

Chapter II

State and Society *a la* Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore was first and foremost a poet and a visionary. Yet he had strong views on the political states of affairs of India of his time – the social and moral predicaments brought about by the British rule. He was also critical of the world political situation between the two world wars, and the rise of nationalism in India and the world outside. Tagore's political ideas are intertwined with his philosophy of history, ideas of social regeneration and human freedom. These are not accidental. Beneath the sub-soil of the Indian polity there was already an undercurrent of patriotism nourished by the message of the nineteenth century renaissance. The talk of humanism, free will and self-respect was very much in the air. It is no wonder that for a poet and humanist of Tagore's sensibility, it was not possible to remain aloof from the dawning political awareness of his time, and in fact he got drawn into it.

It is not easy to comprehend the thoughts of Tagore on the state. Varied as they are remaining scattered in many of his Bengali and a few English writings. But there are good works done on Tagore's political thought. Sachin Sen's of *The Political Thought of Tagore* has been a pioneering work. Another is Stephen Hay's *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China and India*.

One may ask the question: Why should one get interested in the political views of a poet who was not a politician in the technical and professional sense, and who did not found a political school or launched a political party? We may very well recount the answer in the words of Sachin Sen who regards Tagore as a political thinker. He says: "Tagore had definite political speculations which are rich, multicolored, systematized and unconventional, and they call for serious attention in the perspective of world thought. He has made constructive

contributions to our political thought...”¹ Sen refers to Goethe who has described the role of the poet in the realm of politics “as a man and a citizen who will love his native land, but the native land of his genius lies in the world of goodness and beauty, a country without frontiers or boundaries...”² We may also add that a poet, in fact, all artists can provide an answer to what man can aspire for. Mathew Arnold³, while mourning the death of Byron, Wordsworth and Goethe, hails Goethe as “Europe’s sagest head” and, “physician of the iron age’, who undertakes pilgrimage for the “suffering human race”.

What better service could Rabindranath render to his countrymen than “to try to combat pernicious prejudice, open the narrow heart and enlighten the spirit for his people, purifying their taste and ennobling their thought”⁴?

Sen also says: “...it is the mission of a poet to inspire faith in the dream which is unfulfilled: without faith no future can be created. It is the dreamer who builds up civilisation: it is he who can realise the spiritual unity reigning supreme over all differences of race and not stumble over individual facts of separateness in the human world”⁵. Are all this not sufficient to study Tagore’s political thoughts?

Tagore’s political ideas do not tread the familiar and conventional path of tracing dynastic history or the exploits of conquerors and invaders. They fall within the domain of what we call the history of ideas – a history of the unfolding of man’s freedom. In one of his famous essays on “The Vision of India’s History”⁶, Tagore notes the inner tendencies of history; he would not accept the Orientalists’ view that the history of India is made out of wars, conquests, battles and dynastic intrigues and quarrels of rulers. Tagore draws our attention to the very basic fact that spirit of man, the creative impulse, is ever seeking unity and harmony among conflicting and contradictory forces. Tagore’s political ideology is based on the lessons of history or the history of India’s culture and civilisations. He explicated them in “A Vision of India’s History”. Tagore was not unaware of the clashes, conflicts and ravages of invasions in the

past, and he did not try to project or impute unity. What he did is to emphasise the element of synthesis, synthesis of various races and cultures – ‘a sea of humanity’ - the idea that the Indian mind remained unmoved in the midst of conflict and revolutions. This is achieved through a spirit of cohesion and synthesis of the narrow distinctiveness and the wide universality of man. Tagore saw the consciousness of a large multitude illumined with teachings of creative men, and he interpreted history accordingly. In his own words: “Let my heart be awakened gently in the sacred pilgrimage. Let it be awakened on the shore of the sea-like great soul of India. Standing on this shore I stretch my hands and salute the human god ... No one knows by whose call different forms of human life converged into this ocean in an irresistible flow; the Aryans and the non-Aryans, the Dravidian and the Chinese, the Saks and the Huns, the Pathans and Mughals merged with one body here”.⁷

