Chapter - 2

Nationalism: The Patriotic Gurudev
There are men rare in any age, but unique in their age, to which it is given to shape the mind of their country and the world to an extent that cannot be rightly estimated in their own lifetime. Rabindranath Tagore is such a man, and the debt which modern India owes to him, one cannot try to measure. His teachings and writings are penetrating the most out-of-the-way and distant corners of India; the amount of moral regeneration and social uplift which his work will accomplish, it is quite impossible to describe now. To the people of India, he is a prophet with a strong message. In the true sense of the word he is a national figure. India fills his heart as nothing else does. He sees what India wants, and tells Indians what exactly it is.

Rabindranath Tagore sees the inward agonizing of the Indian soul, understands the passions and doubts surging in her mind, wishes to deliver her from the travail through which she is passing, and give her solace. He pours forth in his prose the dreams and aspirations which are moving in the mind of India. The joys and sorrows, the hopes and fears, the doubts and beliefs of the Indian life are captured in his books. Adapting Johnson, one might say that the work of Rabindranath Tagore abounds in sentiments to which every Indian blossom and returns an echo. He gives voice to the doubts which are darkening the once glorious faith of India. It is the sign that God has not lost all hope of India that Rabindranath Tagore is born in this age.

The greatest of all problems which confront the patriot-reformer of India, who proposes to shatter the sorry state of things and remould it. His solution is nearer to people’s heart-desire and it is also the religious future of the country. The religious situation will have to be dealt with in a manner that would guarantee the spiritual progress of the country, and do justice to the bewildering variety of faiths and creeds, indigenous and foreign, which flourish in the land.
Rabindranath Tagore dreams of and pictures to one, a vision of India, purged of its superstitions and worshipping the One God, each in its own way, without quarrel or misunderstanding. In religion he stands for a passionate devotion to God. His is not the way of intellectual comprehension, but that of intuitive grasp. While the externals of worship divide, the deeper core of religious experience is essentially the same. The Sufi mystic, the Christian divine, and the Hindu Rishi agree in regarding creation as the manifestation of the eternal beauty of God; man, His emanation and perfection, becoming one with God.

Rabindranath Tagore has studied a lot of literature, philosophy art and religion of the East and West without any bias and with an open mind. Some of these certainly influenced him. But he is an original thinker. Thus finally ‘humanism’ in Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophy is powered by the humanistic ideas found in Indian Upanishads. Rabindranath Tagore’s concept of God, world, soul, death and immortality all are humanistic in nature.

Rabindranath Tagore was born at the time of great epoch in Bengal, when the currents of three movements started giving a new direction to the culture of the country. One of these was the religious movement introduced by Raja Rammohan Roy. It was revolutionary, for he tried to reopen the channel of spiritual life which had been obstructed for many years by the sands and debris of creeds that were formal and materialistic, fixed in external practices lacking spiritual significance. This was an attempt to reconcile the teaching of ancient religions with the discoveries of modern science. Rather it is the combination of ancient morale and scientific yield.
The second was literary being led by Bankimchandra Chatterjee, who, with a touch of his magic wand, aroused Bengali literature from her age long slumber. Before he entered the scene, their literature had been oppressed by a rigid rhetoric that choked its life and loaded it with ornaments that became its fetters.

The third was a sort of national movement. However, it was not fully political, but it gave voice to the mind of the people who were trying to assert their own personality. It was a voice of impatience at the humiliation constantly heaped upon by people who were not oriental, and who had the habit of sharply dividing the human world into the good and the bad according to the hemispheres to which they belonged. Among these, the religious movement had a great influence on Rabindranath Tagore. It aimed at a social and religious revolution of a new kind. Its vehicle was the Brahmo Samaj of which Rabindranath Tagore’s father was an important member.

It was a society of Hindu Protestants who combined in themselves the scientific outlook with a deep reverence for the purer tradition of their own culture. Rabindranath Tagore’s early initiation into its ways was, to a great extent, responsible for his Catholic attitude and modern ideas. Rabindranath Tagore lived at a time when India was in the midst of a struggle for independence. Nationalism was a powerful force in India and other Asian countries as well as in other parts of the world.

Rabindranath Tagore opposed nationalism because he thought nationalism was associated with the pursuit of power. Nationalism, as he sees, is different from simple love of one’s country. Simple love one’s own country is patriotism and only patriotism, for him, it is not the same thing as nationalism.
Rabindranath Tagore’s nationalism means that one begins with one’s immediate neighbours, but one does not stop at any point and by the power of love and goes on expanding the circle of one’s neighbours and there is no stopping on the way.

Though, not an active politician like Gandhi and Lokmanya Tilak and his younger contemporaries Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhashchandra Bose, Rabindranath Tagore protested the partition of Bengal in 1905 and was in favour of Indian self-government. He also protested against the massacre at Jallianwala Bahg on 13 April 1919, by resigning his Knighthood that the British had previously conferred upon him.

Actually speaking, when Rabindranath Tagore is born there is a seething of religious beliefs and a lawless raging of social forces, the like of which has probably not been seen before. This man of India expresses and corrects the aspirations of the Indian community. He is the signpost warning India, which is at the parting of the ways, to pursue the path of spirit and relinquish that of matter. Deep down amidst the surging doubts, the foundations of a stronger faith in God and India's destiny are being slowly laid by his work. He tries to give philosophical touch to everything.

Rabindranath Tagore sees the world or nature as an inseparable aspect of God. The creative love of God is the source of the universe, which is destined to express the fullness of divine perfection. This world is the living image of God. Rabindranath Tagore adds that the entire world is given to the people, and all their powers have their final meaning in the faith that by their help they are to take position of their patrimony.
Then one wonders why there exists evil in the world if this universe is destined to reflect the fullness of divine perfection! Is evil a necessary aspect of creation? Rabindranath Tagore believes that the reality of evils cannot be doubted in so far as they are experienced by one. It is a part and parcel of conscious beings to feel and experience contradictions, pain and conflicts. This implies that, in Rabindranath Tagorean philosophy, the problem of evils is not related to the existence of evil so much as to the way in which the experience of evil arises.

Rabindranath Tagore’s credence to the experience of evil must not create the impression that according to him; evil is a necessary aspect of existence. Clarifying this point he says, “If existence were an evil, it would wait for no philosopher to prove it. It is like convicting a man of suicide, while all the time he stands before you in the flesh. Existence itself is here to prove that it cannot be an evil.” (Sisir Kumar Das, The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Vol-II, 300). One must remember that Rabindranath Tagore has an optimistic picture of life, he believes in the ultimate goodness of the world process. He is fully convinced that what appears as evil will ultimately be transformed into good. Therefore he says, “Evil cannot altogether arrest the course of life on the highway and rob it of its possessions. For the evil has to pass on, it has to grow into good; it cannot stand and give battle to the All.” (300).

That is why; Rabindranath Tagore asserts that although evils are facts, they are not ultimate facts of existence. If one looks at death from the point of view of evil, it is generally considered as the greatest evil. However, this seems to be an evil only because it is viewed in isolation from life. If one takes death as one single phenomenon affecting one individual it will definitely mean ‘the losses’ of that individual.
Similarly, if one regards death only in relation to the life that is being lived will mean end of this life. But there is much more comprehensive view—a whole-view is possible. If one views death in the universal context, it will appear to be a very necessary and useful aspect of the creation. Rabindranath Tagore clarifies this by saying that “only when we detach one individual fact or death we see its blankness and become dismayed. We lose sight of the wholeness of a life of which death is part.”(299).

Rabindranath Tagore says that the theists find the problem of evil a puzzling one because of their inability to take a balanced view of the presence of evil in the universe. They go either to one extreme, and are not prepared to accept that the creation of an omnipotent God can be imperfect, or they go to the other extreme and feel that once the reality of evil is accepted, it becomes a necessary factor of existence.

