Elucidating Tagore is undoubtedly a challenge to any intellectual. Despite several available and considered interpretations, there is a need to reinterrogate and redefine every concept, action, attitude, ideals and exemplary manifestations of Tagore’s life. Understanding Tagore through his literary works is a futile exercise as every fraction of his life has conveyed infinite wisdom that stands out to be fresh and contemporary even today. Every dimension of his life needs to be approached in all its completeness. Any attempt to understand him becomes a universal critique and hence is the scrupulous presentation of multifaceted aspects of his life in this chapter.

THEORY OF LITERATURE

Tagore never wrote a systematic exposition of his theoretic position vis-à-vis literature. In 1936 Tagore published a collection of essays on literature (Sahitiyer Pathe, i.e. ‘On the Path to Literature’). He wrote a large number of essays in literary criticism which he collected in 1907. His opinions and writings on literature and criticism were in four volumes of essays on ancient Indian literature in Sanskrit, modern Bengali writings and folk literature of Bengal (Prachin Sahitay, Sahitay, Adhunik Sahitya, Loka-sahitya) published in 1907. These essays were far superior to the essays on literary criticism collected in 1936. The latter essays simply reiterated which were already expressed in his earlier writings with
a more persuasive style of exposition. Tagore himself made this comment on his writings on literature addressing a reader. In a letter to Lokendra Palit Tagore wrote: “I have restated my opinions, I have refined them at each restatement, which makes it difficult to fix a particular position attributable to me” (Sahitya. Vol.IV. 706). He has further stated that employing metaphorical language is his weakness though it creates impatience in the readers. But he has agreed that his style hampers the application of the logical method of reasoning. This sort of self critique is valid for a great deal of Tagore’s theoretical writings, on the aesthetics of literature.

The collection published in 1907 comprised essays written between 1891 and 1902 and they mark the birth of a new literary sensibility. The comparison between Sakuntala and Miranda in Shakespeare’s Tempest is not part of traditional appreciation of Kalidasa. When he writes of Meghadutam again, Tagore puts himself in the position of modern Indian reader and looks at ‘the life which flowed at one time in Indian from which we have been exiled’. No Literary critic earlier to him took folk literature seriously the way Tagore did in Loka-Sahitaya, a commentary on a collection of nursery rhymes, folk songs, shymes current among women in their domestic interiors and the verses of plebeian versifiers (Kabi-wallahs) of eighteenth and nineteenth century. Of modern writings Tagore’s criticism is unusually alive to the social and historical context of literary men. The best part of his book on modern literature is devoted to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and his times.
Bankim reconstituted the foundations of Bengali literature and wielded a merciless critic's broom to clear out of the way all that was unfit for survival. In his social reform activities in his 'lethargic, debilitated, ungenerous country' he was alone as Bankin Chandra was in the literary field in his effort to bring in a 'new vitalizing element'. Tagore admired Bankim the critic as much as Bankim the creative writer. Perhaps Tagore's admiration for Bankim and his 'merciless pursuit of the highest standards, commitment, and masculine majesty' was all the greater because Tagore himself often fought shy of engaging in that task because he detested crossing swords with the lesser folk around him. Tagore's basic approach to literature emerges only in these early writings. In the lead article in *Sahitya* (1907) Tagore write that literature is about the heart and the mind of human beings. It is the symphony created by the heart and the outer world and the human mind. To him, literature is represented through language in word pictures and poesy is literature. He experiences divinity at work in the joy of creation and firmly believes that human heart is in that creative activity to express its own self. The innate human desire for self expression, the desire to reach out to other human beings, the desire to keep the message alive abeyond the here and now is at the core of writings ranging from ancient inscriptions to the latest literature. However, all that is expressed is not literature. It is literature when the expression of an idea or a feeling or whatever is expressible, takes a form which allows effective transmission to another mind so as to recreate the same idea, feeling, etc. in that
another mind. He is of the view that the artifices of literature enable things in one man's mind to be internalized in other people's minds.