We may refer to the view of Pabitrakumar Roy in this connection. He says: “In his study of India’s history Tagore accepts dialectics of development. The essence of dialectical movement is comprised by the existence of two mutually contradictory aspects, their conflict and their flowing together into a new category. This is how Marx has spelt out the concept of the ‘dialectic’. Tagore’s study of history does exhibit this scheme, but he is always aware of the fact that history presents a rich and variegated, and often inscrutable pathway of man’s journey through time”. It may be noted that Tagore’s idea of freedom is not freedom from external bondage; it is the freedom from one’s alienated existence. “History”, according to Tagore, “is the passage to freedom”. “It is freedom from the egoism, from the isolation of the self, from the fiercely intense sense of possession”. Indeed, Tagore has insisted on many different occasions and in many different ways that freedom lies in perfect harmony of relationship. In his words: “Only those may attain their freedom from the segregation of an eclipsed life who have the power to cultivate mutual understanding and co-operation. The history of the growth of freedom is the history of the perfection of human relationship”.⁸

Tagore accepted a social interpretation of history. In man's scheme of things society has a primacy. State is the specialised and professionalised aspect of society. In ancient India, there was a separation of the political and social spheres. Human energy was channelised through the home and *asramas*. The people lived their lives almost ignoring the state. Tagore writes: "In our country it was the king who was comparatively free and on the people was cast the burden of their civic obligations. The king warred and hunted – whether he spent his time in attending to matters of states or to his personal pleasures, was a matter for which he might be accountable to Dharma, but on which the people did not believe their communal welfare to depend".⁹

It will be futile to look for a Marxist critique of imperialism or capitalism in Tagore's perception of history. He interpreted the history of India without giving predominance to the productive forces of society, but with reference to the peculiarity of the social forces and relations. He approached history from a humanist perspective – imperialism had to be opposed and alien rule removed because these degrade the individual. Besides, these are alien to India's cultural pattern, which is not 'statist', but pro-society. Tagore's political notions thus are part of his historical perceptions and philosophical premises, and it is difficult to discuss them in isolation. They formed part of a totality of thought which embraced his understanding of man, history, society, philosophy and politics. As for the historical data, he falls back on the Hindu epics, myths and legends as well as customs and social institutions. For him, study of history is a study of society and social institutions and not of the political annals and state-craft. In India it did not matter whether the state was theocratic, autocratic or welfarist, but it had an ethical basis. No king was above the dictates of *dharma* or law governing him. He must fulfill his obligations as a righteous ruler. Politics was considered the 'master science', since dealing with *dharma*, it covered that vast range of human relationships that MacIver has so aptly termed 'the firmament of law'. In this sense, *dharma* was the creator of state and political science, if we

may use this word, i.e., 'political science' in respect to ancient Indian political affairs; it was more than a study of government. The sole purpose of governance was promoting the welfare of the people. Hence, positive law or politics was never a part of *Dharmaśāstra*-s. Even Kautilya in the final colophon of the *Arthaśāstra* made dharma the sole purpose of statecraft. The mixing up of *Dharmaśāstra*-s with *Rājanīti* occurred during the days of the Imperial Guptas when the statecraft had started to harden, and the *Dharmaśāstra*-s were active in incorporating parts of *Arthaśāstra*.

