

Radical Rabindranath: Nation, Family and Gender in Tagore's Fiction and Films, eds. Sanjukta Dasgupta, Sudeshna Chakravarti and Mary Mathew. New Delhi: Orient Blackswain, 2013, 343 pgs., Rs. 695.

Rabindranath's encounter with modernity, especially on issues related to nation, family and gender have attracted wide critical attention and this volume, *Radical Rabindranath* is a welcome addition to this debate. The word 'radical' becomes a point of entry into the world of Tagore's ideas as the authors point out Rabindranath's "subversions, transgressions and disruptions from the traditional normative systems as well as locate his occasional vacillations". Undeniably in his early experiments in Selaidah, his ideas in *Swadeshi Samaj* and his departure from the prevalent nationalist discourse, Tagore was a startling new voice. The early sections of this book provide an interesting background to this radical cauldron of ideas, the co-existence of tradition and modernity within the Tagore household which formed Rabindranath's personality. The presence of a deep nationalist framework, interesting experiments with art, Jyotirindranath's experiments on various issues, the attempt to identify and archive local art forms were part of an ongoing radical process in the Tagore household which Rabindranath inherited. The presence of Rammohun Roy as the intellectual catalyst for Rabindranath could have been highlighted more but the section is a valuable contextualization of a radicalism inherent in Tagore's immediate surroundings.

The nuanced discussions on gender and nation, especially in the context of Tagore's novels and short stories, deserve special mention. The meticulous research highlights Tagore's debates with a host of Bengali intellectuals, including Chandanath Basu, Dwijendralal Roy on female empowerment and provides an insight into the debate on the 'new woman' in which Rabindranath took an active part. The split between Tagore the public persona and the more conservative private individual is noted quite sensitively. In that sense, the issue of radicalism is a problematic one vis-a-vis Tagore's position on female empowerment.

Tagore's response to nationalism was equally complex, especially in the context of India grappling with the early derivative discourses of national identity. While the book draws on Tagore's humanism and internationalism, his debates with Gandhi and his ideas on Sriniketan could have featured more prominently. *Swadeshi Samaj* was in many ways Rabindranath's manifesto for his radical take on nationalism, later leading to *Palli Samaj*. The issue of rural reconstruction (itself radical in its outlook of facilitation rather than aid) was

in many ways the most radical of Tagore's experiments and the concept of breaking 'aals' demanded some analysis. The issue of technology similarly remained a problematic one for Tagore vis-a-vis his encounter with the West and is reflected in his short stories. These are some of the areas where Tagore's radical ideas could have been explored in further detail.

The encounter with cinema dovetails with the exploration of concerns of gender and identity in Tagore's narratives and makes a valuable point about the continued relevance of Rabindranath in the contemporary milieu. One wonders however whether the choice of cinematic texts have rather restricted Rabindranath's appeal in the context of gender and familial roles only. A chapter on (or at least cross references to) stage adaptations of Tagore's texts would probably have added a wider context to the continued relevance of the poet's ideas about an inclusive polity and issues of environment and power.

The 150th anniversary celebrations have led to several anthologies on Tagore but volumes that explore Tagore's ideas in a sustained critical narrative have been few and far between. This volume will thus add great value to the emerging researches on Rabindranath. Well researched, meticulously documented with sensitive and nuanced analysis, this volume promises to carve its niche in Tagore scholarship. For any single volume to capture the myriad radicalisms of Rabindranath is a daunting task, but the authors have done an admirable job.