Rabindranath Tagore adds that both of these views regarding evil present intellectual as well as existential problems that the theists are unable to solve. Therefore, Rabindranath Tagore states firstly that evils are experienced in the world because they are aspects of the world-aspects of the created world. He sees no logical inconsistency in believing that creation has to be imperfect. The very fact that it has been created implies that it cannot have the perfection that the creator possesses; to be created means imperfection. All the same, one should not mean that imperfections are permanent aspects of existence.

Evils are not ultimate facts; they have to be transcended. “As in intellectual error, so in evil of any other form, its essence is impermanence.”(298). If one accepts this, the problem of reconciling the presence of evil with the power and goodness of God will not arise. Good is the positive element in human
nature. The sense of goodness arises out of a truer view of one’s life, which is the connected view of the wholeness of life, and which concerns not only what is present before, but also what is not and perhaps never humanly can be.

He says when one begins to have an extended vision of one’s true self, when one realizes that one is much more than at present one seems to be, one begins to get conscious of one’s moral nature. Then one grows aware of that, which one is yet to be, and the state not yet experienced by one becomes more real than that under one’s direct experience. Necessarily, one’s perspective of life changes and one’s will takes the place of one’s wishes. For will is the supreme wish of the larger life, the life whose greater portion is out of one’s present reach, whose objects are not for the most part before one’s sight.

Then comes the conflict of one’s lesser self with one’s greater self, of one’s wishes with one’s will, of the desire for things affecting one’s senses with the purpose that is within one’s heart. Then one begins to distinguish between what one immediately desires and what is good. For good is that which is desirable for one’s greatest self.

Rabindranath Tagore seems to be aware of the fact that certain limitations and imperfections are inherent in human beings because of their embodied existence. They go along with finitude. Though this is an evil, it is not permanent. One can accept it as only a phase that paves the way for its transcendence. Evil, thus, is an occasion for the disciplining of life, for the “surplus” in man to assert and display it.

Rabindranath Tagore views life as a perpetual struggle between good and evil. At this point Rabindranath Tagore tries to clear up a possible source of
misunderstanding. The usual opposition between good and evil, which is experienced in life, may create the impression that evil and good are essentially antithetical to each other. A caution has to be exercised at this juncture. The concepts of finiteness and imperfection, for example, are opposed to the concepts of infinity and perfection. But the human existence, which is apparently an imperfect and finite existence, does not negate the possibility of perfection or infinity.

In this sense evils are not opposed to the good. Rabindranath Tagore says, “In fact, imperfection is not a negation of perfectness; finitude is not contradictory to infinity: they are but completeness manifested in parts, infinity revealed within bounds.” (298). With this Rabindranath Tagore wants to clarify that in citizens both evil as well as good exist. So he wants to say that both empire and nation are evil. So his point is that there is some good and some evil present in the ideology of East and West. Actually, this is the base for all limitations. Rabindranath Tagore wants to say that good and bad things are there in both East and West. The supporters take their stand and continuously oppose the development of other empire and nation. This is the reason why Rabindranath Tagore doesn’t support empire and nation.

In this connection one can say that Rabindranath Tagore was preoccupied with the thematic of empire and nation in much of his travel writings. Even in many of the letters he wrote to his family and friends during his trips within India and to Europe, America, China, Indonesia, Russia and Persia, and the frequent speeches or interviews he gave during these visits, he wants to demonstrate that both nation and empire are but egoism and evil.
These egoism and evil are wide spread in East and West. He teaches that humanity should reach out for a cultural confederation between races and nations. This can be done through a global dialogue or a creative understanding between the East and the West. Rabindranath Tagore believed that inclusive and synergic meetings between cultures would take the world towards harmony and global fellowship, with the application of Santam, Sivam and Advaitam. These principles he borrowed from the Upanishads.

Rabindranath Tagore clearly speaks out this three-fold ideology, in a letter to Charles Andrews, send from Kashmir, Rabindranath Tagore Writers: “the first stage towards freedom is the Santam, the true peace, which can be attained by subduing self; the next stage is Sivam, the true goodness, which is the activity of the soul whose self is subdued; and then the Advaitam, the love, the oneness with all and with God of course this division is nearly logical; these stages, like rays of light, may be simultaneous or divided accordingly to the circumstances, and their order may be altered, such as Sivam leading to Santam. But all one must know is that the Santam, Sivam, Advaitam is the only goal for which we live and struggle.” (Letters, 50).

This letter soon points out the people the poetic and spiritual base of Rabindranath Tagore’s political ideas. He gives a piece of advice to humanists to bring about inner unity of the self, by overcoming worldly distractions, and to attain oneness with the world. This helps the individual to deny his mind and enter into the soul to become one with in the world. Only by getting rid of the duality of the self and world or I and you, can the individual human become part and parcel of the whole. In the Bruhadaranyaka Yagnavalkya explains this principle to Maitreyi.
“As long as there is duality, one sees the other, one smells the other, one speaks to the other, one thinks of the others, one knows of the other, but when for the illumined soul, the all is dissolved in the self, who is there to be seen by whom, who is there to be smelled by whom, who is there to be heard by whom, who is to be spoken to by whom, who is there to be thought of by whom, who is there to be known by whom.” (Letters, 89).

In this way one is supposed to remove the duality of ‘self’ and ‘other’ by getting rid of the ‘self’, which instantly mingles individual with the larger world. Emphasizing this principle of non-duality and its role in spreading peace throughout the world politically and morally, Rabindranath Tagore advises “Let us be rid of all false pride and rejoice at any lamp being lit any corner of the world, knowing that it is a part of the common illumination of our house.” (Letters, 111). This self less rejoicing of things big or small, with all express feeling that they are all equal, requires the individual as well as the nation to move above the taints of pride and passion or of worldly ‘Maya’ and appreciate that, to quote from the Chandogya Upanishad, “What is in the macrocosm is in the microcosm.” (Letters, 74), and vice versa.

In this connection it is better to observe Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophy of the art of seeing; it is ‘darshana’ to see things in the light of eternity, to establish man’s faults in meaningfulness of his existence and seek a harmonious relationship between man and the objective reality. He is one’s great reconciler. He has tried to reconcile the extremes of transcendence and immanence; of one-sided naturalism which makes of man a mere product of nature and extreme spiritualism which separates the man totally from nature.
In his ethics also one can see the same attempt at reconciliation between polarities. He condemns hedonism without losing his faith in the joy of life; he shows how determinism and freedom both hold for more mechanical activity which sometimes one may incorrectly call progress. Man is the dreamer of dreams and the music maker. Rabindranath Tagore’s universe is prominently man centre. His guiding principle in aesthetics is harmony, or reconciliation between two harmonies - the external which he calls proportion or Pramana and internal harmony which he calls Lavanya or grace.

In his important essay collection *Sadhana* called *The Relation of the Individual to the Universe*, Rabindranath Tagore observes the true relationship between the two. Comparing the Eastern and Western views on this, he says the West takes pride in subduing nature ‘Wresting everything from an unwilling and alien arrangements of things’. This creates an unnatural relationship of the two actually dissociation or a sort of separateness between man and nature.

India, on the other hand, as Rabindranath Tagore says, emphasizes the harmony that exists between the Individual and the Universe. India intuitively felt that the essential fact of the world has a vital meaning for it; the citizens have to be fully alive to it and establish a conscious relation with it, not merely impelled by scientific curiosity or greed of material advantage, but realizing it in the spirit of sympathy with a large feeling of joy and peace. World must be undivided and all citizens of this world should think beyond empire and nation. When a man does not realize his kinship with the world, he lives in a prison-house whose walls are alien to him. When he meets the eternal spirit in all objects, then he is emancipated, for then he discovers the fullest significance of the world into which he is born; then he finds himself in perfect truth.
Rabindranath Tagore emphatically says again and again that man is supposed to realize the wholeness of his existence, his place in the infinite. The spirit of the *Upanishads*-‘in order to find him and must embrace all’- is the standard spirit and the key to Rabindranath Tagore’s thought and art.