Another basic presupposition of Tagore's political ideas is his philosophical anthropology or concept of man. A distinction may be drawn between anthropology as a science and philosophical anthropology. Anthropology as a science is a systematic study of the physical beginning of man in the world, his biological evolution and the physical, cultural, historical and social development. Philosophical anthropology is about the concept of man; its central question is: What is man? The term 'philosophical anthropology' was introduced and the task of the discipline outlined by Max Scheler. According to him, philosophical anthropology is about the essence or essential structure of man. "It is the task of a philosophical anthropology to show exactly how, from the basic structure of human being, all the specific monopolies, creations and activities of man follow: language, conscience, crafts, weapons, ideas of justice and injustice, state, leadership, the representative functions of the arts, mythology, religion, science, historicity and sociality".¹⁰

The philosophical anthropology of Tagore views man as bi-polar. Man inhabits two worlds. In one, he is tied to the utilities, in another he is an 'angel of surplus'; he has two aspects, physical and universal, the finite and the infinite, material and the personal. Tagore never advocates the repression of the first terms of these polarities – the repression of man's individuality or his utilitarian motives and glorifying the terms of the other pole. But he believes that man can transcend his narrow self-hood and egoity, achieve universality, and realize his

personality. So freedom for Tagore is a dynamic concept; it consists in dialectic between the individual and the universal, between the finite and the infinite, between materiality and personality. That man's history is a history of freedom for Tagore, can be shown with reference to his views on the evolutionary process. He observes that a critical change is ushered in when man enters the scene. It signifies the entry of novel elements - elements of human imagination and creativity which are synonymous with freedom - in the stark uniformity of the evolutionary process. In *The Religion of Man*, Tagore says of man: "As an animal he is still dependent on Nature; as a man he is a sovereign who builds his world and rules it".¹¹

The most important difference between man and animal is that animals are bound within their limits, the greater of their power being necessary for self-preservation and preservation of the race. Animals too give expressions to feelings of love, anger, happiness, desires, etc. In animals these expressions are tied to usefulness, utility and survival. In man, though these feelings still have their roots in some original purposes, they have spread their branches far and wide in the infinite sky above the soil. That is why of all creatures man knows himself, feels his personality more intensely than other creatures. Let us dwell a little more on Tagore's idea of personality. It bears psychological overtones. We use this word to attach importance to some individual or group of individuals and to emphasize him or them. We say Mr. X has a strong personality or his personality clashed with the personality of his boss, or the mother's personality has a greater influence on the child. We must not confuse Tagore's concept of personality with the ordinary concept of it. The inner core of man's nature from which consciousness takes its direction to the world is personality for Tagore. Personality is a self-conscious property of transcendental unity within man which comprehends all details of facts that are individually his in knowledge, feeling, wish and will and also all world. In its negative aspects it is limited to individual separateness, while in its positive aspects, it ever extends itself in the

infinite through the increase in its knowledge. The negative aspects dichotomise human reality because it remains confined. Personality, understood negatively, leads to our alienation from others and the world, and confines us within the precincts of a limited hypostatized self. Tagore calls it *choto āmi*, the limited finite ego. Personality in its positive aspects takes man beyond such confinements. When Tagore speaks in terms of the dualities, physical-personal etc., he does not prescribe the annihilation of the first or submerging it in the second, rather he would speak of harmonising the two. This rounded off concept of man is the foundation of man's social consciousness, and his understanding of the processes of the world.

It is the freedom of man which creates a free state. This is the message of Tagore's *Swadeshi Samaj*. And this is backed up by his understanding of India's history. "Historically, in India the form of government has not been important, rather the triumph of the human ... the primacy of society persisted in spite of the rise and fall of kingdoms and empires".¹² Tagore made the very significant observation of how the common toiling mass remains unconcerned of the rise and fall of empires, wars and change of governments, and go on doing their work:

great multitudes I see...
moving with tumult,
along diverse paths in many a group from age to age,
urged by mankind's daily need of life, and in death.
They ever
pull the oars, keep holding the helm,
they, in the fields,
sow seeds, cut the corn.
They go on working.
The kingly sceptre breaks, the war drums
no longer resound:

Columns of victory gape, and blood-shot
 eyes and faces
 hide their annals in children's story books.
 They go on working,
 in Anga, in Banga, and Gujarat.
 The myriad hum of voices thunderous
 woven together, night and day,
 makes resonant the great world's livelihood.
 Sorrows and joys unceasing
 blend in chant rising to mighty hymn of
 On the ruins of hundreds of empires they go on
 working.¹³

