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Department of English

Dr. K.N. Modi University, Newai, Rajasthan, India.



## **A Study of the Nationalist Sentiments in *Ghore Baire* in the light of Camus' *The Rebel***

**Barnamala Roy**

Postgraduate Student English,  
Presidency University, Kolkata.

**Abstract:** In my paper titled, "A Study of the Nationalist Sentiments in *Ghore Baire* in the light of Camus' *The Rebel*", I have attempted to explore the philosophical/ideological underpinnings behind nationalist movements (as portrayed in Tagore's novel) in comparison to Camus' idea of rebellion. The novel though rooted in the country's freedom struggles from the British Raj remains especially relevant for our times. The fatalism involved in rebellions that necessitate violence has been put to question and examined through *The Rebel's* discourses round 'crimes of passion' and 'crimes of logic'. The simultaneous 'becoming' and undoing of many through the course of the movement, egged by narrow patriotism, has also been traced. The choice of selecting an European text (published in 1951) to analyze motives of rebellions in the Eastern context owes to Tagore's statements in his essay, "Nationalism in India" that India tries to appropriate the models of the West when it comes to political movements when it should rather aim at building a 'samaj' or society.

**Keywords:** Nationalism, Woman, Absurd, Violence.

Sandeep: "I only seek the result", said I, "which belongs to today."

"The result I seek", said Nikhil, "belongs to all time." (Tagore)

The dialogic exchange of ideas between Sandeep and Nikhil in Tagore's *The Home and the World* appears from the perspective of Sandeep, whose analyses of Nikhil's idealism as impractical gains the greater focus. The urgency of the immediate driving rebellions and the farsightedness involved in contemplating a reformed future which forms the crux of the personality and vision of the two nationalists in the novel can be seen in the framework of



Camus' demarcation in *The Rebel*. In my view, the novel develops through an implicit critique of the rhetoric of affect and mechanized production of images to drive the masses towards an illusory freedom, where the origin ('utpatti') and the realization ('upolobdhi') of nationalist sentiments are gulped, without discarding or merely using as foil Sandeep whose very agenda is critiqued. What Sandeep's character embodies, apart from implicating the malaise at the heart of the Swadeshi Movement, maybe defined in Camus' words as "the rebellion cannot exist without a strange form of love" and that "real generosity towards the future lies in giving all to the present" (Camus 3).

"My beloved, it was worthy of you that you never expected worship from me. But if you had accepted it, you would have done me a real service" (Tagore Web). Worshipping as characteristically typical of women, inherited from her mother had assimilated into the daily gestures in Bimala towards her husband like touching his feet as he slept each morning and offering blossoms of devotion to his framed portrait. This stance is interpreted by Nikhil as a self-delusional practice by Bimala occupied with a false ideal of her husband that can only arouse in him humiliation and envy. The disservice rendered, thus, by removing himself from the pedestal of worship, seems to have redirected Bimala's worshipping impulses towards the nation vis-a-vis Sandeep. What Nikhilesh suspects Bimala of is however not far from the myth making he engages in resulting in an erasure of Bimala as a real woman (Chaudhuri 228). False idealism extends to the trope of conceiving the nation as motherhood through the body of the woman by nationalists like Gora (in the figure of Sucharita) and Sandeep (Bimala) informing the ideology of the rebellions. The "stupendous joy in (this) unquestioning surrender" (Tagore) that extended from the iconic Bimala to a nation of patriots engaging in an imitation of Western nationalism where conflict and conquest results in a "political and commercial aggressiveness" (Tagore 64) has been critiqued by Tagore. The stigmatization of the 'other' contrary to the inclusive spirit of India is reflected in the aggressive vocabulary of the extremists and contributes to the formation of a 'vigorous' national hero (Ray 192). The national hero, who inspires that "unquestioning



surrender” to the reclaiming of an oppressed nation, stands in opposition to the spirit of ‘sublimation’ of others within the self embodied by Nikhil (Chaudhuri 228) can be discussed in light of Camus’ *The Rebel*. Through becoming the erotic interest, ‘Queen Bee’ of Sandeep and her elevation to the status of the nation-mother, Bimala too attains a heroic status of national dimension.

Camus describes the rebel as a personage who can simultaneously say ‘yes’ and ‘no’- ‘no’ to the infringement of rights and ‘yes’ to the conviction of absolute right within him (10). In Sandeep, Tagore’s advocacy for the necessity of anti-colonial revolution and the distrust of its self-covetousness combines. Driven by the sense of ‘absolute right’, a response to the call of the hour gets distorted by ‘forceful desire’ (Tagore) - a distortion that is underlined in his monologue that establishes that “every man has a natural right” to possess and the country should be possessed by force. In his rapacious rhetoric appropriated when addressing Bimala or the concerns of the nation, his motives are deeply suspected because even if the rebellion itself may not essentially be egotistic, once the cause of rebelling is taken up one can rebel equally well against lies as against oppression (Camus 12). The very ambition of seizing one’s own nation forcefully implicates an interchangeable motives of colonialism and nationalism. “Indians complained of colonial arrogance, and yet they treated their own people so badly”- in the words of Ramachandra Guha (xiv). “At first I suspected nothing, I feared nothing” (Tagore). Bimala’s embracing of the nationalist cause can be relegated to that moment of awareness, the “sudden, dazzling perception” (Camus 11) when complete identification with other men and the absolute good. The rebel aspires to embrace ‘All’ or ‘Nothing’ and resolved to resist the rebellion even at the cost of death, as can be traced in the “supreme bliss” (Tagore) of impeding self-annihilation that Bimala becomes addicted to.

