

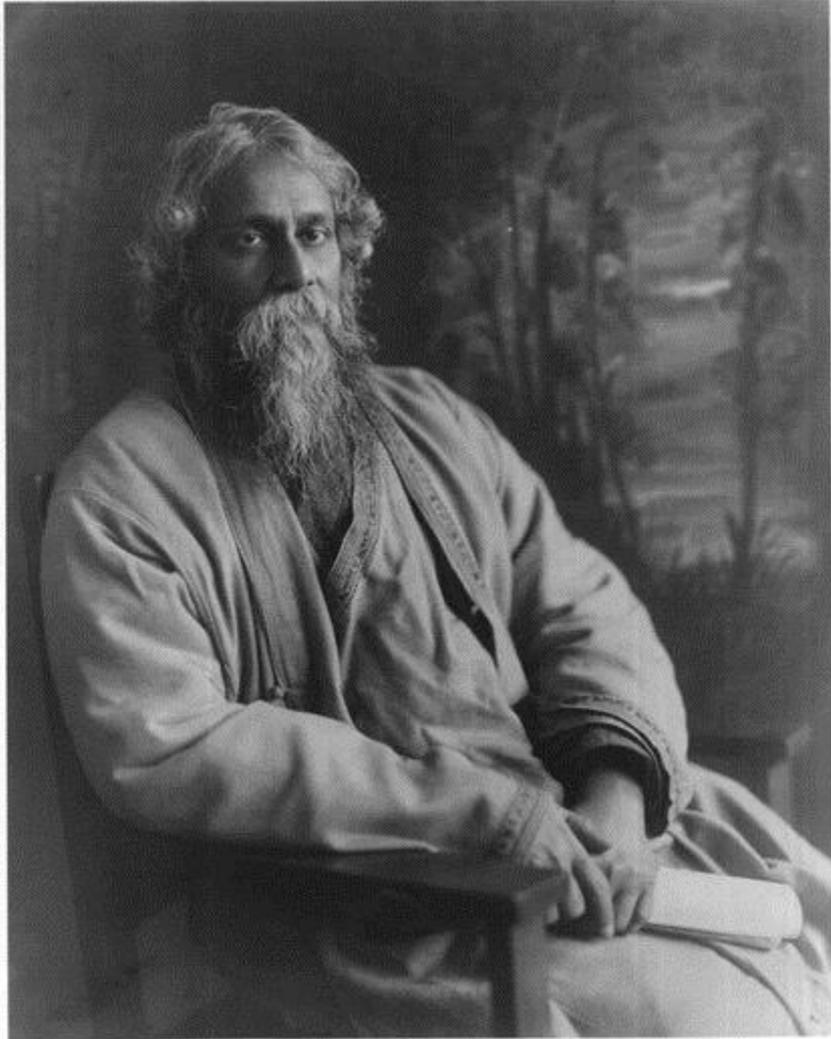
Rabindranath Tagore's
Ghare Baire (Bengali, 1915) /
The Home and the World (1919)

