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Examining Cultural Space and Gender Embodiment in Tagore's *The Home and The World*

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Abstract

Aims: The paper examines the concepts of 'masculinity', 'femininity', and 'embodiment' within the context of gender studies. It also analyzes how Tagore employs the spatial metaphors of 'home' and 'world' to investigate gender embodiment and the constraints on individual agency within the nationalist discourse.

Methodology: The methodology includes a close reading of the text in the historical backdrop of the Swadeshi Movement. The concept of "embodiment" is also used to comment on the evolving consciousness of characters due to the shared experience with cultural settings.

Outcome: Through this paper, it can be claimed that identities are constructed and shaped by external factors. Though cultural space determines the roles that individuals pick in each social situation, it is up to one's personal choice to exercise autonomy and agency or to conform and tread the beaten path.

Conclusion: The characters of Bimla, Sandip and Nikhil are studied through the lens of gender studies to understand how each of them embodies gender roles differently and how their embodiment is shaped by the cultural space each of them occupies. Nikhil resists the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, while Bimala finds autonomy as she withstands the patriarchal grounds.

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Rabindranath Tagore was the first Asian and person of Indian descent to win the Nobel Prize. In addition to being a novelist, he was also a poet, dramatist, writer, composer, playwright, philosopher, social reformer, and painter of the Bengali Renaissance. Tagore was famously referred to as Gurudev. In 1901, he established Santiniketan, which eventually evolved into Vishwabharati University. He is also known for composing “Jana-Gana-Mana”, the National Anthem of India, which was initially written in Bangla. He made a phenomenal impact in enriching Bengali literature and left an indelible mark in the world of fiction. Tagore’s novels portray humanistic characters exploring their intricate relationships in transforming social landscapes. Some of his prominent novels are *Gora* (1910), *Ghare Baire* (1916), *Chokher Bali* (1903), *Shesher Kobita* (1929), *Char Adhyay* (1934). Through his works, Tagore provides a profound insight into the human mind and social-political realities of his time.

Ghare Baire is a fictional autobiographical novel set against a rapidly changing India during the Swadeshi movement. It presents the situation of Bengal in 1905 and the emerging nationalism under the period of British rule in India. It is an allegorical novel, as the title suggests. ‘The Home’ is the private sphere, whereas ‘The World’ is the public sphere. The novel was initially written in Bengali and later translated into English by Surendranath Tagore in 1919. The narrative grapples with the rising forces of nationalism and dichotomy faced by women being part of the reform. Tagore’s narrative entwines the fervor of nationalism, tradition, and modernity to present the complex relationships of its leading characters. The narrative shows how both spheres are connected and can influence or contradict each other. Tagore puts forward another allegorical representation through Bimala, who symbolises the nation of India. Bimala is conflicted between choosing the traditional rules of ‘Home’ or the political stance of the ‘World’, which reflects India’s conflicting journey of maintaining traditional values or adapting the modernity brought up by Western influence. The transformation of Bimala, who attains self-realisation, mirrors India’s journey of gaining identity and independence.

Home and The World, presents Tagore’s progressive ideas about gender, nationalism, tradition, and modernity. He brings out these issues through the novel’s main characters – Nikhil, Bimala, and Sandip who are caught in a love

triangle. The plot presents the character of Bimala as she struggles to find her identity influenced by a patriarchal society, Nikhil, who embodies the rationalist approach towards nationalism, and Sandip, a fervent nationalist with extremist approaches to gaining *Swaraj* (self-rule). Through Bimala, Tagore also lays down the inner turmoil suffered by women during the *Swadeshi* era, as she struggles to choose between traditional duties and loyalty towards her husband, Nikhil, and her burning desire towards Sandip and political awakening. The novel encompasses themes of the self-awakening of both India and Bimala, a contrast between tradition and modernity, and an exploration of established gender roles. “One day I woke up and found the whole world around me had changed. The feeling that had been so long in my mind took root, and I felt its growing power. I had no name for it, yet I felt it surging within me like the sea, ready to overwhelm me” (Tagore 45). This line from the novel beautifully sums up the dilemma faced by the nation, which Tagore weaves into the narrative. “Ghare Baire, the Bengali original of *The Home and the World* was written and serialized in a journal *Sabuj Patra*” (Guha Thakurta 46). The novel traces the historical background of the *Swadeshi* movement, displaying the effects faced by individuals, their moral dilemmas and the challenges. Tagore presents his insight through Bimala, Nikhil, and Sandip, the central characters, locating their identity in turbulent times.

