



**Epitome : International Journal  
of Multidisciplinary Research**

**ISSN : 2395-6968**

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**THE HOME AND THE WORLD  
NATIONALISM VS. UNIVERSALISM**



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**RESEARCH PAPER**

*“Nationalism can rouse the noblest sentiment in man as well as basis to propensities of human character. It can be vehicle of culture as well as engine of oppression. It can unify as well as disrupt. Its contribution to the sum total of human welfare has been great but its contribution to human misery has been perhaps greater”*

No other Writer of India has attracted the attention of such wide range of readers and critics as Rabindranath Tagore. No poet in history has perhaps so much honor in his life time as Tagore. No poet again has perhaps suffered public indignation as Tagore. For that he himself provides the answer “The desire for unity with the rest of the world”.

Tagore political philosophy his literary works rise above regional considerations. In his novel “The Home and The World” his protagonist Nikhil says” To worship my country as a god is to bring curse upon it”.

Tagore was a champion of national movement, a composer of patriotic songs, writer of our national anthem, an inspiring anticolonial activist, a vigorous critic of western imperialism, he was considered a precursor to Gandhi, Romain Rolland had described a meeting between Tagore

and Gandhi as one between “ a philosopher and an apostle, a St. Paul and a Plato” So why has Tagore’s reputation fell when published *The Home and The World* in 1915 and even further when he published *Nationalism* in 1918 and *Four Chapters* in 1934. The reasons are not so much poetical but ideological and philosophical. Tagore’s vision of universal human unity, of living bonds in society, of spontaneous expression of man as a social being, of his equation of nation with the universe. (*The Home and The World*, p.37)

Tagore’s vision of human unity and equality, and his critique of modern civilization with its twin principles of materialism and nationalism, is recurrent in all his works. His vision emerges most explicitly and powerfully, however in several of his lectures and Addresses, including ‘My Life’, ‘My School’, ‘ My Religion’, ‘Civilization and Progress’, ‘Nationalism in India’, ‘Nationalism in Japan’, ‘Nationalism in the West’, as well as in his novels ‘Gora’, ‘The Home and The World’ and energetically investigates what has gone wrong with the world and where the remedy lies

Tagore’s disenchantment with the national movement grew out of his bitter experiences of the Swadeshi movement His first disillusionment started at the sight of burning of foreign cloth. The illiterate poor, who could not afford like the rich land owners the luxury of burning cloth, they were forcibly made to burn their cloth at the cost of their jobs and wages and led them to the brink of starvation There was still another group of protestors, the Muslims. Who refused to participate in the Swadeshi movement as an assertion of aggressive Hindu nationalism promoting Hindu sentiments.

Rabindranth himself was deeply scarred by the outcome of Swadeshi which had earlier embraced. *The Home and The World*, produced out of the ravages of time, relives some of the poet’s own anguish. In a series of essays written shortly after this novel, Tagore would aggressively decry the goals and outcome of nationalist politics Nationalism in the west, he claimed, had produced a mindless hungering, after material wealth and political power , its ultimate terrifying form being imperialist domination of other people of the world

The novel deals with the experiences of three characters during the volatile period of Swadeshi: Nikhil, a benevolent, enlightened , and progressive Zamindar: his friend Sandip, a charismatic nationalist leader, Nikhil’s wife Bimala who is happy at the outset in her traditional role as a Zamindar’s wife, but who encouraged by her husband steps out of home to better acquaint herself with the world and find a new identify for the Indian woman At the sight of Sandip, she

emotionally trips, vacillates between him and her husband until she returns home, bruised and humiliated but with a more mature understanding of both the self and the world

Nikhil represents Tagore's view of patriotism on constructive lines rather than political, emotional and tyrannical approach. While Sandip represents aggressive nationalism rather than ethical or human grounds. Bimala is torn between the two contradictory elements of truth and force, reason and emotion, idealism and opportunism. The book appears to present many of its readers with a transparent statement of Rabindranath's personal distrust of militant nationalism and his henceforth permanent commitment to peaceful social change. Bimala in this allegorical reading is the figure of the nation and the strife of Nikhil and Sandip a battle over competing visions of a sovereign India.

