

**Satyajit Ray, Rabindranath Tagore,  
and *The Home and the World* :  
Indian Nationalist History and Colonial/Postcolonial  
Perspectives in Film and Fiction**

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In the history of British imperialism in India (1757-1947), Bengal occupies a special place. Earliest exposed to post-Enlightenment culture of European modernity primarily through Western education, Bengal was the vanguard of most literary, artistic, and radical political and social movements in India for at least one hundred years. The western educated colonial Bengali elite or the *bhadralok*,<sup>1</sup> who usually led the movements was, as a group, highly *politicized* and ardent nationalists. This elite was also sensitive to the orientalist claims of India's classical past, and was especially mindful of Bengal's cultural aspirations and achievements, in which literature and the arts enjoyed a privileged place.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the average Bengali's traditional passion for literature and politics even today (generally speaking) colors the attitude to the sister arts, especially cinema. Such an attitude is inscribed in the culture's tacit recognition of the symbiotic weave between literature, politics, and film. One consequence has been that since the "talkie" period of Indian cinema (which began roughly around the early 1930s), the Bengali art film has been particularly dependent upon literature for its themes, characters, and plots. The novels of such eminent late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengali writers as Bankimchandra Chatterjee, Saratchandra Chatterjee, and Rabindranath Tagore, along with popular contemporary fiction, have often provided (and continue to provide) sources of fictional material for the Bengali filmmakers.

If we bear in mind, then, the literary tradition of Bengali cinema, its interest in social issues, and, especially, its neorealist aesthetics since 1955, the year Ray's *Pather Panchali* was released--it should come as no surprise that Satyajit Ray (1920-1992), perhaps India's best-known film *auteur*, found in Rabindranath Tagore's work material for his cinematic adaptations. The texts by Tagore (1861-1941), arguably India's greatest modern writer and the first Asian to win the Nobel prize in literature (in 1913), provided Ray with strong narrative lines, a cast of varied characters, and social issues: nationalism and its pitfalls, religious superstition, the emancipation of women, and the (often difficult) conflation of politics, "emancipatory" violence, and social activism, among others. In short, Ray found in Tagore's texts narratives of the socio-cultural and political history of India as it was emerging from a

British colony to an independent nation-state. Ray consistently tried to recover this history. He believed in its contemporariness as a source for analysis and understanding of the past and, especially, the present. Ray often turns to Tagore's late nineteenth and early twentieth century narratives in search of a liberating aesthetic distance that would permit him a strong focus on specific past and contemporary Indian realities, and help him explore "local" issues as well as certain so-called "universal" human concerns.

It is this impulse to observe the past and to subject it to a fresh scrutiny (and a need to assert a set of values that he and his audience can experience) that we see at work in Ray's 1984 adaptation of Tagore's *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World*, 1916). The novel captures the tensions and conflicts of a significant period in the early years of India's anti-colonial nationalism--between 1905 and 1908--called the *swadeshi* (literally, "of one's own nation" or "indigenouness"). During this time, the Bengali/Indian elite vigorously protested the partition of Bengal under the English Viceroy Lord Curzon in 1905. In a defiance of the colonial state authority, a militant but influential section of the elite leadership called for a total boycott of British manufactured goods and strongly and sometimes violently promoted *swadeshi* or indigenous manufactures. Intimately associated with the early phase of *swadeshi* as Tagore was, it did not prevent him from excoriating the radical militancy of the movement (and its coercive violence) or its class-based, exclusionary politics later on.<sup>3</sup> (By 1915, Tagore had become a vocal critic of the hegemonic *swadeshi* Indian nationalism that sought to silence dissenting and resisting voices against it.) In the novel, Tagore detaches himself from the forceful rhetoric of late nineteenth century Indian nationalism and its myth-making strategies, and critiques the nationalist myths of the Indian nation-state and Indian nationhood as elitist, essentially Hindu constructs. In his film, Ray considers Tagore's historiography and criticism of militant Indian nationalism and the "woman question" from a post-independence (read: postcolonial) perspective. Ray treats the precursor text as a record of a critical period in colonial Bengali history--the partition of Bengal--which precipitated in the colonial culture, first, specific ideologies of nation and nationhood, and, second, underwrote the nationalist ideological agenda concerning the Bengali/Indian women and cultural notions of femininity.

