Chapter VII
Concluding Remarks

In the 16th and 17th centuries there occurred the growth of European nationalism, extensive commodity production and world commerce. Asia, henceforth, became a mere field of operation for European imperialism and colonialism. The rise of the Industrial Revolution intensified the process of augmentation of economic and political power by Western nations. In the 18th century and the early part of the 19th century, the Asiatic countries presented a spectacle of economic decline, political prostration, social stagnation and cultural decadence. British rule came to be established in India as a systematic basis with the Anglo-French wars in South India, the battles of Plassey and Buxer, and the grant of the Dewani rights by Shah Alam. The introduction of the mighty force of British Imperialism harnessed with all the powers of diplomacy, statecraft and an advanced military armament appeared like a cataclysmic element in Indian politics. The failure of the patriotic struggle of 1857 buttressed British imperialistic hold on the country.

Since the middle of the 19th century the mind and soul of Asia have once again awakened. The forces of nationalism began to grow stronger, and there was a demand for social and economic reshaping. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries India came into direct contact with modern military technology and the advanced phases of Western rationalistic and scientific thought. With the introduction of Western education and learning in India a new spirit of intellectual quest was generated, and it applied itself to religious, social, economic and political problems. The teachings of reformer and religious leaders in India gave rise to the desire for an autonomous and self-determinate political existence. The awakening of the Indian spirit manifested its creativity in the realms of philosophy, religion and culture, and political self-consciousness came as an inevitable consequence. The renaissance in India was characterised

primarily by moral and spiritual aspirations. Revivalism had a dominant sway over the minds of certain section of the people. They advocated a deliberate modeling and moulding of the present life on the basis of the past scriptures. The sentiment of revivalism was generated as a reaction against the great challenge thrown by an alien, aggressive and arrogant civilization politically dominant and economically powerful. Out of this clash of the new mechanical civilisation of the Occident and the old pietistic and religious cultures of India, we find the emergence of new India.

As a defense mechanism against the impact of an alien political power in the country, the old cultures of the land began to revive and reassert themselves. A new humanist and cosmopolitan interpretation began to be put upon the old writings. Further, ideological researches strengthened the roots of cultural nationalism in India. Vivekananda's historic role at the Chicago Parliament of Religions in 1893 prepared the ground for the sentiments of self-reliance, strength and above all fearlessness among Indians. Subhaschandra Bose had testified to the role of Vivekananda as a hero-prophet of nationalism.

Nationalism in India is a complex and composite movement with both idealistic-spiritualistic and objective-materialistic roots. Take for instance, the case of Rammohan Roy. Monistic Theism was the metaphysical foundation of his thought. Following Locke and Thomas Paine, Roy accepted the immutable sanctity of natural rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of property, and he championed the moral rights of the individual. But Roy's theory of right was constructed in the prevailing Indian framework of common social good or *lokasamgraha*. Besides, being an exponent of individualist theory of rights and freedom, he also advocated state legislation for social reform and for educational reconstruction. Hence, to the concept of natural rights he added the notions of social unity and human welfare.

In course of the times, primacy of society came to be consciously adopted in political programmes. Rabindranath Tagore, for example, accepted a social

interpretation of history. According to him, man is a social, sensitive and imaginative being and not a mechanical entity or political animal. Like Comte and Durkheim Tagore accepted primacy of society. Politics is only a specialised and professionalised aspect of society. India's history was a manifestation of the continuing process of racial and social synthesis. In ancient India, there had been a separation of the political and social spheres. The home and the *āśrama* provided the force for the organisation of human energies. The people led their lives almost by ignoring the state. Politics had very shallow roots in society.

Tagore was a societarian to the extent that he regarded the society as having greater primacy than the state. He regarded the society as a spiritual organism. Man's moral and aesthetic consciousness takes its root from society. It is natural to man and responds to his social propensities. But Tagore believed in a functional conception of society. He was opposed to meaningless social stratifications which perpetuate social tyranny. The social organism can be a living totality only if the members are bound by the ties of mutual performance of duties and treat all sections equally. Tagore stood for human rights, but rights to him are not exclusive possessions, they proceed from disinterested contribution to higher good. "Men does not acquire rights through occupation of larger space, not through conduct, but his rights extend only so far as he is real, and his reality is measured by the scope of his consciousness".[1] (*Sādhāna*, pp. 18-19). Like Vivekananda Tagore stressed the necessity of cultivation of strength for the realization of rights, both by the individual and the group. Weakness is a betrayal of the human soul.