Bimala’s initiation into nationalist devotion beginning with an impulse to worship and surrender soon degenerated into inebriation which she describes as a “cataclysmic desire”, “a making havoc of myself” (Tagore). The passions which seethed in Sandeep only to



overwhelm Bimala and a nation of compatriots even when the former had ceased to respect him as an individual beyond his wizardry of speech can be consigned only to the negative aspect of rebellion. Whether it is in Sandeep's preaching of the theory of Injustice to pursue the nation's work or in Bimala's attachment to the cause of nationalism even after her recognition of Sandeep, resentment is discernible which is expressed by Scheler as an "autointoxication—the evil secretion, in a sealed vessel, of prolonged impotence" (Camus 12). The simultaneous resentment and fascination towards her own nightmarish state which is a far more intoxicating than the drunkard Munu is in alignment with Scheler's association of it with women who are prone to desires and passions. Resentment transforms into either "unscrupulous ambition" or "bitterness" (Camus 13) in accordance with its inculcation in an individual but in each case, it results in a refashioning of identity- a becoming. While "unscrupulous ambition" affects Sandeep, Bimala is finally shattered by the bitterness of a dawning realization of the corruption at the heart of the Swadeshi practisers. The ethical non-divide that emerges between Bimala and Nikhil leading to the eventual degeneration of the conjugal bond revolves round Nikhil's denouncing of the collective coarseness which mass mobilisations in movements often deviated into. From the incitement of 'ojoswita' (declamation) and 'uddipana' (excitement) through poems for pro-nation people like "Progress of the Country" to the renunciation of the folk tunes in *Baul* (1905), Tagore's delinking from mainstream politics by promoting narrow patriotic sentiments becomes apparent (Ray 200). The autointoxication or spirit of hatred and resentment implicit in the rhetoric of 'ojoswita' and 'uddipana' curbed Nikhil, often the mouthpiece of Tagore, from partaking in a self-covetous Swadeshi which ran on mutual instigation through the '*Bandematarm*' mantra. In Tagore's words which closely links the vices of the nationalist movements in India with the rebellions of the West, it is the hypnotic spell on the people who is unaware of its moral perversion but become dangerously resentful when pointed out. (Ganguly XIV) Sandeep and his followers can be ascribed to that community of rebels whose rebellion feeds on social injustice and is a "pillar of power" whose agenda of attacking the tyrants and the power of the rules than the rules themselves make revolution an impossibility,





according to Sartre (Paz 168). Tagore's eschewing of the political in preference of the social, as apparent in his *Nationalism* essays was in keeping with the enlightenment project of moral and spiritual upliftment of the people to approach a revolutionary order.

While the rebel figure can run risks to the extent of self-sacrificing for the cause of his/her rebellion, whether killing can be justified and any question of value is invoked by a rebellion informs *The Rebel*. Violence enters into the narrative of the nationalist movement in *The Home and the World* in the disconcerting incident where Sandeep challenges his followers at a picnic to cut off one leg of a grazing goat to encounter a lack of volunteers. He proves his mettle at being above human weakness by perpetrating the task himself evoking a fascinated reverence from his followers. The drive to murder and willingness towards self-destruction is simultaneously included in the narrative of nationalist struggles. Camus takes up the argument regarding the justification of "crimes of passion" and "crimes of logic" in *The Rebel*. Camus moves from the negation of the self involved in the trend of suicide thirty years ago to the denial of others through ideology that justifies killing in rebellions. In the process of revolution attempting to find a logic within itself, the rightness or the wrongness of the murderer becomes less crucial as movements are not driven by demarcation between the just and the unjust but between the master and the slave. Awareness of the absurd removes scruples as a determining factor in the legitimacy of killing inciting the proliferation of crimes but even though ideology logically validates these crimes perpetrated in the name of movements, the right to kill another human still remains open to debates. Camus' concerns about the rights to violence and murder is addressed by Tagore's assertion of the importance of the individual in the larger scheme of things. While Sandeep could easily lead his nationalist troops to commit crimes of passion and logic, Nikhil would starkly renounce the sacrifice of life and one's scruples to achieve one's ends as is underlined by statements by the two proponents of nationalism. Nikhil refuses to acknowledge success won at the cost of the human soul because he finds it more valuable than success, while bloodlust is implicated in that of Sandeep's statement-"I want the western military style to prevail, not the Indian. We shall then not be ashamed of the flag of our passion, which mother Nature has sent with us as



our standard into the battlefield of life” (Tagore)