Nikhil, a rationalist, embodies Tagore’s point of view. Like Tagore, he strikes a balance between tradition and modernity by embracing modernity without patronizing the traditions of his own country. He promotes egalitarian nationalism instead of frantic devotion towards the nation. He does whatever he can to support the cause, such as opening mills and banks to enhance the idea of *Swadesh*, even though it doesn’t succeed. Nikhil’s evolving consciousness is visible through his relationship with Bimala. His progressive views allow him to free Bimala as he states: “I forgot to calculate, that one must give up all claims based on conventional rights if one would find a person freely revealed in truth” (Tagore 23). He does not impose his ideals on Bimala; instead, he encourages Bimala to be free-spirited and find her individuality. He doesn’t succumb to the traditional norms set by society but follows a pragmatic view towards human-made institutions. “My wife - does that amount to an argument, much less the truth? Can one imprison a whole personality within that name?” (Tagore 42).

According to Nikhil, marriage doesn't bind one to another; it is one's choice and decision to commit to it. Marriage should follow liberal idealism, which allows both personal respect and equality. However, he gradually comes to see that his wants are like iron chains that bind him and Bimala together, limiting their independence, as he accepts: "I had simply come to understand that never would I be free until I could set free... May I be saved from such self-destruction" (Tagore 101). Soon, Nikhil realizes: "when I lost her, my whole way of life became narrow and confined... forgetting how great is humanity and how nobly precious is man's life" (Tagore 64). His consciousness transforms as he understands that his life is more valuable than losing it to sorrow. And to make it worthwhile he must contribute to humanity.

Bimala is an ideal wife who undergoes a noticeable transformation as she interacts with the outer world. Initially, Bimala, confined in the inner chambers of her home and never saw the outer world with her own eyes, was a mold of societal thinking and norms. "Can there be any real happiness for a woman in merely feeling she has power over a man? To surrender one's pride in devotion is women's only salvation" (Tagore 04). This statement of Bimala indicates that her days passed in seclusion from the political world, leaning towards devotion to household duties, which she believed could fulfill her responsibilities as a wife and would open the door for redemption. Nikhil pushed her to strive for autonomy by introducing her to outer space and new perspectives, which didn't alter her conventionally shaped mindset. Her initial refusal to leave the *Zenana* was halted when she witnessed Sandip preach about *Swadeshi*. Bimala exclaims, "I was no longer the lady of the Rajah's house, but the sole representative of Bengal's womanhood" (Tagore 14) as the fervor of *Swadeshi* reached her. This account of self-realization disrupts her established identity. Her strife for personal liberation and autonomy begins through the pull of revolutionary ideas as she realizes: "I who before has been of no account now felt in myself all the splendour of Bengal itself" (Tagore 30). The transformation of Bimala can be viewed as she had foregone her English pleasures for the *Swadesh*. However, her burning flame, fueled by Sandip's persuasion, makes her a pawn in Sandip's self-interest. She betrays and robs her 'Home' under the intoxication of desire to sacrifice for the cause. She regrets her actions as she witnesses Sandip's

intentions, which ethically undermine society and take advantage of it. Her self-awakening results from her tackling her desires and ambition for power, along with the inner turmoil of choosing between loyalty towards Nikhil or Sandip's seduction. Bimala transforms as she distinguishes right from wrong and awaits her destiny as she tries to mend her mistakes.

