
UNIT 13: RABINDRANATH TAGORE: *HOME AND THE WORLD II*

UNIT STRUCTURE

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13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- grasp an idea of the novel and its characters in a detailed manner
- explain the concurrent wave of nationalism that forms the backdrop of the novel
- analyse the various characters in the novel
- discuss the themes and style of the novelist
- associate your reading of the novel with other novels that records the history of our nation

13.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit aims to familiarize you to the novel in detail, and the various

characters that colour its narrative. The following section provides you with the chapter wise summary of *Home and the World*. However, the summary provided is only a glimpse or a window to the whole novel which should encourage you to read your text thoroughly. The originally Bengali novel was translated by the author's nephew, Surendranath Tagore.

13.3 SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL

Read the chapter-wise summary of the novel given below followed by a brief commentary on each chapter. While reading each chapter we have to bear in mind that the narratorial voice keeps on changing alternately among Nikhilesh, Sandip and Bimala.

Chapter 1



Lacklustre: lacking brightness.

Taunts: jeers.

Raving: delirious; mad.

In this chapter, we are introduced to the character of Bimala in her own voice. We are also given a glimpse of her in-laws' house, her husband, Nikhilesh, and her two sisters-in-law, Mejorani and Bororani. Bimala describes her mother as a beautiful, dark skinned woman, and herself as a plain, **lacklustre** counter figure of her mother. It is through her narrative that we know about her beautiful sisters-in-law who came to this aristocratic Brahmin family by virtue of their beauty and grace. Bimala was chosen by this family as its daughter-in-law by virtue of astrological readings that said that she would be an auspicious addition to the family. She also describes how life had turned sour for her by the constant **taunts** and mockery of her sisters-in-law, especially Mejorani. She would mock her for all the jewellery, clothes and accessories Bimala used to adorn herself with. Mejorani jeered her by saying that all this show was only a disguise to cover her plain looks. Bimala was full of praises for her husband who educated and enlightened her. When she complained to him about the other women in the household, he would only coax her by saying that Mejorani's condition was the result of the indifference and negligence of her husband when he was alive that turned her envious and bitter. But this coaxes only had a temporal effect on her, and soon she would find herself in depression caused by her sister-in-law.

This chapter shows how the spirit of the Swadeshi was **raving** throughout

the country. Miss Gilby, Bimala's, home tutor, was scorned by the residents of the house. However, Nikhil's warm behaviour remained the same and he escorted Miss Gilby to the station in his car.

Sandip, an important character in the novel and Nikhil's childhood friend, is also introduced to us. Bimala first met him in the temple courtyard where he had come to deliver his speech on Swadeshi. Later, he was invited to Nikhil's house for supper, and there Sandip used his eloquent **rhetoric** to express his own ideology of women's participation in the freedom struggles and Swadeshi. Nikhil remained indifferent to the principles of Swadeshi, but Bimala found herself more and more attracted towards Sandip for his personality and active entity. Towards the end of this chapter, we are also introduced to Nikhil's teacher, Chandranath Babu.



Rhetoric: the art of using words impressively.

Chapter 2

The narrator of this chapter is Nikhilesh. He expresses his concern for Bimala and Sandip and feels that his household is slowly being enshrouded in a garb of darkness. He confesses that he cannot bind Bimala to his house for his selfish interest; infact, he wants her to explore for herself the world outside their home. Chandranath Babu could sense this growing tension between the couple and throw a slight hint to Nikhil by asking whether Sandip should be coming back to their house often to carry out his duties of the nationalist project. Nikhil picks up this hint and asks Sandip over tea that should he be going to Rangpur to perform his duties. Bimala feels hurt. And when asked about her opinion, she simply says that duties could be performed in both ways: by roaming here and there, or by remaining steadfast to one particular place. Sandip gives her the title 'Queen Bee' and said that from that moment she would take care of their activities. Chandranath Babu had asked Nikhil to take Bimala to Darjeeling for a few days to feel rejuvenated following that sojourn. Bimala refused to go. Nikhil thought that Bimala was worried about her country's freedom and feared that if she moved out, her duties would be neglected.

