

**THE LOSS OF INNOCENCE AND THE TURBULENT WORLD:
A STUDY OF TAGORE'S *THE HOME AND THE WORLD***

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Abstract

*Humanity has been for long debating the relative virtues of violence and counter violence. The quality of humanity is not inborn but to be cultivated by all of us. In the present context of the conflicting demands of nationalism and globalization on us, violence and nonviolence are struggling to win the heart of man. Tagore's novel *The Home and the World* is extremely relevant for a critical scrutiny. The lines between home and the world are thin and the former as the final resort of peace as shown by Bimala's tears of remorse over her action and the death of Amulya is the inevitable tragedy born of the ruthlessness of the world. In fact at times we feel whether the clash between Nikhil and Sandip is a replica of the battle raging between his quietism and nationalism outside and inside. In this battle, Nikhil's patriotism eventually wins at enormous social and personal cost. The present article unravels how quiet strength is more desirable than selfishness masquerading as lofty ideal. (Humanity, nationalism, Globalization, Violence, Tagore, patriotism)*

Key words: *innocence, turbulent world, nationalism, globalization, quietism, patriotism*

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Humanity has been for long debating the relative virtues of violence and counter violence. The quality of humanity is not inborn but to be cultivated by all of us. The desire for proprietorship and Freudian conclusion on the inevitability of violence may incline us to think that violence is natural. In the present context when there are conflicting demands of nationalism and globalization are on us and when violence and nonviolence are struggling to win the heart of man, Tagore's novel *The Home and the World* is very much relevant for a critical scrutiny. Anita Desai writes,

Indeed it has become increasingly so as the terrorist movement that Tagore described when it was in infancy as a movement of romantic idealism, impractical and misdirected, has developed in to a tough, utterly professional system and a threat in all parts of the world. (Tagore 8)

Another critic Shankar Bhattacharya writes that the major concern of *Four Chapters* and *The Home and the World* is "the conflict between political agitation and human values." (109)

In the novel Nikhil and Sandip stand for antagonistic ideals whereas Bimala stands for nature. We find a tussle between nationalistic emotion and internationalism. Sandip wants to wrest power, glory and woman from others. To him Nikhil is weak, sentimental and too good to succeed. Nikhil has believed in his own strength, nature and love. He wants his love to triumph over worldly greed. He wants his wife to go into the wide world out of home

and be with him out of choice. Initially his wife Bimala is against this notion but in the course of time she slowly steps out of the cocoon of home life. In the world was raging the fire of Swadeshi Movement that stirs people into action. Sandip, the leader wants to use energy, cunning, strength, emotion and power to realize his ideal. He encourages Bimala as incarnation of Sakthi, fountainhead of inspiration and wants to draw her away from Nikhil, the Benevolent Rajah who believes more in quiet strength rather than agitational politics of national movement. He doesn't want people to do things by force whereas Sandip has no qualms of conscience and sees means above ends.

Bimala who has come out of cocoon gets energized, perturbed, and powerful enough to play her part in the politics of the time. She moves away from her husband mentally and encourages the movement. She knows that she has become an object of adoration for Sandip and others and is pleased by her expanding personality. Though She observes and remains indifferent to the sarcastic response of her sister-in-law to her moving closer to Sandip. Nikhil has believed that worthiness has to be earned in the outside world. He is not for keeping Bimala with her out of convention. He questions himself,

Did the love which I received from her, I asked myself, come from the deep spring of her heart, or was it merely like the daily provision of pipe water pumped up by the municipal steam-engine of society?(Tagore 41)

While Nikhil thinks that the weak resort to the shortcuts to justice, Bimala loves 'to find the turbulent, the angry and unjust. Her respect must have its element of fear.' (Tagore 42) Since Nikhil hasn't taken to fiery nationalism, he has been seen as feeble by Bimala and unimaginative by Sandip. Nikhil sees lust lurking beneath nationalistic religion of Sandip and 'his love of country is but a different phase of his covetous self-love.' (Tagore 43) Despite his grasp of Sandip's nature, he fails to communicate with her as she is hero-worshipping him and out of fear of being misconstrued as jealous.

