poetry and philosophy in his discussions with Bimala.

That such a hybrid man during *Swadeshi* will turn into a pure Bengali with the touch of '*Bande Mataram*' is incredible. Sandip turns his nationalist project hybrid by combining the Western concept of nationalism with *Swadeshi* and *Bande Mataram*. Tagore found both the western concept of nationalism and the Indian concept of the Nation as a god unsuitable for the Bengal: 'India has never had a real sense of nationalism. Even though from childhood I had been taught the idolatry of Nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity, I believe I had outgrown that teaching.'²⁰ Sandip is aware that nationalism and religion cannot go side by side. He states that the main anomaly of his age is that Indians combine religion, *Bhagavadgita*, and nationalism, *Bande Mataram*, together. He compares this combination with the performance where both English military band and Indian pipes are playing together. He calls it a form of cultural confusion that he will end, promoting the western military style and passion as the prime power in the battlefield of life. Nonetheless, Sandip fails to do so and remains culturally hybrid. Rather he articulates hybridity through his plan of establishing Bimala as the incarnation of the nation-goddess, the Kali. He boasts: 'It must be my supreme legacy to the Nation. Ignorant men worship gods. I, Sandip, shall create them' (HW 166).

In Sandip's seduction of Bimala, he also translates Bengali cultural symbols into modern Western symbols. He translates the concept of 'Affinity' (HW 54) into the modern scientific notion of passion in order to remove the restraint Bimala feels as a loyal wife. Affinity refers to the social and religious belief that 'God has created special pairs of men and women, and that the union of such is the only legitimate union, higher than all unions made by law' (HW 54). It advocates sex-in-marriage as legitimate and higher form of human love. Sandip asserts that affinity is not one but can be thousand and innumerable, and no one can reject many affinities for the sake of one. Thus, he conceives the modern notion of free sex and plans to make Bimala ready to remove her cultural restraint by giving her English books on the science of sex. He hopes that these books will make Bimala 'acknowledge and respect passion as the supreme reality' (HW 74-75). She thus will be willing to reject shame and restraint and become modern.

Like Sandip, Nikhil is also hybrid in his thoughts and actions. As he is the only M.A. in their family, in Nikhil's case the act of translation of native cultural codes into Western modernity has been started long before the *Swadeshi*. This translation continues throughout the *Swadeshi* era in his persistent friction with and ultimate fracture from Sandip and Bimala.

²⁰ qtd. in Saha 15

However, unlike Sandip, Nikhil's character manifests a hybrid version of humanism which juxtaposes elements from Western modernity and Indian Vedantic philosophy, the Divinity of Man.²¹

Before the *Swadeshi* Bimala describes Nikhil as 'absolutely modern' (*HW* 11). He fills his house with English books, appoints Miss Gilby as an instructor for Bimala and loves to adorn her with European dresses and ornaments. Nikhil also likes the modern concept of the equality of man and woman and supports the concepts of women's liberation from the narrow circle of home. Nikhil's grandmother disliked his penchant for the English culture at first, but gradually she starts loving the stories from the English books that Bimala reads to her. Nikhil's grandmother becomes uncomplaining to such an extent that if Bimala came out of the home, leaving her *pardah*, she would even accept it.

Nevertheless, during the *Swadeshi*, the true nature of Nikhil's modernism is revealed. His humanism is not only modern, but also Vedantic. He is a modern mystic imbued with spiritual and ascetic strength. He is unique in thoughts, character, and actions. He does not give in to self-indulgence, extravagance, and alcohol like his predecessors. He is patient, selfless and grave, and his motto in life is to uphold goodness, Right, love and freedom. He looks at the whole world from a fair point of view and considers the twentieth century an age of fortune for all countries. For this reason, to him, Sandip's *Swadeshi* is an inebriation, and his worship of the country as a goddess is a wrong way to serve the country. He considers that all countries are divine, and that human beings, divine themselves, must love all countries equally. That is why, when Bimala insists on the dismissal of Miss Gilby from her home, Nikhil says: 'I cannot look upon Miss Gilby through a mist of abstraction, just because she is English [...] Cannot you realize she loves you?' (*HW* 25). He does everything to save Panchu, his poor vassal and becomes strict to Noren, his dependent, for his misconduct to Miss Gilby.

