

Qirat Tabasum F2018-231

Visual Arts 3rd year

Urbanism and the Arts: Lahore in the 20th Century.

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Assignment 3:

What transformations do you detect in Indian women stepping out of their homes in the early part of the twentieth century?

In the early part of the twentieth century it was not easy for women in India to step out and participate in a male dominated society. This matter has been observed for a long time and a lot has been done by great women in the early years of the twentieth century to make it possible for a woman to participate more in society. The Suffragette Movement in the UK can be used as an example. Women were not allowed to vote and through this event in history, it was made possible for them to at least start voting. Likewise in India, it has also been tough for women to get themselves involved in public matters.

Although the role of a mother in India was idolized and extremely respected, it was as if the society forgot it was the same gender of that needed to fight for the rights to be involved in more than just home affairs. The cover image of the 1927 novel, '*Spectres of Mother India*' by Mrinalini Sinha, shows how godly the concept of a mother was and how the soil of India has always been associated with the loyalty and love of a mother.¹

The paucity of women's rights was embedded in patriarchal structures of society, and an unwillingness by men to cede any rights to women. There was, therefore, a need to educate not just women, but also men. To discuss the struggles that Indian women faced when they attempted to step out of their homes, and participate in the outside world, I shall refer to a novel by Rabindarnath Tagore '*The Home and The World*' and analyse the character of Bimla, a Hindu woman from an affluent *zamīndār* background in Bengal.²

In an excerpt from Veh Mehta's *Daddy Ji*, we see how it was 'normal' for a wealthy man to educate himself to any extent possible, and it would just add to his status and qualification.³ However, comparing this to the next gender, the women, it was not the case. A woman was the apple of men's eyes until she didn't speak in matters other than home, and once she did, she'd be seen as someone too outgoing and outspoken for her "womanliness". At the same time, in my

¹ Sinha, Mrinalini; '*Spectres of Mother India*', 1927, Cover page

² Tagore, Rabindranath; '*The Home and the World*', 1916

³ Mehta, Ved; '*Daddy Ji*', 1972

opinion, although there are other exceptional cases, it is education that allows distinction between a progressive woman and a woman confined in her traditional role. The more educated a woman is, the more she is able to exercise her agency.

Tagore's novel 'The Home and the World' is based around the time when the Swadeshi Movement was taking place. The movement developed from the Partition of Bengal. At the time, the partition was being opposed and a lot of new methods were being introduced to make a difference around the country. During this time, the women's emancipation movements were gaining momentum. One of the organizations found at that time that influenced the community a lot was the All Women's Conference in 1927. It was a created space as Lefebvre would describe it according to his book '*The Production of Space*', for women to discuss issues they were facing, along with targeting issues such as the Purdah, child marriage and several other matters that were being faced by women in the nineteenth to twentieth century.⁴

The novel by Tagore does highlight the themes of nationalism and terrorism in India, but it also deals with the emancipation of women. When Bimala, the female protagonist in the story is caught in a love triangle, with her husband who embraces western ideologies and his friend who represents value in a society, her husband realizes that this issue needs to be addressed by not just anything, but education. He hires his wife a tutor to educate her and the newly developed confusion she then faces, represents the inner conflict of any middle-classed woman then and today. Whether to become independent or to remain confined in the walls of her threshold. The novel makes it obvious that after facing difficulties, it was still possible for a middle-class woman to get herself educated. Women below this specific class, however, would disagree because they were always told that it wouldn't be worth the effort to educate them. The editor of *Tehzib-e-Niswan*, an Islamic women's magazine, wrote a biographical introduction, '*Bibi Ashraf ne parhna seekha*', in the book '*Hayat-e-Ashraf*' that tells us alot about women and education.⁵

In today's world I still believe that at many points in life, women still do face the issue of having to decide whether to live for herself or for people around her. Females that are too educated do face issues in our society and when it comes to marriage, people feel intimidated by women who have had a history of great education. I believe this is because the male community still does not want to be in any way dominated by females, and in my opinion this is one of the many reasons women are treated as objects of society, and are given the 'role' of the society's morale so that women know they have an entire community to think of. I also believe this is one of the many reasons women in the twentieth century would want to look beyond their 'duties' and educate themselves to turn the space around them into a safe space for women around them and for further generations to come.

⁴ Henri Lefebvre, '*The Production of Space*', Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, 1991

⁵ Muhammadi Begum, '*Hayat-e-Ashraf*', Annual of Urdu Studies, 1987, Vol. 6

A digital preview of Mrinalini Sinha's "Spectres of Mother India":

https://books.google.com.pk/books/about/Spectres_of_Mother_India.html?id=xI2LClkTrFIC&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false

To read more about the British Suffragette Movement: <https://time.com/5134820/british-suffragettes-centenary-women-rights-inequality/>

Rabindarnath Tagore's "The Home and the World" E-print:

https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/20908/24/RABINDRANATH_TAGORE-THE_HOME_AND_THE_WORLD_mobile.pdf

About the "The Home and the World" film directed by Satyajit Ray:

<http://www.filmsufi.com/2014/10/the-home-and-world-satyajit-ray-1984.html>

Buy Ved Mehta's Daddy Ji: <https://www.amazon.com/Daddyji-Ved-Mehta/dp/8174367527>

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2082465.Daddyji>

To read more about the All Women's Conference in 1927, a presentation by the AIWC:

<http://www.aiwc.org.in/pdf/History.pdf>

Henri Lefebvre's 'The Production of Space' translated by Donald Nicholson Smith in 1991:

<https://transnationaleverydaylife.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/henri-lefebvre-the-production-of-space.pdf>

<https://thecharnelhouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Henri-Lefebvre-Extracts-from-the-Production-of-Space.pdf>

The biographical introduction of 'Bibi Ashraf' by Muhammadi Begum, Annual of Urdu Studies, 1987, Volume 6:

https://dsal.uchicago.edu/books/annualofurdustudies/pager.html?volume=6&objectid=PK2151.A6152_6_106.gif