### Tagore's Novel

Briefly told, the story of *The Home and the World* revolves around the figures of Nikhilesh, a progressive and enlightened landowner; Bimala, his intelligent if overly impassioned and idealistic wife; and Sandip, Nikhilesh's former college friend, an ardent but unscrupulous nationalist, who shrewdly uses his political and personal charisma to manipulate Bimala's well-intentioned but somewhat confused patriotism. Gradually, Bimala is

estranged from her husband. Her commitment to nationalist causes and her growing feelings for Sandip lead to tragedy, however. Sandip's narrow and exclusionary nationalism incites a mass violence between the Hindus and Muslims, during which Nikhilesh dies in an attempt to quell communal riots. In the meantime, Sandip escapes, leaving behind a distraught and disillusioned Bimala, the conjugal harmony of her "home" destroyed, and her political involvement in the public affairs of the times severely compromised.

Tagore's protestations to the contrary, *The Home and the World* is less an exploration of individuality and the inner workings of personality than it is the author's critique of what Ashis Nandy calls "unselfcritical Indian nationalism,"<sup>4</sup> i.e., a reactive form of nationalism based on anti-imperial, anti-colonial ideology but which, ironically, deemed the nation-state to be the organizing principle of Indian political life. Such a concept was premised on the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century European belief that regarded the nation--state as the necessary source of cultural pride and unity of a group of people sharing a common history, linguistic heritage, religion, or ethnicity, and an impetus to economic progress. Tagore was clear-sighted enough to realize that the *swadeshi* movement in colonial Bengal/India was a middle-class dominated, majoritarian (i.e., Hindu) formation that, modelling itself on Indian colonial rulers, was dismissive towards the peripheries of society, especially the two peasant minorities in Bengal, the Muslims, and the low-caste Namasudras. For instance, in the novel, Sandip arrogantly declares that the Muslims "have to be held down," for they need to realize that "power is ours [i.e., the Hindu middle-classes] to wield."<sup>5</sup> To Tagore such nationalism was elitist, exclusionary, and often violent, and antithetical to the accommodative spirit of Indian life and culture. Also, it was alien to a people who, as Tagore wrote, historically had no sense of nationalism in the European sense. In the novel, Tagore sets himself through Nikhilesh to prove that a nation which gives in to immoral aggrandisement is on the road to political (and moral) disintegration, and that a nation which accepts predatory patriotism deforms its own ideals.<sup>6</sup> The "real tradition" of India, according to Tagore, was to "work for an adjustment of races, to acknowledge the real differences between them, and yet seek some basis of unity."<sup>7</sup> Also, Tagore saw the danger of the primordial *communal* passion and prejudice that such a sectarian nationalism would unleash in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious India. The violence directed against the British would, Tagore was convinced, eventually divide and consume the entire country. In contrast to the anti-Muslim rhetoric of Sandip, Nikhilesh argues that the Muslims in Bengal/India have a special place in the ethnic, cultural, and social weave of the nation. "If the idea of a united India is a true one," he tells Sandip, "then the Mussalman has a place in it."<sup>8</sup> Tagore's *The Home and the World* boldly argues that an exclusionary nationalism that imposes on the masses an elitist solution to the

problems of colonial rule, political freedom, and a class-based, majoritarian idea of nationhood was unworkable, and Tagore offers his own perspective on India's anti-colonial struggle: "consensual nationalism" (the phrase is Ashish Nandy's).

As a novel, *The Home and the World* is a flawed work. In its narrative representation of Indian nationalism in general and of militant *swadeshi* in particular, the work is, in some ways, a novelized version of several essays Tagore wrote between 1907 and 1909, after he had broken with the movement.<sup>9</sup> But whereas the essays are keen discursive analyses of the pros and cons of *swadeshi*, in the novel Tagore sacrifices artistic imperatives and the truth of coherence to a didactically conceived image of "reality," that is, "the way things *really* were" in the *agni yug* ("the decade of fire," as the *swadeshi* era was popularly known). But despite its weaknesses as a novel, *The Home and the World* tells not merely how things *were*--that is, as Tagore saw and knew them--but how they *felt*--how *swadeshi* felt and smelled and looked ! Part of the work's continued appeal may be attributed to this sense of historical specificity and (human) immediacy.

