

The Impossibility of Being Bimala: An Analysis of the Predicament of the Modern Woman in Colonial India

Chetna C.

Assistant Professor

Department of English, Government Girls College, Singrauli, Madhya Pradesh

Abstract

The advent of modernity in the colonial period posed a serious challenge to Indian womanhood. Women¹ were expected to transform themselves into an impossible image as it meant being contradictory things at same time. They were expected to emulate the ideals of chastity and purity of Sita and Savitri. Simultaneously, they had to be modern enough to be socially mobile and publicly presentable, i.e., represent tradition and modernity in some ambiguous proportion unflinchingly. Any deviation, failure on any one side was undesirable. Bimala's character from Tagore's *Ghare Baire* remains one of the truest depictions of this liminal position where women were caught in the crossfire between tradition and modernity.

Forced to endorse Western learning, shun purdah and most important to think independently by Nikhil, her romantically idealist husband, Bimala does his bidding as an ideal wife must always do. But this enforced modernity sets her into some choices that not only leads her into getting infatuated by Nikhil's friend, Sandip but also lead her to widowhood, the ultimate doom for a Hindu woman. Closely examined, coming out of purdah was not her choice but her husband's. Similarly the modernity project introduced to Indian woman by male reformers directed them to be socially mobile and adequately modern. But women still remained the flag bearers of tradition and were still held responsible if anything went untoward in the changing social fabric. After all as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in his *Prachina o Nabina* makes clear in spite of his concern for hegemonic patriarchal intentions of reformers on women's condition that loyalty to the husband is the fundamental duty of all wives. When Bimala deviates from this set path, she is faced with devastation in loss of innocence, infidelity and widowhood.

The present paper aims to discuss the liminal position of the woman in late colonial India against the backdrop of reforms and nationalism, through the character of Bimala, representative of the new woman who with enormous responsibility of tradition over shoulders walked precariously the path of modernity. Janus-headed, the unsure Indian women tread the hazy way of the male reformer's expectations and the more closely one looks into latter the more convoluted the women's emancipation project appears.

Keywords: modernity, women's emancipation, patriarchy

The typical Indian woman's image that conjures up in majority? as one conscious of her strength derived from traditions and moving confidently in the modern world is a product of colonial times. This self-affirming image of Aryan woman who was emblematic of spiritual essence may have modified with times but is still deeply ingrained in our psyche, and it continues to control Indian sense of female propriety and morality. The project of modernising women formed a significant part of the colonial discourse and resulted in a constitution of a peculiar modern woman, the *adhunik naari*, whose nature this paper aims to explore through Bimala, from Tagore's novel *Ghare Baire*. She remains one of the most palpable representations of the dilemma of the newly educated and emancipated woman, the *bhadramahila* (essentially a high caste and class Hindu woman in Bengal). The paper would explore the fault lines in the major ideologies involved in shaping this modern women and how the move to emancipate women created more challenges for her.

To understand the problematic context of the liminal position of this Indian woman standing at the threshold of modernity with all the baggage of tradition one needs to look at the socio-cultural context which gave birth to this construct. The project of women emancipation through the course of social reform movement and nationalist agenda created a complicated situation for women to navigate as this paper intends to elaborate. The construct of the peculiar modern woman, the *adhunik naari* with a strange mix of past and present was a result of the tussle between the colonizer and the colonized who had Indian woman as one of the most important points of contention: "It was the sometimes adversarial sometimes friendly intercourse between British imperialists and the Indian elite that rendered Indian women visible in colonial discourse" (Hubel 109). So far the conventional patriarchal setup had kept women (the high caste elite Hindu woman in particular) secluded to the female quarters of the home, *andarmahal* away from the public gaze to take care of the domestic chores. However the influx of modernity with colonization brought about a series of change in the status of women. Debates on their education, their public participation in the growing nationalist movement took the centre stage in the social discourse, so much so that women came to be represented as the nation itself. (Burton 9)

The present paper is devised on the premise that the so called emancipation of women offered by the reforms did not lead to a straight forward upliftment of women, rather it posited some serious challenges before them and they seemed more of the pawn in the discourse where their context was utilised even at their own cost. The modern educated Indian man needed a proper consort, one who is cultured enough (in western modern sense) to be presentable to the outside world in order to retort back to the intimidating gaze of colonizer and also to safeguard the sanctity of inside in terms of ancient traditions. (Murshid 62) Socially a dynamic era the Indian society then was in a phase of realignment with the pressing needs of changing times. Thus though the reform movement set in action due to the denigration of Indian society on account of women's poor state brought some amount of upliftment but the patriarchy remained intact as women were now expected to endorse their new roles.