Therefore, the philosophic universal view of Rabindranath Tagore was mainly taken from the Hindu tradition of the *Upanishads* and then spread Vishnava tradition. The absolutistic interpretation of the *Upanishads* given by the Advita School, however did not appeal to Rabindranath Tagore. He felt closer the theistic Upanishads like *Isa* and *Sretaswetara* rather than those like *Katha, Chandogya* and *Bruhadaranayaka* - in which the identity of the absolute with the self is the dominated idea. Rabindranath Tagore was one of the first to point out the Western scholars had given a distorted picture by emphasizing the idea of maya or illusion. He never accepted sorrow and asceticism as the destiny of man’s life; his stress was or Ananda or bliss.

Frankly speaking, Rabindranath Tagore’s birth took place at a critical juncture in Indian history, in 1861 - four years after the great indigenous uproot against the East India Company was successfully ruined, and first three years after “the British parliament passed the Government of India Act, transferring ‘all right’ that the company had hitherto enjoys on Indian soil directly to the crown. This transfer of power consolidated the British imperial hold on the subcontinent, creating an environment in which the Indians were enslaved by an alien power in their homeland. They became the beasts of burden for another society, toil icy away so that the English could be fed, clothed and nourished and, as Rabindranath Tagore tauntingly suggests in a letter from Russia, “become great and do great thing for mankind.” (Dutta, *Anthology, 121*).
Being a humanitarian at heart, he could not understand or accept the rationale behind this British exploitation and injustice in India. He wondered why the Indians were used as a lamp stand to irradiate English life. While the Indians themselves remained smeared in trickles of oils, why should the British systematically pilfer the Indian coffer and inflict the indignity of poverty and pondering on the local people? Why couldn’t the two sides seize the moment of encounter between the East and the West in a creative, constructive spirit, for establishing mutuality and equality between the races, instead of the blind and irrational contempt and corresponding hatred and vengefulness that prevailed between the people.

Rabindranath Tagore’s rejection of the Empire and imperialism was deep seated in his consciousness, and he categorically expresses his outrage against this hierarchical political system in his travel writings. His basic stricture against this oppressive practice was that it was based on the binary of self and others - one race imposing its political and cultural will viciously and violently on another, giving scope to a culture of ruthless exploitation, manipulation, and prejudice. Rabindranath Tagore articulate his total rejection of this repressive political culture in a letter from London, responding to a woman who had accused him of being unduly critical of the British people in one of his letter:

“I deeply feel for the races that are being insulted and injured by the ruthless exploitation of the powerful nations belonging to the West and the East. I feel as much for the Negroes, brutally lynched in America, often for economic reasons, and for the Koreans, who are the latest victims of Japanese Imperialism, as for any wrongs done to the helpless multitude in my own country.”

(Letters, 127)
Rabindranath Tagore felt morally outraged by the fact that one nation should rule over other by brute force, and thrive on the life-blood of the victim nation. This was an insult to human dignity on both sides, as it completely violated the law of autonomy of the self. Moreover, as an ideal or action, it was unscrupulous even scandalously criminal. It created a mode of victimizer-victim, ruler-ruled, master-slave and deterred the races from growing out of this symbolic relationship and fulfilling their true human potential. This scramble for new level was motivated by what Hobsawn would call great or what said later described as a wish for cultural dominance.

Thus Rabindranath Tagore strictly opposed the imperial arrogance and caused this for misery and injustice in the world. He was equally critical of the parochialism and chauvinism fomented by nationalism. In a letter from Vienna, Austria he said, “I have said over and over again that the aggressive spirit of nationalism and imperialism, religiously cultivated by most of the nations of the West, is a menace to whole world.” (Dutta, Selected Letter, 333).

Rabindranath Tagore recurrently saw an ongoing nexus between the two forces like Hobson did. He judged imperialism as an expression of national egoism, and both are potent sites of power discourse. He accused the Europeans had come to India and other parts of the world driven by love and pride for their own nation. The plundered other countries only to further the prosperity of their own land, and to establish its power and authority in the world. Their patriotism blinded them to the betterment of humanity.

Rabindranath Tagore considered ‘nationalism’ as a highly intoxicating and additive sentiment that breeds radicalism and passionate excitement in people comparing nationalist zeal and religious fanaticism, in that they both mutilate the sense and sensibility of the individual and nations. In a letter from
New York, dated 20 December 1920, he wrote: “Formalism in religion is like nationalism in politics; it breeds sectarian arrogance, mutual misunderstanding and a spirit of persecution.” (Letters, 85)

Rabindranath Tagore also accused nationalism of exclusivistic and provincialistic since it creates artificial walls among nations by enclosing each in a separate ‘geographical cage’. It eventually leads individuals to think in a narrow mode of fierce separateness between one nation and another, fostering aggressive national egoism and fatal rivalry among nations. In a letter from Stockholm, dated 27 May 1921, he expresses: “The nations love their own countries; and that national love has only given rise to hatred and suspicion of one another. When we hear ‘Bande Mataram’ (‘Hail to three Mother’ - a nationalistic slogan in India that became popular during the Swadesi movement in Bengal, in 1905) from the housetops, we shout to our neighbours; “You are not our brother”…. What even may be its useful for the present, it is like the house being set on fire simply for roasting the pig! Love of self, whether national or individual, can have no other destination except suicide.” (Letters, 143).

In one more letter from New York, dated 8 February 1921, Rabindranath Tagore recounts how he himself witness the sinister effect of this dichotomous sentiment in the U.S., culminating in emotional and sometimes physical violence towards people who were deemed as ‘other’. He gives the examples of the Asians, who were viewed with antipathy by the mainstream while community and the blacks, who were “burnt alive, sometimes merely because they tried to exercise their right to vote, given to them by law.” (Letters, 98).
Moreover the Germans were ‘reviled’ and the Russians were ‘deliberately misrepresented’. Rabindranath Tagore wants to tell that for Americans to realize their national identity as a people, they had to constantly put themselves on a higher plane and calumniate others, or see their relationship with non-whites and non-Americans in a dichotomous light. They had to feed their individual and national egos through “continual supply of hatred, contempt, jealousy and lies and lies.” (Letters. 98).

Rabindranath Tagore was holistic thinker, who believed in the multifaceted nature of the human being. “To me humanity is rich and large and mercy sided.” (Letters, 92). He wrote in a letter dated 14 January 1921 from New York. To operate efficaciously, any ideal would have to take into account this multiplicity in the human individual and bring wholesome nourishment for the whole being.

This multiplicity included both mind and soul, and for Rabindranath Tagore an ideal had to minister to each of these attributes so that each is brought to fullness. Only then would the individual’s in new unity and creative bond of wholeness be reinforced, steering the world towards a “grand harmony of all human races.” (Letters, 108).

Given this multilateral outlook, Rabindranath Tagore naturally perceived nationalism to be unilateral and monolithic concept, utterly indifferent to the spiritual aspects of the human individual. Nationalism required the individual and nations to sacrifice the spirit, or the higher ideal of humanity, at the altar of greed and gain, magnifying there by, Rabindranath Tagore explains, “Our vulgarity (and) cruelty…dethroning God, to put (up) bloated self in its place.” (Letters, 98). This forceful displacement of the sacred element of the soul with
self-love is sacrilege to Rabindranath Tagore, and one that upsets man’s moral balance by subjugating his inherent nobility and goodness to a worldly Maya.