Love for science and the application of scientific methods for the betterment of human being is also a watchword in Nikhil's kind of *Swadeshi*. He innovatively, though vainly, tries to employ science to uplift the life conditions of his people. He opens banks, produces sugar and even buys unsold local threads from Suksar bazaar to produce clothes locally. When Sandip explains science only regarding violent passion, he asserts that

²¹ Humanism generally refers to a man-centered philosophy of the universe. It originated in the sixteenth century renaissance and germinated the age of modernity. In the twentieth century humanism is defined as 'a philosophy of joyous service for the greater good of all humanity in this natural world and advocating the methods of reason, science, and democracy' (Lamont 13). It is secular, scientific, naturalistic and democratic in thought and approach (Lamont 48-51). Nevertheless, the humanism that Nikhil represents is the one where we see the presence of the Vedantic concept of *Nara-Narayana*, the Divinity in Man (Sarma 58). This philosophy advocates a non-dualistic concept of the divine nature of human soul that is one with the Atman or the Divine Spirit. It asserts that human being has a three-dimensional relationship with the Divine Spirit – body, soul and nature. Whereas the relationship of body and soul with the Divine is master-slave and part-whole relationship, the relation of nature is that it itself is divine and inseparable and indivisible from the Divine. For this reason, the goal of human nature is to transcend the animal nature within it and, through different stages of evolutions in real life, to become a true image of the Divine Spirit (Abhedananda 63-66; 89-90).

in Europe, people look at everything from the viewpoint of science. But man is neither mere physiology, nor biology, nor psychology, nor even sociology [...] Man is infinitely more than the natural science of himself [...] You want to find truth of man from your science teachers, and not from your own inner being. (HW 73)

He emphasises here that human beings cannot be described or understood from scientific theories, because man is infinite and his truth lies within, in the soul that is divinity itself. In this way, man has both rational and divine powers within himself to be guided through the way of Right and to the welfare of man. He accuses Sandip of being a biased person who indulges the animal nature and wounds regularly ‘the great, the unselfish, the beautiful in man’ (HW 73).

Nikhil’s version of humanity also becomes clear in his views of the emancipation of woman. He considers husband and wife as equal and considers love, not respect or worship, its basis. For this reason, he does not let Bimala touch his feet as a form of worship. He dislikes the separation of women from the outer world in the name of the traditional *pardah* system. He thinks that it keeps the women cocooned both physically and intellectually, not letting them know themselves. He says to Bimala: ‘Here [the Home] you are wrapped up in me. You know neither what you have, nor what you want’ (HW 18). In this way, women, all through their lives, live in a small world and thus become narrow-minded. Nevertheless, this view of Nikhil is also informed with a spiritual perception. He expects that coming in the outer world Bimala will know herself, her husband, love, and freedom in their real form. She will love the divinity in man with all its positive values and free herself from the worldly temptations. When he finds that Bimala ‘has no patience with patience’ and loves to see ‘in men the turbulent, the angry, the unjust’ (HW 44), he decides to renounce her. He decides to dedicate his life for the sake of humanity: ‘The suffering which belongs to all mankind shall be my crown [...] Save me, Truth! [...]. If I must walk alone, let me at least tread your path’ (HW 144).

Dis(location) of Bimala’s Agency

Nikhil’s and Sandip’s hybrid thoughts and practices have an impact on Bimala’s agency as a wife and as a nationalist worker. It snatches away the Shakti, power, Bimala feels before and during the *Swadeshi* in herself and dislocates her from her place. The novel presents this feeling of dislocation in the beginning and at the end of the narrative through Bimala’s words:

The storm within me had shifted my whole being from one centre to another. (HW 29)

Where I am, I am not. I am far away from those who are around me. I live and move upon a world-wide chasm of separation, unstable [...] When I look into my heart, I find everything that was there, still there, – only they are topsy-turvy. Things that were well-ordered have become jumbled up. The gems that were strung into a necklace are now rolling in the dust. And my heart is breaking. (HW 254-255)

In the first quotation, Bimala talks about two centres in her life and in the second she indicates an abyss in which she has fallen. In the first quotation, she refers to the time of *Swadeshi* when her centre has been shifted from Nikhil to Sandip, home to world, stability to

instability. The second one talks about the consequences of that shift when she has no centre, but a world of gap and separation where all things are disorganised.

The narrative presents Bimala as a traditional woman, brought up within a Bengali Hindu culture in the then India. Being the product of that time when women, marriage and family were considered the nucleus of the nation,²² Bimala feels that she is ‘the Goddess Lakshmi’ (GB 16), the deity of the household. Due to Nikhil’s love, unlike her other sisters-in-law whom their husbands do not love, Bimala becomes the centre of her home. She exercises considerable authority in all decisions in the inner quarters. For example, Nikhil wants Bimala to move Calcutta after the death of grandmother. Bimala does not agree with Nikhil because she does not want to leave the seat of the guardian of the household to the hand of her sister-in-law. Or Nikhil desires that Bimala will come out of her inner quarter to meet Nikhil’s friends and know about her surroundings outside the home. But Bimala refuses to leave her seclusion.