### Ray's Film

In his 1984 adaptation of *The Home and the World*,<sup>10</sup> Satyajit Ray faced two major tasks. One was the politics that overlaid the novel, and the other was its triangular love story, a love which, conflated with anti-colonialist politics raised the crucial issue of the position of the "new" and "traditional" Bengali/Indian woman and the latter's nationalist constructs. For the purposes of a structural cohesiveness and perspective, Ray needed to integrate these two spheres of the Tagore text: the romantic aspect of the story, which apparently attracted him the most<sup>11</sup>, and the shifting parameters of the "Home" and the "World," i.e., the external and public domain of politics and the "inner" and, therefore, more private (and feminized) space of the middle-class (Hindu) home. Added to this was the vexing issue of Bimala's symbolic role--she has been seen as the figural-symbolic site of competing ideologies informing India's anti-colonial and "semimodern" nationalism.<sup>12</sup> In his film version, Ray follows Tagore's historiography of the *swadeshi* period and his critique of political extremism fairly closely, primarily through the two controlling motifs of the film, fire and mirrors. While the first suggests the fatal aspects of physical passion (*moha*) and militant nationalism, and, crucially, represents the ritual fire of purification in Vedic Hinduism, the latter implies, in its self-reflexiveness, seeing and (not) knowing. But Ray realizes in film what Tagore only tried to do in the novel by presenting the political history as a study of personality, mostly by focusing on the larger "history" of Bimala's personal struggles as she tries to reconcile the claims of love (home) and politics (world). Ray creates drama rather than political commentary by making

Bimala the narrative center of the film--its mediating consciousness--by privileging her screen presence and her voice over the voices of Nikhilesh and Sandip that also constitute the competing points of view in the three first-person narrations found in the original Tagore novel.

Crucially, the novel's contested politics and ideology become in Ray's film text an issue of character and moral principles. Whereas Tagore's Sandip is an attractive but manipulative demagogue, Ray's portrait of him is more nuanced. In the opening segments of the film, Sandip's attractiveness (as in Tagore's text) is compelling: his dramatically incantatory "bande matarang" ("hail to the motherland") becomes an emotional prop for Bimala. It represents a spiritual awakening and a call to duty, as it was to thousands of nationalists like Bimala all over Bengal and elsewhere in India at the turn of the century. But Sandip is much less than the sum of his own self-representation in Ray's film. Played by an older and somewhat heavier Soumitra Chatterjee, Ray's favorite actor, Sandip looks and acts like a jaded epicurean, a far cry from the popular image of the *swadeshi* as a selfless, self-sacrificing, and disciplined ideologue-activist. Consistently, Ray undercuts Sandip's militancy by revealing its instrumentality in controlling, mobilizing, and manipulating human feelings, represented in the film by his psychological and sexual influence on Bimala. The potential degeneracy and destructiveness of such a militancy is evident also in Sandip's moral failures--in his wanton and cruel acts of vengeance against any and all opposition to his narrowly defined patriotism. He orders a peasant boy's tattered German shawl burnt, and the meagre capital of a small shopkeeper--some bales of Manchester cloth--confiscated and put to flames; a questioning and resisting Muslim trader loses his business when his boat carrying imported textiles is sunk on Sandip's orders; and finally, Sandip's inflamed rhetoric of (Hindu) nationalism engulfs Nikhilesh's estate in a frenzy of communal violence. And yet, for all his character flaws, especially his elitist contempt for the peasantry, Ray's Sandip is not quite the manipulative *swadeshi*-terrorist that we find in Tagore. Although the film's Sandip is a satirical prototype of the professional politicians who dot the contemporary Indian political scene, and resembles in his fanaticism some of the excesses of the middle-class (mostly) Bengali urban terrorists of the Naxalbari era<sup>13</sup>, he is also humanized in a way that is absent in the novel. The connection between his extremist politics and his egotistical and appropriative nature becomes clear when we learn that Sandip has failed in everything he has done or attempted so far. His will to power fills an inner void and is Sandip's vengeance on a seemingly uncaring world. His loneliness "frames" everything he does, from his attempts to seduce Bimala to his disregard for the poor.