Rabindranath Tagore’s life is full of experiences. The experience in Italy and its troubling aftermath demonstrated to Rabindranath Tagore the gulf between the reality of human affairs and his ideals. An incident in Delhi just after his return from Europe in December reminded him. If he needed remembering of the even widen gulf in India. On 23 December 1926, a Hindu reformer was killed by a Muslim fanatic. Speaking at Shantiniketan, Rabindranath Tagore said that the greatest calamity which afflicts one in this country is that different communities would be dwelling side by side and yet have no real relations with one another.

Rabindranath Tagore refused to blame the killing entirely of politics and politicians, a favourite exceed potion of Indians then - as it remains even now. Relations were not better ‘in the old days he said, speaking from great experience, politicians rather than creating dissension had manipulated a long standing antipathy. On his estates, he recalled, in the early days of his management, he used to find part of the floor covering in the estate office rolled up by the tenants - to clear a place for the more respectable Muslims.

This religious apartheid had long been accepted by Hindus and Muslims alike. ‘Then he said that all of a sudden there came a day when the Hindus called up on the Musalmans to join them in their political campaign, saying: ‘you are our brothers; you must take your share of loss, and join us in braving jail and oppression. To our dismay we found them sporting new blood-red fez caps, asserting that they too desired to maintain their distance; what is the obstacle we asked, wonder-stuck to our standing shoulder to shoulder in the field of polities?
The obstacle was more or less the same old gap between the carpeted and uncarpeted portions of the floor. By no means, a trivial gap - not at all events a gap which can be bridged by calls for unity made from public platforms’.

Rabindranath Tagore was outraged by the idea of the nation in general but much of his criticism was directed against Gandhi’s nationalistic movement in particular. He generally had a great personal interest and respect for Gandhiji, but he could not accept his political vision of Swadeshi and Swaraj for various reasons. He believed Gandhi’s movement had no spiritual basis; he did not fulfill the Upanishadic principle that all belong to one self-efficient Brahman and that one should work towards realizing that divine is one identity of humanity by overcoming worldly temptations. Instead of his search for a separate identity for India helped frustrate the attainment of the alternate reality by creating a world that is disunited and fractured.

In one of his letters from Chicago, Rabindranath Tagore painfully explains how Gandhiji’s nationalist programmes were more inclined towards to Buddhist philosophy of dukkha (misery) and nirvana, than the Hindu Philosophy of one (everlasting yes), anandam (blissful joy) and mukti. Nirvana calls on the individual to attain the truth of nothingness by following the negative path of destroying the self. Mukti on the other hand, require the self to reach out for Brahman thought the position path of purifying the soul of its worldly delusions and forgetfulness. This latter idea can be best understood in light of the following statement from the Mundaka Upanishad.

The individual self, deluded by forgetfulness of his identity with the divine self, bewildered by his ego, grieves and sad. But when he recognizes the worshipful Lord as his own true self, and beholds his glory, he grieves no
more… The Lord is the one life shining forth from every creature. Seeing him present in all, the wise man is humble, puts not him forward. His delight is in the self, his joy is to self, and he serves the Lord in all. Such as him, indeed, are the true knower’s of Brahman.

With his intrinsically peaceful and harmonious view of humanity and God, Rabindranath Tagore came to believe that Gandhiji’s Satyagraha movement, in spite of Gandhi’s non-violent objectives, was generating excessive negative excitement among Indians, inflaming their hatred and vengefulness against the British. Such proliferation of emotional violence could not remedy. India’s problem since what India needed was the wisdom of love, acceptance and tolerance and not the spirit of hostility and persecution. Hostility would only breed more hostility pushing the country to the brink of destruction. Besides, as Rabindranath Tagore points out sharply, in a letter from London, “It is hateful to hate.” (Letters, 126) a well organized and deep rooted hatred can reap up and no positive outcome at all.

In another letter from Ardennes, French, dated 7 September 1920, he encourages his compatriots to disperse their negative sentiments for the sake of their self-respect and pride, “Stung by the insult of cruel injustice we tried to repudiate Europe, but by doing so we insult ourselves. Let us have the dignity not to quarrel or retaliate; not to pay back smallness by being small ourselves.” (Letters, 69). In the same letter he further reminds his fellow Indians that their true mission should be to carry out their own duties whole heartedly and not to worry about the wrong doing of others.

The above comment brings one to the crux of Rabindranath Tagore’s argument. He essentially believed that India ought to be more inward looking
and soul searching; that it should strive to reduce its own overwhelming social problems before it could gain the moral right to resist the injustice of the British. How could India rightfully stand up against an oppressive colonial power, when it had for centuries abused multitudes of its own people? India should first address the caste issue, which had taken a hypnotic hold on the minds of its people creating a gigantic system of cold-blooded repression of the untouchables. It should also address the issues of poverty and gender discrimination, and work out a method to fasten the religious and racial harmony among its various groups. If India could come to grips with its ‘burden of heterogeneity’ and forge a horizontal relationship between its cross-sections of people, it would then become imperative for the British to quit India because of the moral superiority of the natives. Perhaps it would then also provide a positive lesson to the British and the rest of the world on how to live in fellowship and mutual harmony in a multi-racial and multi-religious milieu without degenerating into physical or intellectual brutality.

Rabindranath Tagore refused Gandhiji’s nationalist movement for one more reason also; he told that like any other movement, it glorified an abstract cause at the expense of the individual. The result many individual lives were sacrificed mindlessly at altar of the cause. As a philanthropist, who valued the concrete over the abstract and as a socializer, who felt every single life invaluable and sacred, this practice of perceiving the one through the prism of a great cause, reducing him to a phantom, was totally not acceptable to him.

In a letter from Chicago to his friend Charles Andrews, dated 5 March 1921, Rabindranath Tagore complains that many Indian college students were taking up Gandhi’s call to boycott the British education system and sacrificing their learning and future, without any alternative provision planned for them by
the great leader. This negligence of the so called leaders would inflict serious injustice on the students, as their wishful response to the call would deprive them a better future, which they could have accomplished through meaningful education. Rabindranath Tagore shows his anger in the letter at such unscrupulous victimization of helpless youths for an ideal that, in itself, was ill-advised and flowed and a practice he saw was becoming rather too common place in the modern world.

Here it is opt to discuss Rabindranath Tagore’s personal views on the East and the West. The East and the West join hands was a welcoming exhortation for Rabindranath Tagore. The English and the Christian may come to India and join the vast and holy sea of humanity here composed with various tributary races. This may be thought to be an idealistically beneficent view of the English conquest of India. But it is a view repeated almost word for word and systematically elaborated, in sober prose in a work which makes the culmination of all Rabindranath Tagore’s reflections and to home and the world, on his country and others.

India’s mission right from the beginning of history, Rabindranath Tagore says was “like that of a hostess who has to provide proper accommodation for numerous guests” many ‘races’ had come to India in the past; it was at last the turn of the English now, “and we neither have the right nor the power to exclude these people from the building of the delighted India”. But there was a vital difference, unlike in the past we in India had to deal this time “not with human races but with a nation - we who are no nation ourselves.” (Rabindranath Tagore, Nationalism, 3). Whole human races could commingle and harmonize; a notion was abrasive and destructive.
There is a crucial thing even if somewhat elusive distinction between a race, which is human and organic and transplantable and a nation which is an inhuman ‘machinery of commerce and politics’ and thus it is an intrusive agent of exploration and dominance. In contrast ‘The spirit of the West’, which is beneficent with ‘the nation of the West’, which is so evil as to be almost satanic. Soon enough for Rabindranath Tagore, the politically recognized entity of nation-state has become ‘this abstract being, the Nation’ which is henceforth consistently personified and capitalized, and soon enough mythopoliticalised into an all destroying demon of the monstrosity and enormity of say Bakasura or Bhasmasur.

It is somehow not easy to follow Rabindranath Tagore in all the stages of this impassioned myth-making, especially as he keeps strewing his discussion with characteristic obiter dicta (such as the West has a history and India has a destiny). He amazingly gives to the term ‘nation’ a meaning of his own, which seems hardly compatible or inter faceable with any of the wide range of connotations which have lately been discussed for example by Benedict Anderson etc.