The stream of the living history of India had flown on throughout despite her political vicissitudes. Hence, Tagore was insistent on repeating "that disaster can only overtake our country when its social body, the Samaj, is crippled. That is why we have never staked our all to resist a change of sovereignty, but have clung with might and main to the freedom of our Samaj".¹⁴ With the British conquest, the Samaj began to show cracks and to give way. To turn the tide we have to become our true selves consciously, actively and with our full strength.¹⁵

"*Samaja* is an ancient word, occurring in the Rgveda, and it connotes equality of its members, derived as the term is from *Sama*. Society then is the republic of selves. Freed from the shell of ego, the self realizes itself fully. Harmony, for Rabindranath, does not mean negation or exclusion of discord but transcendence of it".¹⁶ Tagore's vision of India's history is based on a distinction between truths and facts. He says: "The mark of truth is that everything comes under its purview. Despite an apparent discord or disorder in such convergence, there is a great harmony at the depth of it, or else it would have annihilated itself. But this symmetry is not there lying aside the disproportionate, it accepts the

disproportionate and then transcends it".¹⁷ It is from the fact that man can transcend facts into truth that society becomes possible. We may recall that that the *Swadeshi Samaj* was written in the context of an acute scarcity of water in Bengal in 1904. There Tagore pointed out that what distinguished British and Indian ideas of administration was that in the former, the state alone was responsible for state welfare – even the provision of alms to the poor. But, in India, this responsibility was, only partially, that of the ruler. Consequently, Tagore argued that if the king suddenly stopped providing assistance or if anarchy descended, society's education or pursuit of religious teaching did not stop abruptly. In developing this thesis in the *Swadeshi Samaj*, Tagore observed: "We are not strong where Europe is strong ... The source of strength is the State. The State has taken upon itself the responsibility of discharging all welfare efforts – the State distributes alms, the State imparts education, the State looks to the preservation of religion ... In our country society is the source of our welfare... India has not cast a look at kingdom; she has looked at her society".¹⁸ This belief in the primacy of the society and restriction of the functions of the state is consistent with Tagore's faith in the worth and ability of the individual.

The anti-state attitude of Tagore was bound up with the curbing of the state's power. He recognized that the political action was not the only means of human improvement; political state was not the only agency of expressing democratic will. The historical sense should inform every member of society to be actually conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity, to understand the society in which he lives. Tagore returned to the same theme time and again during the early years of the last century by stressing the concept of social responsibility and its relation to the idea of *dharma*, the spirit of which he felt was essential for a rediscovery of India.

There was something moral in Tagore's concept of social responsibility. He derided excessive dependence on government, insisting that government stood outside of society, and to seek favour from it automatically implied conceding some amount of freedom to it. He anticipated that his ideas perhaps

would not be popular. Bengal was passing through a severe drought and Tagore's exhortation to self-reliance was often interpreted as unwillingness to demand anything from the Government. But he would not compromise, for his spirit was opposed to centralisation, bureaucracy and big government.¹⁹ "In order to reinvigorate Indian society, it was necessary to revive the spirit of integration, co-operation and understanding. These social traits could have their best expression in local self-government which should be made responsible for the welfare of its members. Rabindranath supported the idea of a decentralized and federative state wherein the regional units would be allowed to play a prominent role consistent with their larger responsibility".²⁰

Tagore's emphasis on society does not spring from the theory of non-state; it is tantamount to an anti-state attitude. The anti-state attitude of Tagore does not suggest that he was opposed to the state as such or that he considered the state to be an amoral entity. But he vehemently discarded power philosophy, and believed in taming of power. He wanted to put on embargo on the extension of the state's activities in every sphere of life. Naturally, this could be possible in a self-reliant society. He depreciated the tendency to look to the state for solving problems facing the community. In the essays in the collection *Atmashakti* (1901-05)²¹ Tagore often commented on the divergent rules in the India and Europe. He repeatedly asserts that India has nothing whatsoever to gain from importing the Western notion of state.