Amulya, one among the many young patriots who left their education, homes and jobs to partake of the nationalist movement, incites the second awareness in Bimala- this time of horror at the utter lack in aesthetics in the drives of the romanticized rebellions. In an exchange, where Bimala asks Amulya if he can arrange for fifty thousand rupees for utilisation in the work of nation-making as Sandeep had demanded of her, he answers with an afflicted “why not?” that fails to convince Bimala of the ethicality of the means he contrives to adopt. He first proposes looting the market to bribe the watchman who guards the treasury but realizing the impracticality of the venture, arrives at the conclusion of shooting him. The sight of the pistol in the boy’s hand and ready utterances from the *Gita*, stupefies Bimala regarding the allure of an imagined freedom from oppression she had been besotted to and which in her becoming, had also been her undoing as of many misguided young nationalists like Amulya. The misguiding romanticization of the nationalist movement extends from the ‘egotistic’ and ‘romantic’ hero, explored in Sandeep since the inception of the novel, who in the singleness of his purpose, disavows innocence and embraces human injustice and deliberate violence (Camus 28). Camus mentions that a suitable crime committed in a frenzied state reveals the whole life of the individual- Amulya’s contemplation of the heinous crime with relative ease reveals the sham of the nationalist rebel life Bimala had engaged in. From the suggestion of dismissal of Ms. Gilby to the attack of her on the road by an young nationalist, Bimala had failed to dissociate herself from the aggressiveness of nationalist pride that is stripped of compassion and pity. Much like Amulya understands pity as the height of cowardice that refrains from hurting one’s own tender instincts (Tagore). Amulya’s decision of murder confuses the boundary between ‘fatalistic’ and ‘calculated’ murder (Camus 11) because while the former is preconditioned by the feeling of the absurd, the latter cannot be accorded to the same. While the consciousness of the absurd has been initiated into Amulya at a premature age wherein ‘evil’ and ‘virtue’ have become caprices, Sandeep and other patriots who believe in calculated murder for the freedom of the nation would ensure interpellation by the same. The incident signifies at once a return for Bimala and the



awakening of the true Mother in her-a mother that longs to protect the humaneness of the child from misappropriation breaks away from the eroticized symbol of motherhood created by the gaze of a national patriarch that only provides illusory strength to the masses. Tagore's repeated appeals to the ideals of the 'Universal Human' (Banerji 70) implicated in his suspicion of nationalism led to his fashioning of a cosmopolitanism, according to Asish Nandy, through the cultural revival by a national ideology he found lacking. (Banerji 70) In assuming a social responsibility towards the likes of Amulya, Bimala momentarily subsumes herself into Tagore's philosophy of placing the people before the nation- what her husband had meant in his convictions that he could not be oppressive to the nation even if for the sake of the nation.

The extent to which the patriotism based on false idealism can break havoc in that dedication is transformed into intoxication can be realized in the final act of stealing from her husband's treasury for Sandeep's project of nation-building even though she is conscious of committing a greater disservice to the nation rather than justice in her act. Even though she thoroughly recognizes the opportunism in Sandeep's person and realizes her mistake in being ideologically opposed to Nikhil's sensible and sensitive form of nationalism, Sandeep's personality still incites her into believing in what she knows she cannot believe in. Nikhil could perceive with clarity that Bimala's words were contoured by the shadows of Sandeep's ideas and not by her own realizations so her words could easily be rendered fickle. He refrained from dismissing Sandeep on similar grounds in spite of his conflicts with him in the nation-building vision, because his opposed ideals were rooted in authenticity, that is in Sandeep, the origin of the cause and its realization were not divorced. Camus in *The Rebel*, establishes the necessity of a rebellion's transition into a revolution since, "the rebel is nothing if not a revolutionary" (Camus 124). Revolution presupposes the "absolute malleability of the human nature" (124) which can be reduced to historical forces while rebellion aims to surpass the limits of history. Tagore's ardent support of the Swadeshi movement in its earliest stage by publication of poems and songs to contribute to the frenzy





of the time was auto-critiqued in his essays in *Prabasi* as pointed out by Swapan Chakravorty (Guha XV). The evolution in his identity as a nationalist and social thinker, summed up in his own words-“I took a few steps down the road, then stopped”- contributed to the variety of incomprehension he faced all his life. According to Guha, he had been in turn accused of being anti-Western, colonial agent, as an extreme patriot by the foreigner and not as patriotic enough by the Indian (ix). This echoes Nikhil’s contingent position in *The Home and the World* where his refusal to be swayed by the extremism of mass politics in spite of his truer dedication to the cause of the nation evoked public criticism, slanderous reports, caricatures and lampoons in the newspapers burning of effigies. If Nikhil appears to be more of an ideal reformist than a revolutionary in Camus’ terminology throughout the novel, Sandeep too stops short at being a rebel, hence, the transition from the rebellion to the revolution is barely played out though Nikhil turns out to be the more revolutionary in that he is futuristic.

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