# TRANSCULTURALISM

## A CRITIQUE


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## About the Book

According to Mikhail Epstein, **Transculture** is a new aspect of cultural development, which transcends the borders oftraditional, national, racial, gender and professional cultures. Transculturalism may be viewed as a unifying force of cultural diversity and an imbibing source of virtual belongingness of an individual to the multiplicity of cultures. It is a well-known fact that transculturalism is rooted in the pursuit to define shared interests and common values across cultural and national borders. It is interesting to find how different groups interact sharing common concerns as well as those that differentiate. Transculturism seeks to locate power in terms of language, history and arts.

In "Their Humanism, Our Humanism: A Trans-cultural Study" by Dr. Mir Jahan Ali Prodhani examines humanism as classicism and its varied application besides throwing light on the role of classics in transforming a chaotic assortment into a heroic experience. Humanism, characterized by a sense of personal autonomy and critical attitude, is viewed as a unifying force of the literary and historical disciplines and a reforming source of the social order. It analyses how Renaissance humanism, transcending the borders, led to the emergence of the modern, creative literature in India. A. Farhana Khatoon, in her paper "A Journey from Pastoralism to Modernity" traces out Robert Frost's technique of depicting the harsh realities as well as disintegration of moral values in contemporary life. There is a focus on the human experience and how it has been reduced with all its sensation, emotions, and knowledge of good and evil to materialism in this world.

"Revisiting the Poetic World of Emily Dickinson" by Sharmila Banu makes an observation that the nineteenth century English literature was filled up with various elements of Nature , given new colours by Emily Dickinson. Her nature poems reflect the keen observation of the various phenomena of Nature.

than a novelist engaged in the task of weaving an illusion of reality. The paper "Novel with a Social Purpose: A Study of Romen Basu's Rural Novels" by Dr. P. Somanath, tries to explore the fictional artistry of Romen Basu and his commitment to a 'cause' in each of his novels with a positive approach to life. He belongs to the tradition of social realism and humanism established by Mulk Raj Anand and fostered chiefly by Bhabani Bhattacharya and Kamala Markandaya. The present paper focuses on Romen Basu's three rural novels – *The Tamarind Tree, Outcast,* and *Blackstone* – as they present the social and economic problems of rural Bengal. They present a steady progression from non-violence to full-scale violence as the means of establishing a just social and economic order.

Kakara Sasikumar in his paper sums up the Nihilistic attitudes of the characters of the three novels under examination and analyses the philosophy of John Barth in the postmodernist literature. This dissertation makes a very modest attempt to explore Barth's philosophy in his Nihilist Trilogy and the impact of Nihilism on the minds of several characters in these three novels namely, *The Floating Opera, The End of the Road* and *The Sot-Weed Factor* which form the Maryland trilogy.

The paper by M. Ayesha Anjum is intended to examine R. K. Narayan's attitude towards India and the depiction of Indian reality as reflected in his essays. His distinctive sense of humour, his trademark irony, his bemused, 'knowing' 'overseeing' perspective, his rootedness in religion and family values and his inescapable capturing of the essence of Indian sensibility—all have been looked at from a refreshingly new viewpoint, hitherto only partly touched or left unexplored and unattempted. The paper attempts to present a critical study on the vast pool of literary output of R.K. Narayan.

The paper by Dr. Indira Devi throws light on how *Haroun and Sea of Stories*, dressed in the garb of a children's story delights the children with its verbal play. But for adults, the decoding

of this allegory is alluringly intriguing and challenging. The story starts like a very common point, a tale of a father and son and starts spinning its magic by adding so many characters and the dramatic jugging taken off adding complex developments, unfurling into a poignantly incredible journey. This marvellous account stands as a perfect concoction of fable, fantasy, scientific romance, political allegory, art, moral and psychology. C.N.Bhargavi's paper "*Feminine Archetypes in Nwapa's One is Enough*" is a portrayal of the male-dominance and the denial of woman's economic independence in African society. It views how a mere weaker sex, chosen only to render sexual service, retaliates furiously, marking the beginning of a new era of freedom and equality.

