

## ***Ghare Baire* – Tagore’s Text to Ray’s Film– A Revaluation**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article focuses on the adaptation of '*Ghare Baire*' (translated as *The Home and the World*) written in the context of 1905 when there was a plan going on for the partition of Bengal. Satyajit Roy made a movie out of this novel retaining the name in 1984. This adaptation raises issues somewhat at variance with the novel. The film is an opportunity to look at the contemporary world from an educated and elite woman's point. As the social context during the Tagore's time appeared to be redundant during Ray's making the film, he shifted to the other issues which were gaining ground throughout the world. The film becomes a restating of the story from Bimala, the major protagonist's angle. While discussing this aspect, the translation of novelistic language to filmic language and some other aspects need to be considered.

### **KEYWORDS**

Adaptation; film language; the language of the novel

Intrinsically connected to each other, translation and adaptation are both practices and results of communication and a simple variation of the translation- process. They are an integral part of the global interaction. Baker and Saldanha foreground intricacies of meaning while translation interprets inter-cultural activities. There are others like Gambier and Gottlieb who feel that there is no translation without adaptation (35).

Julie Sanders in *Adaptation and Appropriation* emphasizes that an "adaptation" will usually contain omissions, rewritings, may be additions, but will still be recognized as the work of the original author (26). After adaptation of a source text, certain

characteristics of the original may remain but the new text will be more that of the adapter.

In spite of its being an integral part of the translation process, adaptation faced serious criticism as far as classical translation studies were concerned. Hendrik van Gorp remarks that translation creates 'an ideal image' of a source text while adaptation undermines it (66). However, others feel if a translator fails to adapt habitually, the target text becomes weak. (Vinay, Darbelnet 41) Adaptation is a way to make a text 'easily comprehensible to target audience via the process of approximation and updating' and to bring the source and target text to a 'shorter cultural and temporal distance' (Sanders 19). Thus adaptation, according to Vinay,

Darbelnet and Sanders, has some distinctive features like appropriation, rewriting, and editing, making it somewhat more liberated than the source text.

Some of the most common areas where translation needs adaptation are 'cross-code breakdown', 'situational or cultural inadequacy', 'genre switching' and 'disruption of a communication process' (Baker and Saldanha 41). In most cases, all these aspects work jointly.

Morris Beja classified adaptation into two main types- one type mostly faithful to the text while the other type, when adapted in a different medium, prefers to make changes freely in the original work (82). Michael Klein and Gillian Parker categorise adaptation into three types- one is literal translation faithful to the text; the second type keeps the core structure of the narrative re-interpreting or de-constructing the source text. The third type regards the source material merely as raw material. (9-10)

Adaptation for films combines in itself literature, drama and modern technology. Film and the novel belong to two separate genres, with some meeting points too between the two. Both transfer images but a novelist uses the word as a medium while filmmakers use the moving pictures. The point of similarity is that it is the brain to receive such images but brains may react in their own way to these images.

Film adaptation needs special attention. Claiming adaptation to be an independent work, Balaz thinks a film-script writer has the right to use the novel as a raw material for his/her purpose. Not all novels are worth for film-adaptation as some features are uniquely filmic while others peculiarly novelistic. Therefore, the same cannot be converted unless destroyed, as is the case with Proust and Joyce whose novels cannot be filmed because some systems of filming do not allow such adaptation. (Bluestone 211) The

screenwriter must be aware of the limitations of the medium and make necessary adjustments accordingly, which makes him another author. For the French Auteurs, the film has a language which the film director expresses using lens instead of pens.