Chapter 3

This is a rather short chapter of which Sandip is the narrator. We can call

it Sandip's soliloquy where he vents his own intentions and insidious plans to get them materialised under the guise of patriotism. He is unable to understand Nikhilesh's ideology towards life and nationalism: "Nikhilesh talks like this, in metaphors." Sandip admits to himself that he has been able to win over the innocent hearts of many women through his charm. He knows that it is his rash and impulsive behaviour that pulls women towards him. He further nurtures a sinister plan to charm Bimala towards him.

Chapter 4

In this chapter, Bimala is the narrator. She regrets being mocked constantly by her second sister-in-law, Mejorani. Her gradually movement outside their house has raised concerns among the women folk in the house. Mejorani jokingly informs the matter to Nikhilesh by stating that all these years, it was the men who used to make their women cry. But from that day onwards, the women would make their men shed tears. Bimala confesses that during those days whenever there was a meeting of their nationalist project, she would dress up in a special manner. She had started liking those meetings, and Sandip had become successful in convincing her to become an active member of their 'activist' movement. She also confesses that Nikhil's treatment towards Sandip was that of an elder brother who could never trust his younger brother's actions. Nikhil was deliberately left outside these matters by Sandip, and Bimala thought it to be Sandip's fondness for Nikhil. Bimala gradually found herself participating in an unknown space, outside her familiar space, her home.

Chapter 5

Sandip is the narrator in this chapter. Sandip admits that the meetings with Bimala had become frequent. One Thursday Sandip found a servant guarding the door leading to the drawing room. He gently asked Sandip to go away. Sandip kept insisting to get inside. When the servant, Nanku, grabbed his hand to stop him, he eventually slapped him out of anger. At this point, Bimala appeared and sternly ordered Nanku to go away. Sandip had never seen her so annoyed. Later, the whole matter was intimated to Nikhilesh and Bimala suspected him of ordering Nanku to stay on guard. Nikhilesh disapproved of

such a charge against him, and later it was found out that Mejorani was behind all this. Bimala insisted Nikhil to sack Nanku from his job. Sandip understood that it was Bimala's way of avenging her anger for Mejorani.

Sandip relates a small incident in their library when he found Bimala reading a contemporary English book that had explicit details on man-woman union. This was the same book that he was reading. When Bimala was caught reading it, she became embarrassed. Gradually, as their conversation warmed up, Chandranath Babu suddenly appears on the scene. He takes up the topic of Swadeshi, and Sandip's impulsive behaviour comes to the fore through their conversation. Nikhil comes to join in their talk.

In this chapter, Sandip muses over his past when he had mesmerized a young widow, Kusum, with his charm. The poor girl knew about his intentions but had become completely helpless. Towards the end of the chapter, Sandip confessed that he wanted to win Bimala's heart as well.

Chapter 6

Nikhilesh is the narrator in this chapter. He acknowledges his own weaknesses in letting Bimala stray away from his household. However, he does not use coercion to bind her rigidly to his home. According to him, his love cannot betray him. He sees Bimala as 'truth' - "My love will not betray me - she's Truth, the Truth - that's why I see her again and again and will continue to see her always; I've seen her through my mistakes and through the midst of tears." Nikhil admits his helplessness and sorrow of being at the verge of losing the love of his life. Towards the end of this chapter, Mejorani appears before Nikhil and expresses her deep regret at seeing him so tormented by his thoughts. Nikhil simply touches her feet and moves in.

Chapter 7

Bimala, the narrator in this chapter admits that the greatest pleasure was in destroying oneself completely. She was already in a trance, an obsession of sacrificing herself in the name of nationalism. She admitted the fact that Sandip was no match for her husband. Infact, she disrespected him. For days together,

there had been no discussion on nationalist movement, and the central topic was men women relationship under the pretext of English and Vaisnav poetry which was ‘coarse’. Bimala’s reverence for Sandip was fading away. She remembered the time when she would literally worship her husband’s framed photo of which Nikhil had disapproved several times. Despite that, she had quietly placed Sandip’s photo, beside her husband’s. She used to keep it under lock and key in her jewellery box and often open it to have a look at it.



Machete: a broad heavy knife.

Chapter 8

In this chapter, Sandip recollects a gory episode of his life when he, along with his companions, went for a picnic in a garden. They saw a goat there, and Sandip announced to see who was courageous enough to cut its hind legs with a **machete**. When no one dared to do it, Sandip performed the heartless act. The most merciless of their group fainted at this sight.