Tagore, we may say, is in the company of Bertrand Russell who believes that "if social life is to satisfy social desires, it must be based upon some philosophy not derived from the love of power". Russell says: "If I had to select four men who have had more power than any other, I should mention Buddha and Christ, Pythagoras and Galileo ... No one of the four would have affected human life as he has done if power had been his primary object. No one of the four sought the kind of power that enslaves others, but the kind that sets them free."²² State is that organisation where power is concentrated in the hands of a few. Tagore's distaste for all kinds of regimentation and bureaucracy is a

constant trend in his thought. While the essays in *Atmashakti* and *Swadesh* were written in the early part of the 20th century, his observation on the Soviet society following his visit to Russia in the twilight decade (1930) reflects this very continuity of his thought. Tagore was almost overwhelmed by the Soviet achievement. In his letters to his son Rathindranath and others²³ Tagore repeatedly gives expression to his almost unbridled enthusiasm for the great experiment, mentioning that a sea-change has been effected in merely thirteen years since the Bolsheviks came to power. But his eloquent praise is counterbalanced by his concern for the freedom of the individual. The drawback of the Soviet Russia was the incursion of the state in education. “They have made a mould with the education system. But humanity created in a mould does not last. If ideas of a live mind don’t match ideas of education, the mould is bound to disintegrate into pieces one day, men’s mind will become lethargic and die or they will become robots”.²⁴ Considering that this observation was made in 1930, Tagore’s words today sound almost prophetic.

A staunch believer of man’s progress to freedom and self-realisation, Tagore was against the manifestation of force in any form, be it state force or force used in challenging the state. He was not only against violence and terror as means for gaining freedom which is amply brought out in his novel, *Char Adhyay*. He was also against violent nationalism under the guise of patriotism. Rabindranath believed in the fellowship of men. He visualised the dawn of “the great federation of men”. Hence, he was averse to the concept of nationalism too.

Nationalism in the West, particularly in Europe, has often been thought to have a political relation to the Napoleonic conquest of Europe and to the break-up over the centuries of the Empire in Central Europe. It is more plausible to say that there emerged from the Napoleonic attempts at Europe, an association of nationalist and legal and political obligation and political identity. These are allegiances which are in some sense less than wholly political—matters of geographical, cultural and ethnic association. The motive is to find some binding

force among people that are stronger than any revocable agreement to the governed, wider than any merely personal affection, and sufficiently public to lend itself to the foundation of political institutions or laws. In India, nationalism developed in the context of colonialism.

Nationalism has been understood differently. We may distinguish three different senses. In one sense, nationalism concerns national identity. In that sense national identity claims that it may properly be a part of someone's identity that he belongs to this or that national grouping. Making our nationality an essential part of our identity, we are not doing something that is rationally indefensible. A person who in answer to the question: "Who are you?" says, "I am Indian" or "I am American", is not saying something irrelevant or bizarre. This proposition is a fairly modest one; it does not say that we are rationally required to make nationality a constitutive part of our personal identity, or that having a national identity excludes having collective identities of other kinds. Nor does it say that a person's national allegiances must always have a single object; it does not exclude a person's identifying herself as a Bengali, an Indian, pursuing a career in medicine, being a member of a music club, or an environment enthusiast, etc. "Identity" and its cognates like "identification", "to identify", etc. have a long history from the ancient Greeks through contemporary analytic philosophers. Identity is important not only because it contributes to make a man the kind of person he is and enriches his relationship with his fellows, friends and neighbours.

The second proposition about nationalism is ethical and claims that the duties we owe to our fellow-nationals are different from and more extensive than the duties we owe to human beings as such. That is not to say that we owe no duties to humans as such. But it is to claim that a proper account of ethics should give weight to national boundaries and that in particular there is no objection in principle to institutional schemes - such as welfare states - that are designed to give benefits to those living within its boundaries.