Another significant point Tagore makes is that literature speaks not only to the present times but to the future as well. Literature tries to claim immortality in the heart of man for ever is literature. In 'Sahityer Vicharak' published in Sahitaya Tagore almost echoes Bhavabhuti (popular ancient writer) and postulates that literature addresses not just the contemporary reader but the human society of all times (Vol IV. 627). Thirdly in his early essays as well as in later writings Tagore declares his faith in the maxim 'Truth is beauty; beauty truth'. The perceived tradition notion is rescued by Tagore with invocation of the authority of the Upanishads. Whatever is expressed or revealed is divine ecstasy and life eternal. Tagore slightly deviates from this perception in Visava-Sahitya. When we realize that literature reveals the universal man we shall see what is the essence of literature. When an author's thoughts resonate with the thoughts of the whole mankind, he expresses in his mankind the anguish of all men. One has to consider how man has extended his self in the tangible world into an intangible self. Confined as he is in his location in the outer world, every man in his intangible creations enlarges his self and this second universe is his own creation. Tagore wants literature to represent these perspectives. Further, Tagore says that it was not for him to show the way to this ultimate aim of literature, but he wanted to liberate literature from the parochialism that fails to perceive the universality inherent in literature.
These basic ideas about literature expounded in Sahitay are reiterated over and again in Tagore’s later writings published in *Sahityer Swarup* (1943), *Sahityer Pathe* (1936). Tagore’s approach to ‘Modernism’ in literature is seen in his later writings. Many of the later writings are in the form of letters to various literary personalities of those times and what Tagore writes is often like Tagore ‘talking down’ to them. Some of these writings in 1930s are commissioned by favoured editors and the like and are not of Tagore’s best. The other problem is that some of the pronouncements in the 1930s are *ex cathedra* judgements which Tagore did not care to defend or explain in the last phase of his life. Thus Tagore’s writings on the subject in these years, hailed by admirers around him, do not match the quality of his earlier writings in literary criticism. Krishna Kripalani was a close observer who married Tagore’s granddaughter. In *Rabindranath Tagore*, Kripalani recalls that Tagore was writing for an uncritical clientele who applauded whatever he did. Gradually he came to be surrounded by a flock of admirers, many of whom were little better than courtiers and sycophants, who were like a wall between him and the real world (349). Kripalani also quotes Rothenstein who felt uncomfortable to see Tagore’s band of followers who pretended to share his spiritual idealism and tended to ‘weaken his artistic integrity by flattery’. Tagore’s essays in literary theory appear to be particularly prone to fall prey to the tendency to uncritically acclaim whatever fell from the great poet’s lips. However, Tagore continued to give his best to poetry and creative writing. In the late 1920s & 1930s Tagore chose the new genres and he created virtually prose-poem (gadya
Kavya) in Bengali. He tried this form in *Lipika* but did not have the courage to do that again till 1930s in *Punascha, Sesh Saptak, Patraput* and *Shyamali* in 1936. Tagore cites the examples of the psalms of David and Solomon which possesses a poetic quality that is evident in the English translations of King James’s version of the Bible. It is in the later writings, we identify Tagore welcoming the advent of ‘Modernism’ of new authors in Bengal. He saw a new wave of creative energy among the modern writers of Bengal during his time. Tagore supported the modernists’ claims of knowing the life through reality. But he vehemently criticized the modern writers for their lack of genuine attempts to explore the reality. He found that for many of the writers ‘Modernism’ is a hot spice to impart pep and curry powder of imagination as an essential ingredient. Likewise, the stress on the sex urge in literature, he said, is not necessarily commendable. It is one of the easiest ways of showing off a kind of courage.

It is to be perceived, Tagore has addressed the issue of modernism in English poetry. He began saying that when he was young, Burnes, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats were considered modern. In 1930s it became customary to call all that ‘mid-Vctorian’ and a new modernism took the place of the old. Tagore thought that the character of Modernism lies in poet’s trying hard to avoid being ‘poetic’. There was an effort to eschew ornamentation, to bring things down to the barest form. Tagore cited examples from Amy Lowell, T.S. Eliot, et al. to come to this final conclusion. To him, perceiving the world dispassionately with an objective of illuminating the perceptions is pure modernism. Just as science views
the world in an objective way, poetry should also look at the world objectively and this stands as a modern classicism. Tagore went on to argue such perceptions are called modern in early 20th century. They existed even in early times in the works of the 9th century Chinese poet Li Po. The only feature of 20th century modernism was the proclivity to look at only the distaff side of life. In this it differed from the older poetic tradition and it was also artificial.

But from a different perception, it is not the subject of writing which makes a work a representative of modernism. A subject relevant to the times makes a piece of writing valuable. Tagore is of the opinion that in India we are easily overwhelmed when we encounter a trend in European literature and this was considered to be a source of danger to our authors. Tagore’s critique of modernism generated a spectacular achievement. Tagore has excelled the modernists in the novel *Sesher Kabita* (The farewell song). His works in the thirties in fiction (Char Adhyay, ‘Four Chapters’, 1934; Tinsangi, ‘Three Companions’, short stories, 1940) as well as in poetry (Punascha, ‘Post Script’. 1932; *Senjuti*, ‘The Evening Lamp’, 1938; *Nabajatak*, 1940) mark a new turn in his creative writings. The description in *Shamali* (My Translation) stands for post modernist perception: “My perception coloured the emerald green and the ruby red. The east and the west were lighted when I turned my eyes to the sky I said to the rose ‘You are beautiful’ and ‘beautiful’ it became. That is metaphysics, you say, not poetry. Truth, that is what poetry is about, is my answer” (Shamali. 1937). Many of the modernist poets acclaimed the new turn in Tagore’s writings from the
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late twenties. Tagore in turn patronized and contributed to the modernists' literary journals (e.g. Kabita, Parichay). They corresponded cordially with young poets of the school. One of the Bengali modern poets Samar Sen in Babu Brittantal (1978) said that Tagore's certificate of line of two is something they hankered most. Thus Tagore remains a perennial source of dominant inspiration to many of the modern poets and authors even today.

