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A MASTERFUL TRIANGLE

By Barbara Shulgasser

EXAMINER FILM CRITIC

NOTHING STIRS the passions like uncertainty. Seeking such exhilarating shakiness in his marriage, a maharajah ventures a test of loyalty in Satyajit Ray's "The Home and the World." His recklessness jeopardizes the marriage and his Bengal estate's stability.

Nikhil (Victor Banerjee, who played Aziz in "A Passage to India"), with his liberated view of women, has already broken with custom by giving his wife an English education. Now he must also know that she would choose him over another man, a nearly hereti-

cal concept in India of 1908.

Bimala (Swatilekha Chatterjee) first set eyes on her husband at their wedding and, leading the traditional life of female seclusion, hasn't seen another man since. After 10 years of contented marriage, Nikhil coerces her to leave the women's quarters and meet his friend, Sandip, a charismatic politician leading a movement to boycott British goods. Aggressive and handsome, Sandip immediately steals Bimala's heart.

Ray wrote the screenplay from the 1919 Rabindranath Tagore novel and neither shakes a finger of disapproval at Nikhil's ill-fated radicalism nor pins the collapse of civilization on women's liberation. Ray avers that just as love is a fiercely political territory, so are politics a dangerous form of romance.

Ray has masterfully recorded three graceful performances in a film that is a joy to look at and an impressive earful of talk. Nikhil, who has Banerjee's feminine beauty, rarely touches his wife; the childless couple caress each other with words and their discussions provide some of the film's most passionate moments.

Sandip, too, is an eloquent speaker who woos his crowds into political activism. But his dedication to the movement takes second



SWATILEKHA CHATTERJEE
Tested by her husband

place to his self-aggrandizement.

Bimala is certainly steamrolled by the oily Sandip, but the worldly Nikhil proves to be the film's actual naif. Still, he and his rival are two halves of the same soul — Sandip, the devious, carnal egotist and Nikhil the man of spiritual generosity. Neither alone satisfies the confused Bimala.

Ray first tried to write this film 30 years ago. We are lucky he waited. "The Home and the World," having simmered for decades in Ray's imagination, is a delectable repast.

The film opens today at the Lumiere.

Movie review

'The Home and the World'

Cast: Victor Banerjee, Soumitra Chatterjee, Swatilekha Chatterjee and Gopa Aich

Director: Satyajit Ray

Screenwriter: Satyajit Ray

Cinematographer: Soumendhu Roy

Music: Satyajit Ray

Theater: The Lumiere

Running time: 130 minutes

Unrated, with no sex

Critic's evaluation:

★★★★