M.Muni Ranga Swamy in *Self and Society in John Updike's Short Stories* tries to highlight Updike's remarkable style within the brevity of short story and examines how he combines the characteristics of the novel and the short story to create a new genre. *Bech: A Book* , *The Same Door* , *Pigeon Feathers* , *The Music School* etc. won the appreciation for Updike's brilliant handling of his short stories and his genius for showing the magic. A. Amana Khatoon in "Feminism in Buchi Emecheta's Novels" focuses on the theme of motherhood to reconstruct the sexual identity of an African woman. It is the woman's struggle towards self actualization and self-defining endeavour without demeaning the joys of motherhood. "Richard Wright and the Notion of Black Alienation" by Dr. S.M.Basha is an attempt to explore the theme of the quest in African American Fiction with special reference to the works of the angry young man, Richard Wright. It examines how rejection, alienation, and selflessness form the characteristic features of Wright's heroes who seek violence as the means of liberation. Dr. M. Farida Begum in her paper, "Feminist Concerns in African Novel" aims at justifying the contribution of the feminist writers to the resurgence and renovation of African society. She upholds the chief concern of feminism which is to make a woman find the destiny on her own, overcoming all the external as well as self-imposed inhibitions, besides attaining economic independence and self-reliance.

This book, as a compendium of 20 papers, tries to take the readers on a transcultural journey through the itinerary of shared feelings. Encompassing different genres, an attempt is made to offer new insights into the issues pertaining to transcultural studies. It is fervently believed that this book finds favour with discerning lovers of literature.

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We thank Dr. Mir Jahan Ali Prodhani of Northeast India Publication (NIP) Dhubri, Assam for accepting our proposal gracefully and bringing out this volume with affection. We acknowledge the staff of Kohinoor Offset Press, College Nagar, Dhubri, Assam for giving this book an elegant shape.

We solicit the views of discerning readers to help us rectify the mistakes and improve quality of content and expression in our future ventures.

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# Contents

# DRESSED WITH WORDS: A STUDY OF THE FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN TAGORE'S *THE HOME AND THE WORLD*

*Subhrajyoti Chanda*

*The Home and the World* (*Ghare Baire*), published in 1916, is set against the backdrop of a volatile Bengal where the Swadeshi (a nationalist movement begun in Bengal in 1905, which called for boycott on goods made in Britain) movement has spread beyond the contours of the towns to the rural areas of the province. This novel, originally serialized in the Bengali magazine Sabujpatra, marks a break from the earlier novels with Tagore experimenting with new narrative strategies. What the reader gets to read in *The Home and the World* are personal diaries of Bimala, Nikhilesh and Sandip written in first person; although the setting is political, it is essentially the stories of the inner lives of the three chief characters. There have been many dedicated leaders of the Swadeshi time who favoured armed struggle, Surya Sen or Masterda of the Chittagong Armory Raid fame being one of them; Tagore's Sandip is no such character, in fact, he is a hard core materialist wanting to realize his base desires under the guise of nationalist struggle. Tagore's reluctance towards presenting the nationalists in a better light can be traced to his utter disgust at the pistol cult of the Swadeshi movement, at the sentimentality and emotionalism attached to the worshipping of the country as mother

as underscored in the call Bande Mataram. Nietzsche's words – " To be is to be strong, strong enough to exist, to survive, to assert, to affirm, to hold one's own and go one's own way. The will to live is, then, essentially a Will for Power..." finds a (not so) distant resonance in what Sandip thinks:

> Let moral ideals remain merely for those poor anemic creatures of starved desires whose grasp is weak. Those who can desire with all their soul and enjoy with all their heart, those who have no hesitation or scruple, it is they who are the anointed of Providence.
>
> (35)

But Sandip hesitates, he gets conscientious and the picture which emerges at the end is that of a man who has failed to live up to his own standards. Upendranath Bhattacharya observes that Sandip essentially remains a curious creation of Tagore, resulting from the partial amalgamation of Swadeshi, Western materialism and Nietzsche's radical views.