In so far as Nikhilesh is concerned, both the novel and the film stress his constructive *swadeshi*, which combines moral integrity, social activism, and



*Ghare Baire* directed by Satyajit Ray

a progressive political philosophy based on (among other things) the principle of self-reliance (*atmasakti*) and rural development.<sup>14</sup> However, Ray also presents him as a passive and ineffectual victim of history whose rationality and enlightened humanism are undercut by the amorality of political expediency and radical excesses of Sandip, an idea that is somewhat removed from Tagore's conception of his protagonist's character. If Victor Banerjee's Nikhilesh seems weak and rather "feckless,"<sup>15</sup> who is neither critiqued nor analyzed nor fully explored, it is not how we see him in the novel. In Tagore, Nikhilesh's idealism is both robust and confident.<sup>16</sup> In his sympathetic portrayal of a somewhat "feminized" Nikhilesh, Ray shows a disillusionment with contemporary Indian life and its myriad social and economic problems, and, ironically, a yearning for certainties in Indian class and gender structures before the coming of the British. Ironically, too, the occasionally elegiac mood of the film, evoked in Bimala's English governess Miss Gilby's song, "Long, long ago..." and in the pathos of Nikhilesh's increased isolation from Bimala, helps deepen the film's melancholy and its nostalgia for a vanishing ethos of rational civility, liberalism, and moral high-mindedness with which Nikhilesh is identified.

As for Bimala, Ray treats her emergence into the open theatre of public concerns (the "world") with cinematic and visual elegance. The controlled slow motion sequence where Bimala, almost hand in hand with Nikhilesh, comes out of the inner confines of the Chowdhury mansion through its long corridors and into the main, more public part of the building to meet Sandip is memorable. As Bengal's cultural imprinters, the Tagore family had advocated women's emancipation, a topic to which Ray himself had returned time and again in his adaptations of Tagore and other writers: *Two Daughters*, *Devi*, and, especially, in *Charulata* and *Mahanagar*. In Tagore's text, however, the question of Bimala's emancipation is contained within the bounds of patriarchy (as Darius Cooper has rightly observed<sup>17</sup>), tied to the benevolent if self-critical paternalism of Nikhilesh: Bimala encounters the fractious "world" on its own terms, but she eventually returns, suitably chastened, to an over- generous and forgiving Nikhilesh. Tagore's literary portrayal of the "New Woman" throws light on the emerging ideology of womanhood in colonial Bengal/India, and his sketch of Bimala is penned with an eye on contemporary debates on women's status.<sup>18</sup> A nation in the midst of cultural and political crises needed a new kind of woman to resist the external and internal threats to its moral and social order. So Tagore frees Bimala from the enclosed space of domesticity and puts her in a companionate marriage where, unlike the traditional Hindu wife who is her husband's partner in religious duties (*sahadharmini*), Bimala is "dynamized" into a figure who tries hard to be Nikhilesh's (and certainly Sandip's !) ideological and activist partner in *swadeshi*/nationalist causes. Yet, Tagore's Bimala retains enough

of the Bengali/Indian wifely virtues endorsed by the early Indian cultural nationalists to make her an embodiment of East/West cultural fusion. Ray's Bimala is both more, and, paradoxically, less. She is conscious of the nuances of sexual politics, and in the early parts of the film resists Sandip as he playfully calls her *makshirani* or queen bee. She reads in such naming/renaming of her an act of primordial nomination, that is, an act of male possession. She knows her mind and is not afraid to challenge the restrictive Hindu social codes that strictly defined what women could or could not do. It is largely Bimala's choice to help Sandip, and so she is responsible for the grim consequences that follow. In the tight gaze of Ray's camera, the image of her ashen, haunted face at the conclusion of the film articulates Bimala's tragedy.

Yet her spirit of independence notwithstanding, Ray's Bimala is less than satisfactory, at least if Ray's point is to create her as a positive symbol of woman's social and psychological emancipation. She has little if any of the fire of Tagore's heroine or her intellectual grasp of politics or even her ability to "read" men, especially Sandip. In Ray's film, Bimala's understanding of *swadeshi* is mediated through the nationalist myth-making of Sandip and so it remains unrealized, even in the end, as do her struggles with the issue of her own identity, both as a wife and a woman. The problem of Bimala's pallid characterization in long stretches of the film, makes for a less than enthusiastic treatment of her role as a "modern" woman of nationalist literature whose boundary crossings represent the narrative of a nation seeking political freedom. The double-consciousness of Ray's "New Woman" as a Bengali/Indian and as a modern individual in companionate marriage is undermined by an over-reliance on patriarchy--she repeatedly defers to both Nikhilesh and Sandip--and by her limited understanding of and fitful commitment to flexible and experimental gender relationships. At the film's end, therefore, the issue of Bimala's identity is left unresolved: she is neither at ease in her home (*ghar*)--i.e., within the confines of traditional domesticity--nor in the world (*bahir*) of her times. Under such "reduced" circumstances, it becomes hard for us to see Ray's Bimala as any kind of a symbol, much less of Emergent India. Not only does her role as a *woman* in the history of Indian nationalism appear to be merely "contributive," her contribution is marginal, indeed, destructive. It is ironic that Ray's postcolonial perspective on the "woman question" in colonial India should echo those conservative critics in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal, who found the "New Woman" asserting her individuality over the claims of the joint or extended family as "aping" the English.