But there is no doubt of his general intent that he stands for a supersession and transcendence of nationalism by internationalism, and that while he may hate a nation he can still love the race. Rabindranath Tagore had a deep love and great respect for British race as human beings. He said that while fiercely reviling the English Nation of which these particular human beings as unquestioning subjects.

In this way one can talk these discriminations and convictions which may be said to constitute the key to an understanding of Rabindranath Tagore’s stand
towards the West and England, and conversely, towards imperialism and India’s nationalistic moment. They explain why, at the peak of Gandhi’s first nationwide movement of Non-co-operation in 1920-21. Rabindranath Tagore (who was in America) insistently pleaded with a close associate such as Andrews to ‘keep Shantiniketan away from the turmoil’s of politics’, and to keep his head above politics. Thus though Rabindranath Tagore himself characterized his preferred concept of internationalism as spiritual and transcendent, it may be useful to look at the specific historical and personal factors which contributed to his constriction. Rabindranath Tagore’s internationalism was founded on the significant biographical fact that through birth and upbringing, he had always been familiar to not with one nation but with two; his own and England.

Rabindranath Tagore was immensely praised and was a positive writer. He was not in a position to compromise his ideals for any practical political or individual gain. He knew pretty well that supporting Gandhi’s movement would make him more popular among the people of India, but he refused to do so and solely courted to risk of being accused of disloyalty by the striving millions in this vast country. With his refusal to take part in to nationalist movement one should not think that Rabindranath Tagore didn’t love his mother land.

He undisputedly loved India and his love for nation is not in any way less than Gandhi or any of his contemporaries. But the only thing is his love was not confined to this country only. He advocated universal brotherhood. For that cause he dedicated his entire life and strength. Practically speaking he was the first person to praise India’s glory and beauty in many of his special writings. Two of his great songs have been chosen for National Anthems of India and Bangladesh respectively. His works in many ways are immortal in not only in Indian literature but also in world literature as a whole. He established a bank, a
match factory and a wearing centre to help his poor co-Indians. He founded a university to make a point that only education can uplift the nation’s glory and fame.

In present day schools and colleges, a major problem is the relation between the teacher and the taught. There is no proper interaction between them so that the students are alienated from the teachers and vice versa. Unless a warm and purposeful relationship is established between the learners and teachers, education cannot hope to achieve its full objectives. That is why Rabindranath Tagore gave emphasis to the life within a classroom is similar to the life within a community where all are equal and so interaction and cooperation must be as among equals. The teacher must be a guide to his students as well as their friend. Education must teach the mind how to create and help it to relax and enjoy - and so, Rabindranath Tagore’s insistence on creative self expression. Two ways in which this could be achieved was aesthetic education and craft work. Rabindranath Tagore strongly disapproved education that emphasized cramming, which plays an essential role in the educational pattern of today.

So Rabindranath Tagore would not allow himself to be blinded by his passion for the land or love for country dominates his moral sense. He truly believed in a global society, in which India would form a part of the whole, and not occupy his whole being. “The complete man must never be sacrificed to the patriotic man, or even to the merely moral man.” (Letters, 92). He warned in a letter from New York, dated 14 January 1921. In a letter he also said, “I love India, but my India is an idea and not a geographical expression. Therefore I am not a patriot - I shall ever seek my compatriots all over the world.” (Letters, 119).
Rabindranath Tagore was of the opinion that both Imperialism and Nationalism were only passing phases in the development of human community. Humanity was too good for such narrow, exclusive and vaguer ideas, which patronized the social hierarchy, exploitation and careless injustice. He confirmed that the days of bothering suffering and suspicion are coming to an end and better days are awaiting humanity.

The reason he quotes is that corrupt forces of imperialism and nationalism were continuously losing their strength. In a speech in Iraq in 1932 he said, “We must usher in the age of reason, of cooperation, of a generous reciprocity of cultures which will reveal the richness of our common humanity”. In a letter from New York he gave a piece of advice, “We must make room for ‘man’ the guest of this age, and not let the nation to obstruct his path.” (Letters, 80).

Here one might be tempted to remove Rabindranath Tagore as a romantic and idealist writer who is unrealistic for a practical and realistic world. But that is not real. Almost all his agreements have been accepted by his critics. For example, Rabindranath Tagore’s view that imperialism was inspired mainly by sheer economic and cultural factors, and that it was a site for control and domination of weaker nations by the stronger ones, has been reemphasized by Hobson, Lenin and said likewise, many of Rabindranath Tagore’s views on nationalism are sensibly valued, and some are born by contemporary post-colonial criticism.

Secondly, Rabindranath Tagore’s view that imperialism is but an off shoot of nationalism is shared and accepted by Timothy Brennan, who suggests that European nations came into their own and realized their national identity only when they confronted by the ‘other’ in the colonized nations. On the other hand,
now-a-days intellectuals found out that ‘nationalism’ is the father of sentiment in tolerance. Out of which one can get irrationality, prejudice and hatred which will spoil the spirit of people within and between nations.

These agreements speak volumes that Rabindranath Tagore is still relevant in this present society. The ethical and spiritual values in this man’s political thoughts are not outdated. One can easily understand why Rabindranath Tagore opposed the terms ‘empire’ ‘nation’ or ‘nationalism’ both in the covert sense of English imperialism and in the obverse and overt sense of Indian anti-imperialism, his ‘a political’ internationalism and universalism has belief in race as the highest common factor of its best individuals and all such ideas have been accepted by the modern man. He is willing to follow the path of international fellowship, inclusive and mutual harmony, paved by the enlightened soul, the great Rabindranath Tagore.

Nationalism results in India as a historical development, which materialized as a cause of the advancement of educational and economic changes which took place during the colonial age. The original Indian nationalists were individuals who asserted that an Indian nation however is defined or ought to exist, had certainly unique characteristics and special goals.

They were mostly religious and political reformers, political agitators, poets, saints and Statesmen. Some had programmes for change, while others merely criticized the conditions around them and some others were content to express their devotion to India, which existed only in religious and mythological symbols. Hence for Indians, Nationalism was a representation of many ideals.
For Mahatma Gandhi it meant getting rid of the British through non-violence and for Jawaharlal Nehru it was not purely an anti-western ideal. For Indians, primarily and most commonly accepted norm of nationalism meant getting rid of a western political domination, which later with the development of communication became an ideal, which transcended to advancement of the common man and the state towards the twentieth century, consequently to a building of a modern nation; India. The leaders of the nationalist movement in India, who based nationalism as a revival of Hindu culture openly acknowledged their identification of nationalism with Hinduism.

Reformists like Bala Gangadhara Tilak stressed on the concept of Hindutva being devotional to Hinduism as an expression to Nationalism, which may have routed racial problems created among Indian people at a later stage. However, the reformist movement in India had its dawn in Bengal, the ruling centre of the British Raj. The movement in Bengal is hence most known as the Bengal awakening or ‘Bengal Renaissance’.

Secondly, every morning the Rabindranath Tagore sons had to recite verses culled from the Vedas and the Upanishads with proper pronunciation and accent. These morally uplifting prayers and its recital practice influenced young Rabindranath Tagore and made a lasting impression on his mental makeup. Rabindranath Tagore therefore grew up in a surrounding of reformists, philosophers and intellectuals. While describing his boyhood days he states; Pundits of the deepest learning would visit father’s drawing room to discuss the scriptures and sciences: musicians would display their skill… such people made of our house a living university.

Rabindranath Tagore’s nationalistic views may serve as one major example of the Bengali focus of the nationalist movement. Though his ideas on
Nationalism are filled with his unparalleled charm and clarity in the language as in the literary works of his contemporary Bankim Chandra Chaterjee, Rabindranath Tagore could stimulate not only the populace but also the masses in Asia itself. Rabindranath Tagore assumed that European Nationalism was political in nature and dedicates to strengthen the nation state and its sovereign independence.