The third conception of nationalism is political. It is understood as a theory that a state (perhaps every state), should be founded on a nation, and that a nation should be constituted as a state. Hence, the attempt to uphold national identity is something more than nationhood; it involves not only terrestrial integrity, common language, custom and culture as essential to the idea of a nation, but also consciousness of these, as determining separate rights and allegiances. This consciousness is held to render intelligible and to justify the habits of strong association among members of a state. Not only that; it also signifies the sentiment and ideology of attachment to a nation and its interests.

It is surmised that Tagore would not be averse to nationalism conceived in the first sense. About the second, he would want to supplement ethical particularism with ethical universalism, and he would be opposed to the third sense of nationalism. His essay on *Nationalism*.²⁵ is a denunciation of nation and is 'prophetic' in character. Tagore's criticism of nationalism has to be read as a critique of nation-state. Tagore takes nation to be co-terminus with nation-state. Nationalism has an unwelcome connotation for Tagore when a nation makes a claim to a state of its own the bounds of nationality and bounds of state coincide. When this happens, obligations of nationality are strengthened by giving expression in a scheme of political co-operation; a formal scheme of political co-operation is superimposed on the national community. Perhaps, rights and obligations of citizenship coincide with rights and obligations of nationality. A nation-state not only fosters a fierce sense of national identity but also entails moral indifference to outsiders, to people beyond the national boundary. It proclaims the superiority of one particular nation and asserts that nation's right to trample upon others in pursuits of its vital interests. A nation coagulating into a state leads to the view that superior nations have the right of domination over weaker nations; it entails exclusive concern for one's own country, a desire that it should dominate others.

Tagore's Nationalism is no isolated treatise. It should be viewed in the light of Tagore's other socio-political writings, particularly the thesis of *Swadeshi Samaj*. Tagore's concept of nationalism has grown out of his anti-state point of view, and his argument is developed in terms of such opposites as organized and mechanical on the one hand and creative, spiritual and man on the other. These are the contrary categories of existence that Tagore seeks to harmonize. Tagore recognises that the word 'nation' cannot be translated into Bengali. In conversational language *jāti* refers to *varna* or *jāti* can be used to mean 'race'. He says: "I have no hesitation in accepting the word 'nation' (in Bengali) in tact. The idea we have derived from the British; I am prepared to acknowledge debt by retaining the word from their language".²⁶ The Indian nation was just in the making when Tagore penned these words.

In "What is a Nation"? (Nation Ki? in Bengali)), in which Tagore analyses the view of Renan (1820 - 1992) Tagore goes on to examine the many building blocks of a nation - territorial unity, centralized administration, linguistic affinity and ties of common market. But he concludes that while all these are relevant, nation, in the final analysis is "a state of mind", rather "a family of minds" not constrained by geographical limits. His definition of nation is the political and economic union of a people organized for a mechanical purpose. It is largely utilitarian and exploitative. The mechanical organization of people in pursuit of material aggrandisement is necessarily aggressive and imperialist in character. The nation is also the "least human and least spiritual". "It builds a civilization of power which makes it exclusive, vain and proud." One form of its manifestation, according to Tagore, is the colonisation and exploitation of people. "To the "nation", Tagore opposes "the world of personality", that is, all social relations that are not mechanical and impersonal.