In the author's "commentary" on the novel in 1916, Tagore suggested, somewhat disingenuously, I think, that the book was primarily about love and only secondarily about politics.<sup>19</sup> That claim is only partly true, however. The



physical passion (*moha*) between Bimala and Sandip, and their intense feelings of mutual attraction-repulsion define their powerful but problematic relationship outside the traditional bonds of marriage. In contrast to this *moha* there is Nikhilesh's love, which Tagore presents as being grounded in freedom of choice, not in any idea of control or subjection--- psychological, emotional, social or any other. As a wife and as a woman, Bimala, the novel seems to argue, has the freedom to choose between the claims of opposing and competing political ideologies, and between a love that is constricting (because physical) and a love that is liberating (being spiritual). Part of Bimala's "education" into her own autonomy and her will to resolve the conflicting pulls of the "home" and the "world," Tagore felt, lies in her ability to negotiate successfully the complex and often contrary demands of these two forms of love. What Tagore did not acknowledge in the "commentary," however, was that the theme of love had been subsumed by the novel's politics, a fact which neither his contemporary readers nor his critics missed.<sup>20</sup> The characters' love for each other is predicated not on any deep human need but on either some abstract idea of the Truth or the ideological necessities of militant nationalism and political terror. There is no sense of genuine human partnership in this novel of ideas.

In the film, Ray's treatment of this triangular love story is ambiguous, at best. In the film text, as in Tagore's novel, love is overshadowed if not actually "consumed" by the right or wrong kind of politics (read: hegemonic and militant nationalism versus morally responsible, "consensual nationalism"). While Ray's *mise-en-scene* places characters in relation to each other, often framed in and by arches, colonnades, walls, and mirrors, the relational space they occupy is less human than ideological. And despite the various cinematic encodings of physical love in the film text, especially between Bimala and Sandip, and later, briefly, between Bimala and Nikhilesh, the characters really talk past each other rather than to each other. As in the Tagore text, in Ray's film the bond of love that enables human beings to grow is lacking. And Ray's frequent use of the mirror as a visual trope adds to the indeterminacy of the enterprise. As Nikhilesh, Sandip, but mostly Bimala look into the various mirrors, they see only what they wish to see; the Victorian mirror images do not become symbols of self-analysis or self-scrutiny. Their collective consent to the illusion is established : here, looking is far from knowing. The fire motif in the film which is a reminder of the destructive love-as-passion (*moha*) only emphasizes the dangers of socially unsanctioned love. It is also the traditional Vedic ritual fire of purification through which Bimala must pass in order to reclaim her chastity (*satitva*) as a Hindu wife. As the film's treatment of sexual, indeed of any love at all becomes increasingly undercut by its imagery, Bimala's central position in the film narrative, the human drama of her struggle toward agency and autonomy becomes unsettled if not actually

erased.

### **Ray's Intertext--Related but Independent**

It should be clear by now that in his adaptation, Ray absorbs Tagore's critique of militant nationalism and its "moderate" alternatives as they were available in colonial Bengal in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> Tagore's view is both self-critically modernist (read: rationalist) and apolitical in temper, and it is this rationalist and apolitical spirit that animates Ray's film, too. Both artists see in the excesses of the *swadeshi* movement an expression of the misdirected ideology of the dominant Western educated (Hindu) middle class that is at once historically short-sighted and hegemonic in its assumptions of Indian nationhood and India as a nation-state. In *The Home and the World*, Tagore does not interpret the "history" of this hegemonic nationalism as an end in itself. Rather, he sees in Nikhilesh's constructive *swadeshi* a preparation for the individual's responsibility in fashioning the common humanity of the future--nationalism as a liberation of individual consciousness. Ray's film text is similarly ideological (in the Althusserian sense<sup>22</sup>) in that it is less a validation or distortion of historical "reality" than a certain practice of representation whose function is to create a specific kind of reading: liberal humanistic (like Tagore's), and "tropic" and pessimistic.