EN123, Modern World Literatures

Lecture: Week 1, Term 2

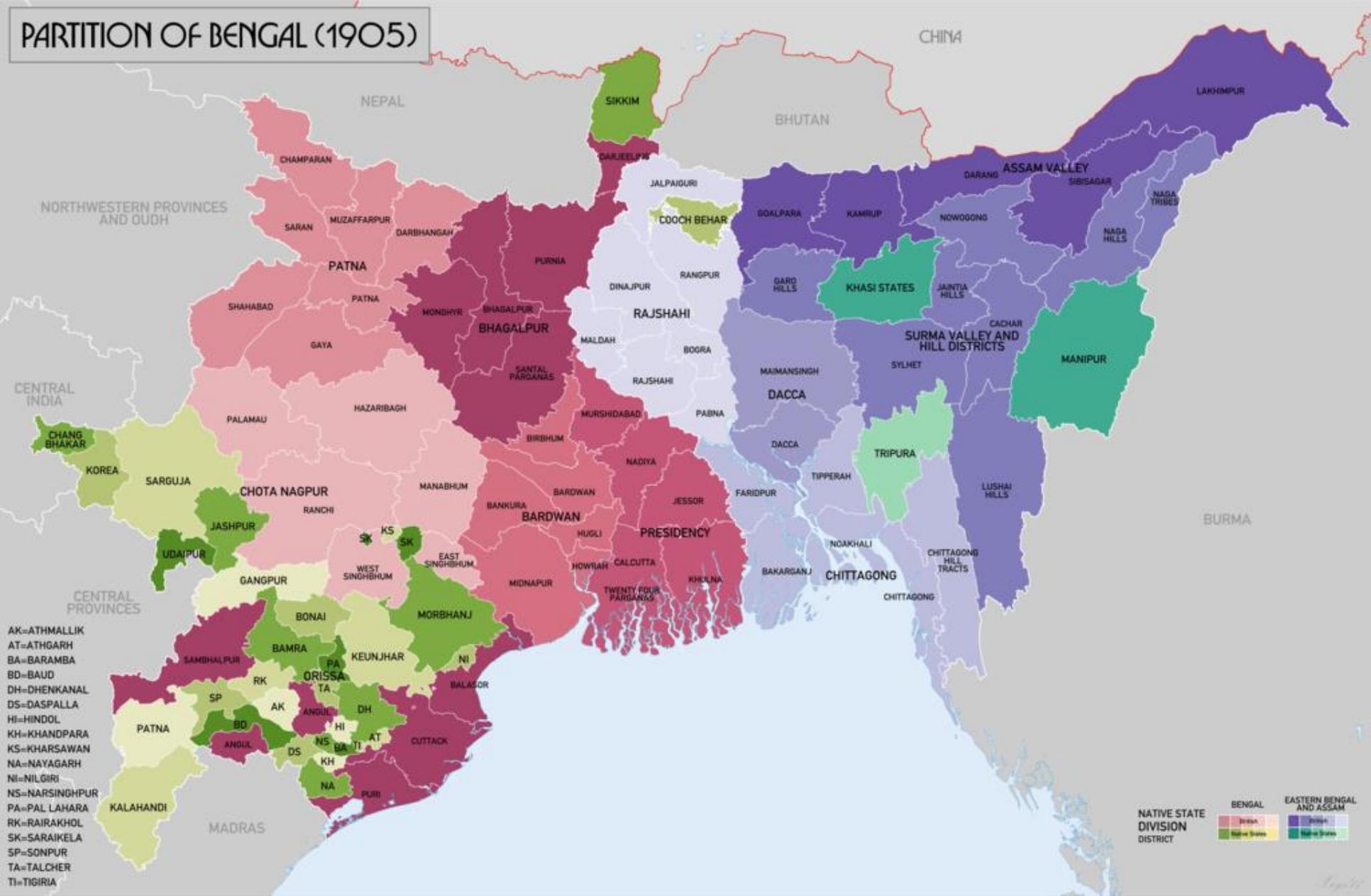
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Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)



- Man of Letters, Nobel Prize (1913)
- Modernist | Humanist | Internationalist
- Viswa Bharati University (1921) – a radical experiment in education
- Benevolent Paternalist: elite, upper-caste, upper-class Bengali family; landed gentry that combined traditional *zamindari* ('landlordism') with modern education and progressive ideals and politics
- Renounced knighthood in the aftermath of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre (1919)

PARTITION OF BENGAL (1905)



[Source: Wikipedia] Partition of Bengal in 1905. The western part (Bengal) gained parts of Odisha, the eastern part (Eastern Bengal and Assam) regained Assam that had been made a separate province in 1874

Historical Context

- 1905, Lord Curzon's Partition of Bengal ('divide and rule')
- The crystallisation of Hindu-Muslim communal division: which sets off a series of major historical repercussions thereafter (and felt even today)
- 1905-1908: Swadeshi movement — sees both reformists and revolutionaries; moderates and extremists
- Boycott of foreign goods; emphasis on economic self-reliance

PUBLIC MEETING
AND
BONFIRE OF FOREIGN CLOTHES
Will take place at the Maidan near Eghinstone Mills
Opp. Eghinstone Road Station
On **SUNDAY** the 9th Inst. at 6-30 P. M.
When the Resolution of the Karachi Khilafat Conference and
another Congratulating Ali Brothers and others will be passed.

All are requested to attend in Swadeshi Clothes of Khadi. Those who
have not yet given away their Foreign Clothes are requested to send them
to their respective Ward Congress Committees for inclusion in the
GREAT BONFIRE.