In his essay on "Prachya O Paschatya Sabhyata", he writes: "the word Nation does not occur in our language, nor does it exist in the country. We have learnt of late to prize national greatness by virtue of European education. But its ideals cannot be found in our minds. Our history, our religion, our society, our

family, none of them has recognised the ascendancy of the cult of nation. Europe prizes political independence; we set store by spiritual liberation... it is clear that it's (the cult of Nation) ideals are not ennobling, they carry the evils of injustice and falsehood; there is a sort of terrible cruelty about the cult ... the basis of Hindu civilization is society; the basis of European civilisation is the State. Man can attain greatness either through society or through the state. But if we ever think that to build up the Nation after European pattern is the only way open and the only aim of humanity, we shall be wrong".²⁷

Besides the ideology of the *Swadeshi Samaj* and the poet's gigantic sense of history of the role of man in the making of history which led him to his own understanding of nationalism, there were also historical pressures behind Tagore's lectures on nationalism. The most important was the impact of the First World War. The outbreak of the First World War dramatically brought to the open the horrible implications of the latter. The catastrophic war called into question the universal humanity, which influenced Tagore deeply. However, the world war is not a central theme of *Nationalism*. It is rather ever present in the background as proof of the self-destructive tendency of the organised modern nation. Indeed, this perception intimates his whole argument. In his words: "This European war of Nations is the war of retribution. The veil has been raised, and in this frightful war the West has stood face to face with her own creation, to which she has offered her soul". The world war was the fulfillment of the necessary logic of aggressive western materialism, of science divorced from spirituality, by which the Nation will drag the greater part of the world "down into the bottom of destruction. Whenever power removes all checks from its path ... it triumphantly rides into its ultimate crash of death".²⁸

During his travels in Japan and the United States (1916-17), he warned in various lectures against these dangers. Nationalism was to him an ideology of collective selfishness. Its central pursuit was power at any price. It set people against people, and organized people by destroying their reason, conscience and creativity. Patriotism, he later explained, "is proud of its bulk. It would not

acknowledge a difference which is fundamental ... Power lies in number and extension. It talks of unity but forgets that unity is that of freedom. Uniformity is unity on bondage".²⁹ The immediate reception of Tagore's criticism of nationalism was mixed. The American Press was hostile. *The Detroit Guardian* warned the people against Tagore as corrupting the mind of the youth by sickly mental poison. Japan, where he initially received great ovation and appreciation as the poet seer from the land of the Buddha, turned cold when he cautioned them; his warning against the worship of the nation-state was virulently criticized. Within India, some of Tagore's contemporaries took exception to his remarks. For instance, some members of the Gadar party mistook his criticism as betraying the Indian nationalist aspirations.

Tagore's concept of nationalism is different from the modern concept of it, which takes into account the phenomenon of race, language, ethnicity, religion or nationalist myths. His anti-nationalism is related to anti-politics. This anti-politics implies primacy of civil society. Tagore conceives civil society as something distinct from and of stronger and more personal texture than political or economic structure. In Tagore's view despite successive invasions and conquests, civil society in India has survived as an organic reality. He holds that society as such has no ulterior purpose. It is an end in itself, a spontaneous self-expression of man as a social being. The cult of nationalism is sinful, he argues, because it forces individuals to surrender their personal wills into an abstract organisational will and to give their loyalties to its impersonal goals. He ever keeps his firm faith in the individuals who have made human ideals living in their personality. The human civilisations have their genesis in individuals, and they also had their protectors in them. Civilisation is the creation of great individuals. It has not been created by big institutions. When humanity is in peril individuals have helped it survive, and not organizations and institutions.

Besides Tagore's stated abhorrence to nationalism, there are explicit reference to it in his novels. Ashis Nandy,³⁰ who has scanned three of Tagore's novels, *Gora*,³¹ *Ghare-Baire*, (*The Home and the World*)³² and *Char Adhyay*,³³