Further in the chapter, Sandip deifies Bimala as Goddess Kali. To him, this nation requires a sacrifice, just like the Goddess. And he could go to any extent to make that sacrifice possible.

Chapter 9

It is a brief chapter where Nikhilesh is the narrator. He feels more and more isolated in Bimala’s absence. He often breaks out into a few sad lines:

“Monsoon floods July and August,

My temple lies vacant!”

He remembers how he had to leave Bimala behind him as he had to appear for his MA examination in Calcutta. Now he had realised what a trauma Bimala had to endure in his absence. The rift between them had gradually grown. In this chapter, we are introduced to a minor character, Panchu, a subject of their neighbouring landlord, or zamindar, Harish Kundu. He had brought a humble offering of coconuts in a basket and touched Nikhil’s feet out of respect. He had come to know Panchu through Chandranath Babu. Panchu greatly respected his teacher. He did not take any money from Nikhil for the coconuts saying that once, when he was almost starving, he had stolen some

coconuts from Nikhil's garden. Panchu used to earn his living by selling stuffs like tobacco, mirrors, *paan*, combs, etc. to women farmers. When Nikhil wanted to aid him financially, Chandranath Babu advised him not to do so because, that way he would only make Panchu dependent on him for every small thing.

Chapter 10

Bimala is the narrator in this chapter. She describes how their family had come to the notice of the people around them as encouraging imported salt, sugar and cloth in their land. Since Nikhil was the landlord of that jurisdiction, people began to think that he deliberately did not ban these products in his land. However, at home, Nikhil was that old, familiar self, drinking water from his brass tumbler, placing the old brass flower vase in his drawing room, using old furniture and bird quills for writing. Bimala discusses Mejorani's hypocrisy on the use of Swadeshi goods. She used to continue bathing with imported luxury soaps and using imported ivory pens, but would never fail to cheer up her brother-in-law, Nikhil, by demanding indigenous, homemade products for daily use. She never used them, but tried to prove Bimala inferior before Nikhil. This annoyed Bimala further and she called for Sandip without using any excuse or pretext.

Chapter 11

Nikhilesh is the narrator in this chapter and narrates how poverty had struck the people of his land. Panchu was the representative of this poverty-stricken community. When his wife died of tuberculosis, the Brahmins demanded a sum of twenty-three and a half rupees as atonement for her sins. He even had to pay a heavy amount for performing her last rites. Nikhil saw this as atrocity done to the poor, illiterate folk. For a month, Panchu stayed away from his family that comprised four children and eventually turned into a hermit.

Later, when he came back to his home, he confessed before Chandranath Babu that he could not bear to see his starved children nor could abandon them. When the teacher agreed to help him financially to start up a small

business, but on condition that Panchu would return him the money as soon as he earns it, Panchu did not like the offer. Then Chandranath Babu thought that by giving alms to Panchu, he would only hurt his dignity. Panchu realised this, and with the help of that money he bought some foreign warm clothes and sold it to the farmers. In two months he earned the profit and was able to return Chandranath Babu's debt in installments.

Soon the news spread that Sukhsayar market, which was under Nikhilesh, was encouraging the trading of foreign goods. A group came to warn Nikhil of this but soon Chandranath Babu came to his rescue. The workers of the Swadeshi claimed that for the sake of their country Nikhil should ban foreign threads and clothes in Sukhsayar market. They were all ex students of Chandranath Babu. After a brief argument they left from there shouting 'Vande Mataram.'

A few days later, Chandranath Babu brought Panchu to Nikhil stating that all his German shawls that he had bought to trade in the market was set to fire by his landlord, Harish Kundu, in front of Sandip. The people around were shouting "Vande Mataram". When Sandip was summoned to bear witness to the whole injustice done to the poor man, Sandip said that he would take the zamindar's side. The teacher and Sandip had a brief argument over it, and finally, Sandip stormed out of the house. Nikhil admitted that Sandip could do more harm than he had already done. Nikhil resolved to buy Panchu's land, which was rightfully Panchu's ancestral property, and make him his subject. This way, Panchu could trade any foreign goods he wished. His teacher liked this idea. But when Panchu feared that the miscreants might set fire to his home along with his children, Chandranath Babu agreed to keep his four children with him. However, Panchu soon came running to the teacher that an imposter, **feigning** herself to be his aunt, had forcefully come to live in his house.