Bimala, leading a sheltered life after her marriage, is at sea when confronted with the idea of nationalism in the world outside. Sandeep, the nationalist firebrand equates her enquiring eyes to stars "looking out for something unknown." The starry dimness of her gaze, Sandip finds, pales in comparison to her 'inner fire'. He redefines the disposition of the Indian woman; it is not the personality within but her gold bordered sari which transforms Bimala from a worshipping wife into a radical: *"That is the flame we want, visible fire! Look here, Queen Bee, you really must do us the favour of dressing once more as a living flame."*

(40)

Being entranced by Sandip's fiery speech, Bimala resolves to 'burn all her foreign clothes.' She literally tries to transfer the fire discovered in her by Sandip into a bonfire. The paradoxical logic of the nationalists that the 'destructive excitement' of burning would give the

'energy to build' is not appreciated by Nikhil: *"That is as much to say, that you cannot light the house unless you set fire to it."* (13)

The Swadeshi movement in the early decades of the twentieth century changes the usual; the rhythm of life even in rural Bengal gets altered. Even Bimala, forgetting the decorum, comes out of the purdah (the system of keeping women from public view). She describes the sudden change in her world view with the destiny of a river. She, a small village river, is at a loss when confronted with the tidal waves of Swadeshi movement: *"...my breasts heaved; my banks gave way and the great drumbeats of the sea waves echoed in my mad current."* (42)

Always morose because of her lack of beauty like her sister-in-law, Bimala suddenly finds a reason to rejoice in the praise from a handsome and eloquent nationalist like Sandip. Attitudinally Nikhil and Bimala have been miles apart, the emergence of Sandip in the scene only made obvious the truth. Image of a surgeon's operation table is used to suggest the cutting of the nuptial knot: *"When the knife was busy with my life's most intimate tie, my mind was clouded with my fumes of intoxicating gas that I was not in the least aware of what cruel thing was happening."* (42)

The 'storm' of nationalism outside and the presence of Sandip, who literally becomes Bimala's guru by initiating her with the mantra of 'Bande Mataram', within, destroys all illusion harboured by Nikhil. The 'house' that he hopes to build with love eventually collapses and like Vidyapati he laments the emptiness in life: *"It is August, the sky breaks into a passionate rain. Alas, empty is my house."* (82)

Truth is not always pleasant; Bimala indulges even with full knowledge of the consequences of her actions. The poet uses the river simile, again, to comment on the enigma of human nature:

*"When, like the river, we women keep to our banks, we give nourishment with all that we have; when we overflow them we destroy with all that we are."*

(42)

Nikhil, the ever loving husband, has found his joy only in providing, in decking his wife with fashionable clothes without ever asking for anything in return; when Bimala faces the 'hungry eyes' of Sandip, she suddenly discovers a new role for herself - the role of the giver. Her silent cravings for a child probably find an expression in her wholehearted wish to be the manifestation of Shakti (the female principle of Divine energy), the Motherland personified. The complex nature of the human psyche is painted by Tagore with the fantastic imagery of the 'ripening rice,' 'village groves,' 'river at night.'

That she leaves her bed at night and moves to the terrace to witness in the darkness 'the vague embryo of some future creation' is symbolic of her deviation from her husband's path. Hypnotized by the mantra of Bande Mataram, she enters into reverie and sees the 'country, woman like [herself], standing expectant.' But the mother to be has no calling; she is totally oblivious of her household chores, her motherly/wifely duties: *"She has left home, forgotten domestic duties; has nothing but an unfathomable yearning which hurries her on . . ."*

(92)

The vision reflects a picture of purposelessness; the nationalist movement, under the guidance of greedy leaders having ulterior motives, was heading nowhere. The woman in the vision is expectant, but there is clearly little promise of a bright future; sleepless Bimala in her waking dream conceives the land in the guise of a mother upon whom she projects her own dilemma, her yearnings; but the meaning of all these remains obscure: *"Both the end and the means have become equally shadowy to me. There remains only the yearning and the hurrying on."*