The imperialist rule had aroused a sense of nationhood and Indians yearned to assert their autonomy and respectability. Among the various social issues raging the country, the women's movement became the most prominent issue to be taken up by the social reformers and aligned perhaps most integrally with the nationalist agenda. Consequently

it contributed significantly to the idea of nationhood and was in turn decisively shaped by it.

Reactions to the attacks by the colonial writers ensured that Indian women were almost built up as superwomen: a combination of the spiritual Maitreyi, the learned Gargi, the suffering Sita, the faithful Savitri and the heroic Lakshmbai. Spiritual power and the sadharmini model in particular were central to the idea of womanhood because these could be transformed to play other roles in the regeneration of the nation. Nationalism...was a permitted area for women's participation. (U. Chakravarti 79)

Nationalist agenda further deepened the dilemma for the modern woman as while they were allowed participation in the national cause they were expected to maintain the sanctity of inner world as well. The dilemma for this modern woman increased as the expectations from her was unclear in this new setup, while they were to be educated and allowed out of *purdah* but they were still responsible for maintaining the sanctity of inside. The new woman was granted freedom, but the expanse of this freedom was still in the process of negotiation amongst the thinkers as there was a concern for the disruption of the past values of womanhood. Though they were encouraged for self-discovery and yet "intellectual aspirations and ambitions on the part of females generally were regarded as gratuitous, perhaps abnormal" (T. Sarkar and S. Sarkar 5-7). Judith E. Walsh's book titled interestingly *Domesticity in Colonial India: What Women Learned When Men Gave Them Advice* (2004) presents an interesting study of the conduct manuals of the times aimed at training the women to adjust to their new roles pointing at the preoccupation with the conduct and manners of the new woman.

Having sketched the social context, we may now take up the novel in details to understand the drama that ensued in the lives of women, through the character of Bimala. Set against the Swadeshi movement in post 1905 Bengal, *Ghare Baire* was originally published in 1916 and later was translated into English as *The Home and the World* (1919) by Tagore's nephew, Surendranath Tagore which has been referred to for the purpose of this paper. In the paper, I attempt to show the conflicting ideas to which Bimala, a traditional woman in modern times is faced with and how ill equipped she finds herself to make choices in her journey of self-identity that in turn juxtapose the modern emancipatory zeal in conflict with women's primary role as the spiritual guardian of home. Notwithstanding the sweep of modernity that brought Bimala out of the confines of home, the *andarmahal* to the world, as the name of the novel suggests, she faces a series of tragedies as a result of the unconventional choices she makes. As the novel is in the form of first person narratives of the three major characters, namely Bimala, her husband, Nikhil and Sandeep, Nikhil's friend and a Swadeshi leader, I have formulated my argument in symmetry with the structure of the novel. Following the narratives of the three major characters, the paper examines the plot dealing in turn with the perspectives of these characters and their effect on Bimala against the historical upheaval of modernity and thereby shows that modernity complicated the situation for women.

It might be contextual to refer to Pramatho Choudhury's allegorical imposition on the major characters of the novel. Choudhury, the editor of *Sabuj Patra* where *Ghare Baire* was published between 1915-16, compares Nikhil to 'ancient India', and Sandip to 'modern Europe' and Bimala to 'India today', thus the latter navigating a path for herself

amidst these “opposing pulls” (Bhattacharya 128). Thus the novel is largely interpreted as Tagore’s exploration of the conflict arising from the changing dynamics in the relationships brought about by modernity and the structure of the plot, is focussed on ‘the restoration of conjugal relationship’ (Ghosh 70). Amongst the numerous novels of the time analysing women’s new situation in the society, *The Home and the World*, remains one of the most potent depictions of the chaos that followed in the lives of women as modernity questioned the traditional boundaries of the home and the world.