Sandip, a crucial character in the novel, is a radical nationalist, which sets him apart from Nikhil. Dr. A. Tamilselvi states, "Sandip is sufficiently intelligent to guess the emptiness of his views" (138). Sandip exploits patriotism and humanism for personal gain, which is visible as he proclaims, "My country does not become mine simply because it is the country of my birth. It becomes mine on the day when I am able to win it by force" (Tagore 26). He follows the belief of owning what he wants by force, even if it leads to a cycle of violence. Sandip's psychological motivations can be traced as he manipulates his interpersonal relationships with Nikhil and Bimala through personal influence to suit his ideology. He brings out the flame suppressed in Bimala through calculated flattery by feeding her pride and exploiting it to fulfill his ambitions. However, his deceptive words and actions reveal his desire to attain self-affirmation as he tries to mold others' perceptions into validating his views and beliefs. Sandip's complex character exposes his consciousness shifting between two phases-realization and greed. Tagore presents him as a character who embodies avarice in the early stage. Even though he exploits others, he later accepts, "I was born in India, and the poison of its spirituality runs in my blood. However loudly I may proclaim the madness of walking in the path of self-abnegation, I can't avoid it altogether" (Tagore 56). He ultimately decides to put his greed ahead of moral advancement, hence, his knowledge is short-lived. His words: "I have not forgotten the basic fact that man's goal is not truth but success" (Tagore 77), reveal Sandip's consciousness of his ambition to accomplish his target and acquire power to feed his ego.

All the characters undergo significant changes as their lives are intertwined with each other. According to Mukherjee, "Tagore provides an innovative way of doing justice to the complexity of the human relationships in the novel where the female protagonist gets a voice too. It helps us trace the evolution of each of the characters, and provides a platform for the interaction of

the public and the private worlds” (62). Tagore’s raw portrayal of issues offers a realistic view of how the Swadeshi movement affects characters’ motivations and shapes their consciousness as they wrestle to find their identity.

“One day there came the new era of Swadeshi in Bengal...the new epoch came in like a flood, breaking down the dykes and sweeping all our prudence and fear before it. We had no time even to think about, or understand, what had happened, or what was about to happen.” (Tagore 10) This passage from the novel illustrates how abruptly the movement charged. The movement began in 1905 as a response to the partition of Bengal. It aimed to decolonize British rule by boycotting their products and fostering economic self-reliance by using *Swadeshi* goods, i.e., ‘our own’. “This movement gave Indians the chant of Vande Mataram and impacted the country’s political discourse” (Ghatpande). The extremist leaders saw the movement as an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of their strategy and change the goals of the nationalist movement for their benefit. They manipulated the consciousness of the youth to build their agenda in the guise of patriotism as aptly written by Dr. A. Tamilselvi, “The youth of India has been mesmerized by the term nationalism and nationalistic movement, rendering unthinking sacrifices towards freedom struggle and failing to make distinction between nationalism and patriotism, liberation and Westernization” (137).

Tagore uses his characters – Nikhil, Bimala, and Sandip to illustrate many viewpoints and hardships faced by the people involved in the nationalist movement. The interaction between these three individuals is complicated not only because of the love triangle but also due to the political tension brought by the movement highlighting the conflicts between ‘The Home’ and ‘The World’. Tagore contrasts Nikhil and Sandip to represent the clash between two different political ideologies and the clash between tradition and modernity that emerged in the wake of the Swadeshi movement. “Nikhil suggests the unfeasibility of both rationalist nationalism and utopian nationalism. Whereas Sandip bases his nationalism on an extremist belief in individual wisdom, science and passion” (Pham 311). Sandip claims to foster a traditional approach and rejects British goods, however, he does use English medicines. On the contrary, Nikhil is open to modern views without disconnecting from his traditional roots. Both Nikhil and

Sandip use different means to cultivate *Swadesh*. However, Tagore believed that “true freedom of the nationalist imagination will be gained by going beyond every form of ideological prejudice and separation and by synthesising every conceivable value that could be useful for the development and maintenance of the nation” (Pham 304).