Sandip believes in the conquest of nature and morals as the prop of the

weak creatures. Those who are passionate to have and unscrupulous are the chosen ones by nature. 'Nature spreads out her riches and loveliest treasures for their benefit. They swim across streams, leap over walls, kick open doors, to help, themselves to whatever is worth taking.' Sandip's theory is that nature delights in being possessed by the forceful people and has no love for the ascetic. He is ready to lust after things, conceal or reveal when necessary, use craft to get what he wants. He has no regard for ascetics or avatars who appeal only to the weak or 'metaphor-mongers' (Tagore 47) Sandip is also proud of his winning ways with women whom he sees as more realistic than men. He thinks that women love the passionate 'but not created for these pale creatures-that lotus-eater of idealism.' (Tagore 48)

Nikhil understands that he has no right to possess Bimala.

What is Bimala to you? Your wife? What is a wife? A bubble of name blown big with your own breath, so carefully guarded night and day, yet ready to burst at any pin-prick from outside? (Tagore 64)

Love is free and it can't be obtained by force. He understands that life is bigger than narrow domestic walls. He thinks that

the full value of his life doesn't all go to buy my narrow domestic world; its great commerce does not stand or fall with some petty success or failure in the bartering of my personal joys and sorrows.(Tagore 65)

He goes and kisses Bimala asleep on her forehead and hopes of the abiding memory of the vibration of that kiss.

Contrasting perspective towards nature, women and nationalism:

Tagore's *The Home and the World* shows the contrast between violence and nonviolence represented by Sandip and Nikhil. When Bimala asks Nikhil to stop the selling of foreign goods even by tyranny for the sake of country, he

refuses her demand. 'To tyrannize for the country is to tyrannize over the country. But that I am afraid you will never understand.' (Tagore 109). He finds, understands her mysterious motive and rejects herself and her elaborate adornment .

Nikhil feels enchanted by nature. He has come closer to nature and his freedom lies in the freedom of all. While Sandip is for exploiting nature, Nikhil's effort has been to find out the truth and appreciate nature as it is. He thinks that the true woman is one who leads them to man's ideals not one who distracts him. He declares, 'In my work will be my salvation' and despite the ache in his heart he knows that 'the suffering which belongs to all mankind shall be my crown.' (Tagore 110) He prays Truth to avoid false paradise of illusion and give him strength to walk alone if necessary and to Victory.

Sandip's mind is that of a man wedded to power and glory. He associates plundering of nature as a sign of masculinity.

From the primeval days have we men been plucking fruits, cutting down trees, digging up soil, killing beast, bird and fish. From the bottom of the sea, from underneath the ground, from the very jaws of death, it has all been grabbing and grabbing and grabbing- no strong-box in nature's storehouse has been respected or unrifled.(Tagore 116)

He says that the earth has been fulfilled through her yielding herself to man. He equates woman with earth who needs to satisfy the desire of man and their greatness lies in surrendering themselves to men.

They had to bring all the diamonds of their happiness and the pearls of their sorrow into our royal treasury; they have found their true wealth. So for men to accept is truly to give; for women to give is truly to gain. (Tagore 116)

Sandip is capable of endless rationalization. He wants money for his

cause and treats Nikhil's paternal estates as a 'superfluity to him' (Tagore 117). For him morals are superfluous and when he is cornered by the estate manager over his complicity in drowning Mirjan's boat for carrying foreign clothes, he's prepared to pay money to hush up the affair to the police and Mirjan and nationalism is also dubious. He sees slime underneath Swadeshi Movement. He has no love for illusions and people with delusions such as Nikhil in his view. What he sees as practicality is really opportunism in disguise.