Bimala called for Nikhil after some time and asked why he did not ban trading of foreign goods in his market. He replied that he could not use coercion on his people, his subjects. He left her to avoid argument. Nikhil could understand that the words that came out from Bimala's mouth were actually Sandip's. He remembered the faces of the people one by one- Panchu,



Feigning: pretending.

Quagmire: a bog, a marsh; swamp.

in his poverty and agony, the sandalwood paste smeared forehead of the so-called highly religious man, Harish Kundu. He felt that he was slowly approaching Truth in the **quagmire** of poverty and hypocrisy.

Chapter 12

Sandip, the narrator in this chapter describes how Bimala appears disturbed because of the turmoil in her marital life. He also describes how some local youths had set fire to a poor farmer's goods, some German shawls, which he had bought to sell in the market. The local authority was also with them. Hence, no charge was issued against the miscreants. Sandip cleverly sets his plan to extract money from Bimala. He provokes her by stating that if the money did not belong to her, it did not belong to Nikhil either. All Sandip wanted was money. In an episode in this chapter, Sandip describes how he managed to burn the foreign goods and exploit the poor farmers under the pretext of the Swadeshi. He had even sunk the boat of a village tradesman, Mirjan, with the help of the head clerk, Kulada. Exploitation was at its peak, and Sandip was planning to **capitalize** on the poor man's plight.

In the later part of the chapter, the head clerk, Kulada, threatens Sandip that if the police get to him, he would drag them along. He had the requisite evidence for that matter- one letter written by Sandip and three letters written by Sandip's young disciple, Amulya.

Again, Sandip was of the opinion that Muslims could not be easily coaxed into becoming a part of the Swadeshi. Nikhil observed that India was as much the Muslims as to anybody else. Sandip wanted to **eradicate** them completely or issue them reservations so that they could not revolt against him.

Sandip's veil of religiosity is only a medium to provoke the people against unity of the communities in the country. He suggested an idol to be made so that the people awaken to the carrion call of the nation. And he already had Bimala on his mind for this purpose. Sandip tried to mislead the innocent people of the land, "It was because our country knew this for a fact that it was said in olden days that for the ignorant, lie was the Truth. The man who could accept an idol as the symbol of the country would actually be working on that



Capitalize: to make profit of a given situation.

Eradicate: wipe out.

as the Truth.” He wanted Nikhil’s money through Bimala. His own mercenary motives are guised as the country’s requirement of a deity: “But I had to get beyond myself. I wasn’t the one taking it. It was for the worship of the Mother and all of it would go for that. The puja would be so glamorous that no one ever would have seen anything like it.”

Chapter 13

This chapter has Nikhilesh as the narrator. He narrates how the newspapers have started mocking at him and his family for not participating in the Swadeshi. He also receives a letter that serves as a threatening to him: “Meanwhile, I have received a letter written in red ink detailing the number of zamindars whose offices have been burnt down because their loyalties lay with Liverpool.” According to Nikhil, terror had a new name at that time, and it was called the ‘Swadeshi’. He was disturbed to find college students dropping out of their course and getting engaged in this new fury, by inflicting violence upon poor folks. We see new faces of terrorism in the form of Harish Kundu, the Chakravartys of Sankibhanga and Gurucharan Bhaduri, and they are all servile to higher forces.

Therefore, it is a vicious cycle of exploitation. Sandip exposes himself more and more as someone who believes in the method of coercion to bring about change and rule the land. What Nikhil wanted to do was to eradicate fear from the common people of his land and to face their exploiters with courage. “My battle is with this brutality inherent in weakness.”

There is a short episode in this chapter that shows Nikhil and Bimala in conversation, urging Bimala to be unfettered from all social bindings that she must have thought been imposed by their marriage.

Chapter 14

Bimala, the narrator in this chapter, confesses that she has started loving her cage that limits her movement within the reach of Nikhilesh. She is hurt at her husband’s indifference to her: “The other day, my husband told me so easily in the garden: I release you. Is it so simple- giving release or being released?”

Is freedom tangible? It's empty. Like the fish, I had always swum in the waters of love. All of a sudden if I am held up to the sky and told, here is your freedom, I cannot survive."