Sandip, a passionate revolutionary with a pragmatic view, is a cynical person. He perceives himself as a realist and believes: “My country does not become mine simply because it is the country of my birth. It becomes mine on the day when I am able to win it by force” (Tagore 26). This demonstrates his willingness to cross all ethical considerations and disregard moral ideals in favor of his greed, as he also states: “We are the flesh-eaters of the world; we have teeth and nails; we pursue and grab and tear” (Tagore 28). He represents the extremist leaders who manipulate the views of others for self-gain with their charismatic orations. “The extremists adopted the *Swadeshi*, claiming the superiority of the Indian economy” (Pham 302), which shows Sandip’s intentions. Sandip exploits the cause to fulfill his greed, he knew the hollowness in his words and his wrongdoings, yet he deliberately chooses to ignore them, which is visible as he ponders, “At first I gave no thought to his point of view, but of late it has begun to shame and hurt me” (Tagore 83). He represents the conventional tradition as he strives to build a nation where patriarchy rules.

Nikhil upholds idealistic views that allow him to be more introspective about the situation. He assesses it and takes rational actions instead of being swept by the intense passion that fuels the popular nationalist sentiment. He worries about the poor who might suffer the potential for violence under the impact of the *Swadeshi* fervor. For him, moral upliftment co-exists with freedom; freedom has no real value if achieved based on exploitation. He believes in following an ethical and humane approach to endorsing the *Swadeshi* movement and the idea of self-reliance, such as reviving domestic industries and crafts, instead of imposing his principles and depriving the individual of the freedom to make decisions. Sandip asks for personal sacrifice to win freedom; for Nikhil, personal autonomy is of key significance. Nikhil’s humanistic ideals challenge Sandip’s revolutionary approach toward nationalism and independence. The contrast between these two characters presents the political discourse of India and

the dangers of blindly following political ideologies. The conflict between character's different ideologies, constructed by various factors, creates an imbalance between "Home" and the "World".

Tagore provides an insight into the societal construct of masculinity by contrasting Nikhil's rational and calm self to Sandip's aggressive and dominating personality. Tagore opens the ground to debate what 'ideal' masculinity is and promotes a more flexible definition of masculinity. An article writes, "In the socialization of masculinity, boys and men are encouraged to reject or avoid anything stereotypically feminine, to be tough and aggressive, suppress emotions (other than anger), distance themselves emotionally and physically from other men, and strive toward competition, success and power" (Masculinity), exposing that such are the ideals and requirements of the conventional society to become "The Man". It proves that masculinity is a social construct, molding people to adjust to the society they belong to. They are the result of their cultural norms and social relationships. According to Moynihan, "Gender is influenced by historical, social, and cultural factors, rather than anatomical factors, and is not part of a person's essential, "natural," "true" self. It combines many different, even contradictory, theories of what it means to be male" (Moynihan). As Raewyn Connell and Messerschmidt write, "Masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body and personality traits of individuals. Masculinities are configuration of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting" (836).

Raewyn Connell's Hegemonic masculinity theory offers key insights into the leading male characters in the novel. According to the American Sociological Association, "Hegemonic masculinity is not static but responsive to changes in the conditions of patriarchy. Most men do not embody the hegemonic ideals, but they still benefit from the "patriarchal dividend" that advantages men in general through the subordination of women" (320). It means that men can assert their dominance in marginalized sections of society to their advantage. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the masculinity that consists of traits of power, authority, and dominance that have been idealized by society through the ages. Traditional notions view hegemonic masculinity as a superior form. Sandip's character is a perfect fit for hegemonic ideals as he is aggressive and manipulative, without any

ethical considerations or moral ideals. He craves control, which is achieved through manipulation.

However, not all of Tagore's characters are bound to one kind of masculinity but present a spectrum view since "Masculinities are multiple, fluid and dynamic and hegemonic positions are not the only masculinities available in a given society" (Jewkes et al.). Masculinity is not a monolithic concept, it varies due to many factors such as family background, personal experience, societal treatment, class distinctions, cultural values, etc. Tagore contrasts Sandip, whose ideals are led through passion, with Nikhil, who has a more emotional approach toward life. The same culture and society shape both characters, yet they embody different masculinities.

