Semester VII

REPORT ON READINGS FROM RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S *'GHARE BAIRE'* (THE HOME AND THE WORLD) - IN CONTEXT OF THE SWADESHI MOVEMENT OF BENGAL

On 22nd July 2026, Dr. Sukanya Mitra conducted a reading and discussion session on Rabindranath Tagore's novel, *'Ghare Baire'* (The Home and the World), in the library for Semester VII History students. The discussion aimed to capture the importance of the novel as a significant source for understanding the complexities and internal contradictions of the Swadeshi Movement of Bengal (1905). Written in 1915, the novel is divided into chapters using monologues and soliloquies by the three main characters: Bimala, Nikhilesh and Sandip. The core of the discussion centered on the ideological clash between the characters, which symbolizes the broader debates within the movement. Nikhilesh, a benevolent and rational zamindar, represents Tagore's own critique of aggressive nationalism. Disillusioned by the flashy, grand luxury traditionally expected of his aristocratic status; a quiet simplicity that his wife Bimala initially finds boring; Nikhilesh believes in true, grassroots socio-economic growth. He strongly opposes the forced boycott led by Sandip, arguing that real freedom requires building up society from within rather than resorting to unnecessary violence and political manipulation. In sharp contrast, Sandip, a full time activist and childhood friend of Nikhilesh embodies the radical and militant faction of the Swadeshi movement. With intense personal charisma, Sandip mobilises the local youth often viewed as trouble makers within the rural society. Tagore portrayed this through the character of Amulya, a brilliant student who, captivated by Sandip's charismatic personality, joins the Swadeshi Movement. However, Sandip frequently used Amulya to extract money and jewellery from Bimala, causing her into believing that these sacrifices constitute her true contribution to the nation, while Nikhilesh remains completely unaware of these exchanges.

Bimala, the wife of Nikhilesh, similarly falls under the spell of Sandip's attractive presence. Sandip uses the concept of the nation to inspire her. Through Bimala's monologues, Tagore highlights the profound psychological awakening of a woman traditionally restricted to the *Andarmahal*. Seeking a new self-worth, Bimala attempts to discover how as a woman she can contribute to the birth of a new nation, viewing Sandip as the figure who completely transforms her worldview. The discussion also focused on how the sudden call to boycott cheap foreign goods completely ignored the reality and the indigenous (*swadeshi*) alternatives were not only more expensive but often inferior in quality, causing the common people to openly mock or resist the movement. While Nikhilesh quietly adopted indigenous goods out of personal principle, the aggressive enforcement of the boycott by Sandip's followers brought distress among the masses.

The readings from Rabindranath Tagore's *'Ghare Baire'* provided the students with valuable exposure, offering a critical lens into the different ideological phases and limitations of the Swadeshi Movement. It facilitated a more comprehensive and analytical understanding of the diverse viewpoints held by the movement's supporters. The session also taught the students to closely read a fictional text and link it to historical events.


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