Writing on nationalism he states. “A nation in the sense of the political and economic union of a people is that aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for mechanic purpose. Society as such has no ulterior purpose. It is an end of itself. It is a spontaneous self expression of man as a social being. It is a natural regulation of human relationships, so that men can develop ideals of life in co-operation with one another. It has also a political side, but it is only for a special purpose.” (Letters, 57).

Rabindranath Tagore derived a subtle negativity on the idea of nationalism practiced at that time: Hindu civilization, by contrast he saw as dedicated to a spiritual rather than a political freedom and its ultimate goal was the religious liberation of individual.

According to Rabindranath Tagore the word ‘nation’ did not actually exist in any Indian language and he noted that neither Indian history nor its religious and domestic life show any evidence of emphasis on nation building activities. In one of his writings he had stated as, the Indians have no word for nation in their language. When they borrow this word from other people it never fits them. The Bengali word rastra is used to indicate a state or a large political unit but has no cultural connotations. The term ‘des’ was often used to refer to either to Bengal or to India but the term originally meant the place of origin, place of geographic,
social, linguistic and cultural sense and the Rabindranath Tagore, who popularized the name ‘Mahatma’ - great soul - as a description of Gandhi with great admiration, had many disagreements with him on the ideas related to Nationalism.

Though Gandhi’s mission was humanitarian, as an experienced lawyer he could not divorce himself from political constrains, his ultimate goal was national freedom and social harmony through non-violence and truth. His campaign on Swadesi, Swaraj and Satyagraha (passive resistance) and his ideal of Ahimsa in many ways connoted his rediscovery of Hinduism as well as means of adopting tolerance to unite India into one secular nation. Rabindranath Tagore knew that he could not have given India the political leadership that Gandhi provided. He also started a Swadesi Bandar movement in Calcutta for the promotion of indigenous goods and actively supported the movement by composing a number of national songs, leading processions and by raising funds for the establishment of the national schools. When in the course of time the Swadesi movement assumed a form of a mere political agitation producing extreme reactions, Rabindranath Tagore withdrew from it.

The burning of much needed cloth in the name of boycott of foreign goods and the alienation of Muslims by Hindu religious motifs in the struggle deprived Rabindranath Tagore. It is a well known fact that Rabindranath Tagore gradually moved away from the mainstream of nationalist movement and with his initial involvement with Swadesi movement, which later centered on partition of Bengal in 1905.

Then he retreat himself at Shantiniketan and started writing on public issues concerning the violent passion of patriotism, the illegitimacy of Nationalism, and disengagement of political from the social and moral.
Nationalism and nation states thereafter appeared to him as a great menace and a ‘geographical monster’. The author of India’s national anthem was thus outspoken in his views on Nationalism as he did not expect the idea of a nation-state to supersede Indian society and civilization.

Rabindranath Tagore’s sensitive poetic mind, in his late thirties, was very disturbed as he witnessed such aggrandizement by the British during the Boer War in South Africa (1899-1902) and the Western missionaries at the Boxer uprising in China (1899-1901). This loathsome attitude of the imperialists worldwide was vehemently condemned by the young poet in some of his political essays published in the journals Bharati, Bangadarshan and Sadhana, and also in some of his poems in Naivedya.

In his essay The Eastern and the Western Civilization, he wrote: When the national interest, which is the foundation of European civilization, is inflated to such an extent that ignores righteousness of all kinds, eventually a crevice is formed through which the evil makes its way in. The nature of self-interest is such that it always leads to hostility. At present this hostility becomes evident like thorns at the edge of European civilization. That is an early indication that the European nations will quarrel and fight with each other for their share on earth….” (Kalyan Kundu, Majumder, P11).

In another essay, Antagonistic Ideals, published in the same journal, he wrote in September, 1901: Antagonism of interest is inevitable. Conflict of interest makes a man blind. If the English manages some kind of opportunity in Asia, French will immediately think the English are gaining strength. Even if they are not involved in war on this issue the very thought will poison their mind.
The rising strength of one nation always concerns other nations. As a result, a blind hostility and malice, and the suppression of truth will inevitably happen. Though renowned throughout the world as a creative artist, Rabindranath Tagore’s concepts on war and peace were confined to his writings within the boundaries of his native land. It was only after he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913, that he gradually emerged onto the international stage more and more as a pacifist and promoter of peace - and less and less as a literary figure. In America, Canada and Britain, pro-peace organizations such as Quaker Societies (also known as Societies of Friends) were formed.

Their objectives were to promote peace through pacifism and though Rabindranath Tagore was never an active Quaker, he had contacts with the Societies of Friends and faith in their ideals. The Austrian pacifist Bertha von Suttner, the first female Nobel Prize winner for Peace, invited Rabindranath Tagore at the Peace Congress held on 15 January 1914, at the Great Concert Hall in Vienna. Rabindranath Tagore did not attend, but sent a message supporting the peace movement, quoting from Atharvaveda. In addition, Rabindranath Tagore’s poems were read out at that congress. Her book Maschinenzeitalter (The Machine Age), published in 1889, was amongst the first in the West to forecast the outcomes of exaggerated nationalism and armaments which became Rabindranath Tagore’s strong conviction in later years.

Rabindranath Tagore’s political thought was complex. He opposed imperialism and supported Indian nationalists. His views have their first poetic release in Manast, mostly composed in his twenties. Evidence produced during the Hindu-German Conspiracy trial and later accounts affirm his awareness of the Ghadarite conspiracy, and stated that he sought the support of Japanese Prime
Minister Terauchi Masatake and former Premier kuma Shigenobu. Yet he lampooned the Swadeshi movement, denouncing it in ‘The Cult of the Charka’, a bitter essay written in 1925.

This approach to the idea of the nation cuts across late twentieth century debates about the nature of nations and nationalism. If one thinks about the exchanges between two of the most significant scholars of nations and nationalism, Ernest Gellner and Anthony D. Smith, and a Rabindranath Tagorean perspective, one would find Rabindranath Tagore (perhaps unexpectedly) agreeing, in some senses, with Gellner’s modernist understanding of the nation. Smith’s emphasis is on the importance of history, myths and memories (Anthony D. Smith, Nations and Their Pasts, 359). For nations, thereby stressing their pre-modernity, would concur with what Rabindranath Tagore calls “a people” or “peoples”. Gellner’s emphasis is on high politics and the ideology of nationalism which creates nations, “rather than pre-existing nations giving rise to nationalism.” (Ernest Gellner, Thought and Change, 174).

This is precisely what Rabindranath Tagore sees as essential to nations, which is historically possible only within the context of specific aspects of Western modernity. The characteristics of that particular modernity which gives rise to nations are the regulatory power of the state, combined with science, set within a wider framework of commercial and military competition between individual national units.

The value of the comparison with contemporary political theories of nations and nationalism is more than just incidental. It reminds one that Rabindranath Tagore’s perspective on the Western nations was that it belonged to a particular period in the West’s history, but it constituted neither a universal
model nor a necessary path of convergence. Rabindranath Tagore’s ‘contrast concept’, which helps one place his definition within the parameters of contemporary debates on nations and nationalism - as well as distinguish a distinctively Rabindranath Tagorean position - is ‘society’. The nation is equated with the state as “the organised self-interest of a whole people, where it is least human and least spiritual.” (Sen Gupta, The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore, 50).

The nation-state is a ‘machinery of commerce and politics turning out neatly compressed bales of humanity which have their use and high market value. Society, by contrast, has ‘no ulterior purpose’, but is rather ‘an end in itself’. In short, “it is a spontaneous self expression of man as a social being. It is a natural regulation of human relationships, so that men can develop ideals of life in cooperation with one another.” (51).