The novel begins with Bimala’s story where she seems to be reminiscing about her life and her choices. Given her conditioning, Bimala grew up keeping to the conventional patriarchal setup, where carrying out wifely duties is of ultimate value. It is significant that the novel begins with Bimala meditating over the image of her mother as a dedicated wife, something she imbibed from her and aspired to emulate. She remembers her mother with the ‘vermilion mark’, a sign of a married woman thus imagining her primarily as a wife. She goes on to describe at length her mother’s devotion to her own husband as the dutiful wife’s role elevated her mother and imparted her ‘a beauty which passed beyond outward forms’. This devotion as described by her is quite potent:

...Bimala seems to evoke her mother’s tradition-bound aesthetic of Hindu womanhood to suggest such a privilege: mode of being that she too inherited from her mother. That mode, with its fusing of love and worship, stitched the woman securely with ancestral tradition, a shared female world, a feminine form that was recognised universally as beautiful. (T. Sarkar “Many Face of Love” 28)

Being appreciated, people praise Bimala as, “The girl has good signs. She will become an ideal wife...resembles her mother” (Tagore 1). This is ironical because in the wake of modernity, she steps out and drifts away from the ‘ideal wife’ image of her mother. Thus in the initial part of the narrative itself, Bimala’s core faith in women’s traditional role of a housewife is established and this very faith comes into conflict with her circumstances as the narrative progresses. She is faced with the dilemma of the contemporary woman to be a good wife or to seek a new identity as offered by modernity thrust upon them.

Bimala, a woman with modest looks and humble background lands up in the house of landed gentry as she gets married to Nikhil, the master of Sukhsayar estate, by the virtue of a favourable horoscope. The latter is a modern educated man who seeks a companionship of equality from Bimala. He exposes her to the props of western modernity such as European clothes, ornaments, classical English poetry books as well as an English piano teacher, Miss Gilby. He believes women have been kept long under subjugation and should be brought out from the realms of *andarmahal* to the world. It is interesting that Bimala prefers to stick to her domestic life as a mistress of household while Nikhil, her modern husband keeps motivating and cajoling her to move out of the *andarmahal*, the inner quarters. She keeps resisting his attempts of modernisation and asserts that, “But my real joy was, that my true place was at his feet.” and touched his feet as a mark of respect. She has internalised the gendered essentialism of husband/wife from her mother as she says, ‘woman’s heart which must worship in order to love’ (Tagore 3). She looks up to her husband as God, *swami* (the master) and uses words as ‘worship’ and ‘devotion’ for her feelings for her husband and repeatedly emphasize the need for devotion to husband in Godly terms: “To surrender one’s pride in devotion...salvation” (Tagore 6). As the plot progresses, we see that though Bimala

attempts to assert her autonomy in a characteristic modern way, she remains throughout integrally tied to this image of the orthodox wife's role.

However, with the sweep of nationalism in the wake of *Swadeshi*, a drive to boycott foreign goods and support the indigenous Bimala encounters the charming nationalist friend of Nikhil, Sandip. Mesmerized by his eloquence and call to join nationalist movement, Bimala finally agrees to step out of the inner quarters of home and meet Sandip, an outsider. Her deep seated desire of assertion which could not manifest with Nikhil surfaces with her relationship with Sandip for whom she is a muse, an inspiration. Soon, she gets deeply infatuated with him and leaves the home momentarily to join Sandip in his endeavour. This choice made by her shows her autonomy, however does not go well with her core belief of wifely duties and thus she is tormented in her passion for Sandip:

And through it all, there burned a passion which in its violence made as though it would tear me up...Nevertheless this flesh-and-blood lute of mine, fashioned with my feeling and fancy, found in him a master-player. What though I shrank from his touch, and even came to loathe the lute itself; its music was conjured up all the same. (64-65)

When she realises her mistakes, it is already too late for her to mend things as she had betrayed her own husband and became a tool in the hands of manipulative Sandip. Besides her sense of self expression does not necessarily question the patriarchal set up and seems to accept the hierarchical subjection of women to men as she keeps reiterating throughout the novel. In fact she laments that her husband's attempt at bringing freedom to her brought ruin, "But if you had accepted it, you would have done me a real service" (Tagore 5).