This power is compounded during the *Swadeshi* after Bimala attends Sandip’s meeting. She no longer considers herself ‘only the deities of the household fire, but the ‘Bharati’ ((GB 16), India as the Mother Goddess. She is now ‘the *Shakti* of the Motherland’ (HW 31) and ‘the *Shakti* of Womanhood, incarnate’ (HW 36). She feels an urge to serve the hero and the country. Subsequently, becoming the centre of the movement as Queen Bee, she conceives herself as a passively active power who, playing the role of an adviser of Sandip, is actually present in the heart of the *Swadeshi*: ‘behind whatever was taking place was Sandip Babu and behind Sandip Babu was the plain common sense of a woman’ (HW 58). This honour makes Bimala happy and makes her consider herself a goddess incarnate whose magical power summons Sandip to submission at her feet and makes Amulya bright with devotional feelings. During this time Bimala’s ultimate purpose is to be a dedicated worker for the Bengal’s cause: ‘The glory of a great responsibility filled my being’ (HW 58). She has indeed shifted her centre from Nikhil to Sandip, but she never wants to leave the first one for the second. She never thinks that this shift will move her further away from this centre in the upcoming days. Sandip will prove a man of flesh and blood, not the representative of the immortal gods. And, renouncing her identity as a mother, she will appear as a beloved, the goddess of destruction, Kali.

Nevertheless, Bimala’s men never understand what she is or what she truly wants. In Nikhil’s modern mysticism and Sandip’s modern hedonism lie their motto ‘I want’ that in mild and wild form dislocates Bimala’s feelings of Shakti all through the narrative. They always consider themselves the authority of Bimala and attempt to mould and remould her according to their expectations.

From the very beginning of their married life, Nikhil tries to shape Bimala as he likes. Nikhil wants Bimala to leave *purdah*, to arrive in the outside world and to know herself. But

²² See Somdatta Mandal, ‘Was Tagore a Feminist? Re-evaluating Selected Fiction and their Film Adaptations’, *Literature Compass* 12.5 (2015) 5; Sunita Peacock, ‘The Nationalist Question and the Bengali Heroine in Rabindranath Tagore’s *Ghare Baire* or the Home and the World’, *Pakistan Journal of Women’s Studies: Alam-e-Niswan* 18.2 (2011) 28.

in Nikhil's mildness, goodness and generosity, there is a substantial burden of expectations towards Bimala. He expects Bimala to know herself, where to know herself actually means to know Nikhil, the selfless truth and love in her life. He expects Bimala with her modern education and experiences of the outer world will belong to him only and help him in his work of picturing himself as a complete human being. Nikhil also expects Bimala to be a humanist like him, freeing herself 'from her infatuation for tyranny' (HW 44). When Bimala fails to fulfil his expectations, Nikhil becomes sorrowful. He vivisects her nature unpleasantly saying that she is naturally a lover of violence and rage: 'But now I feel sure that this infatuation is deep down her nature. Her love is for the boisterous. From the tip of her tongue to the pit of her stomach she must tingle with red pepper in order to enjoy the simple fare of life' (HW 44). Then he promises to free her from his tie and move to the eternal truth and love he invents for himself. This decision of setting Bimala free is actually Nikhil's fulfilment of his desire. Because to Nikhil, setting Bimala free means setting himself free from the worldly impulse: 'never would I be free until I could set free' (178). Instead of prompting Nikhil to negotiate and reconcile with Bimala, Nikhil's goodness thus disengages him from her.

The same thing happens in Bimala-Sandip relationship. Sandip does not realise the real emotion Bimala feels towards the *Swadeshi*. He emerges quickly as a womaniser and keeps contriving to transform Bimala, the rational, to Bimala, the passionate. With his hybrid thoughts that combine modernism and idolatry, he entices Bimala to be the goddess Kali, the destroyer. Bimala gradually feels that the power she had of feeling like the Mother Land is vanishing under the manly power of Sandip. Her conversation with Sandip is slowly dropping 'all talk of the country's cause' (HW 85) and turning towards the discussion on modern sex-problem and poetry. Bimala hears underneath their talk the resonance of Sandip's 'true manly note, the note of power' (HW 85) and is submerged in his cajoling to break the cocoon of the inner quarter:

Do you not know that I come to worship? Have I not told you that, in you, I visualize the *Shakti* of our country? Is this power of yours to be kept veiled in a zenana? Cast away all false shame [...] Take your plunge to-day into the freedom of the outer world. (HW 90-92)

Sandip's eulogy renders Bimala so powerless that she starts to consider Bengal a beloved, like her: 'She is no mother. There is no call to her children in their hunger, no home to be done. No; she hies to her tryst' (HW 120). Thus, Sandip's endearments dislocate Bimala from her centre as a worker of the country and re-centres her emotion around Sandip.