The Home and the World ('Ghare Baire')

- 1915-1916: appears in the serialised form in avant-garde journal *Sabuj Patra* ('Green Leaves')
- 1919: translated into English by Tagore's nephew (in consultation with Tagore) Surendranath Tagore
- Intersections of:

Home | Nation | World

with that of

Tradition | Modernity

- Colloquial *Cholito-bhasha* ('running language') preferred to Sanskritised *Sadhu-bhasha* ('uptight language')

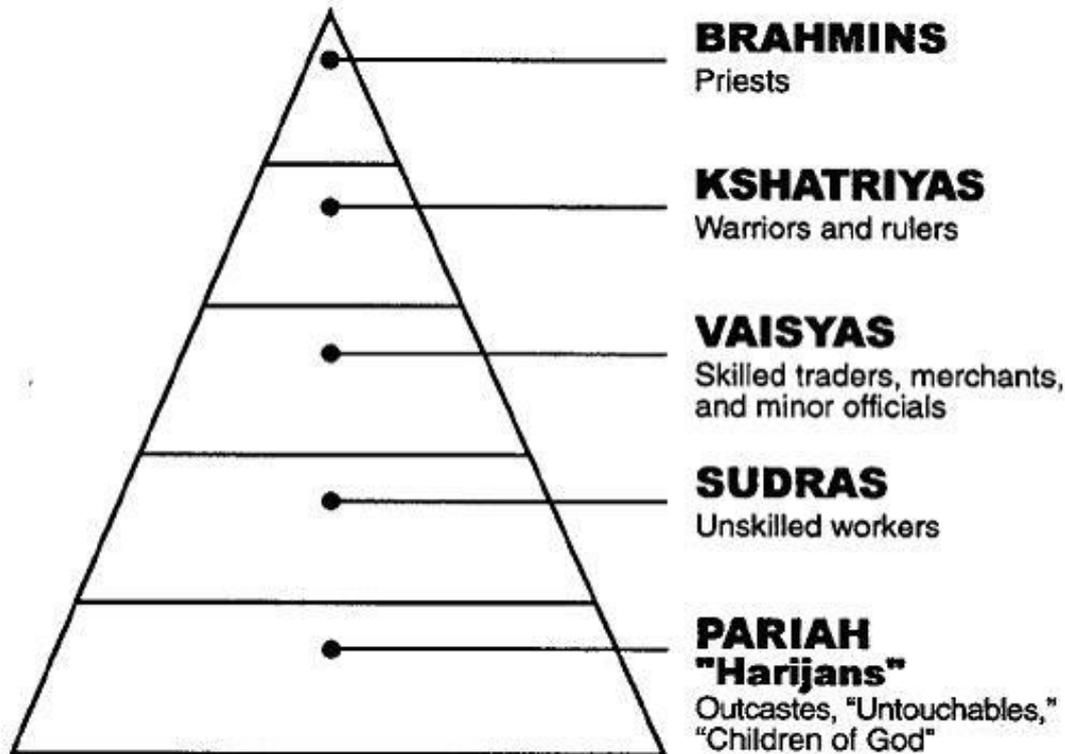
Influences on the Novel

- **Auguste Comte (1798-1857)**: French philosopher and social scientist; formulated the doctrine of positivism. Tagore would later formulate a theoretical response to Comte, in the book *The Religion of Man* (1931)
- **Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838-1894)**: Bengali novelist, poet, and journalist. Also the original composer of *Vande Mataram* [or *Bande Mataram*; 'Hail Motherland'] personifying India as 'mother goddess' — a rallying cry for activists (particularly Hindu nationalists) during the Indian Independence Movement. (*Bande Mataram* first appears in Bankimchandra's 1882 novel, *Anandamath*)

Home, Nation, World

- Typically the domain of 'woman' and traditionally represented by her
- Occupied in the novel by 'the ideal Hindu wife' Bimala, who [led by her husband] is also 'modern'
- Traditionally a space/identity metaphorically marked by the need to be cherished, protected, honoured (against the intrusions of the 'encroaching world'); symbolic of the inner spiritual self
- Yet, in the novel, it is also a site negotiating tradition and modernity; one that can imagine different possibilities
- It is a novel of ideas – Tagore's passion for ideas make it both didactic and polemical

Home, Nation, World



- Nationalism and Gendering the Nation [Masculinities, Femininities, & the Erotic]
- Caste, Class, Communalism

ABOVE: Stratification of Hindu society into FOUR CASTES:

Dalits (former 'untouchables') fall outside the caste system, thus historically considered 'outcaste'.

The Caste System gets sanctioned as *Varnashramadharma* in the *Manusmriti* - a key text in the Hindu Vedic textual tradition.