Bimala's mind is already preoccupied with the thought of the fifty thousand rupees that Sandip had demanded. She was in a fix because she could bring herself to steal Nikhil's money. This chapter also focuses on the young freedom fighter, Amulya. She is horrified to see him contemplating the murder of Nikhilesh's family treasurer to extract the sum. She takes away his pistol and gently asks him to leave. She even contemplates suicide but cannot bring herself to do it. Guilt resides in her heart before stealing Nikhil's money because she had called Bororani and Mejorani thieves in this house several times. But what was she doing now herself? She steals the money from a chest.

The money in it was a sum of six thousand rupees which belonged to her sisters-in-law. It was an amount given to them by Nikhil during special occasions. He had not yet deposited the amount in the bank. After stealing the money, Bimala confesses her guilt saying: "I had failed to separate my home from the world. Today I have robbed my home, and therefore robbed the land; for this sin, my home was lost to me in the same instant that my land slipped away from me. Had I gone begging in order to serve the country, and even lost my life before completing my service, that incomplete service would have been accepted by God as obeisance." Mejorani accuses Bimala for being involved with the robbers of the land, who had looted rich families.

When Bimala finally gives the money to Sandip, out of sheer impulse, he rushes towards her to hold her in his embrace. Bimala pushes him and throws him away. Amulya witnesses the whole scene and feels embarrassed. Sandip finds out that the bundle contains only six thousand rupees. Amulya suggests that this is a big amount for them for their work at hand. But Sandip refuses and says that this amount means nothing to him.

Meanwhile, the matter of the amount of money kept in Nikhil's room was discussed by Mejorani. She feared that robbers would take away their money so she wanted to get it deposited in the bank as soon as possible. Bimala

feared that she would be exposed. Therefore, she gave Amulya her jewellery box and asked him to procure at least six thousand rupees for her. Sandip saw this and asked her rather sarcastically whether she trusted Amulya more than Sandip. He continued his charges against Bimala when Nikhil entered the drawing room, and Sandip changed his topic to Browning's poetry. Nikhil warned Sandip that some Muslims from Dacca had come to urge the Muslims of their land against the other people. It all happened because they felt threatened by Sandip and his followers. Sandip only mocked Nikhil as a weak zaminder who could not oppress the Muslims of his land. In the other part of the house, Amulya consoled Bimala that he will accomplish the task that she had given to him. He also told her that he was the only son of his mother.

Chapter 15

Nikhillesh is the narrator in this chapter. This part of the novel contains the discourses related to the Hindu Muslim dichotomy. Nikhil wants to make peace between his subjects from these two communities. At the same time, he tries to justify his empathy towards those who do not want to participate in the Swadeshi, the sole reason being their poverty. Meanwhile, the Maulavis from Dacca were pouring in to insinuate the Muslims of his land. He had already spent a lot of money on bringing about prosperity to his subjects. He only did not want to flaunt it, for which he was titled "a calculating miser" by them. At the same time, he receives the news that their treasury had been robbed in a place called Chakua. Strangely enough, only six thousand rupees was looted and rest remained scattered on the floor. The prime suspect was the guard, Quasim Sardar, who had taken a bullet on his arm. He fell at his feet, when interrogated by the police, and said that he was not involved. He also suggested that Harish Kundu might be behind this act. Nikhil called for Chandranath Babu to discuss his problems. The teacher advised him to leave for Calcutta as soon as possible and take Bimala along.

That night, when Nikhil left his bed and came out to his verandah, he found Bimala lying there. He uttered nothing and simply stroked her hair. At this, Bimala broke down into silent sobs.

Chapter 16

In this chapter, Bimala narrates how Amulya was held in police custody as he was suspected of robbing Bimala's jewellery. It was the same jewellery that she had allowed him to sell and bring six thousand rupees. Sandip had his greedy eyes on this jewellery and he expresses his greed quite clearly in these lines: "I have my eyes on all the wealth in the whole of Bengal. There is no greater virtue than greed. For the lords of this earth, greed is the vehicle. So then, all this jewellery is mine."