Taking a cue from Ronald Barthes, Brian McFarlane distinguishes between 'Cardinal Function' and 'Indices'. Cardinal Function forms the crux of the story. As it is not language dependent, it can be directly transferred from novelistic to filmic mode. But in 'Indices', only that part containing information of names, age, the profession of characters, details of physical setting etc. can be transferred. (13-14). Andrew Dudley refers to three modes of the relation between the film and the text - namely borrowing, intersection and transformation. When the cultural aspects of the original text are transferred, it is borrowing. Intersection means initiating interaction between the literary forms of one period and the filmic forms of our period adapting what suits our period and what resists it. The sociological aspects need to be considered while studying adaptation of films. Films appear to be assessing critically the theme of the novel as film adaptation needs selecting some and excluding other episodes, at times expanding while at other times contracting details. This adaptation also offers alternatives to some of the specific areas in the novels providing fanciful flights to some characters making the film more convincing than the novel and, in the process, enriching the novel-appreciation.

Wherever there is a screen adaptation of literary texts, fidelity, criticism and transformation work though not at the same amount everywhere (Andrews). Selection of a text depends, more or less, on the 'why' and 'how' factors. The ideological stand of the film director and the relevance-factor also matters a lot in deciding a literary text. Furthermore, a text may be relevant for a particular time.

Sometimes, the handling of the subject matter of a text is so beautifully handled that it could be good for the film medium.

The present article studies how far cardinal function and indices work in the adaptation the novel *Ghare Baire (The Home and the World)* into film and to what extent. However, at the very outset, a reference to Bhaskar Chattopadhyay's assessment, which seems to be representative of the fault-finding critics of Ray's film *Ghore Baire*, appears to be relevant:

The biggest weakness of the film is the execution of that same story. While Tagore weaves a beautiful tale of love, companionship, deceit and freedom (in the most wholesome sense of the term) against the backdrop of the nationalist movement . . . Ray stretches the story too thin with unconvincing portrayals of its trio of characters. The film is held together by nothing other than over two hours of dialogue, the camera seems too lazy to do anything other than staying on the face of the characters delivering their lines, there's hardly any emoting, and wherever there is any, it tries to overcompensate, leading to disastrous results. . . . Whatever precious little that works in the film is only because of the story and the story alone. (Chattopadhyay)

At the same time, it is also to be observed to what extent the cultural aspects are transmuted from the text to the film, and how the interaction between the novel and the film was undertaken and how the element of transformation was done effectively. The adaptation of a novel to film is responsible for a number of factors – it leads to the change of the language with the change of the medium. There is a change in the narrative techniques too. The imageries communicating emotions of multiple shades too are modified. In addition,

the recipient type changes-from readers to viewers. The director's viewpoint matters which may be different from the novelist. Added to this is the demand of the age which counts a lot. In her 'His Films, Their Stories', Meenakshi Mukherjee sums up the process of text to film adaptation.

Adaptation, the process of re-emediations in the form of inter-semiotic transpositions from one sign system to (e.g. words) to another (e.g. images), has always been central to the process of film-making. Since almost the beginning, adaptations have been studied as translations and transformations, as selections and specifications, as re-imaginings of literature. (196)

Perhaps, through these above-quoted lines, Mukherjee sheds light on Ray's understanding of adaptation by referring to the excerpts from rejoinders that Ray wrote in response to his critics on his adaptation. Before initiating any discussion on an adaptation of the novel, few points need to be taken into active considerations. When Tagore was publishing his novel in 1916, the nationalist movement was taking shape. This was not the case with Ray whose movie was released in 1984. Indian Independence for him was history and he could well perceive the movement with accuracy and clarity.

In her 'Two Masters One Text', Somdatta Mandal makes a close study of Tagore and Ray to assess the extent of reconstruction that Ray undertook of the Tagore novel in order to bring out a 'constant and consistent text' of his own. (38-39) For such an attempt, bold I must say, Ray, the director, invited a lot of criticism from his 'ill-informed critics' who were in favour of the word to word 'fidelity' to the original text. In both Ray and Tagore, *The Home and the World* is a presentation of an inter-communal conflict wherein the Hindus and Muslims entangled

themselves in cross-cultural interactions. Alongside the Nationalist-agitation which was intensifying every day with people joining the movement more and more, the practice of 'Swadeshi' and boycott became a threat to the racist British government. With this, the emotional commotion within the lives of Nikhilesh, Bimala and Sandeep aggravated. For Ray, as some critics interpret, the whole novel revolves around a tension between the home and the outside world.

