

Title of *The Home and the World*

The real significance of the title 'The Home and the World' lies in the different choices that Bimala has to make throughout the book – choices between the different 'homes' and 'worlds' that form the backdrop to this love story. In the first place, it is quite evident that the title of the novel incorporates two key words — "Home" and "World"— which are contrary or antithetical in their implications. The word "Home" carries associations of shelter and belonging, of comfort and peace, familiarity, domesticity and happiness. On the contrary, the word "World" suggests vastness, danger, openness, uncertainty and alienation. Yet, it is important to note that these are not the only significances. As, if "Home" suggests familiarity and comfort, it also implies a narrow and limited space of operations and a cloistered existence. Somewhat similarly, if "World" implies the fearful vast and unknown, it also suggests freedom and space, new opportunities and a greater stage for manifesting one's talents.

These contexts of meaning and implication are invoked early in the novel in a conversation that Bimala, had with her husband Nikhil. Bimala says:

My husband was very eager to take me out of *Purdah*. One day I said to him:
'What do I want with the outside world?'
'The outside world may want you' he replied.

The quoted lines are fraught with much significance. It is clear from this that for Nikhil "home" represents the petty domestic round that is removed and hence divorced from "reality." But Bimala does not want to leave her "home" even metaphorically. She adds a little later in the novel, "I have read in books that we [i.e. women] are called 'caged birds'. I cannot speak for others, but I had so much in this cage of mine that there was not room for it in the universe...."

This comment truly indicates that Bimala, at least initially in the novel, does not want to move into the outer world as desired by her husband since her own cage i.e. her home contains so much that she does not feel the need of anything the outside world may offer her. And yet, the outside world does catch up with Bimala, first in the shape of the English education that she imbibes through her teacher Miss Gilby and next through the storm of the Swadeshi movement that touches her mind and heart. It is this latter force that finally encourages her to step outside the home-space to interact with the political world. However, the occasion that sets off Bimala's stepping outside her home-space is the arrival Sandip and his followers in the neighbourhood. In the "big .meeting" held in the "temple pavilion" of the Zamindar's mansion, Bimala sees Sandip for the first time. Once Sandip begins to speak, Bimala finds that she "had impatiently pushed away the screen from before [her] and had [her] gaze upon him." The pushing away of the screen is clearly symbolic of Bimala's coming out, and her regarding of herself no longer as a home-bound wife but as a greater entity. Therefore she says: "I was no longer the lady of the Rajah's but the sole representative of Bengal's womanhood."

For Bimala, then, "Home" and "World" are conceptional entities, the first indicating the domestic space over the control of which she struggles with her sister-in-law the Bara Rani, and the second comprises the tumult of political and social awakening. For Nikhil, however, "Home" and "World" have different resonances. His reflections on this topic are important. As he tells his wife, "What I want is that I should have you, and you should have me, more fully in the outside world." The idealist that he is, Nikhil wants to verify that the love his wife has for him is not an emotion she is obligated to offer as a housewife, but something more genuine. And with this view Nikhil insists on bringing his wife out in the world.

The third major character in the novel, Sandip, is significantly depicted as having no "home" of his own. He is rather a "worldly" man who uses the opportunity provided by Nikhil's hospitality to invade his home and to try and seduce his wife. The "world" that Sandip represents is thus the epitome of unethical and unsocial behaviour, of self-seeking and deception. In terms of Tagore's depiction, this is the

"world" of politics, and so we may legitimately read the title of Tagore's novel as pointing to the dichotomy between genuine feeling and emotion of the one hand, and scheming opportunism on the other. But of course, to say only this would not be enough. And this is because Bimala's contentious relationship with the Bara Rani shows that, the "home" can equally be a site of a struggle for power and dominance, and the "world" may act as a vale of soul-making in which Bimala can find herself and her husband anew and so can come back at the end of the novel to the "home" after her sojourn in the "world".