Sandip exclaims: "I forgot, for a moment, that it is the mission of a man to be aggressive, to make women's existence fruitful" (Tagore 87). It uncovers that Sandip abides by the traditional gender roles that require him to be strong and violent, as he presumes, "WE are men, we are kings, we must have our tribute" (Tagore 85). He appears in the narrative as a charismatic leader who fuels the passion of nationalism in others and exploits them for personal gain. He preaches *Swadeshi* and forces his ideology through deception or coercion to fulfill the cause. He follows the utilitarian concept to reach his aim, without worrying about the suffering inflicted on the poor. Sandip uses Bimala as a tool to assert power and control by coercing Bimala to give him money for the cause. However, his statement, "It is for man to give ornaments to woman, to take them from her wounds his manliness" (Tagore 94), exposes Sandip's hypocrisy, that even in need, he must project himself as a superior being who can dominate women. He is allowed to accept money but believes that it is for the man to adorn women with jewels, and taking it wounds his self-esteem and pride. Sandip reflects many qualities of hegemonic masculinity and can be called the product of traditional gender roles.

On the other hand, Nikhil embodies humanist and non-violent principles. He is patient and sees women as equals who should be empowered and autonomous individuals. His progressive thinking is revealed as his wife, Bimala, states: "But my husband would not give me any opportunity for worship. That was his greatness. They are cowards who claim absolute devotion from their

wives as their right; that is a humiliation for both” (Tagore 03). Nikhil believes that women should have the agency to choose to participate in household duties and public spheres. His emotional sensitivity allows him to commit to universal values such as empathy, justice, rationality, patience, and more. However, Bimala is more attracted to traditional masculinity, which asks for men to be formidable and controlling. “Nikhil can hardly help it, for his masculine identity is both gentle yet discreet. Nikhil avoids talking to Bimala when he finds Bimala is attracted to Sandip and blames her for being attracted to Sandip’s alpha-masculine qualities.” (Post). Nikhil does not embody hyper-masculinity; even after discovering Bimala’s affair with Sandip, he remains calm and does not try to cage her in the *Zenana*. He is not afraid to face his true self as he discloses, “What harm if I confess that I have something lacking in me? Possibly it is that unreasoning forcefulness which women love to find in men. But is strength a mere display of masculinity? Must strength have no scruples in treading the weak underfoot?” (Tagore 22). Tagore’s protagonist subverts the socially accepted notion of masculinity, he values his principles and tries to work for the upliftment of society rather than his personal gain.

Bimala represents both the ‘Home’ and the ‘World’. She is attracted to Sandip whom she sees as a fiery patriot. Though she loves Nikhil, she becomes enchanted by Sandip’s active participation in the Swadeshi Movement, his charm and aggression. She wishes that Nikhil, her husband, would zealously commit to nationalism and *Swadeshi* and participate vigorously. “I have often wished that my husband had the manliness to be a little less good.” (Tagore 06). Tagore poses the key question of “manliness”, is being violent, manipulative, and controlling being a ‘man’? Bimla’s perception reflects how society constructs gender identities, in which men are expected to be turbulent, angry, and unjust instead of being affectionate and gentle. “Bimala had thought her husband lacked boldness, at the same time she found in Sandip the daring boldness which has no boundary” (Tamilselvi 138). For Bimala, a ‘Man’ should not only protect the household but also be fearless in the public sphere as he fights for public causes adamantly.

However, it dawns on Bimala that Sandip’s moral degradation and violent methods are opposed to her husband’s moral principles. Sandip clings to traditional, domineering masculinity, while Nikhil represents more introspective

and modern masculinity. Nikhil's progressive views and his ethical conduct set him apart from Sandip. Tagore dismantles the dichotomous views on gender norms through his characters who do not stick to rigid gender rules assigned by the society as "Tagore has never lost sight of the fact that men and masculinities, like most other social categories, are products of particular time and context, and are shaped by myriad of interlocking socio-cultural, economic, and religious factors" (Post). Chakraborty suggests, "Not only does Tagore oppose male chauvinism, but he also makes it categorically clear that woman's contributions are indispensable for the maturation, stabilization of growth and an all-round amelioration of the male sex." (129) Tagore opposes the male-dominated thinking that considers women as subordinate. He believed that harmony in man-women relationships brings true progress to society. He critiques the conventional rules that decree that women's role is limited to domesticity through the female characters, Bimala, Bada Rani, and Nikhil's grandmother – who are victims of patriarchal society in colonial times. Bada Rani and Nikhil's grandmothers, rooted in the orthodoxy of rigid traditional rules, are contrasted with Bimala, who gains freedom with the support of her husband, Nikhil, who has progressive views. Bimala's portrayal challenges the predetermined cultural roles that women are expected to conform to.