Both Tagore and Ray faced bitter criticism from their country-men – one for writing such a novel and the other for making such a film of this novel – of course for different reasons. Tagore was charged with anti-nationalism responsible for destroying Hindu morality. It was a consciousness impregnated by the western philosophy that affected Tagore's thought process to a large extent. In reality, Tagore distanced himself from the ongoing turmoil and observed the incidents from a historical point of view. For Tagore, both the colonial masters and the *Bhadrolok* have a common programme- to torture the poor, the inarticulate and illiterate Indians. What Tagore wanted to say was that the educated middle-class Indians were humbugs and hypocrites and followers of conservative philosophy. Tagore was vehemently opposing the involvement of the school and college-goers to participate in the nationalist movement and particularly the type led by Anushilan Samity and other terrorist groups.

Why and to what extent has Ray gone away from Tagore's novel while adapting it to the film? That Ray's *Ghare Baire* is not a replica of Tagore's novel is indicative of the comment of Sarmistha Panja facilitating us to understand the extent Ray moved away from Tagore in his creation of the movie. "Perhaps if the novel had been closer to Satyajit Ray's cinematic version of 1984 the turn of the

century Calcutta reading public would have been happier." (109)

Ray was criticised for deviating here and there from the original. However, he had his point. He recreated a film script of his own making an adaptation of the text. The sociological aspect that led Tagore to write his novel was different for Ray. Like so many other films of his, some critics pointed out, Ray's purpose was to present a conflicting state between the home and the world and not anything on the volatile state of Bengal at that juncture in 1905.

Set in the backdrop of Bengal revolution, with emotions centring on 'swadeshi' and 'Bande Mataram', the plot of the novel as well as the cinema evolves round with three major characters –Bimala, Nikhilesh and Sandeep. Nikhil is Bimala's husband and Sandeep his friend.

While Ray gave a specific date for the historical events in 1905, Tagore did not mention any date in his novel. What were the incidents linked with nationalist movement? Inspired by Bankim Chandra's *Anandamath*, the Swadeshi movement intensified along with banning of foreign goods with a craving to recreate an image of the motherland "in the mould of a Hindu goddess." (Panja110)

The storyline of *Ghare Baire* found in Tagore is set in the revolutionary Bengal of 1905 full of battle cries of 'Swadeshi' and 'Bande Mataram.' There are three principal characters - Nikhil, Bimala and Sandeep. Nikhil is Bimala's husband while Sandeep is his close friend. The autobiographical account of these protagonists intertwines to make the novel. Living a protected life of a Hindu wife in Purdah for a considerable time, Bimala is brought outside by her husband Nikhilesh to meet Sandeep. Nikhilesh believes that once Bimala experiences the outside world, her love for Nikhilesh will deepen. Nikhilesh risks Bimala to experience the excitement of freedom. While Nikhil stands for stability,

security and wisdom, Sandeep is an unpredictable impulsive revolutionary menacing Bimala's safe world. She is caught between the two. While Nikhil does not believe in 'end justifies the means' ideology, Sandeep passionately backs the same. Bimala's meeting with Sandeep makes her feel a strong magnetic pull towards him. Sandeep crowns Bimala 'Queen Bee'. Nikhil is warned by his well-wishers about the inherent danger of the growing Sandeep-Bimala relationship. Sandeep's photograph is placed close to Nikhil's in Bimala's bedroom. Sandeep does not even hesitate to convey his love for Bimala openly. Soon after, the ripples 'within' turned out to be a storm 'outside'. Sandeep does not succeed in his Swadeshi campaign and so he goes on destructive campaigns- of burning foreign garments of the poor, timid tenants. Sandeep pushes forward the philosophy-'all is fair in love and war' diluting minimum truth with maximum lies. On the contrary, Nikhil opposes terrorizing the people of the country and oppressing them - a stand outrightly rejected by Sandeep. A sense of hopelessness broiling in the novel is echoed in the conversation between Nikhilesh and his teacher. According to them, this Swadeshi movement is the outcome of bourgeois initiative centralised in urban areas and imposed on the unwilling people especially the poor traders and farmers - most of them being Muslims. They are too poor to buy costlier swadeshi goods. As they ventilate, it becomes clear that the movement was limited to the *babus* and the over-enthusiastic young students yet to develop an ability to assess right or wrong. Along with them, join the hoodlums just for their own sake. Their stupidity indulges them to oppress the poor people burning their so-called foreign goods. They are involved in arson and violence on their fellow countrymen whom these oppressed sections consider no better than their colonial rulers. The actions are