We may now look at Tagore's theory of Freedom. Necessity and determination are operative in nature and history. But if the objective world was a theatre of bondage, man could attain freedom and spontaneity in the spiritual world. The free spiritual realm is the world of the creative abundance, or the surplus in man. As a theorist of freedom and spontaneity, he pleaded for liberty of thought and action and liberty of conscience. He stood for free autonomy of the human spirit, and he protested against the pretensions of all organised

institutions like the ecclesiastical pontificate and the state which smother the power of the human individual. The state exists to safeguard the interests of the individual; the individual does not exist for the state. Against coercion and external domination, Tagore sanctified the moral and spiritual freedom of the human spirit.

Tagore, like Vivekananda and Aurobindo, entertained a spiritual conception of freedom. The essence of freedom is illumination of the soul by a process of self-realisation. It lies in the attainment of universality. Love is the pathway to freedom. Aloofness and alienation create maladjustment in the economy of the world. He writes: "In the social or political field, the lack of freedom is based upon the spirit of alienation, on the imperfect realization of the One. There our bondage is in the tortured link of Union".[2]

As a believer in the spiritual fellowship of man, Tagore refused to abide by the dictates of the nation-state. Nationalism, he said, fosters separatism and its aggressive virulence constitutes a threat to the civilization of the world. National pride is the result of narrow imagination and an absence of spiritual sensitiveness. In place of exalting the consent of the governed it breeds imperialism and chauvinism. Tagore championed the *people* and not the *nation*. Western nationalism, for Tagore, does not represent any high principle of social cooperation of spiritual idealism. It is only a political organisation oriented to the economic exploitation of other races.

Tagore formulated and sponsored a moral approach to politics. His political philosophy proceeded from his deep spiritual humanism. His condemnation of power, his denunciation of nationalism and his stress on a social organic living based on cooperation and fraternity – proceed from his fundamental humanism. But there are points of uneasiness. Modern sociologists like Hobhouse and Maclver also stress the social dimension. But it does not seem correct to minimise the political factor. The association of politics with domination made the political element appear repulsive to Tagore. But as Bentham pointed out, political element has been a necessary evil in man's

history. In a democratic set-up and in the context of technological progress, the political factor is assuming ever-growing proportion in India today. How are we to reconcile this state of affairs with Tagore's social interpretation of history? His philosophy of politics is more *revisionary* than *descriptive*. History, for Tagore, is the enactment of a moral logic and any neglect of the moral values is bound to wound the fibre both of individuals and the group. Thus, like Plato, Burke and Gandhi, Tagore refused to regard politics as the realm of the unmoral.

Although, we have not included Vivekananda in our plan of discourse, we shall say a few words on him as he exerted deep influence on the political orientation of Aurobindo and Subhas Chandra Bose.

Vivekananda championed Hinduism as a universal gospel of ethical humanism and spiritual idealism. The philosophical foundations of Vivekananda's political thought lie in his idealistic non-dualism. His political philosophy is contained in his *Lectures from Colombo to Almora, The East and the West*, and *Modern India*.

The central concept of Vivekananda's system is *Brahman*, and he believed in the harmony of Vedānta and Science. His political philosophy could be termed Vedantic nationalism. Like Hegel, he believed that there is one all-dominating principle manifesting itself in the life of each nation. Religion, he said, had been the momentous guiding principle in India's history. In each nation, he wrote, as in music, there is a main note, a central theme, upon which all others turn. Each nation has a theme: everything else is secondary, India's theme is religion. Vivekananda thus worked to build the foundation of a religious theory of nationalism, which was later advocated by Sri Aurobindo. Vivekananda declared that the national life should be organized on the basis of the religious ideal. Spirituality or religion meant, according to him, the realization of the eternal principles, and was never to be identified with social dogmas, ecclesiastical formulations and obsolete customs. Vivekananda's soul, like that of Bankimchandra, was lit with the luminous vision of Mother India as

a deity, and this conception of India as the visible expression of the divine mother has been the basic concept with the Bengal nationalists and terrorists.