Just like Bada Rani and Nikhil's grandmother, Bimala is initially ensnared in domestic life, oblivious to the outer world. However, she was encouraged by her progressive husband, Nikhil, to become self-reliant and quest for her autonomy, which is clear as Mukherjee points, "She appreciates her husband's modern outlook, but she herself is still quite grounded in tradition... In spite of her education, what seems to be lacking is the willingness to break away from the traditionally defined roles" (64). Nikhil hired Miss Gilby to tutor Bimala. Bimala sang English tunes, decked herself in Western attires and perfumes, yet she couldn't break away from the societal construct of the ideal Indian wife despite her schooling. Bimala believed, "To surrender one's pride in devotion is women's only salvation" (Tagore 05). The construct of devotion was ingrained in her since infancy as she witnessed her mother devoting herself to the service of Bimala's father. "She describes her mother, who, without questioning her position in the society, happily catered to the gender role that was pre-assigned to her. Her

mother's generation seemed to be unconcerned with the state of the outside world, and they did not desire any role beyond the private sphere." (Mukherjee 64). She was satisfied within her cage as she states: "I had so much in this cage of mine that there was not room for it in the universe" (Tagore 09). However, later on, Bimala breaks through the safe confines of domestic chambers and enters the outer world.

Nikhil's grandmother plays a passive role in the narrative as she embodies conventional norms and values. Grandmother didn't like the influence of Western culture, yet she never opposed Nikhil's extravagant spending to adorn his wife with Western attire and ornaments. She was content that Nikhil's splurging was on his wife Bimala instead of courtesans or liquor, which ruined the other men of her family. She was worried that stopping Nikhil may result in Bimala becoming like Bada Rani, who lost her husband to liquor and courtesans and was widowed at a young age. Bada Rani, being a widow, is restrained by patriarchal ideas and rules. Her status as a female and a widow limits her agency, as Mukherjee voices, "social roles were identified according to gender to 'correspond with the separation of the social space into ghar and bahir'" (63). Bada Rani is critical of Bimala for wearing Western clothes and leaving *Zenana*, as it is a sign of disgrace. Her actions are the outcome of the implanted knowledge of rigid social structures by a male-dominated society that prioritizes men in the social hierarchy.

Unlike Bimala, Bada Rani's life is confined in the passivity of inner chambers of the "Home" whereas Bimala redefines her identity in the outer space, challenging the internalized traditional values. Bimala's involvement in both the domestic sphere and the political sphere allows her to access her consciousness, which leads her to question the subjugation of female rights. Bimala assertively questions the gender roles that are deep-rooted in the mind of Bada Rani by the social milieu of the patriarchal nation. Tagore contrasts Bimala with Bada Rani and Nikhil's grandmother; all three of his female characters embody femininity differently, but each of them has constructed their concept of the self through the process of socialisation. Bimla's exposure to education allows her to resist the imposition of society; she explores the social sphere by stepping out of the 'home'.

Tagore's novel *Ghare Baire* critiques the objectification and subservient position of women in society. The concept of femininity is ingrained in women from infancy. They are made to believe that they will attain fulfillment and salvation if they perfect the role of daughter, wife, and mother to serve patriarchy. "Cultural texts naturalize the oppression of women through their stereotypical representation of women as weak/vulnerable, seductress, obstacle, sexual object or a procreating device" (Nayar 117). Mary Wollstonecraft, a key figure in feminist writing, also believes that "gender roles are societal constructs instead of being natural" (120) as she explores gender inequality. Another female activist, Margaret Fuller's key planks were "Education, employment and political rights" (121). "She believed that women need not be confined to the domestic duties, and there are no 'feminine' roles" (ibid).