Amulya refuses to give it to Sandip and claims that the rightful owner is his respectable 'Ranididi' (Bimala). Bimala and Sandip have an argument over this issue and Bimala makes her position clear that she does not need this jewellery either. Nikhil enters the drawing room at this point and asks Sandip to follow him to Calcutta the very next day. Sandip initially refuses by saying that he was not a valet to Nikhil. When Sandip says that the world is not made up of two areas- Nikhil's house and Calcutta, Nikhil poses a sharp sarcasm at him, "Looking at you one would think there is no other place in the world beside my area." Sandip took this as insult and told Bimala that he still worshipped her as his 'goddess', his 'Queen bee' but he had to leave. He left behind her jewellery box.

Bimala starts packing her bags because Nikhil and she were to leave for Calcutta the next day. She called for Amulya but the bearer comes back saying that he was not there. Bimala feared something bad might have happened to him. She had longed to become that innocent bride some nine years back.

Chapter 17

Nikhil and Bimala pack their luggage for Calcutta, Mejorani also begins packing hers. Nikhil describes that his relationship with Mejorani started when she came to his family as a bride to his elder brother, and she was only nine at that time. Their relationship was beyond any materialistic greed that Bimala often suspected. It was a sibling love, a pure affection that they shared. Mejorani was ready to leave her familiar home and step into the cosmopolitan

city only because of Nikhil. She was a childless widow and was left completely at the good will of Nikhil.

Meanwhile, the inspector in charge of the theft of six thousand rupees and Amulya, the suspected accused, were having sweets in the drawing room. When Nikhil found them, he was only surprised. The inspector later told him that the theft was committed by Nikhil's head-clerk, Tinkori Dutta and Quasim Sardar. When the inspector leaves, Nikhil tries to find out from Amulya as to who was the real thief who confesses that it was him. He had taken the money from the safe only to return it to Nikhil. He had promised Bimala to do so. Having confessed, he touched Bimala's feet. Once Amulya leaves, Bimala confesses to Nikhil and Mejorani that she was the real thief who had stolen the money. When they were left alone, Bimala makes a gesture of her repentance by touching Nikhil's feet with her forehead.

Chapter 18



Palanquin: a box- like carriage with four poles lifted by bearers.

In this final chapter, Bimala narrates how Sandip comes to their house as Nikhil and she were packing their belongings. He returns the six thousand rupees in guineas and leaves them as he had something to settle with the Dacca Muslims. Meanwhile, Chandranath Babu carries them the news that the Dacca Muslims are infuriated with the zamindars and that they have already looted Harish Kundu of his treasury. Hearing this, Nikhil rushes out. Bimala could not stop him. Mejorani again abuses her for not stopping her husband. Mejorani appeared before the estate manager and told him to go and tell Nikhil that she had fainted. This might bring him back. The wait became longer, and Mejorani started praying for Nikhil's safety. It was evening and still there was no news of Nikhil.

Finally at ten at night, the manager asked a rider what had happened. There was a doctor beside a **palanquin**, Dr. Mathur who had said that nothing was certain. Nikhil had had a very serious head injury, and Amulya was killed with a bullet shot in his chest.

13.4 PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

Nikhilesh

He is the male protagonist of Tagore's novel. He has the refinement and education, the sensibility and taste of the Bengali aristocratic household, and such a person popularly known as the 'bhadralok'. Although a zamindar, Nikhil does not use coercion on his subject. He deals with the most complicated subject with ease and composure. When he wants Bimala to step out of the house, and know a little more about the outside world, when he sets his mind to free her for the sake of her happiness, his urge to educate her by employing a British tutor Miss Gilby, we see Nikhil as a 'modern' man. His plunge into the disturbed area under his jurisdiction by the Dacca Muslims also shows that he was not scared to move to any extent whenever the safety of his subjects was concerned.

Bimala

Bimala is the female protagonist of this novel. The novel marks her gradual journey from the naïve, homebound woman to an emancipated one taking her own decisions. She enthusiastically participates in the tasks given out by Sandip as an activist in the Swadeshi movement. She is often seen muddled up in self contradictions, of feeling herself attracted towards Sandip. Her final reconciliation with Nikhil shows her maturity in the novel.