Besides the religious and spiritual theory of nationalism, Vivekananda had a concept of freedom. This was a comprehensive theory. The whole universe, he said, in its constant motion represented the dominant quest for freedom. He regarded the light of liberty as the only condition of growth. Vivekananda not only stood for spiritual freedom or emancipation from the bonds of *māyā*, but also demanded the material or external freedom of man. He believed in the theory of natural right of man. Freedom in its total aspects – physical freedom, mental freedom and spiritual freedom – had been the watchwords of the *Upaniṣads*, according to him.

Further, his concept of strength and fearlessness, in terms of political philosophy, can be called his theory of resistance. He did not openly advocate any protestant theory of Indian nationalism in opposition to British imperialism. Instead of talking about political freedom and social justice, he talked about a broader concept – strength. Without strength one can neither preserve one's individual existence nor one can fight for the vindication of one's rights. He even said: strength is religion, and declared: "The essence of my religion is strength".[3] He justified the theory of fearlessness on the grounds of philosophic Vedantism. He taught the Indian people the immense vigour and vitality of the spirit or *Ātman*. He sought to utilize the Vedantic formula of *abhaya* or fearless character. This gospel of fearlessness was, for Vivekananda, the sure way of national rehabilitation. The fearless advocacy of the strength of the *Ātman* was the best antidote to tyranny and oppression. Vivekananda's poem, "To the Awakened India" is an eloquent call for cultivation of strength.

Vivekananda advocated the moral foundations of national solidarity. He stressed such virtues as manliness, a sense of human dignity and honour. These individualistic qualities had to be supplemented with a positive sense of love for the neighbour. Without the deep sense of selfless service, any talk of national cohesion and fraternity would sound hollow. Western sociologists emphasise the

social aspects of nationalism. Vivekananda harmonises the individualistic and social approaches with the scales tipped in favour of the moral growth of Individuals. The national ideal should comprise both service for the community and emancipation for the individual. Service and renunciation have got to be made the essential bases for the regeneration of the modern nation. However, it was *strength* and *fearlessness* that mark the political testament of Vivekananda. In point of fact the genesis of the Indian nationalist movement owes a great and good deal to the gospel and writings of Vivekananda.

Vivekananda often described himself as a sociologist. He inquired into the causes of India's social and political decline and prescribed a formula to eradicate social inequalities. His sociology was of course spiritually oriented. His Vedānta was practical, and at the political and social levels, he stood for resolute defiance against centers of oppression and tyranny. His social and political ideas followed from his Vedantic conception of the inner self as omnipotent and supreme. He wanted to get rid of all obnoxious ideas of class and caste superiority and tyranny which made the Hindu society loose, stratified and disintegrated. He denounced the evils of untouchability and condemned the wily of the kitchen and cooking pot. He wanted a thorough overhauling of society but he would do that on the basis of the spiritual heritage. Ha had scant sympathy with westernising ways of the social reformer like Keshab Chandra Sen and Mahadev Govinda Ranade. As a social reformer he preferred the philosophy of social organic growth. In point of fact, Vivekananda was a social realist. This social realism is revealed in his statement that India's political slavery of a thousand years is rooted in the suppression of the masses. Its sociologically realistic interpretation of Indian history was a pioneering attempt.