Sandip thinks that greatness is obtained by being unjust. 'Whenever an individual or nation becomes incapable of perpetrating injustice it is swept into the dustbin of the world.' (Tagore 79) As an example of his cruelty, he mentions that how one day he taught the lesson of cruelty to his followers by cutting off the leg of a goat alive. In his argument with Nikhil, the latter says that that success can't be at the cost of soul. 'The soul is not as distinct as success, and so you only lose your soul if you seek it in your success.' (Tagore 80) Sandip too sees the anomaly of the necessity of having religion as well as nationalism, Bhagavadgita and *Bande Mataram*. He wants to put an end the conflict between Indian and western. He feels unease in compunctions and even says that Ravana's weakness is leaving Sita and being lenient to Vibhishana to their freewill should not have. He regrets that he has allowed many moments of possible intimacy with Bimala and he has not been able to face his friend Nikhil. He sees Bimala as personification of India and wants her to become free from the role of conventional wife.

Sandip argues with Nikhil to make an image of country for the sake of lesser minds called his countrymen despite the latter's protest against such creation of delusion. While the nationalism of Sandip wants the subduing of Muslims, Nikhil's sees the as a part of India. Sandip cares only for the moment whereas Nikhil's eyes are on eternal result. Sandip wants Nikhil to suffer for choosing truth whereas he himself wants illusion. Here we find him changing his earlier stance of praising himself for preferring practicality to illusion. He says that Bengal has given the image of Durga as an image of nationalism given by Bengal to the rest of the country. He also asks Bimala money for the cause.

While Nikhil sees freedom in non-interference of government in dress, trade and eating habits of the people and against the element of fear, student followers of Sandip think that force is allowable in promoting nationalism as they praise the strong arm tactics of Kundu and Chakravarty Zamindars in contrast with Nikhil's passivity. Nikhil is for freedom of the spirit and against fear. He says to student nationalists

The slavery that has entered into our very bones is breaking out, at this opportunity, as ghastly tyranny. You have been so used to submit to domination through fear; you have come to believe that to make others submit is a kind of religion. My fight shall be against be this weakness, this atrocious cruelty! (Tagore 131)

When Nikhil understands Sandip's coercive and collaborative nature with the other Zamindars, he asks him to leave his estates and go to Calcutta. Krishna Kripalani opines that in depicting the character of Nikhil 'Tagore could not rise to the dispassionate calm of self-analysis which Tolstoy attained.' (Kripalani 286)

Tedious home versus Lethal World:

Bimala has been pleased by Sandip's attention and his praise exalted her self-esteem. She felt that she was needed by the countrymen represented by Sandip. She thinks

All his gaze proclaimed that I was a wonder in beauty and power; and the loudness of his praise, spoken and unspoken, drowned all other voices in my world. Had the creator created me afresh, I wondered? Did he wish to make up now for neglecting me so long? I who before was plain had become suddenly beautiful. I who before had been of no account now felt in myself all the splendour of Bengal itself.(Tagore 50)

She became the counsel of Sandip who flattered her wisdom and Nikhil,

the husband of Bimala had been kept outside their transactions. The intimate relation between Nikhil and Bimala had begun withering slowly and invisibly. Bimala remained unaware and comments, 'When like the river, we women keep to our banks, we give nourishment with all that we have; when we overflow them we destroy with all that we are.' (Tagore 51)

For Sandip the truth was more to do with man-woman relation, flesh, passion and against custom, deception unavoidable. He has set himself against moral precepts which bind women. Through Tagore voices ideas of women's liberation through Sandip, his sympathies are with Nikhil but not with Satanic Sandip. He says that we are really weaker and delusional whereas man-made custom had made woman who is realistic appear weaker and his aim is freedom in human relations.

Bimala's truth is breaking out of the tedium of the home whereas Sandip's is tearing the veil of custom and waiting till Bimala comes to him. He interprets the trembling of her steps, the turnings of her face, curious gazes, her blushing as signs in his favour. To him 'the little red ribbon, which peeps through the luxuriant masses of her hair, with its flush of secret longing, it is the lolling tongue of the red storm cloud.' (Tagore 55) Sandip tells Chandrakantbabu, the teacher of Nikhil that he wanted to work with passion and without expecting fruit but only thorns. But Contrary to his assertion, he has been interested in winning Bimala. He wants to counterpoise his passion to Nikhil's mistiness and to make Bimala seek truth in passion and 'modern' and his placing of his youthful photo beside Nikhil in the photo frame is one such an attempt. The teacher criticizes him saying that nations have advanced through action but those consumed by discontent seek short cuts for liberation. Bimala has understood the turbulence in her heart and Sandip's irresistible and lethal charm. she hasn't cared sarcasm her sister-in-law and has been enveloped by 'the protective armour of the exaltation of the sacrifice.'(Tagore 69)