Sandip

Sandip, if not a villain, is definitely an anti hero in the novel. He plots to disrupt the peace of Nikhil's household by making Bimala a pawn in his dirty game of politics. All he wants is wealth. In his monologues, he often expresses his greed for money. His activism and patriotism are only disguises to cover his real intentions. He uses Bimala and Amulya to take his plan to its climax.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- Q1. How does the novel end?
- Q2. What kind of a narrator is Bimala?
- Q3. How does the character of Nikhilesh appear to be that of a modern man?

13.5 THEMES OF THE NOVEL

Some of the themes evident in the novel are as discussed below.

Globalisation Versus Swadeshi :

In the novel, we find Nikhil and Sandip nurturing two polar opposite tendencies. Where Sandip is a staunch follower of the Swadeshi, almost inflicting violence on those who do not agree to this idea, Nikhil believes in cutting across the boundaries of the nation, and he believes that it is only through international relations that India could prosper. In **Chapter 15**, Nikhil recollects how he had tried to make the people of his land prosperous. “..Sometimes I feel like showing them my books with the accounts of my work for the country. I suppose they are ignorant of the fact that I once tried to improve the quality of crops harvested in our motherland. I tried to get the farmers to grow sugarcane by importing seeds from Java and Mauritius; I left no stone unturned, as per the advice of the agriculture department of the government.”

Nikhil sometimes is found self contradicting when he encourages the use of locally made products at home. However, even in exercising this mild form of Swadeshi, he does not impose any rigidity. Nikhil and Sandip have two different methods of treating the subject of nationalism; while Sandip adopts a narrow, almost suffocating stance of insulating the country to her immediate sources, Nikhil opens up new avenues for the progress of the country and his people.



Dichotomy: a division into two parts or kinds.

Binary: in pairs.

Home and the World :

An obvious **dichotomy** that surfaces in the novel almost in every chapter is this home and the world **binary**. The drawing room of Nikhilesh’s house becomes a negotiating space for both the matters from these two regions to be discussed. Bimala first gets a glimpse of Sandip in the temple courtyard. Since then, her movement to the world has always been through Sandip. Her education is provided by Nikhil through home tutoring through Miss Gilby. She gets the knowledge of the world without much crossing the threshold of her home.

Role of Women :

Women's participation in the nationalist project forms a major chunk of the novel. While Bimala actively participates in the activist movement under Sandip's guidance, she also plays an important role in giving Nikhilesh that space to let her grow from within. Her absence in his life makes him realise how she must have felt when he was away for his higher studies in Calcutta. Mejorani, their second sister-in-law, also plays an important role when she poses as a counter foil to Bimala. She stays as a consolation to Nikhil whenever Bimala is engaged with Sandip. She tries to boost Nikhil's ego by demanding India made products and discarding imperial goods in his presence. She operates at home, while Bimala operates more on the outside. Mejorani, nevertheless, asserts her power over Bimala and Nikhil from the limited space provided to her.

Barrenness :

One important facet of the novel is that the three women in the house, Bororani, Mejorani and Chotorani (Bimala) are childless. Not a single child appears in the novel; Bimala feels compassionate towards Amulya when she sees him treading upon forbidden paths. Her maternal instincts are stirred at the very advent of Amulya. However, the barrenness of the women might be prophetic of the utter futility of bloodshed and violence that yields to no definitive conclusion. Their childlessness might be read as prophesy of the last tragic incident that occurs in the novel. Amulya's martyrdom remains an unsung, uncelebrated death, echoing the barrenness of one's life and existence.

Tradition and Modernity :

Seemingly, Nikhil appears to us as a traditionalist and Sandip, a modern individual. However, the traces of both the tendencies are present in both of them. In Nikhil's support extended to Bimala to make her educated, and give her space to grow, we see him as a modern man. She becomes emancipated with Nikhil's encouragement. But the same person becomes a traditionalist when he takes care of his widowed sisters-in-law only through small allowances made to them during festivals. Where did Nikhil's broadmindedness go when Mejorani and Bororani were both sentenced to an indefinite confinement within the house after they were widowed?

Sandip, on the other hand, talks about modernity in terms of involving women in nationalist projects. However, his very concept of offering sacrifices to the blood-thirsty deity to appease her from time-to-time marks him as a man still stuck in a primeval worldview. This dichotomy between tradition and modernity marks the furious years of Indian independence, specially the years between 1905 and 1908, when the Swadeshi movement was at its peak in Bengal.