Here Nikhil's view of life is just opposite to the conservative Hindu's view of life. He considers that husband and wife are equal in love. According to him there is no place for wife's devotion for Hindu since devotion is an obstacle in the way of true equality

But Bimala who has been accustomed to domestic life, shows no interest in the world other than her husband and her paradise of home. She opposes Nikhil's view of equality of husband and wife as she firmly believes that a woman's salvation lies in surrendering her pride to her husband through devotion.

Bimala's outlook on life and society undergoes a change with the advent of the Swadesh movement along with Nikhil's friend Sandip. He seemed to her marked out by the gods as their messenger to mortal men and women. (P.28) The reaction is so strong that Bimala, who had never before agreed to step out of boundary walls now willingly, comes out of Zenena to meet Sandip. Her home which is her only world is now broken and she is now exposed to a bigger world. Though she fails to comprehend its real meaning she is changed

Nikhil is unknown for true patriotism. He stands for truth than force, reason than emotion, idealism than opportunism. He believes human values rather than power values. He seeks social freedom than political freedom. To Nikhil the purpose of religion is to maintain peace and harmony but to Sandip, religion is a political tool to success

Sandip is a typical Machiavellian patriot who exhorts the people recklessly to burn British goods and resort to violence when opposed.

Nikhil believes that violence for freedom is far worse than alien forces. He says to ‘tyrannises for the country is to tyrannise over the country’(p.142) He considers Sandip’s love of the country is but a different phase of his covetous self-love. Sandip considers Nikhil to be metaphor-monger(p.53) and weak because he will not resort to force. Bimala stands between the two-fascinated by Sandip, married to Nikhil.

The spell of Sandip is so profound that under his influence. Bimala forgets her individual identity and she identifies herself as a sole representative of Bengal womanhood.

Bimala’s delusion of being “Sakti of mother land” is cleverly exploited by the unscrupulous Sandip who through clever flattery lays a snare for her mind and body.

Bimala’s attraction was primarily due to her admiration for the leadership and surprisingly effective speeches he delivered on economic and political nationalism. In contrast to her views the balanced opinion of husband appeared to be timid and very cowardly. She had always his opponents. Rabindranath who had himself played a leading part in the Swadeshi movement in his earlier phase, here depicts through Bimala how the women folk of Bengal became stired heart and soul during Swadeshi Movement.

When Bimala sees the true colour of Sandip under the banner of patriotism she comes back to Nikhil. But at what cost? She has lot Amulya a true patriot in the communal riots. Almost the same is Nikhil’s condition, his life too is uncertain. Sandip who came from no where in sight. What else left is blazing fires of communalism. As Bimala robbed by self seeking Sandip so India by self- seeking nationalists.

Through the character of Sandip, Tagore openly criticized the extremist nationalists of the then Swadeshi movement. The lapses of Sandip represent the lapses of Swadeshi leaders. The failure of Bimala represents the failure of Swadeshi movement. The attack on Nikhil is parallel to the attack on Tagore.

It is not surprising that The Home and The World invited protest letters. Swadeshi movement produced a galaxy of political leaders extremists and moderates, charismatic leaders, and fiery orators, true patriots and also self seeking leaders.

It can’t be dined Tagore totally ignored true patriots, highlighting pseudo patriots like Sandip. Not all leaders are self-seeking and anti-secular like Sandip nor all people are blind participants like Bimala. Tagore denounced nationalism attributing Swadeshi lapses, attributing communal

riots. If Swadeshi movement would not have ended with communal riots would then Tagore supported the movement? It seems that Tagore denounced nationalism only to embrace universalism and Swadeshi lapses are only reasons to defend his role further.

Tagore political philosophy like his literary works rise above regional considerations. This is one of the greatest reasons that critics attacked him by pointing that his sense of nationalism was subdued by his passion for internationalism was subdued by his passion for internationalism.

We see Tagore's global sentiment through Nikhil when Sandip arbitrarily equates God with nation,

Sandip: I truly believe my country to be my God.

Nikhil: "If that is what you really believe, there should be no difference for you between man and man and so between country and country"

(The Home and The World) P.37.

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