This dislocation of Bimala from one centre to another, then another again, creates a vast gulf in her world. She feels she is not what she has been and is utterly alone. Her home that she used to take care of is mocking her. She is no longer at home at her home, in her country. She is the looter of its safety and destroyer of its peace. She looks at her heart and finds that all things are there what they have, but all are disorganised and dishevelled. She is not what she has been. She is the not near and dear one of anyone and 'unstable as a dew drop upon the lotus leaf' (HW 253). She desperately tries to regain her power through Amulya, but in

the meantime, her home and the world have already descended into chaos. Conflict, communalism, and death hover over Suksar. Sandip has taken his leave, and Nikhil has left home to try and resolve the communal conflicts.

Bimala at this stage experiences a harrowing physical and psychological stasis. Her body is petrified beside the window and her mind goes blank. She feels she needs to commit suicide or do something for her home, but she can neither move to take the pistol nor pray. She keeps staring at the darkness outside and hear the indistinct noises far and near. She feels her mind is blocked and she cannot think anything. She waits inertly for her fate to prevail: 'But I could not move a step from the window [...] was I not awaiting my fate?' (HW 279). She feels broken and becomes remorseful: 'So long as I was alive, my sins would remain rampant, scattering destruction on every side' (HW 279).

Works Cited

- Abhedânanda, Swâmi. *Vedânta Philosophy: Divine Heritage of Man*. Hollister: YogeBooks, 2010. Print.
- Ahearn, Laura M. 'Agency.' *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 9.1/2 (2000): 12-15. Print.
- . 'Language and Agency.' *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001): 109-37. Print.
- Bagchi, Jasodhara. 'Representing Nationalism: Ideology of Motherhood in Colonial Bengal.' *Economic and Political Weekly* (1990): WS65-WS71. Print.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Biswas, A. 'Paradox of Anti-Partition Agitation and Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1905).' *Social scientist* 23.4-6 (1995): 38-57. Print.
- Desai, Anita. Introduction. *The Home and the World*. By Rabindranath Tagore. New York: Penguin Group, 2005. xxi-xxiii. Print.
- Dutt, Sunil. 'Samkhya Philosophy and Its Importance in Indian Philosophy.' *New Man International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 3.8 (2016): 22-25. Print.
- Lamont, Corliss. *The Philosophy of Humanism*. New York: Humanist Press, 1997. Print.
- Mandal, Somdatta. 'Was Tagore a Feminist? Re-evaluating Selected Fiction and their Film Adaptations.' *Literature Compass* 12.5 (2015): 227-237. Print.
- Morales, Frank. 'The Concept of Shakti: Hinduism as a Liberating Force for women.' Dharma Central. 7 Nov 2000. Web. 27 April 2017.
<[http://www.adishakti.org/pdf_files/concept_of_shakti_\(dharmacentral.com\).pdf](http://www.adishakti.org/pdf_files/concept_of_shakti_(dharmacentral.com).pdf)>
- O'Connell, Joseph T, and Kathleen M O'Connell. 'Introduction: Rabindranath Tagore as 'Cultural Icon'.' *University of Toronto Quarterly* 77.4 (2008): 961-70. Print.
- Peacock, Sunita. 'The Nationalist Question and the Bengali Heroine in Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare Baire* or the Home and the World.' *Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies: Alam-e-Niswan* 18.02 (2011): 23-36. Print.
- Phillips, John, Chrissie Tan. 'Langue and Parole'. *The Literary Encyclopedia*. First published 08 February 2005 [https://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true&UID=662, accessed 23 August 2018.]
- Priandhita, Riza Sovia Nur, and Inayatul Fariha. 'The Representation of Indian Nationalism in Rabindranath Tagore's *the Home and the World*.' *SKRIPSI Jurusan Sastra Inggris-*

Cultural Hybridity and (Dis) location of Female Agency in Rabindranath Tagore's Ghare Baire or The Home and the World. Umme Salma Gitanjali & Beyond, Issue 4: Revisiting Tagore: Critical Essays on Ghare Baire

Fakultas Sastra UM (2013): 1-16. Print.

<<http://jurnalonline.um.ac.id/data/artikel/artikel60E99C17A5DA80A7E184984EAF262682.pdf>>

Radice, William. Preface. *The Home and the World*. By Rabindranath Tagore. New York: Penguin Group, 2005.vii-xvii. Print.

Saha, Poulomi. 'Singing Bengal into a Nation: Tagore the Colonial Cosmopolitan?' *Journal of Modern Literature* 36.2 (2013): 1-24. Print.

Sarma, Arup Jyoti. 'Humanistic Philosophy of Tagore.' *KRITIKE: An Online Journal of Philosophy* 6.1 (2012): 50-66. Print.

Tagore, Rabindranath. *Ghare Baire*. Dhaka: Nayem Books International, 2010. Print.

Tagore, Rabindranath. *Ghare Baire or The Home and the World*. Translated by Surendranath Tagore. London: McMillan, 1919. Print.