says that “Tagore’s political concerns in the three novels did not change over the 25 years of his life that the writing of three novels spanned”.³⁴ The last one shows how passion of nationalism legitimizes violence inevitably leading to a loss of self and signification. Particularly in *Gora*, the protagonist comes out of the narrow confines of nationalism and transcends to a moral universe. During the hectic anti-partition campaign of 1904, Tagore was briefly drawn to join militant nationalists, but the experience produced a profound disillusionment. He soon discovered that the movement’s main inspiration was negative, violent and irrational. On such negative basis no just and open society could be founded. Gora, the protagonist of the novel, is a passionate advocate of Hindu revivalist nationalism. Although his experiences of the Hindu society are at variance of his beliefs, he nevertheless holds first to faith in an ideal Hinduism, and does not want to subject it to critical analysis. In the end, he is faced with the revelation that he was not a Hindu at all but the child of an Irish parent, brought up by a Brahmin and his wife as their child. Gora, then, finds his Hindu identity crumbling like a house of cards. He is nobody in the Hindu society. He realises himself as an individual only, whose allegiance is not to a particular community or tradition but his own sense of right and wrong. He declares: “In me there is no longer any opposition between Hindu, Mussalman and Christian. Today every caste of India is my caste. I can never be afraid of contamination even in the house of the lowest of castes.”³⁵

In *Ghare-Baire*, Nikhil, the hero of the novel, risks everything to live according to his humanist ideal; it wrecks his relationship with his wife and isolates him from the nationalist movement that turns violently against him. Tagore is trying to say that risks have to be taken if the human values are to be restored. Tagore could not get reconciled to the collective selfish ideology of nationalism. He was equally critical of patriotism. In his last novel, *Char Adhyay* (1934), he unfolds how the violent and secretive forces of extremist politics, may turn out to be tragic. The tragic ending is in sharp contrast to the hopeful ending of the earlier two novels. The common thread of the three novels is a critique of

militant nationalism coupled with colonialism and patriotism. This was sought to be achieved at a time when nationalism, patriotism and anti-imperialism were a single concept for most Indians. A recent critic, E.P.Thompson has suggested that Tagore employed the term nationalism to mean what we mean now-a-days by imperialism. What Tagore was ever trying to project is a self-definition transcending the geographical barriers of India.

It has been alleged that Tagore does not appear to have succeeded in suggesting ways of transcending the contradiction of nation and no-nation - the pursuit of dialectic which marks the general tenor of his thinking. But this is only apparent. The affirmation of the primacy of the social and personal freedom, in which Tagore saw the true basis of the individual's manifold relation with the society and the whole world, characterises Tagore's political thinking. He refuses to grant primacy to the political even when he was drawn in politics and it gives an obvious feeling of irony that his songs are sung as national songs and anthems of two nations, India and Bangladesh. He pleads for man to "have his new birth in the freedom of his individuality". "We must make room for MAN, the guest of this age, and not the NATION of this age, obstruct his path".³⁶ Tagore's outspoken stand against nationalism brought him into public controversy with Gandhi, but his commitment to individual freedom was not shaken. People in power are expected to pay attention to this.

In concluding this chapter, we may note that there is a certain datedness in Tagore's political theses. But it is an eye-opener. In spite of the protectors of peace and international understanding by organisations like the UNO, the promotion of International Law and Charter of Human Rights, states carry on their game of power politics. One does not have to look beyond Tagore's own land for a strong confirmation of the deleterious consequence of the party politics. The struggles for power and blind partisanship have marked our sense of justice, natural sympathies and the capacity for cooperation. This is not totally to deny the importance of politics. But a principle of people's politics should be to restrain the power of the state and stop it from assuming totalitarian control

over society. The capacity of the state, particularly the military state, for doing evil, is practically unlimited. The good that it can directly promote is far limited than what most people seem to realise. An essential prerequisite for any durable social improvement is to prepare public opinion in its favour. Mad men in power can today destroy the entire human civilisation. In the Buddha's time violence was only local. The Buddha's mission was removing local oppression. Today nuclear weapons have proliferated, and have reached a much larger number of nations. India too is not excepted. What is a matter of hope is that peace movements have started all over the world. They aim at raising the level of human consciousness in the world to a clearer perception of the unprecedented hazards ahead. Thus public opinion of a civil society is valuable to keep the state in check. Global movement for peace must learn to move in sympathy with struggle for freedom from a powerful state.

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