undertaken not passionately but in cold blood. However, Nikhil's interest in Swadeshi has a positive side when he opens factories and provides loans to the poor farmers at a very low rate which causes him great financial loss oft and on.

From the hyped image of 'Mother India', Bimala suddenly attains a sexual appeal when Sandeep retitles her 'Queen Bee'. She is so much swayed by Sandeep that she does not hesitate to steal for his cause but soon recognises her folly. Sandeep's greed and perversion are exposed to her and she realises how Sandeep has misled young people like Amulya. Bimala understands Sandeep's frivolity and deceptiveness.

Bimala returns to her husband, mortified and remorseful. Nikhil forgives her and is for compromise. But a death wish prowls somewhere within him and he goes to stop a riot without taking any safety measures for him, gets fatally wounded. Bimala has to pay a price for her folly. Bimala is shown in the last scene chopping off her hair and wearing a widow's white dress.

Ray shifts from Tagore in delineating the three characters. A frustrated, desperate parasite from the very beginning, Sandeep's gluttony is obvious from his maiden on-screen-appearance. Very much persuasive and sensible, Sandeep seduces Bimala for his needs by his eloquence telling her that in the long run the poor will be benefitted although they are suffering at the moment. Ray is critical of Sandeep's deceptiveness as he has personal preferences for foreign cigarettes and travelling in first-class contradicting his own imposed upon philosophy on the poor countrymen in the name of nationalism. These are Sandeep's personal shortcomings. Somewhat inconsistent with his design, Ray skips the strong, intimate conversation between Sandeep and Bimala soaked in high patriotic fervour. Such is the power of Sandeep's speech that not only Nikhilesh but

Bimala too is confused about her own self. Ray's lens captures Bimala's style of smiling and the costly tea-set in a scene where Bimala and Sandeep are introduced to each other. Thus Sandeep's flattery at the outset becomes bold requests soon after. Interestingly, when Tagore is vehemently critical of the self-destructive movement in the novel, Ray is moderate in this aspect.

Ray's Nikhil is there to contradict Sandeep and is represented as a considerate and generous husband ready to linger on as an onlooker. Although he suffers, Nikhil has no confusion. Ray's Nikhil is devout and perfect but somehow cannot accept the blemishes for his doing and chooses to die. Bimala seems too ready to be swept away. Ray awards her punishment for her sins in the film when Nikhil dies while trying to stop a Hindu-Muslim riot. Making a comment on Ray's presentation of Nikhilesh that is deviated from the novel while adapting in a cinematic form, Chandak Sengupta says

'Ray not only retained but sharpened Tagore's contrast between Nikhil and Sandip - Nikhil, as Andrew Robinson has pointed out in his biography of Ray, is just too good, too rational, too calm to be credible. But heroic as he is in the film, his fate is anything but inspiring. Tagore had, in fact, ended his novel ambiguously - the last we hear of Nikhil is that he was badly hurt while trying to prevent a Hindu-Muslim riot precipitated by his radical friend - but in the film, he dies during that encounter. Not only does an individual liberal die, but his whole dream of leading his wife into the world also fails. Bimala's education and brief romance do not lead to fulfilment or liberation - all she finds at the end of her passage from the home to the world is widowhood and self-mortification (21)