Gendering the Nation

- *Bande Mataram!* (also *Vande Mataram*; ‘I revere thee mother’)
 - *Bharat Mata ki Jai!* (‘Hail Mother India’)

[Sandip to Bimala]

“Do you not know that I come to worship? Have I not told you that, in you, I visualize the *Shakti* [‘divine feminine power’] of our country? The Geography of a 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. When you have anointed me with your own hands, then shall I know I have the sanction of my country; and if, with that in my heart, I fall fighting, it shall not be on the dust of some map-made land, but on a lovingly spread skirt—do you know what kind of skirt?—like that of the earthen-red *sari* you wore the other day, with a broad blood-red border. Can I ever forget it? Such are the visions which give vigour to life, and joy to death!” (37-38)



Vande Mataram (I Revere thee Mother), P. S. Ramachandra Rao, 1937.
Chromolithograph published by Rao Brothers, Coimbatore. Courtesy of Erwin
Neumayer, Vienna.



Shaheed Bhagat Singh
(Martyr Bhagat Singh),
artist not known, late 1940s.
Chromolithograph
published by Rising Art
Cottage, Calcutta. Courtesy
of Christopher Pinney,
Cambridge.

শহীদ ভগত সিং
J. P. Co./R. 106

ভারত মাতার মুক্তি সাধনায়
শহীদ ভগত সিং

Shaheed Bhagat Singh

Ma ki Pukar ('Mother's Call'),
artist not known, 1966. Print
published by Murari Fine
Arts, Delhi. J. P. S. Uberoi and
Patricia Uberoi Collection,
Delhi



Jawaharlal Nehru:

“It is curious how one cannot resist the tendency to give an anthropomorphic form to a country. Such is the force of habit and early associations. India becomes Bharat Mata, Mother India, a beautiful lady, very old but ever youthful in appearance, sad-eyed and forlorn, cruelly treated by aliens and outsiders, and calling upon her children to protect her. Some such picture rouses the emotions of hundreds of thousands and drives them to action and sacrifice.”

(in *An Autobiography*, 1980)

Reform and the Problem of Caste

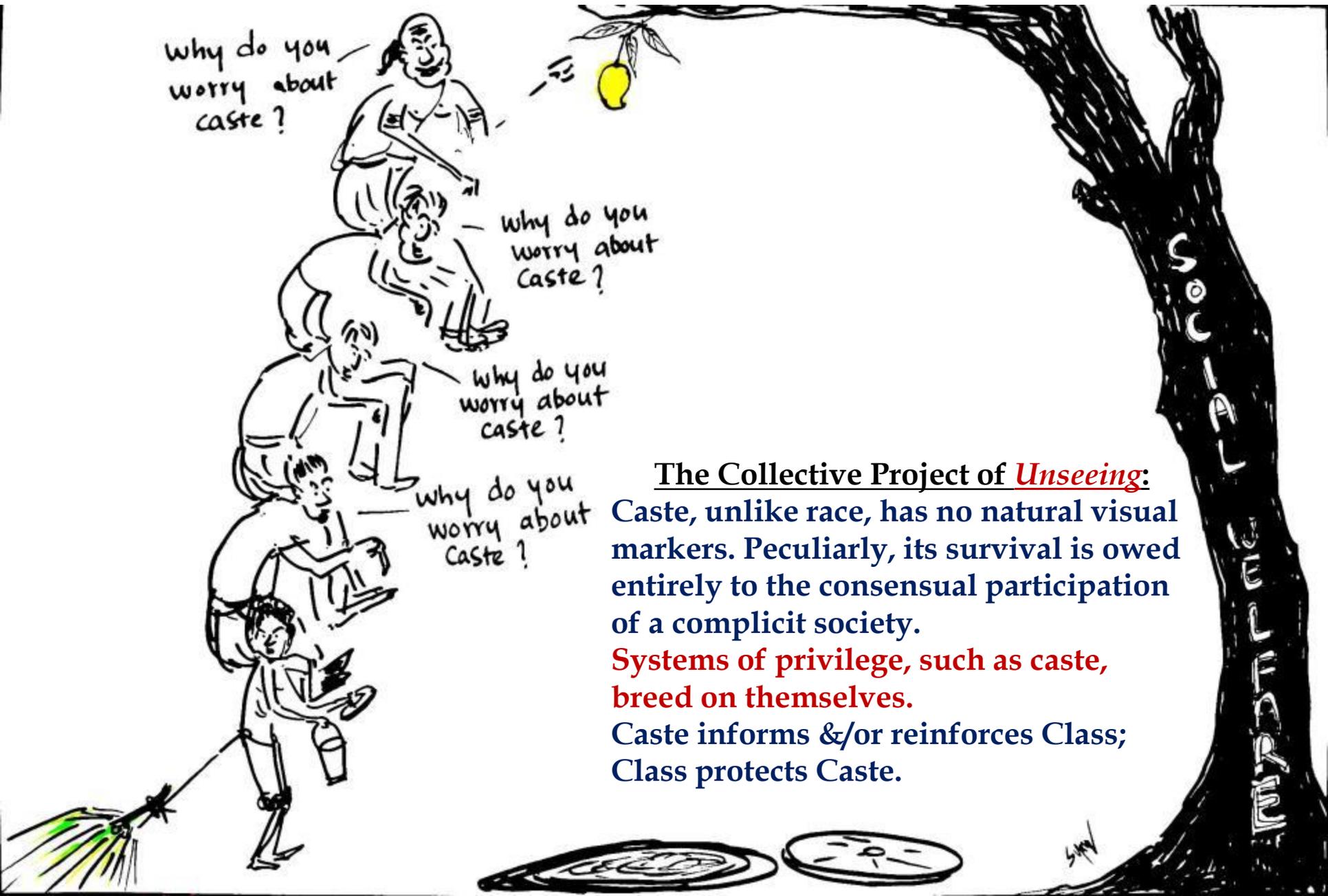
“The old woman is not a bad sort,” my master [Chandranath Babu] went on musingly. “Panchu was not sure of her caste, and would not let her touch the water-jar, or anything at all of his. [...] When she found I had no objection to her touch, she looked after me devotedly. [...]

