

The Home and the World as an introspective novel

The background of Tagore's novel is based on the wide canvas of the national uprising of 1905, particularly in Bengal. As oppression and exploitation were let loose by British imperialism, resistance and agitation began to grow in India, and particularly in Bengal. The partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon in 1905 added fuel to the fire, and the situation in Bengal took a grave dimension. Non-violent movements, along with violent retaliations, pervaded and disturbed the white man's rule. Thus in the history of India's struggle for freedom, the year 1905 has remained an unforgettable time. It is against this background of national uprising in Bengal in 1905 that Rabindranath's *The Home and the World* has its frame-work. The novel candidly portrays the author's attitude to the concept of genuine nationalism. And hence, the presence of nationalistic materials in the novel is indisputable.

There is indeed no doubt about Rabindranath's profound sense of nationalism. As the 'unacknowledged legislator' (in Shelley's language), the poet in Rabindranath steered and inspired the nationalistic movement against the partition of Bengal by means of his well reasoned deliberations and stirring compositions. Tagore's poems and songs gave impetus to the movement that drew whole Bengal together. But, Rabindranath was no supporter of any extremity, whether in religion or in socio-political action. He believed in reason and judgment, sobriety and restraint. Thus Tagore was rather pained to see how sanity gave way to chauvinism under the uncontrolled upsurge even for a just cause i.e. Swadeshi. Therefore one witnesses that *The Home and the World*, impresses to be Tagore's desperate attempt to portray the dire consequences of aggressive or fanatical patriotism.

The story of *The Home and the World* starts with the depiction of the quiet and happy conjugal life of Nikhil and Bimala. Their home is all peaceful, amorous and congenial. And all that Nikhil desires is to bring his wife out of the narrow home to the wide world in order to know her more fully. However it is Sandip's arrival, his intoxicant political views and his personal enchantment that stirs Bimala's serene centre- her home – and brings her out of to the whirlwind of politics in the wide world outside. She is fascinated by Sandip's stirring speeches and Swadeshi slogans and also by his romantic adoration of her as Mother India. Again Sandip is crafty enough to bring a stir among the young generation of Nikhil's area. In other words Sandip and his associates light up the political fire with noble intention but unfortunately the fire spreads in a destructive manner.

Now, inspite of the Swadeshi background of Tagore's novel, questions have been raised about the actual political scenario of *The Home and the World*. Indeed the politics of Swadeshi is deeply rooted in the centre of the work and spreads its boughs and twigs all over the story. But, even inspite of that, 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 and the glorious self- sacrifice by many dedicated souls has got a space in the novel. Therefore judged from this 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 altogether. 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 a lot

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 Tagore's intention to show the negative aspect of the movement, which was given birth by sincere patriotic thoughts. Herein it is worth mentioning that, Rabindranath's concept of nationalism is free from aggressiveness and extremism. True nationalism, according to him, is graced with liberalism and humanism, sincerity and dedication. 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."