Bimala, initially presented as an archetype of a domestic wife, evolves when she gains self-awareness about both the 'Home' and the 'World'. She is trained to fit into those roles, which is evident when she confesses, "My heart said that devotion never stands in the way of true equality; it only raises the level of the ground of meeting" (Tagore 4). "Bimala's struggle, therefore, was to find freedom from her own inner inhibitions, which no doubt was fostered by her upbringing in the rigid orthodoxy of a traditional patriarchal society" (Mukherjee 63). The gender stereotype was deep seated in Bimala, which obstructed her freedom. Her refusal to leave for Calcutta and leaving her household position to Bada Rani establishes her desire for power. Her inclination toward maintaining power and authority in *Zenana* confirms her indulgence in the domestic realm which is evident in her statement: "I felt the real point was, that one ought to stand for one's rights. To go away, and leave everything in the hands of enemy, would be nothing short of owning defeat" (Tagore 09). Her refusal to lose her household position to Bada Rani establishes her desire for power. Her initial denial of Nikhil's request to enter the outer chambers came to a halt when she heard Sandip preach about the *Swadeshi*. She reveals her enthusiasm for the cause as she voices, "My sight and my mind, my hopes and my desires, became red with the passion of this new age" (Tagore 10). The fierce passion of *Swadeshi* and her enchantment towards Sandip had a magnetic pull that brought Bimala out of *Zenana*. With the heightening of *Swadeshi* fervor, Bimala decided to burn foreign

clothes but was prevented by Nikhil. Bimala admired Sandip's gusto to sacrifice for the cause, it fueled her desire to contribute to the nation. Sandip pompously manipulated Bimala which is evident as he states, "Bimala had been longing with all her heart that I, Sandip, should demand of her some great sacrifice" (Tagore 86). Bimala is ignited with devotion and chants "I want" (Tagore 54), which blurs her senses. Bimala's blind devotion leads her to rob her husband and home of trust and money. She soon realizes the seriousness of the situation and claims: When the knife was busy with my life's most intimate tie, my mind was so clouded with fumes of intoxicating gas that I was not in the least aware of what a cruel thing was happening. Possibly this is women's nature. When her passion is roused she loses her sensibility for all that is outside it. 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 (Tagore 32).

With the realization of the gravity of her action and the unethical intentions of Sandip, she pleads, "O God...Can I not be born over again? Cleanse me, my God, and purify me and give me one more trail!" (Tagore 130). She regains herself when Nikhil accepts her true self. She cries, "I now fear nothing – neither myself, nor anybody. I have passed through fire. What was inflammable has been burnt to ashes; what is left is deathless" (Tagore 157).

Tagore's Bimala is a multifaceted character who holds agency to make her own decisions and take a stand. Although she was trapped in the cultural norms and societal constructs, she soon breaks free from the ideals of patriarchal society. She undergoes a political awakening and rejects conventional rules, and strives for independence. Her journey can be traced through the way she responds to situations and exhibits power. Bimala is taken advantage of by Sandip as he manipulates her into believing herself as a national spirit. This incident suggests that "Tagore shows active participation of women in the political sphere in some of his other works...His objective seems to be to highlight the exploitation of naive women who were being drawn into the glamour and prospects of the public sphere for the first time" (Mukherjee 71). Bimala serves as an allegory of the nation as both underwent conflicts during colonial times. Bimala represents women who are victims of patriarchal dominance and struggle to achieve liberation and self-identity. Through Bimala, Tagore attempts to give a voice to

subjugated women, showing resistance towards established social codes of male orthodoxy.

The Home and The World provides a deep understanding of cultural space as it precisely blends the historical background, the man-woman relationship, gender roles in society, and the consciousness of the characters. Even the title of the novel presents the cultural space where 'Home' denotes women's place and the 'World' is a place for men. The study of cultural space allows one to peek into the historical understanding of society and the cultural representation through the characters as they reflect their principles and values. To explore the cultural space, one must understand how it is created and its effect on the individual. It can be understood through the term 'Embodiment', which means 'shared experience' when simplified. Although used by many, the term theoretically traces its roots to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who described it in his book *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945).