But all remnants of Panchu’s respect for me vanished! [...] here I was, risking my caste without a qualm to win over the old woman for my purpose.” (74)



Caste Discrimination:
a social reality in ancient,
modern, and
contemporary India

Reform and the Problem of Caste



The Collective Project of *Unseeing*:
Caste, unlike race, has no natural visual markers. Peculiarly, its survival is owed entirely to the consensual participation of a complicit society.
Systems of privilege, such as caste, breed on themselves.
Caste informs &/or reinforces Class;
Class protects Caste.

Graded Inequality and Caste

“The social system based on inequality stands on a different footing from a social system based on graded inequality. The former is a weak system which is not capable of self-preservation. The latter, on the other hand, is capable of self-preservation. In a social system based on inequality, the low orders can combine to overthrow the system. None of them have any interest to preserve it. In a social system based on graded inequality, the possibility of a general common attack by the aggrieved parties is non-existent ... [because] the aggrieved parties are not on a common level. This can happen only when they are only high and low. In a system of graded inequality, there are the highest (the Brahmins). Below the highest are the higher (the Kshatriyas). Below the higher are those who are high (Vaishya). Below the high are the low (Shudra), and below the low are those who are lower (Untouchables). All have a grievance against the highest and would like to bring about their downfall.

But they will not combine. The higher is anxious to get rid of the highest, but does not wish to combine with the high, the low and the lower lest they should reach his level and be his equal. The high wants to overthrow the higher who is above him, but does not want to join hands with the low and the lower, lest they should rise to his status and become equal to him in rank. The low is anxious to pull down the highest, the higher and the high, but he would not make a common cause with the lower for fear of the lower gaining a higher status and becoming his equal. In the system of graded inequality, there is no such class as completely unprivileged class except the one which is at the base of the social pyramid. The privileges of the rest are graded. Even the low is a privileged class as compared with the lower. Each class being privileged, every class is interested in maintaining the social system.”

—B. R. Ambedkar, in *Dr. Babasaheb Writings and Speeches* (1989), Vol.5, p. 101

Home, Nation, World

- Leading us to the threshold of the home and the world: imagining the possibility of a humanistic civil religion
- “I would have you come into the heart of the outer world and meet reality. Merely going on with your household duties, living all your life in the world of household conventions and the drudgery of household tasks—you were not made for that! If we meet, and recognise each other, in the real world, then only will our love be true” (Nikhil to Bimala, 23)

Some clips from Satyajit Ray's film (1984) on Tagore's *Ghare Baire*

The Call for Swadeshi

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSqSfHZQ2To>

Nikhil opposes Swadeshi

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ANyYPjHNkvU>