Rabindranath Tagore replaces the ideology of nation with the idea of swadeshi samaj of ‘social relations that are not mechanical and impersonal but based on love and cooperation’. The key characteristic of the modern Western nation is that it seeks to exercise power by regulating its populace (what Rabindranath Tagore would simply call ‘the people’) and directing their collective energies towards externally oriented goals.

The nation-state, for Rabindranath Tagore, is an organizing system and a structure of power. This ‘hardening method of national efficiency gains in strength, and at least for some limited period of time it proudly proves itself to be the fittest to survive … but it is the survival of that part of man which is the least living’. It produces efficiency but also monotony and sameness, such that
Western modernity - for example as manifested in modern towns, which presents to one ‘the physiognomy of this dominance of the nation’.

The nation is thus characterized as externally aggressive and competitive, but is also equated with internal disciplinary and regulatory power and the erosion of difference. Hence, in both its internal and external orientations, it is the negation of that freedom which is to be found in the life-world of ‘peoples’ living personalities “that find their self expression in’ literature, art, social symbolism and ceremony.” (Sisir Kumar Das, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol-II, 548).

Again, the similarity between Rabindranath Tagore’s ‘people’ and Smith’s ‘nation’- grounded in what Smith terms ‘ethno-symbolism’- is striking. A second contrast concept utilized by Rabindranath Tagore to draw his distinctions between the activities of the nation-state and the life-world of society is ‘politics’. As E. P. Thompson rightly points out, Rabindranath Tagore was the founder of an ‘anti-politics’ which ‘more than any other thinker of his time, had a clear conception of civil society, as something distinct from and of stronger and more personal texture than political or economic structures.

When political civilization prevails, Rabindranath Tagore wrote: “nations live in an atmosphere of fear, greed, and panic, due to the preying of one nation upon other for material wealth. Its civilization is carnivorous and cannibalistic, feeding upon the blood of weaker nations. Its one idea is to thwart all greatness outside its own boundaries. Never before were there such terrible jealousies, such betrayals of trust; all this is called patriotism, whose creed is politics.” (550).
There is confusion afoot, Rabindranath Tagore says, when equating the idea of ‘nation’ with ‘people’. It leads to ‘a hopeless moral blindness’. The “ideal of the social man is unselfishness whereas that of the nation is selfishness.” (550). Hence, extolling the virtues of the nation means that ‘the moral foundation of man’s civilization is unconsciously undergoing change’, such that “we find men feeling convinced of the superior claims of Christianity, because Christian nations are in possession of the greater part of the world. It is like supporting a robber’s religion by quoting the amount of the stolen property.” (550.)

It is the cult of the nationalism, Rabindranath Tagore believes, that allows one to celebrate the nation even though ‘what we see in practice is that every nation which has prospered (materially) has done so through its career of aggressive selfishness either in commercial adventures or in foreign possessions or in both. Rabindranath Tagore’s point is not that the body he calls ‘the people’ is entirely innocent; ‘we must admit that evils there are in human nature and they come out in spite of our faith in moral laws’, he says. “When this idea of the Nation, which has met with universal acceptance in the present day, tries to pass off the cult of selfishness as a moral duty … it not only commits depredations but attacks the very vitals of humanity.” (550-551).

Rabindranath Tagore implicitly points to the power of the national ideal to generate action and self-sacrifice when he claims that the problem with nationalism is that it teaches that “the nation is greater than the people.” (551) This is interesting because Rabindranath Tagore claims it is precisely the ‘power of self-sacrifice and the “moral faculty of sympathy and co-operation’ that constitutes ‘the guiding spirit of social vitality.’” (551.) Some nationalists and indeed some analysts of nationalism have argued the opposite position: that it is the ideal of nationhood that can inspire the individual to greater ends than he or
she alone could achieve. In Benedict Anderson’s famous example, it is the seductive emotional power of the ‘tomb of the unknown soldier’, ‘in which the principle of sacrifice in anonymity, and on behalf of all ‘the people’ becomes a core ideal of the modern imagined national community.

Others have pointed out “the way in which the national community has been integral to the moral bonds and shared risks underpinning modern welfares.” (David Miller, On Nationality, 10). But for Rabindranath Tagore, in sheer contrast, the faculty of national form is ultimately opposed the spirit of self-sacrifice. This is so because nationalism leads the people “to ignore the moral law *which is universal* but it is used only within the bounds of its narrow sphere.” (Sisir Kumar Das, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol-II, 548).

This, in an important sense, is the crux of Rabindranath Tagore’s critique of the modern nation. He is an insistent Universalist in his belief that moral truth is one, indivisible and omnipresent: hence, any ‘external organizational form which seeks to contradict that truth is a moral offence. It is the nation-state, for Rabindranath Tagore - in dividing humankind - which most aggressively presages this sin. This kind of formulation was never likely to satisfy anyone interested in a systematic theory of nations and nationalism.

It didn’t then, and it does not now. But Rabindranath Tagore’s objective, of course, was not to provide such a theory. Rather, it was to make an intervention in India’s evolving, proto-national public sphere: to offer an assessment of the global historical context in which he found himself, based on a moral and spiritual vision and providing a ‘message’, both to India and to the West.
The philosophical grounding of anti-nationalism:

In the development of Rabindranath Tagore’s argument, one sees a distinction between the internal and the external. Where humanity is living, it is guided by ‘inner ideals’. Rabindranath Tagore then uses an interesting analogy, suggesting that ‘the idea of the nation is the professionalism of the people. Professionalism is ‘the region where men who specialize their knowledge and organize their power, where they mercilessly elbow each other in their struggle’. Such professionalism must not be allowed to assume complete mastery over the personal man, making him narrow and hard, exclusively intent on the pursuit of success at the cost of his faith in ideals.

This is the competitiveness that Rabindranath Tagore sees as being inherent in the modern idea of the nation. The organizational and disciplinary capacity of the modern nation is intimately bound up with the state, and Rabindranath Tagore’s position was one in which the entire world of politics and bureaucracy is rejected in favour of a ‘spontaneous’ life-world based on the “social regulation of differences on the one hand, and the spiritual recognition of unity on the other.” (548). But where does this Rabindranath Tagorean position come from?

As Kalyan Sen Gupta notes in his *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, “while he (Rabindranath Tagore) was … receptive to ideas associated with the Bauls and Sufis of Bengal, as well as to Hindu Vaishnavism and to Buddhism, it was always to the *Upanishadic* endeavour to relate everything to a single ultimate reality that he remained most faithful.”(9).
The *Upanishads* are concerned, amongst other things, with the nature of the ‘ultimate reality’ that stands behind the world of everyday experience. Ultimate reality consists of a supreme power which is both immanent in the universe and also responsible for sustaining and regulating it. Given the name Brahman, it represents a universal ‘world soul’, which Rabindranath Tagore himself referred to as the Infinite Personality. From this spring an obvious moral imperative: “if each of us belongs to the universal soul, if the same infinite is equally present in all of us, then we ourselves are at bottom identical or one with each other … (and) recognition of this paves the way to openness to others, and generates in us love and concern for our fellow beings.” (9). This means that, for Rabindranath Tagore, “our basic commitment to the good of others is grounded in an intellectual, philosophical understanding of the nature of reality.” (10). Perhaps the key distinction to be drawn between Rabindranath Tagore’s position and the classical position developed in the *Upanishads* is one between epistemology and phenomenology. For the Upanishadic thinkers, the ultimate monistic reality that gives rise to a conception of human ‘oneness’ was a matter of metaphysical inference.

While one can certainly establish a reading of Rabindranath Tagore’s position which is similar to this Upanishadic perspective, what is more significant is that, for Rabindranath Tagore, such ‘oneness’ that represents an ‘Infinite Self’ or ‘Infinite Personality’ is to be experienced, not merely deduced. It is not a matter of rational argument. Instead, reality in all its manifestations reveals itself in the emotional and imaginative background of man’s mind. He knows it not because he can think of it, but because he directly feels it.