Nikhil is the ideal character in the novel and many times seems often to be the mouth piece of the novelist and yet his attitude towards Bimala is fraught with contradictions. He is the modern liberal who believes in the equality of women and insistent on bringing his wife out of *purdah*. He feels their conjugal love is constricted within the confines of home where Bimala is 'wrapped' in him and does not know about her real desires: "What I want is, that I should have you, and you should have me, more fully in the outside world...You know neither what you have, what you want" (Tagore 9). As a woman of her times, in spite of her strong sense of self assertion, she does not initially desire to come out of seclusion until she hears Sandip's speech on *Swadeshi* movement. Thus for Bimala the project of modernity brought upon her by her husband seemed to be abrupt and had dire consequences. The chaos brought upon the first generation of women coming out of *purdah*, female's seclusion under the aegis of modernity was not a simple process for women themselves who had internalised the dichotomies of world for man/home for woman.

The conversations between Nikhil and Bimala expose the incompatibility and inherent contradictions within the idea of modernity offered to women. While the former believes in the equality between husband and wife and yet his tone is quite patronising and didactic often leaving Bimala dissatisfied. Besides while pointing out the dichotomy of inside and outside, he considers outside superior and real. Bimala, according to him should 'come into the heart of the outer world and meet reality' instead of staying 'in the drudgery of household tasks', which seems to be belittling the domestic aspect as unreal

and insignificant which is quite not so (Tagore 9). Besides, the essential difference of home and outside seems intact in this way of thinking as well. Obviously Nikhil fails to realise the power women derive from control over household as Bimala explains that she does not wish to quit the power she exercises over the house by moving out of the *zenana*, female quarters in the house and leaving it to her sister-in-law, Bara Rani with whom she does not share a very congenial relationship. Thus Bimala is resentful to Nikhil's trivialization of domestic realms as she observes: "Men never understand these things. They have their nests in the outside world; they little know the whole of what the household stands for" (Tagore 12). Besides she could not think of leaving the house for the sake of his grandmother-in-law as she felt an obligation towards her. Supriya Chaudhuri argues that,

...Nikhil is as guilty of confusing Bimala with the values of his own liberal humanism as Sandip is in identifying her with the resurgent Hindu nation. It is in this respect that his emancipatory project is ultimately a project of his own ego; that the love which seeks to translate Bimala from *ghar* to *bahir* is inattentive to Bimala's own desires and aspirations. Modern, sympathetic, liberal, painfully anxious to grant the woman her right to education, choice and freedom, Nikhilesh's love is in the last analysis uncomfortably paternalistic and self-absorbed. (58)

Another problem with Nikhil's attitude towards his wife is his aesthetic objectification of Bimala. He brings her all sorts of modern western commodities such as foreign clothes and ornaments which seem to be a more of a superficial endorsement of modernity and indulgence. He has been a supporter of *swadeshi* movement, as mentioned by Bimala in the initial section which does not go in line with his extravagant spending on western commodity to deck his wife and house as Bimala narrates, "My husband has filled more than a hundred and twenty per cent of the house with the twentieth century[implying modern objects]..." (Tagore 10). Later in the novel he realises his mistake of trying to look at Bimala in the limited capacity of a wife and ruminates, "My wife...Can one imprison a whole personality within that name?" (58) The emancipatory project "exposes Bimala and the new woman to the manipulative strategies of middle-class ideology which re-invents her as an aesthetic object. That the enlightened Nikhilesh is unconsciously complicit with this disguised exercise of power" problematizes the idea of modernity (S. Chakrabarti 318).

Nikhil believed that Bimala could realise her true potential outside home and thus persuades her to break *purdah* which is in line with the modern natives to modernize their wives through education and entry into public world. The calling of Nikhil to Bimala to come out of the home into the world drove her to a quest of self-identity. When Sandip, an old friend of Nikhil pays a visit and addresses a crowd on *Swadeshi*, Bimala finds a scope for self-expression as she is visibly impressed by the eloquence of the former. She is so enamoured by him that she agrees to meet him breaking the convention of *purdah*.

I was utterly unconscious of myself. I was no longer the lady of the Rajah's house, but the sole representative of Bengal's womanhood. And he was the champion of Bengal. As the sky had shed its light over him, so he must receive the consecration of a woman's benediction...' (Tagore 13)

However we must note that after making the proposition of meeting Sandip to her husband, she quickly realises the immensity of this decision in terms of breaking the conventions and thus retracts the idea, however, Nikhil insists to bring along Sandip. This insistence on part of Nikhil is a part of his assertive attitude in his relationship to his wife in his attempt to liberate her and the coercion brings undesirable results for the couple. So we find the ideals of modernity practised by Nikhil to be problematic and in collusion with patriarchy as the hierarchy between the spouses is evident notwithstanding the liberalism of Nikhil.