Embodiment, in simple terms, refers to the connection between the culture and its influence on the physical body, as both co-exist and shape experience. It studies the body in the context of the environment as "The embodied self primarily includes the social dynamics or forces which are experienced by and through the body of individuals only" ("Unit 1" 12). "Individuals experience the social realities through their bodies, which is known as lived experiences or embodiment. In the process of interaction between the body and society, individuals learn to articulate their experiences of the world which is described as social embodiment. Social embodiment encompasses the interrelationship of body with gender, caste, ethnicity and other social categories" (ibid). This proves that our environment, society, and upbringing in a certain atmosphere shapes us as an individual. Embodiment is the result of the experiences witnessed by an individual within the framework of culture. We acquire certain traits and embody them as culture influences our expression, identity, mannerism, and even the way we dress ourselves. These traits become an expression of our cultural identity. Tagore's characters embody the age of pre-independence India, and their consciousness is shaped through the experiences they go through within the societal framework.

Rabindranath Tagore's characters are products of society and culture; they can be examined through the concept of embodiment. Embodiment is not something an individual is born with but what they acquire through their surroundings, environment, culture, and what is culturally acceptable. Bimala, Nikhil, and Sandip present their beliefs, values and ideals within society shaped by the ongoing cultural movement. Bimala initially embodies the requirements of the society and culture through the way she presents herself as a wife. Her body becomes the site to display femininity, which, according to the Indian culture, was devotion towards her husband, to fulfill duty within the household. However, since the experiences of surroundings can affect an individual, Bimala's personality changes when influenced by her modern husband. The modern influence is evident in her behaviour as she presents herself in Western clothes and sings English lullabies. But when her surroundings are invaded by a nationalist, Sandip, her identity undergoes a transition. She dresses herself in a 'white sari' with a 'red' border, as it demonstrates purity and fire of passion towards the national cause. The get-up also presents her as a patriot, intended to impress Sandip.

On the other hand, Nikhil upholds moral beliefs, his body exhibits gentle masculinity as he allows equality to his wife. He states, "I would have you come into the heart of the outer world and meet reality. Merely going on with your household duties, living all your life in the world of household conventions and the drudgery of household tasks – you were not made for that! If we meet again, and recognizes each other, in the real world, then only will our love be true" (Tagore 08) and sets Bimala free. He reflects the confidence in his own devotion and love for Bimala that she will find him endearing even in outer space. Sandip embodies hyper-masculinity. His traits are visible as he is aggressive and manipulative. His body reflects the moral degradation as he deceives others through his sharp yet hollow words for his greed. He defies logical reasoning and exploits Bimala, using her enthusiasm through the power of persuasion. Sandip exhibits the traditional masculine ideals that subdue women's rights and their autonomy to create a power imbalance. Tagore portrays the impact of culture and society on the individual embodiment and formation of identity.

Home and the World offers an understanding of the historical and cultural milieu of the Swadeshi movement. The leading characters, Bimala, Nikhil, and Sandip, serve as vehicles through whom the readers can assess how gender roles are imposed by society and how individuals embody gendered identities differently, depending on factors such as education, exposure, awareness, moral framework and personal value system. Tagore critiques the exploitation and oppression of women and poor and condemns the choice of violence and aggression in the name of patriotism. Tagore also challenges the conventional gender norms and subverts them through Bimala and Nikhil. Bimala challenges the idea of ‘femininity,’ which requires devotion, as she emerges from the inner chambers of her home to the political chambers of the outer world. The character of Nikhil also challenges the traditional idea of ‘masculinity’, he embodies gentle masculinity as he is empathetic towards the weaker section of society and allows equality and freedom to Bimala. Nayar rightfully comments, “There cannot be completely ‘masculine’ male, just as there is no truly ‘feminine’ female; each contains a bit of the other” (121). In *The Home and the World*, Tagore captures the impact of socio-cultural and historical factors on the central characters, through which it can be claimed that identities are constructed and shaped by external factors. Though cultural space determines the roles that individuals pick in each social situation, it is up to one’s personal choice to exercise autonomy and agency or to conform and tread the beaten path.

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