This ‘emotional background’ is part of an alternative theory of human nature that is central to Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophy and, logically, his
anti-nationalism. It is based on the (ultimately speculative) insight that the ontology of love is more central and insistent to the human condition than that of antagonism. This insistent aspect of one’s being is what Rabindranath Tagore called the ‘personal man’, man in an unalienated condition. ‘It is the personal man’, Rabindranath Tagore claimed, “who is conscious of truth, beauty and goodness, and ‘it is almost a truism to say that the fundamental light of this world of personality is Love.” (C. F. Andrews, ‘Thoughts from Rabindranath Tagore, 76).

But Rabindranath Tagore should not be judged as a thinker whose conception of love was merely aesthetic or abstract. Here is an important and extended letter to C. F. Andrews, written in 1918, shortly after he returned to Shantiniketan from his tour of the United States, Rabindranath Tagore explained his ideal of love as realized in the social world: “We must keep in mind that love of persons and love of ideas can be terribly egoistic and that love can therefore lead to bondage instead of setting us free. It is constant sacrifice and service, which alone can loosen the shackles. We must not merely enjoy our love (whether personal or ideal) by contemplating its beauty and truth, but giving expression to it in our life’s work.” (Sisir Kumar Das, The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Vol-III, 254).

The idea that life, the Real, exists in obstinate antagonism to the Ideal suggests the importance of maya - the world of illusions -for Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophy, and gives one a sense of why he has been referred to as maya yogi. The sense of oneness in marked contradistinction, one might say, to the modernist idea of alienation, is in fact a pressing aspect of one’s everyday being. One important source of inspiration for this Rabindranath Tagorean position was the supposedly unalienated existence of the Shantal tribes people
who lived close to Rabindranath Tagore’s ashram in Shantiniketan. In a letter to Andrews, Rabindranath Tagore wrote: “look at the aboriginal Shantal women around our ashram. In them, the ideal of physical life finds its perfect development, only because they are ever active in giving it expression in work. Rabindranath Tagore sees the individual life as an always incomplete endeavour: a human being ‘is aware that he is not imperfect but incomplete.’” (254).

He knows that in himself some meaning has yet to be realized. As Sen Gupta puts it, it is in the conviction, founded in direct experience, that a person is not a discrete, isolated being and may only realize his or her true nature through identification with the whole universe, which is the essence of Rabindranath Tagore’s spirituality resides. The realization of this unity becomes part of the work of human existence, indeed, for Rabindranath Tagore it becomes its overriding purpose, and constitutes a kind of ‘frontiers of the self’, ever pushing the boundary of the individual outwards.

Rabindranath Tagore emphasized self-help and intellectual uplift of the masses as an alternative, stating that British imperialism was a ‘political symptom of our social disease’, urging Indians to accept that ‘there can be no question of blind revolution, but of steady and purposeful education’. Such views enraged many. He narrowly escaped assassination by Indian expatriates during his stay in a San Francisco hotel in late 1916. The plot failed only because those would be assassins fell into argument among them. Yet Rabindranath Tagore wrote songs lionizing the Indian independence movement and renounced his knighthood in protest against the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh Massacre. Two of Rabindranath Tagore’s more politically charged compositions, ‘Chitto Jetha Bhayshunyo’ (‘Where the Mind is Without Fear’) and ‘Ekla Chalo Re’ (‘If They
Answer Not to Thy Call, Walk Alone’), gained mass appeal, with the latter favored even by Gandhi.

Despite his tumultuous relations with Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore was a key partner in resolving a Gandhi-Ambedkar dispute involving separate electorates for untouchables, ending Gandhi’s fast ‘unto death’. Rabindranath Tagore lampooned routine schooling: in ‘The Parrot’s Training’, a bird is caged and force-fed pages torn from books until it dies. These views led Rabindranath Tagore, while visiting Santa Barbara on 11 October 1917, to conceive of a new type of university, desiring to ‘make S the connecting thread between India and the world [and] a world center for the study of humanity somewhere beyond the limits of nation and geography’. The school, which he named Visva-Bharati had its foundation stone laid on 22 December 1918; it was later inaugurated on 22 December 1921.

Here, Rabindranath Tagore implemented a brahmacharya pedagogical structure employing gurus to provide individual guidance for pupils. Rabindranath Tagore worked hard to fund raise for and staff the school, even contributing all of his Nobel Prize monies. Rabindranath Tagore’s duties as steward and mentor at S kept him busy; he taught classes in mornings and wrote the students' textbooks in afternoons and evenings. Rabindranath Tagore also fundraised extensively for the school in Europe and the U.S. between 1919 and 1921.

Rabindranath Tagore’s relevance can be gauged by festivals honouring him: Kabipranam, Rabindranath Tagore’s birth anniversary; the annual Rabindranath Tagore Festival held in Urbana, Illinois, in the United States; Rabindra Path Parikrama walking pilgrimages from Kolkata to Shantiniketan;
ceremonial recitals of Rabindranath Tagore's poetry held on important anniversaries; and others. This legacy is most palpable in Bengali culture, ranging from language and arts to history and politics. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen saw Rabindranath Tagore as a ‘towering figure’, being a ‘deeply relevant and many-sided contemporary thinker’. Rabindranath Tagore’s Bengali-language writings—the 1939 Rabindra Rachanavali is also canonized as one of Bengal’s greatest cultural treasures. Rabindranath Tagore himself was proclaimed ‘the greatest poet India has produced’.

Rabindranath Tagore was famed throughout much of Europe, North America, and East Asia. He co-founded Dartington Hall School, a progressive coeducational institution; in Japan, he influenced such figures as Nobel laureate Yasunari Kawabata. Rabindranath Tagore’s works were widely translated into English, Dutch, German, Spanish, and other European languages by Czech indologist Vincenc Lesný. French Nobel laureate André Gide, Russian poet Anna Akhmatova, former Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit and others. In the United States, Rabindranath Tagore’s lecturing circuits, particularly those in 1916-1917, were widely attended and acclaimed.

Yet, several controversies involving Rabindranath Tagore resulted in a decline in his popularity in Japan and North America after the late 1920s, concluding with his ‘near total eclipse’ outside of Bengal. Ortega Gasset wrote that ‘Rabindranath Tagore’s wide appeal (may stem from the fact that) he speaks of longings for perfection that we all have. Rabindranath Tagore awakens a dormant sense of childish wonder, and he saturates the air with all kinds of enchanting promises for the reader, who pays little attention to the deeper import of Oriental mysticism’. Rabindranath Tagore’s works circulated in free editions
around 1920 alongside those of Dante Alighieri, Miguel de Cervantes, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Plato, and Leo Tolstoy.

Rabindranath Tagore was deemed overrated by some Westerners. Graham Greene doubted that ‘anyone but Mr. Yeats can still take his poems very seriously’. Modern remnants of a past Latin American reverence of Rabindranath Tagore were discovered, for example, by an astonished Salman Rushdie during a trip to Nicaragua. Rabindranath Tagore the great died on 7th August 1941 in Kolkata at the age of Eighty years. He sees the inward agonizing of the Indian soul, understands the passions and doubts surging in her mind, wishes to deliver her from the travail through which she is passing, and give her peace of soul. He pours forth in his prose the dreams and aspirations which are moving the mind of India. The joys and sorrows, the hopes and fears, the doubts and beliefs of the Indian life are captured in his books. Adapting Johnson, one might say that the work of Rabindranath Tagore abounds in sentiments to which every Indian bosom returns an echo. He gives voice to the doubts which are darkening the once glorious faith of India. It is the sign that God has not lost all hope of India that Rabindranath Tagore is born in this age.