On one hand Nikhil offers Bimala to move out and explore the outer world, Sandip on the other provides her a scope for expressing herself. Sandip serves an antagonist prototype to Nikhil who does not care for means to achieve his desires and his encounter with Bimala marks the breaking of age old custom of *purdah* as she decides to come out to public. The chain of events thereafter leads to the spiral downfall of the latter as she gets swayed in nationalistic jingoism of Sandip. His character for our purpose serves to be the representation of the nationalist agenda ensnaring the new woman with the lofty ideals. He offers a contrast to liberal modernism of Nikhil in his aggressive and extremist Hindu nationalism that imagined country as '*deshmata*' (the motherland), the concept of motherland personified as Mother Goddess that gradually acquired "a seeming naturalness" but was "essentially a process of self-estrangement, of fetishisation" (T. Sarkar "Nationalist Iconography" 2011). This image provided women some amount of freedom and utilised the fantasy of women such as Bimala for self expression and endowed them with the gigantic role of being the symbol of nationalism as discussed in the following section.

An enthusiastic nationalist leader, Sandip provides Bimala a position to assert her own identity as *Shakti*, the feminine power that would represent motherland and drive the nationalist movement: "Give to us the indomitable courage to go to the bottom of Ruin itself. Impart grace to all that is beautiful" (Tagore 29). Sandip's appropriation of Bimala as mother goddess, a feature of radical nationalism 'reduces her to the stereotype of the bewitching enchantress...and desire' (S. Chakrabarti 320). When Sandip meets Bimala he is moved to find a *bhadramahila* out of domestic confines before public gaze and invokes her to be their muse as the Queen Bee. This image of a woman as the guarding angel for the movement was a characteristic feature of the nationalist discourse. As Sandip says, 'Ignorant men worship gods. I, Sandip, shall create them.'(134), he ensnares Bimala by exalting her as the mother goddess and then demands her service in form of money to fund the movement and "as a woman she is simply its object of mobilisation, in precise terms, an instrument for empowering its male leadership" (P.K. Datta 16). Besides, the 'trend of glorifying women', 'placed an enormous burden on women' to conform to the norms being laid by this reconstituted patriarchy (Tharu 263). As Partha Chatterjee's famous essay explains that the nationalist discourse derived strength from the rhetoric of motherhood and conferred on women the 'honour of a new social responsibility' expecting them to live up to the glorified image of motherhood for the cause of sovereign nationhood, thus trapping them in a 'new, and yet entirely legitimate subordination' (245).

Bimala, unaware of the trapping of this constrictive framework of deification finds it too promising in her quest for self-identity. The new sense of identity presented to Bimala by Sandip brings in her a new sense of identity and she is swayed by the manipulative

rhetoric. P.K. Datta in his critical edition on the novel points out, “Sandip’s devotional nationalism delivers her from a dilemma. Bimala was already a nationalist...Sandip offers her a dynamic social form to realise her childhood fantasies without the burden of relating to social inferiors” (16). However, the concern in Bimala for lack of physical beauty to attract Sandip’s attention and offer herself as the ideal woman for the image of motherland again shows the narrowness of the discourse which demanded a certain set of attributes in women to fit into the role of the goddess. “But, alas, the eyes of men fail to discern the goddess, if outward beauty be lacking. Would Sandip Babu find the *Shakti* of the Motherland manifest in me? Or would he take me to be an ordinary, domestic woman?” (21) ‘A powerful new female figure emerged in the nationalist imagination.’ who was ‘in keeping with the now- naturalized Victorian ideals of domestic virtue, patient and long suffering.. a stern custodian of nation’s moral life’ (Tharu and Lalita 172). The image thus constructed embodying the masculine nationalist aspiration was far removed from reality.