Minakhshi Mukherjee explains how Ray converts word-images to moving the visual image by way of adaptation giving him advantages over Tagore's novel to reach larger viewers through his lens and communicate his philosophy of life to their hearts. Some of these images are mentioned here for a better comprehension of his mastery with the lens. One such moment brilliantly captured is Bimala's crossing the threshold for the first time shown in slow motion, a walk down the long corridor wherein sunlight is falling through stained glass. This scene is presumed to be the moment of defiance-of doing away with the Hindu tradition when Nikhilesh brings Bimala out from the imprisoned inner circle of home to the outer world. There within her home, she leads a mundane life - all these captured in slow motion so as to enjoy the same fully its significance by the viewers. There is a close-up of the border of the red sari of Bimala while she is giving the first step outside the room. Red signifies danger and crossing the border to step into the outer world is symptomatic of the impending doom that awaits Nikhilesh and Bimala. Nevertheless, once Bimala accepts the challenge of crossing, she walks confidently through the balcony along with her supportive husband. Added to this is Ray's skilful use of music. On his use of music in the film, Jayita Sen Gupta says, "The instrumental music in the background comprising of (sic) sitar strings, viola and flute harmonising together in the style of western classical orchestra adapts the tune of the Tagore song celebrating the youth and the springtime felicitation." (77) Through the use of colours and music, Ray breaks the social conventions and also the east/west binary.

In another shot, Nikhil is found sad lost in thoughts, looking out to the world outside from his bedroom window. The look is of meaninglessness, reflected in his bedroom mirror. Thus, the shot captures the pathos

embedded in the situation. The shots of the palace, the costume and the sets are meticulously taken care of by Ray, completely missing in the novel. The actors in white and brown attires are Indian while those wearing a western dress are stone-studded and in deep colours. Smartly, Ray frames the 'outside' and 'inside' in the film.

Use of Rabindra Sangeet in the film gives an additional Tagore-flavour. Ray is very much focussed here too. He lets Kishore Kumar sing the song to remove the mystery around Sandeep. As a Rabindra Sangeet singer, Kishore Kumar has not been well accepted by the intelligentsia, music world and a considerable section of the viewers. Ray has worked that disapproval to denigrate the character of Sandeep. Besides this shocking experience of introducing Kishore Kumar, Ray gives the role of Sandeep to Soumitra Chatterjee and that of Nikhilesh to Victor Banerjee, which too are beyond any expectation of the viewers.

Next device that Ray shows mastery in the film to reach his non-Bengali audience, as Bela Balazs observes, is his use of subtitles. Thus, he makes 'noble family' to be the subtitle of *Rajparivar*, the gentle disposition is the subtitle of *Sunyami Purush*, a lucky one for *Pater Bibi*, *quadrangle* for *Nat Mandir* etc (143).

However, Ray makes text without the subtitles also. Being hurt, Miss Gilby describes her anguish to Nikhil, Bimala's voice is heard on the soundtrack, '*I was not destined to be a memsahib*' – something very much subtle in expression. The whole effort of Nikhilesh to civilize Bimala has been enjoyed by her with laughter. For the non-Bengali viewer, it is merely a soliloquy as there are no subtitles for this.

There were changes even in the narrative style too- from Tagore's way to Ray's way where he begins the film with Bimala's narrative using the flashback technique. Like