Tagore portrays Sandip as an amalgam of good and bad. He has been vibrant, poetic, power-hungry and impatient. He also at times appears as a comic figure. While praising talking to Bimala he says that

The Geography of a country is not the whole truth. No one can give up his life for a map! ... When you have anointed me with your own hands, then shall I know I have the sanction of my country; and if with that in my heart, I fall fighting, it shall not be on the dust of some map-made land, but on a lovingly spread skirt?—like that of the earthen-red *sari* you wore the other day, with a broad blood-red border. (Tagore 73)

He praises her that she is not meant for home but for the country. She has been in mental conflict and sees convention made by men as a hindrance to the blooming of her personality. In a moment of exasperation, she has felt like throwing away the orchid gifted by her husband. Bimala struggles a lot in realizing her freedom. When Nikhil who finds her gloomy tells her to be free from the cage, she muses, 'It is like setting a fish free in the sky- for how can I move or live outside the atmosphere of loving care which has always sustained me?' (Tagore 137)

When Sandip wants money, he asks Bimala who is too confident of her power to get it from her husband. Bimala steals the six thousand rupees for the sake of cause espoused by Sandip but feels guilty and regrets the fact that men treat a woman like her as 'a meadow flower in the path of a torrent of flood.' (146) when Bimala offers money to Sandip he goes towards her in passion. She pushes him away which makes Amulya, Sandip's follower respect her a great deal. Later Sandip depicts his passion as devotion and tries to make amends for his behaviour. Bimala takes innocent Amulya into her confidence and asks him to sell her own jewels to fetch the money stolen to be returned without her husband's knowledge. When Sandip feels jealous, Bimala recognizes his weakness. When she listens to Amulya's words her motherly love rises to the fore and she takes his pistol as a token and to prevent harm to

him. But she hasn't come out of Sandip's satanic love towards her.

Tagore himself seems to have soft corner for Nikhil who represents most of his ideas but the artist in him doesn't portray Sandip in all black. He put poetry in the mouth of Sandip, the fire of nationalism with its smoke of egoism. When Sandip extols her as the giver of image of nationalism and inspirer of destruction in him, 'There is no reality in the world save this one real love of mine. I do you reverence. My devotion to you has made me cruel; my worship of you has lighted the raging flame of destruction within me. I am not righteous.'(Tagore 177) Kripalani writes that 'Tagore himself was tossing between his love of his home and lure of the world.'(Tagore 287) Bimala muses that there is coarseness, sensuousness as well as great depths in Sandip and the mysterious purpose of man is known only to the Almighty. At the time of his exit, Sandip speaks in flowery language.

According to Nandy

Not only is she (Bimala) the symbol for which Sandip and Nikhil fight, but her personality incorporates the contesting selves of the two protagonists and becomes the battlefield on which the two forms of patriotism fight for supremacy. In this inner battle, Nikhil's form of patriotism eventually wins, but at enormous social and personal cost (Tagore 14)

Tagore shows Sandip as a mixture of good and evil. Through Bimala's thoughts we come to know Tagore's artistic objectivity which doesn't dismiss fiery nationalists as totally undesirable. In fact at times we feel whether the clash between Nikhil and Sandip is a replica of the battle raging between his quietism and nationalism outside and inside. The lines between home and the world are thin and the former is the ultimate resort of peace as shown by Bimala's tears of remorse over her action and the understanding heart of Nikhil. The death of Amulya is the inevitable tragedy born of the harshness ruthlessness of the world that sullies the purity of the home and

foreshadows 'Tagore's later anxiety about the nature of the violence let loose by nationalism.'(Nandy 14). The novel offers not only "a critique of nationalism but also a perspective on the form anti-imperialism should take in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society..." (Nandy 19).

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