In his rhetoric to mirror the motherland in the image of Bimala, Sandip keeps referring to Bimala’s clothes, again a superficial association to inspire their discourse and reinforcing the aesthetic objectification of women:

“...she was sitting so demurely in her gold-bordered *sari*...It seemed to me that the gold border of her sari was her own inner fire flaming out and twining round her. This is the flame we want, visible fire. Look here. Queen Bee, you really must do us the favour of dressing once more as a living flame.” (42)

Further, Sandip’s discourse often delineates the essential difference between man and woman: “how in the heart of a woman Truth takes flesh and blood. Woman knows how to be cruel...It is beautifully fearful. In man it is ugly...” (28). She is trapped to follow him in a quest for self-assertion and be convinced by his logic of ignoring the means of propagating the *Swadeshi* movement. She becomes dependent on Sandip to feed her egoism and this “dramatizes her disability as a woman” as she goes on to steal money from her house for the movement and realises later in the hollowness of the rhetoric (P. K. Datta 16). The incendiary speeches and activities of Sandeep create a chaos and communal tension in Nikhil’s estate. Bimala comes back to her husband and begs for his forgiveness while Sandip is asked to leave the estate for everyone’s good. The novel concludes with the mortally wounded Nikhil who had to intervene to stop a commotion and is being brought home while Bimala gazes bleakly to her possible future widowhood.

Thus the novel ends with Bimala retreating back to her life inside home realising her stepping out was after all not very emancipatory. She is left isolated in her quest for self and the new patriarchy imposed on her under the garb of modernity by Nikhil and Sandip disrupts her so far peaceful life. Her understanding of women’s place in home is reaffirmed and the beginning of the novel with the idolizing image of her mother as a wife, her desire to emulate the values of her mother remains far from being accomplished. In fact this idyllic image is the unachievable image of past that was being chased by modernity and which made women like Bimala clueless about their course of action. Finally she retreats back from the implications of modernity she experiences and withdraws from public life. In spite of her search for self, in retrospect Bimala regrets crossing the threshold of domestic life she ponders, “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” (44).

In this volatile socio-historical space of nationalist movement where women were offered a place for expression in whatever constricted capacity, Bimala and her likes stood at the threshold and walked a tight rope balancing their homely duties as well as being the representative of new modernity. The adjustment and realignment to which Bimala was faced with was quite daunting and she gets swayed by the narrative of nationalism and forgets her home for a while until she gets disillusioned with the falsity of Sandip only to realise that much damage has already been done. Bimala, Nikhil and Sandip, all the three characters have endorsed modernity in their thoughts and actions but the ideological essentialism of patriarchy does not free them, and thus they face the emotional turmoil as Michael Sprinker comments:

...one cannot ignore the tension between the modernising values associated with the world, the nation, and the politics and the traditional commitments of women to family, husband and home, in a word, to a conventional concept of wifely and motherly duty. Despite her momentary embrace of nationalist politics...Bimala remains tied to many sanctioned forms of domestic subservience... (116)

After all the emancipatory zeal of social reform as well as the nationalist movement were not free of patriarchal implications as modernity itself is gendered (Kosambi 28). Modernity seemed less deliverance than a tumultuous phase to which women were subjected to and the roles they were offered to play were quite ambiguous in their objectives and remained inherently gender biased putting a lot of pressure on women. The wave of modernity after all was not intended primarily to make women enter “a male world, but to be released from traditional values to become instead repositories of “modern” virtues, to be of benefit to future generations” (Borthwick 42). As the predicament of Bimala is expressed towards the closing of the novel, one wonders on Tagore’s stance towards the “extent and limit of woman’s freedom” as “relegating Bimala to the liminality of widowhood, he makes a covert statement about the problem of reconciling the home and the world within the colonial pathologies of gender” (C. Chakravarty 144). Further the ambivalent attitude of Tagore towards women’s question is reinforced in the novel as although Bimala is granted a unique voice for herself, but the consequences of her choices puts the project of emancipation to question. After all he believed “Their [women’s] essential qualities will ultimately reinforce their natural position as healer and helper in the domestic realm and will not interfere with their participation in the macropolitics of the world” (Ray 106).

Each character’s story show how flawed their thought process is in the context of modernity which eventually leads to the predicament of the woman, here Bimala. Thus inspite of the autonomy practised by Bimala as a modern woman and being surrounded by men endorsing modern ways of thinking we find her still tied to the patriarchal limitations on women and accepting the gendered division of world and home without any clear directives for the amount of freedom she could practice without jeopardising her stake. The characters even with their modern outlook practise very orthodox gender essentialism and fail to possess any effective tool of exercising the modern emancipatory zeal for women which did more harm than good to the subject.

Notes

¹The women throughout the paper is a specific category of women from colonial India who is essentially from high caste and class Hindu society as they were the major target of the social reform for women.