In a cinematic adaptation, the question of fidelity is a central one. As Andrew Dudley and Joyce Gould Boyum have shown, insistence on fidelity to film's source may result in a reduction of the status of the film text, making it bear the onus of matching the literary work's "essence."<sup>23</sup> Others have taken a less hierarchical approach to the question of fidelity and have emphasized intertextuality instead, in which two texts are seen as distinct but related because of the cinematic text's status as an adaptation.<sup>24</sup> For a full appreciation of Ray's film, we would do well to regard it as both standing in an hierarchical relation to Tagore's privileged text, *and* as an intertext independent but related.

Ultimately as an intertext, then, creating its own space in relation to Tagore's novel, Ray's film is both an "independent work and a palimpsest."<sup>25</sup> Ray's text contains at least two creative transformations that have contemporary relevance : he particularly emphasizes the spread of communalism, and Amulya--who dies in the novel--survives and is established as the model patriot-nationalist who combines moral integrity with political realism. Ray's film emphasizes communal disharmony and violence considerably more than Tagore's text does, and there is some justification in that. In post-independent India of the mid-1980s, politicization of religion and communal strife are dangerous everyday reality, reminiscent of some of the excesses of the *swadeshi* era Tagore wrote about. Indeed, Satyajit Ray gives a remarkable visual concreteness to this discord. First, tongues of flame gently, almost innocently, flicker on the edges of the screen, then shoot up in

sporadic bursts, and finally explode with a wild abandon and "devour" entire frames, while the film's sound track echoes and re-echoes with the mixed throb of angry and distraught human voices. Ray does not show us a single riot in the film, but through visual and aural devices he brings the violently irrational and the tragic ominously close to us; and the threat of religious strife is a living presence in the work. Ray also effectively balances the horrific brightness of the orange flames with the dark shadows that literally swallow Sandip and a local Hindu landowner's manager (played with a sly viciousness by Bijoy Chatterjee) as they conspire to ruin lives, a sober reminder of what actually happened at that time in several parts of East Bengal, where some Hindu landowners and their estate managers used the *swadeshi* excuse to impoverish their (usually Muslim and low caste Hindu) tenants in order to evict them from their land. Later, deep focus shadows are again used as signifiers when Amulya and Sandip plot a robbery at night to raise money for *swadeshi*. These patterns of light and dark create a *chirascuro* effect and emphasize the anxiety and terror of mass violence, indicating a collapse of civic and political order. Clearly, Ray puts the perspective of his (and India's) present on the representation of the past to a greater degree than does most conventional history. Such transformations are in the best tradition of cinematic adaptations: one serious artist interpreting another without slavish imitation. It is in such transformations, too, that the tropic dimensions of the film surface, and so ironically does its pessimism.

### Conclusion

Tagore wrote his "critique" of the Indian nationalist movement at its foundational moment, when the idea of Indian nationhood was taking shape. He used the novel as a forum for debate and discussion about political contingencies that concerned him. His text thus has different contextual reverberations--an intense personal preoccupation with his own role in pre-Gandhian Indian nationalism--than does Ray's film. Whereas Tagore's novel embodies at least the tensions inherent in the *swadeshi* movement--those between nationalist ideology and political extremism and its implicit communal agenda, and between an alignment of classes that helped sustain the structure of colonial apparatus and the suppression of the political will of the non-urban, *non-bhadralok* masses with the help of elite and elitist organizations--Ray's representation of it is akin to something of a "spectacle" of political and moral confusion. Appropriating Tagore's liberal humanist critique of militant *swadeshi*, Ray's own historical interpretation is nonetheless framed in a context of domestic tragedy, and an elitist aversion to political radicalism. In Ray's film we see a rumination on the problematics of India's anti-colonial nationalism and its present postcolonial communal struggles. Ray adapts his precursor's text at another critical juncture in India's political

history when the postcolonial nation itself is under siege, if not at the point of dissolution, rent internally by the very same forces that Tagore had warned against. Offering a "repetitive" paradigm, Tagore's narrative holds a special significance for India's troubled contemporary history. The similarities between the two historical moments--late nineteenth and early twentieth-century colonial Bengal, and the postcolonial Indian society of the middle 1980s (and after)--are particularly distressing: religious fundamentalism, political factionalism and extremism, violence against the poor, and the simmering threats of communal clashes. In Ray's film text, Bengal's militant and extremist anti-colonial nationalism between 1906 and 1912, which Tagore thought was premised on unsound moral principles, has come home to roost.