Sri Aurobindo is one of the major figures in the history of Indian nationalism. At the philosophical level, Aurobindo claimed to have reconciled the divergent trends of Indian ascetic academic transcendental idealism and western secularist materialism. His metaphysics grows out of the fusion of the Eastern and Western ideas. One of the cardinal principles of modern Indian

political philosophy is the reaction against the Benthamite utilitarianism. In place of the greatest good of the greatest number, Vivekananda, Tilak, Gandhi and Aurobindo advocated the concept of the good of all – the *Sarvabhūtahita* of the *Gītā*. To the Indian thinker the moral mathematics is artificial and egoistic. It leads to the neglect of the interests of the minority. Since the ultimate reality is the spiritual being, a man should try in his personal and political career to realise the good of all living beings. Instead of pleasure and pain as the sovereign criteria, the good of all sentient creatures should be the ethical standard. These criticisms of utilitarianism, found in Vivekananda, Tilak, Gandhi and Aurobindo, are drawn mainly from the idealistic and spiritual ethics and metaphysics. It was T. H. Green who first systematically voiced the protests of neo-Hegelian Oxford idealism against Benthemism. Did he have any influence on Indian thinkers, except on Tilak? Tilak's *Gita Rahasya* bears the influence of Green's *Prolegomena to Ethics*.

Aurobindo is critical of modern capitalism. He criticized the tendecoes toward the growth of centralisation and concentration in modern capitalism. Socialism meant for him the growth of an omnipotent authoritarian state. Much of his criticism is similar to such critics of socialism as Max Weber, Von Mises and Friedrich Hayek. Yet he accepted the socialist ideal as a starting point. He thought that the socialist objective of equal opportunity and the guarantee of a social and economic minimum to all was a mandatory goal for organised social help.

We may now note Aurobindo's philosophy of state. In his theory of nationalism Aurobindo reconciled nationalism with ultimate human unity. For him nationalism is not any limited and political creed. He always conceived of nationalism as a stage in the social and political evolution of man. Aurobindo was a prophet of full independence of India, but simultaneously he accepted the realisation of the gospel of human unity as an imperative political necessity for mankind. He viewed that at a certain stage nationalism has to be transcended by a religion of humanity.

There have been critics who have instituted comparative estimate between Bosanquet and Aurobindo in respect of their philosophy of state.

T. H. Green, for example, has will, not force, as the basis of the state. For Green a state is a collectivity of persons recognized by each other as having rights and possessing certain institutions for the maintenance and completion of those rights. Green writes in the tradition of British political democracy and liberalism. We do not find in him the Hegelian identification of the state and absolute right. He attributes more ethical and moral context to the state.

The Hegelian influence is more evident in Basanquet's *The Philosophical Theory of the State*. He regards the state as the entire hierarchy of institutions by which life is determined, e.g., the family, trade, church, and the university. State, for him, is the structure which gives life and meaning to them all. In Aurobindo there is a sharp separation between the political and the non-political. For him, the social institutions have an intrinsic immanent importance, and do not depend for their significance on the political order.

Yet there is a linkage of ideas between Hegel, Basanquet and Aurobindo. All of them almost accept the transcendence of social and political institutions by art, religion and philosophy. Aurobindo does not attribute the philosophic supremacy to art which Hegel and Basanquet do. But all the three accept that the inward self-consciousness which finds its realisation in religion and philosophy is not limited by the confines of the actual political and social institutions.

In the West, one notices supreme emphasis on the collectivity. Individual self-consciousness is conceived of as a reflection or portion of the external consciousness, and the importance of the individual is considerably belittled in Plato, Hegel, Bradley and Basanquet. In Aurobindo there is emphasis on the sanctity and sacredness of the individual as a spiritual self. Aurobindo (and in this respect Basanquet too) upholds a spiritual conception of individuality. But Aurobindo is a personalist. The Reality is at once as much individual, *vyākti* as the collective *samasti*. To Aurobindo the community is also a formation of the

divine Reality. The problem of *Swaraj* or self-government is a matter of great importance. So is the issue of individual rights. He accepted the idealist theory of more freedom as restraint over the egoistic self, but because of the nudities of the British imperialism in India, Aurobidno, like Spencer, is hostile of governmental encroachment on the individual. Yet, for Aurobindo, *Swaraj* is not enough. He pleads for equal opportunity for all. He realizes the worth of the nation-state. For Bosanquet the nation-state is the architectonic of reason, guardian of moral values. But Aurobindo championed the cause of human unity on spiritual foundations. He was critical of the League of Nations and advocated human unity and a free world-union.

References:

1. *Sādhanā*, London: Macmillan,1913, pp. 18-19.

2. *The Religion of Man*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1931, p.116.

3. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol.II, p.699.