Works Cited

- Bhattacharya, Malini. "Gora and *The Home and the World*: The Long Quest for Modernity." *Rabindranath Tagore's The Home and the World: A Critical Companion*. Ed. P.K. Datta. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. 127-142. Print.
- Borthwick, Meredith. *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849-1905*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984. Print.
- Burton, Antoinette. *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2003. Print.
- Chakrabarti, Shirshendu. "From 'Beyond the Intricate Web of Words: An essay on Tagore's *Gharey-Bairey*.'" *A Worldview Critical Edition: The Home and the World*. Eds. Dilip Kumar Basu and Debjani Sengupta. Delhi: Worldview Publications, 2011. 315-322. Print.
- Chakravarti, Uma. "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism, and a Script for the Past." *Recasting Women Essays in Colonial History*. Eds. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2006. 27-87. Print.
- Chakravarty, Chandrava. "The Dichotomies of Body and Mind Spaces: The Widows in *Chokher Bali* and *Chaturanga*." *Tagore's Idea of New Women: The Making and the Unmaking of Female Subjectivity*. Eds. Chandrava Chakravarty and Sneha Kar Chaudhuri. London: Sage, 2017. 125-149. Print.
- Chattopadhyay, Bankim Chandra. "Prachina o Nabina" bengaliebook.com. Web. 12 April 2022.
- Chatterjee, Partha. "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question." *Recasting Women Essays in Colonial History*. Eds. Kumkum Sangri and Sudesh Vaid. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2006. 233-253. Print.
- Chaudhuri, Supriya. "A Sentimental Education: Love and Marriage in *The Home and the World*." *Rabindranath Tagore's The Home and the World: A Critical Companion*. Ed. P. K. Datta. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. 45-65. Print.
- Datta, Dipannita. "Bimala is What She Is': Re-reading Bimala and Gender (In)justice in Rabindranath's *The Home and the World*." *Tagore's Idea of New Women: The Making and the Unmaking of Female Subjectivity*. Eds. Chandrava Chakravarty and Sneha Kar Chaudhuri. London: Sage, 2017. 150-180. Print.
- Datta, P. K. Introduction. *Rabindranath Tagore's The Home and the World: A Critical Companion*. Ed. Datta. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. 1-6. Print.
- Hubel, Teresa. *Whose India? The Independence Struggle in British and Indian Fiction and History*. Durham: Duke UP, 1996. Print.

- Kosambi, Meera. *Crossing Thresholds: Feminist Essays in Social History*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2011. Print.
- Murshid, Ghulam. *Reluctant Debutante: Response of Bengali Women to Modernization, 1849-1905*. Rajshahi: Sahitya Samsad, Rajshahi U, 1983. Print.
- Ray, Sangeeta. *En-gendering India: Woman and Nation in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives*. Durham: Duke UP, 2000. Print.
- Sarkar, Tanika. "Nationalist Iconography: Image of Women in 19th Century Bengali Literature." *Economic and Political Weekly* 22.47 (1987): 2011-2015. JSTOR. Web. 28 May 2022.
- . "Many Faces of Love: Country, Woman, and God in *The Home and the World*." Ed. P. K. Datta. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. 27-44. Print.
- Ghosh, Tapobrata. "The Form of *The Home and the World*." *Rabindranath Tagore's The Home and the World: A Critical Companion*. Ed. P. K. Datta. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. 66-81. Print.
- Sprinker, Michael. "Homeboys: Nationalism, Colonialism, and Gender in *The Home and the World*." *Rabindranath Tagore's The Home and the World: A Critical Companion*. Ed. P. K. Datta. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. 107-126. Print.
- Sarkar, Sumit and Tanika Sarkar, eds. *Women and Social Reform in Modern India*. Vol I. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2011. Print.
- Tagore, Rabindranath. *The Home and the World*. Translated by Surendranath Tagore. Eds. Dilip Kumar Basu and Debjani Sengupta. Delhi: Worldview Publications, 2011. Print.
- Tharu, Susie. "Victorian Racism and the Image of Women in Indo-Anglian Literature." *Recasting Women*. Eds. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2006. 254-268. Print.
- Tharu, Susie and K. Lalita, eds. *Women Writing in India*. Vol I 600 B.C. to the Early Twentieth Century. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1991. Print.
- Walsh, Judith E. *Domesticity in Colonial India: What Women Learned When Men Gave Them Advice*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004. Print.