Faced with what he believed to be a moral and spiritual crisis in the political will of the early nationalists to forge a common bond between all the Indian peoples, Tagore first retreated and then fought back with a rational, self-critical, but a modernist agenda. But Ray, unlike Tagore, seems overwhelmed by the spectre of confusion everywhere in twentieth-century postcolonial India, especially as he sees the nation torn apart by middle-class greed, civic irresponsibility, and religious intolerance, with the poor still powerless and silenced. Like Nihkilesh, who looks regretfully at the triumph of political "vulgarity" in *swadeshi* Bengal, Ray's mood in the film is sombre, even pessimistic. The final image of the film is a dark and haunting one. In a series of slow dissolves, Ray shows Bimala in the coarse white saree and close-cropped hair of the traditional Hindu widow, her face an anguished mask of guilt and muted despair. Ironically, the "new" but still "premodern" Hindu patriarchy and the nationalist agenda on "spheres" circumscribing the Bengali/Indian woman and her femininity collude to "punish" Bimala's social and ideological transgressions. In Ray's *The Home and the World*, then, the experience of change is not counterbalanced by continuity, much less by hope.

## Notes

1. *Bhadralok* referred to the "dominant elite" of colonial Bengal at the turn of the century. The word means "respectable people," the "gentle men," who were distinguished from the *abhadra* or the low and the ordinary by their (usually) high caste, superior education and culture, and by their customary abstention from manual labor. See J. H. Broomfield *Elite Conflict in a Rural Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp.5-41
2. See Partha Mitter's authoritative *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 221-267 and pp. 350-358.

Mitter's book explores in considerable detail the art movements (and artists associated with them) in colonial Bengal/India and their orientalist and "occidental orientations" between 1850 and 1922. In the process, he also examines the weave between literature, art, and nationalist ideology in colonial Bengal.

3. For an authoritative history of the *swadeshi* era in colonial Bengal, see Sumit Sarkar's majestic *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal: 1903-1908* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1989). Among the numerous studies on nineteenth and early twentieth century anti-colonial nationalism in India, the following works deserve mention : Bruce McCully, *English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942); Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism : Competition and Collaboration in Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1971); Asoka Kumar Sen, *Educated Middle Class and Indian Nationalism* (Calcutta : Progressive Publishers, 1988); Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World : A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). For a revisionist historiography of Indian nationalism, see Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Indian Nationalism," in *Subaltern Studies I* (New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 1-7.

4. Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism* (Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 3

5. *The Home and the World or Ghare Baire*. Tagore wrote the novel between 1913 and 1914, and serialized it in *Sabujpatra*, an avant garde Bengali monthly, edited by his sister Swarnalata Devi in 1915. The novel was published in Calcutta a year later, in 1916, and generated a heated debate that continued till at least 1919, when the English translation by Surendranath Tagore was published from London. A paperback reprint was published by Penguin in 1985, with an Introduction by the Indian novelist Anita Desai. For my purposes here, however, I have used a 1969 reprint of the original Bengali text : *Ghare Baire* (Calcutta: Vishvabharati Press, 1969). All page references are to this text, and unless otherwise noted, all translations from the original Bengali are mine. The quote I cite occurs on page 161.

6. Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (London: Macmillan, 1917). The book comprises three lectures, "Nationalism in the West," "Nationalism in Japan," and "Nationalism in India." Tagore delivered these lectures during the World War I in Japan and in the United States. As Sasadhar Sinha points out, the book "is not in any real sense an analysis of nationalism, but is aimed at Western imperialism, and its distortions." Sasadhar Sinha, *Social Thinking of Rabindranath Tagore* (Calcutta: Asia Publishing House, 1962), pp. 130-131.

7. Tagore, *Nationalism*, p. 59

8. Tagore, *Ghare Baire*, p. 162

9. See especially Tagore's essay "Byadhi o Pratikar" ("The Disease and Cure") in *Rabindra Rachanabali* (*Collected Works*) (Calcutta : Govt. of West Bengal, 1964), Vol. X, p. 630 ff., and also the essays on *swadeshi* and politics in *Rabindra Rachanabali*, Vol. XX.

