

The Home and the World as a political novel.

Irving Howe, in his discussion of the nature and types of novel, defines a political novel as a work of fiction 'in which political ideas play a dominant role or in which political milieu is the dominant setting.' Now, what Howe implies is that a political novel treats some political events of significance in a politically based situation. Naturally, this genre includes political thoughts, confrontations and problems. In fact, materials here are political, situations have a political background, characters, even if imaginary, have political conceptions and ideologies. Of course, it should be admitted here that Tagore's The Home and the World satisfies all the above mentioned requirements and hence its claims to be a political novel seems to be just and relevant.

The background of Tagore's novel is based on the wide canvas of the national uprising of 1905, particularly in Bengal. The partition of Bengal by British rulers in 1905 and its consequent repercussions – the Swadeshi movement and boycott of foreign goods, the indiscriminate burning of foreign goods and clothes, anarchical agitations, political plunders and secret murders- are all included in its purview. Even the oppression of the British rulers and the fanatical activities of the extremists find a brilliant representation in Tagore's fiction.

It is really to be admitted that the political flame of 1905 steers the story of The Home and the World. The story starts with the quiet, happy conjugality of Nikhil and Bimala. Their home was all peaceful, amorous and congenial. All that Nikhil desired was to bring his wife out of the narrow home to the wide world in order to know her more fully. However it was Sandip's arrival, his intoxicant political views and his personal enchantment that stirred Bimala's serene centre- her home – and brought her out of to the whirlwind of politics in the wide world outside. She was fascinated by Sandip's stirring speeches and Swadeshi slogans and also by his romantic adoration of her as Mother India. Again Sandip was crafty enough to bring a stir among the young generation of Nikhil's area. In other words Sandip and his associates lit up the political fire with noble intention but unfortunately the fire spread in a destructive manner.

Truly, there is nothing to question the Swadeshi background of Tagore's novel. Yet questions may be raised about the actual political scenario of The Home and the World. The politics of Swadeshi is deeply rooted in the centre of the work and spreads its boughs and twigs all over the story. Still the movement is not dominant in its real flame and fervour. Except Sandip's catchy, agitative speeches and the reckless burning of foreign clothes at his incitement, The Home and the World presents no scene worth mentioning of the Swadeshi movement. The history of political unrest and the desperate conflict between the English rulers and the poor ruled of India is absent in Tagore's artistic canvas. Nothing of the country- wide revolt by the young patriots, the fearless acts of terrorism and the glorious self-sacrifice by many dedicated souls has got a space in the novel. Therefore judged from this very angle, it remains impossible to group The Home and the World together with the classic political novels like War and Peace, A Tale of Two Cities and The Mother.

Again on the basis of the stark contrast between Nikhil and Sandip Tagore's The Home and the World has suffered much criticism from the contemporary Swadeshi leaders. Contextually Bipin Pal commented, "Rabindranath had not understood the essence of Swadeshi itself." However, a reasonable analysis of the novel establishes a different truth. It is then we confront the fact that, the author is not

speaking against Swadeshi. Rather he is speaking for those poor natives who suffered the extreme as a result of the propagation of the movement which dealt with the destruction of their livelihood. The question is not then, how far Nikhil and Sandip are real historical personages. What is important here is that Tagore by the means of his novel originally intended to show the negative aspect of the movement, which had been given birth by sincere patriotic thoughts. The novel therefore remains as it does a specimen of Tagore's remarkable understanding of the fragility of the destructive temperament, during the Swadeshi era. Herein Nikhil's comment seems to be the most relevant since he in the course of the novel acts as Tagore's spokesman- "you should not waste even the tenth part of your energy in the destructive excitement."