13.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

The narrative of *Home and the World* proceeds with each of the three characters- Nikhilesh, Bimala and Sandip speaking in first person singular. We get to know events through the characters' monologues, and their interaction with each other. Each of them has a different attitude and approach towards life; each has his/her own distinctive ideology. Tagore probably adopted this style of narration because he did not want to appear biased to any one of them, and left the task solely upon the reader to decide how to interpret this text.

It has to be borne in mind all the time that we are reading a novel written by someone who won the Nobel Prize for Literature for his poetry. The narrative is imbued in poetry, especially those passages where Nikhil is philosophising his life with Bimala, and his idealisation of Truth. He vents his trauma of Bimala's gradual absence from his life through sad, blank verses. Even Sandip, known for his ruthlessness, idealises his veneration for Bimala as a deity in the form of poetry.



Jibes: jeer, make fun of, mock.

There are occasions when Mejorani throws **jibes** at Bimala for her unnecessary involvement with Sandip. She does it in the form of mocking songs to annoy Bimala.

The eighteen chapters in the novel have alternate characters to narrate their personal tales, and the parallel discourses on nation and nation building. Their speeches contribute to our information about the events that took place during the freedom struggles of the country.

The original Bengali version is unavailable to us. But this translated version adopts a language which is lucid and plain, and lacks the unnecessary superfluity of diction. The rhetoric used by Tagore carries home the fact that

he was himself a visionary who visualised India as a prospering nation in the global canvas.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



Q4. Which two characters in the novel represent the two extremes of globalization and swadeshi?

Q5. Did you find a poetic tone in the style of the novel?



13.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have familiarized yourself with the story of the novel and its characters. You have also got an idea of the style of the novel and its narrative structure. This unit has also chalked out significant themes that helped the plot to develop. To sum it up, this unit has acquainted you with Tagore's novel, *Home and the World*, and it aims to generate your own interpretation of the same.



13.8 FURTHER READING

1. Culler, Jonathan. (2007). "The Novel and the Nation" in *The Literary in Theory*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
2. Ghosh, Tapobrata. (2005). "The Form of *The Home and the World*" in R. Tagore's *The Home and the World: A Critical Companion* Ed. Pradip Kumar Dutta. London: Anthem Press.
3. Tagore, Rabindranath. (2005). *Home and the World*. Haryana: Penguin Books.



13.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: Being the narrator herself, Bimala does not shy away from expressing her own immaturity and insensibility when describing her reaction at every taunt of her sister-in-law.

Ans to Q2: When he wants Bimala to step out of the house, and know a little more about the outside world, when he sets his mind to free her for the sake of her happiness, his urge to educate her by employing a British tutor Miss Gilby, we see Nikhil as a ‘modern’ man.

Ans to Q3: The final chapter lends the novel its tragic dimension. Mejorani does not stop cursing Bimala till the end for the ill fate of Nikhil. Sandip returns the money, but that does not guarantee that he is a changed man. Amulya’s death makes him a martyr in the true sense, and Nikhil’s head injury indicates the violence already gathering up speed by outsiders.

Ans to Q4: In the novel, we find Nikhil and Sandip nurturing two polar opposite tendencies. Where Sandip is a staunch follower of the Swadeshi, almost inflicting violence on those who do not agree to this idea, Nikhil believes in cutting across the boundaries of the nation, and he believes that it is only through international relations that India could prosper.

Ans to Q5: The narrative is imbued in poetry, especially those passages where Nikhil is philosophising his life with Bimala, and his idealisation of Truth. He vents his trauma of Bimala’s gradual absence from his life through sad, blank verses. Even Sandip, known for his ruthlessness, idealises his veneration for Bimala as a deity in the form of poetry.



13.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

- Q1.** Discuss briefly the major themes of *Home and the World*.
- Q2.** “Nikhilish is a man of contradictions”. Draw a character sketch of Nikhilish through your reading of the text in the light of the above comment.
- Q3.** How does Tagore bring out the topic of disparity among the various castes in rural India through this novel? Answer with reference to the role of Chandranath Babu.
- Q4.** What role does Mejorani play in the plot development of the novel?
- Q5.** Discuss Bimala’s journey from innocence to experience as seen in the novel, *Home and the World*.