Tagore, Ray keeps the two other narrative voices but accommodates in Bimala's flashback and introduces the omniscient narrator at the end of the plot. Not only that Ray shifts away from Tagore but also from the tradition of Indian cinema when he introduces woman narrator at the beginning, rarely found in Indian cinema at that point in time. Ray makes the whole of his screenplay revolves round Bimala. Ray takes care so as to present Bimala gaining self-confidence gradually as she speaks and moves in her drawing room with more confidence. She goes out often. But Ray captures also the life of Bimala doing her daily household work- in the process contrasting the two lifestyles of Bimala. Every now and then Bimala watches herself in front of the mirror. There is a widowed in-law of her who keeps watching her every movement almost like the viewer. Both of them have something common in them as in their interest in listening to a song in the gramophone. Another similarity is their interest in the outer world. For Bimala, Nikhilesh is there to take a positive role while for her sister- in- law, her immoral husband shows little interest towards her. In the novel, the reader finds how Mejobau takes initiative to protect Bimala when she draws off money from her husband's safe but the same incident was completely dropped in the Ray film. Ray remodels his *Mejobau* to look somewhat different from that of Tagore's. In the novel *Mejobau*, always in a distressed mood, asks Nikhil to get soap for her from his factory but it is not so in the film where Mejobau is complaining to Nikhil about the bad quality of the soap returning him the same.

Some critics feel that the film is more or less a love story than a clash of two opposing political ideologies. For them, the film is a new work of art altogether. Commenting on Ray's making the film with a focus on Bimala, Nikhilesh's encouragement to bring his wife

out to the world and shifting of her world outlook in the film, Sarmistha Panja says

There is something enormously contemporary in his stance that Ray could have exploited in order to make his film address certain issues of our times. Nikhil is saying something very similar to that of feminists like Judith Butler when they argue that gender and sex are not intrinsic but socially, culturally and scientifically determined, not 'unproblematically binary' but multiple, not congealed but fluid. (115)

There are some minor characters like Ponchu playing a significant role in making Nikhilesh realise the level of human suffering permeating the country. This character is absent in the Ray-film. Instead, he introduced a scene of Nikhilesh going to Shuksayar riding a horse to take stock of the prevailing riotous condition there developing growing out of Hindu-Muslim misunderstanding. Ray adds in the film the two forced kisses between Bimala and Sandeep. Tagore expresses the same passion touching each other's hand - suggestive of the same craving for one another. But Ray must be doubtful if at all, his viewers could make out anything about the intensity of the passion from this suggestion. Another deviation in Ray's film is mastermoshai, a reticent by nature, who being angry with Sandeep warns him against his harmful activities. Such scathing remarks are not found in the novel.

Chandak Sengoopta reviewed the reactions of some eminent critics of the day to assess how they looked at *Home and the World* as a movie adapted from the novel,

In her essay on *Ghare-Baire*, Somdatta Mandal helpfully addresses Ray's failure to provide sufficient historical context for the connections between the early 20th-century swadeshi movement and the Hindu-Muslim riots

that erupted at its height, whilst Anuradha Ghosh's argument that *Teen Kanya*, *Charulata* and *Ghare-Baire* are united with one another as well as with their Tagorean originals by an ambivalence about the consequences of women's entry into the public domain is perceptive and worth expanding into a fuller analysis. Supriya Chaudhuri's discussion of the 'poetics of space' in *Charulata* and *Ghare-Baire* offers interesting reflections on the creation of 'interior space and interior time' and it, too, deserves to be extended into a more detailed study. (175)

Although prominent critics like Somdatta Mandal, Anuradha Ghosh, Chidananda Das Gupta, Ashis Nandy, Ben Nyce *et al* admit the influence of Tagore in Ray's life, the departure that Ray makes in his films from the Tagore's originals highlights the importance of cinema and especially that of Ray as a growing decisive artistic medium of expression for post-independent Bengal. By adapting several of Tagore's short stories and novels into film, Ray begins transforming the literature of Renaissance to its filmic version in the postcolonial present.

*Ghare Baire* is both a reordering and an annotation of the source text. The cinematic adaptations work at various levels maintaining the outline of the story, more or less, intact with changes in characterisation, narrative technique, presentation style. If Dudley Andrew's classification of adaptation in an extended form is implemented to assess film adaptations, it is observed that the elements of *Borrowing*, *Intersecting* and *Transforming* simultaneously operate along with the element of commitment, communication, understanding and criticism at various forms and stages in Ray's adaptation of the novel into a film.

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