The play of light and shade / chiaroscuro is there in many of Tagore's songs and stories, for instance, he sings in Gitanjali: *"Aaj dhaner khete roudrachayae / Lukochuri khela / Nil akashe ke bhashale / Shada megher bhela."* 'Today light and shadow play hide and seek in the rice field/Who is it that sails the raft of cloud in the blue sky?' This interplay parallels the alternate presence of sorrow and solace in human life; Nikhil is a crusader for truth, he accepts, albeit with pain, the reality of Bimala's position. He finds solace in the presence of 'big star' - 'the everlasting lamp of the bridal night'. That star on the cloudy July night becomes for him the symbol of his 'Eternal love...steadfastly waiting for him through the ages, behind the veil of material things.'

Nikhil to Sandip and Bimala is honest but unimaginative and therefore unattractive. He is compared to a lamp having oil but no flame. Darkness in Tagore remains the symbol of mystery of the unknown; Sandip and Bimala are reflected upon as dark flint stones: *"You must come to violent conflicts and make noise in order to produce your sparks. But their disconnected flashes merely assist your pride, and not your clear vision."*
(31)

Passion for Sandip is like the street light that guides one to one's goal and even Bimala wholly supports his proposition. Passion is real and Nikhil accepts it as truth but at the same time 'recognizes the truth of restraint.' The end justifies the means for Sandip and he does not hesitate 'to dilute ten per cent of truth with ninety percent of untruth'. When held speechless by Sandip's argument that 'Truth grows up by itself like weeds and thorns', and that 'fruit of true success ripens only by cultivating the field of untruth,' Chandranath Babu, Nikhil's tutor, observes: *"I believe Sandip is not irreligious, - his religion is the obverse side of truth, like the dark moon, which is still the moon, but all that is light has gone over to the wrong side."*
(107)

The poet in Tagore paints with images drawn from the outside world: the trees, flowers, rivers with boats drifting on it are

the constituents of his picture 'drawn' with words. Sandip a shrewd observer of the human psyche understands the dilemma he has placed Bimala into with his charisma, but even with all the power at his disposal he hesitates, he commiserates with her. She is described as the snared deer 'straining at her bonds'; but she is also the ripe fruit that is about to drop off from the loosening hold of the stem: *"The fruit hangs on the branch by the stem, but that is no reason why the claim of the stem should be eternal...All its sweetness has been accumulated for me; to surrender for me; to surrender itself to my hand is the reason of its existence."* (76)

Upendranath Bhattacharya observes that the pain Sandip feels for Bimala shows his awakening of love for her. Even his exultation on receiving the sovereign, which he cannot spend, shows his change in attitude:

> This is not money, but the petals of the divine lotus of power; crystallized strains of music from the pipes that play in the paradise of wealth! I cannot find it in my heart to change them, for they seem longing to fulfill their destiny of adorning the neck of beauty.
>
> (181)

Sandip's vacillations make him discover the truth about himself - he does not have the momentum of the storm; instead he is no stronger than a bee circling the flower. He finds his views changing and merging with Nikhil's that personality essentially remains same, even when the garb is changed:

> The colouring of ideas which man gives himself is only superficial. The inner man remains as ordinary as ever. If some one, who could see right into me, were to write my biography, he would make me out to be no different from that lout of a Panchu, or even from Nikhil.
>
> (77)

Lonely Nikhil finds his essential unity with the vegetation outside: 'My mind lives under the trees in the open, directly receives upon itself the messages borne by the free winds... and responds...to all the musical cadences of light and darkness (136)'. The presence of imagery suggestive of boat sailing in the river is ubiquitous in Tagore's poetry and fiction: 'With my empty, drifting heart longing to anchor on to something, I traced my steps towards the inner gardens'. The chrysanthemum rows appear 'like a wave of green breaking into iridescent foam'. Standing 'near the bank of chrysanthemum,' Nikhil finds the full moon personified as the mischievous beloved:

> It seemed as if she had come a-tiptoe from behind, and clasped the darkness over the eyes, smiling mischievously'. In the presence of the moon, Nikhil, the worshipper of truth frees Bimala to choose her own path: 'I tell you, truly Bimala, you are free. Whatever I may or may not have been to you, I refuse to be your fetters.' (138)

Tagore, time and again, returns to the subject of appearance – the presentation of the country in woman's garb by the nationalists; dressing the moon/star as the 'eternal beloved' and also the literal dress rehearsals by humans. Sandip offers a new dimension to whole idea of dressing; he arouses Bimala by placing her on a high pedestal, making her the incarnation of the idea of the motherland: 'The Geography of the country is not the whole truth. No one can give up his life for a map! When I see you before me, then only do I realize how lovely my country is.' His desire for Bimala finds a release in his idea of martyrdom, the lover and the worshipper become one: '...if I fall fighting, it shall not be on the dust of some map-made land, but on lovingly spread skirt...like that of the earthen-red sari you wore the other day, with the broad blood-red border.' Bimala exults in her new found strength in her garb; she revels in her re-presentation as Shakti/Durga.

Taught by Sandip and intoxicated by her new role, she

hopes to impress Nikhil with her adornments and succeed in getting his assurance about the removal of foreign goods from his market. Without any compunction Bimala advocates the use of tyranny in the name of the country. Shocked Nikhil finds her view distasteful: *"To tyrannize for the country is to tyrannize over the country."*

His argument with Bimala clears all doubt letting Nikhil come to terms with truth. The mute pain of loss that he has been harbouring disappears and 'to [his] surprise [he] discovered that [his] mind was freed from all mistiness'. The essential difference that is there between him on one hand and Bimala and Sandip on the other is made obvious by Bimala's crass remark. Both Nikhil and Sandip devote considerable part of their time and energy towards dressing up the woman of their choice – Bimala. Nikhil literally lavishes her with finery while Sandip does it with metaphors. For Sandip it is the dress - the gold bordered sari of Bimala, for instance – that enhances the worth of the wearer and for Nikhil it is the personality of the wearer that rises above all trappings:

> Till that moment, I had never viewed Bimala's adornment as a thing apart from herself. But today the elaborate manner in which she had done up her hair, in the English fashion, made it appear a mere decoration. That which before had the mystery of her personality about it, and was priceless to me, was now out to sell itself cheap.
> (110)

The river image also explains the vulnerability and innocence of youth: "...And Amulya, poor dear boy, when he first came to me - how the current of his life flushed with colour, like the river at dawn!" Bimala is torn between the opposite pulls exerted by Sandip and Nikhil, although her husband frees her, there is no end to her ordeal:

> ...how easy my husband found it to tell me that he set me free!... It is like setting a fish free in the sky,

— for how can I move or live outside the loving care which has always sustained me?

(143)

From many an instance in the novel it emerges that Bimala reveres her husband, she ceremoniously goes through the drill of taking the dust of his feet every morning but whether she does so with love remains uncertain. Again, she meditates on Sandip's photo and yearns for his company. It may be said that her reverence and her worship is all for Nikhil but her love, even with the full knowledge of the hypocrisy, remains with Sandip. At the end the little river of the village meets the sea: *"Now is the time to set sail towards that great confluence, where the river of love meets the sea of worship. In that pure blue all its muddiness sinks and disappears."*

(212)

*The Home and the World* (*Ghare Baire*) unlike *Gora*, *Chokher Bali* (Eye-Sore) or *Noukadubi* (*The Boat Wreck*) lacks the warmth of life, observes Upendranath Bhattacharya. The readers get to read only the self-reflections, recapitulations, dreams and thoughts of the trio; interestingly, all of them without fail are adept at commenting poetically on serious issues, which is quite unlikely in real life. In other words, the characters are not lifelike; they are tools to voice the author's views. What emerges from the discussion is that Tagore is more a poet, philosopher, thinker in The Home and the World than a novelist engaged in the task of weaving an illusion of reality.

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