10. After nearly three decades of contemplating a film version of the Tagore text, Ray finally completed the project in 1984, with Victor Banerjee as Nikhilesh, Soumitra Chatterjee in the role of Sandip, and Swatilekha Chaudhury as Bimala. See Andrew Robinson's *Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye* (London : Oxford University Press, 1992) for a relatively brief but complete account of the history of the making of the film.

11. See Satyajit Ray's comment in Andrew Robinson, "Bridging the Home and the World," *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol. 51, No. 608, September 1984, p. 129.

12. Sandip himself associates Bimala with India when he says, "Today, I shall interfuse my country with Bimala..." (110). One of Tagore's early and influential commentators, Pramatha Chaudhury called the novel a fable (*rupak*) of old and new / emergent India, with Bimala representing the latter. See Tagore's letter to Amiya Chakraborty in the Vishvabharati edition of *Ghare Baire*, p. 287. For a more recent parallel from contemporary Indian politics, it is not entirely fortuitous that Indira Gandhi has often been referred to as Bharatmata, Mother India.

13. An era of ultra-left movement in urban terrorism that plagued primarily West Bengal (but also a few other neighboring states in Eastern India) during the early and mid-1970s. These political radicals--or Naxals, as they were popularly known--were almost always young, urbanized, and from the educated middle class in Bengal. Their ideological mentors were Mao Tse Tung and Che, among others, and they sought to fight the oppression of the Indian peasantry and the urban working class by India's "neo-colonialist" state machinery with revolutionary terror of their own. For a journalistic English-language account of the movement and its often grim socio-economic consequences, see Geoffrey Moorhouse, *Calcutta* (New York : Harcourt, 1971). For a more scholarly analysis of the subject, see Rabindra Ray, *Naxalites and Their Ideology* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).

14. Prabhat Mukherjee, a biographer of Tagore, sees in Nikhilesh's concept of freedom, of *atmasakti* ( i.e., self-reliance), and in his frequent emphases on constructive leadership in political movements Tagore's own experiences during the *swadeshi* period, both the public indifference to his ideas of self-help, and his efforts to develop an independent political and social vision. Tagore, Mukherjee says, "was not bewitched by narrow a sense of patriotism. Gradually he could rise above all country and communalism, and could preach a universalism which he termed 'Religion of Man'" ["Manusher Dharma"]. See *Rabindra Jibani: Part II* (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1961), p. 259.

15. Michael Sprinker, "Homeboys : Nationalism, Colonialism, and Gender in Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World*," in *Reading the Shape of the World : Toward an International Cultural Studies*, eds. Henry Schwarz and Richard Dienst (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), p. 218.
16. Tagore, *Ghare Baire*, pp. 146-149.
17. Darius Cooper, review of *The Home and the World* in *Film Quarterly* Vol. 43, No. 2 (Winter 1989-90), pp. 40-43.
18. For useful discussions of the symbolic value and of the political use of the traditional woman of the (Hindu) classical past and her "modern" incarnation, the so-called "New Woman" in nationalist discourse of late nineteenth and early twentieth century India, see Kumkum Sangari and Suresh Vaid, "Recasting Women : An Introduction," in *Recasting Women : Essays in Indian Colonial History* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990), p. 10, and especially, Partha Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question," pp. 248-249. See also Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 135-157.
19. Tagore, *Ghare Baire*, pp. 275-287.
20. Ibid. p. 283.
21. See Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Modern Bengal*, pp. 131-203.
22. See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 127-186, but especially pp. 162-170.
23. Joyce Gould Boyum, *Double Exposure: Fiction Into Film* (New York: Universe Books, 1985). The book has a full discussion on the notion of fidelity in adaptation in a chapter entitled "The Filmmaker as Reader." For a critique on film adaptation and its relation to the concept of representation, see Andrew Dudley, *Concepts in Film Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 98-104.
24. See Christopher Orr's review outlining the ideology and the politics of cinematic adaptation in "The Discourse on Adaptation" in *Wide Angle*, 6.2 (1984), 72-76. See also, J. Ellis, "The Literary Adaptation" in *Screen*, 23.1, May-June (1982), 3-5.
25. Boyum, p. 64.

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