OLD GENRES AND A NEW TURN

Tagore's contribution is found in different genres: musical drama, prose fiction and nonsense literature, other than poetry. The latter consisted of nonsense rhymes as well as a surrealistic kind of fiction (Khapachchara, 1937, Chharar Chhabi, 1937; Shay (1937), Prahasini (1939). These are highly enjoyable to read and their appeal is not limited to the child to whom these are ostensibly addressed. It is interesting that at the time when Tagore was writing so often on the theme of death, his mind found release in the realm of magical unreason. However, more attention has been commanded by the musical drama Chandalika (1993), Taser Desh (1933) and Shyama (1939). That is partly because these have often been enacted with great success on the stage, and partly because they bring to the viewers some of Tagore's abiding ideas very effectively.

Taser Desh ("The land of Playing Cards") is virtually a manifesto of rebellion against the rule of authority and tradition- a theme on which Tagore often write, castigating India's stagnation in modern times. He uses familiar literary device-strangers invade a land of hierarchic gradation like a pack of
playing cards, routinized habits inherited from the past and a cast of mind opposed to change. The play Chandalika (The Untouchable Girl) is also a rebellion of another kind. In this Tagore makes the untouchable girl conscious of being a human being, not an object of contempt as an outcaste, when a passing Buddhist monk takes water from her hands. Tagore's deep concern with the inhumanity of casteism in India was reflected in this drama. Tagore was completely in support of Gandhi's struggle against untouchability and the theme of the play registers a visible form and life. A secondary theme of Chandalika was that sublime love triumphs over carnal love. It is denouement foreordained in the story of an untouchable girl's love for Buddhist monk. Tagore has found and extracted this from a Buddhist text. Tagore has presented the theme of carnal and sublime love in the last of his great musical drama. The main protagonist, Shyama, sacrifices one of her devoted admirers in order to save the life of Vajrasena, with whom she is infatuated. On knowing this, Vajrasena is repelled by the inhuman conduct and rejects her at the end. The theme of infatuation in contrast to true love occurs in many of Tagore's works, right from Mayar Khela (1888). But in this play the infatuation of women is depicted in the starkest form.

While experimenting with fiction, short stories, Tagore has not produced spectacular works during this period. Three of his short stories were published at the end of the decade (Tinsangi). In 1933-34 two novel and a play were published, Dui Bon (Two Sisters), Malancha ('The Orchard'), and Bansari. All of them are mainly focused on psychological exploration of love in conjugal life and
outside of it. Krishan Kripalani in *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* says that Tagore’s statement of love now was intellectualized and ineffective in conveying its feeling. The protagonists seemed to be unreal artifacts, not flesh and blood creatures. This perception seems to be true and this do not hold good for his last novel *Char Adhyay*.

The novel *Char Adhyay* (Four Chapters) is remarkable for its intensity of gaze and ruthlessness in thinking through to judgements. Its focus is on political violence in conflict with human values. The historical context is, of course, the militant nationalist (*biplabi*) programme of activity through secret societies and acts of individual violence in Bengal and in India at large in the early decades of the 20th century. In political essays like ‘*Path o Patheya*’ (‘Ends and Means’, 1908), Tagore had dealt with question of violence and nationalism. This doesn’t have notable emotional charge of *Four Chapters*. He has examined this in the paly *Prayaschitta* (1909) but this was presented in allegorical form. He had delved deep into the question in *Home and the World* but much of the thematic concerns were drawn as drawing room concerns. It is evident that Tagore had thought long and hard about the issue. But the reasons as to why Tagore returned to it in 1934 are still mysterious. The action of militant nationalists in Chittagong in April 1930 and the eventual execution of its leader Surya Sen in 1934 may have provoked Tagore’s thoughts once again.

It is inevitable to have a brief critical outlook at theme of the novel thought it was thoroughly discussed in the earlier chapter. There are only three major
protagonists in the novel. Indranath, the brilliant evil genius of a secret society of militant nationalist youths and he believes in violent means towards attaining the country’s independence. Atin, an idealist young man who took to that path but found it revolting to be part of inhuman crimes committed in the name of national interests and lives on the fringes of secret society. Ela, a woman whose romantic attachment to Atin, allows no other commitment, dedicated to a cause. She is destined to meet her tragic end. Towards the end of the novel, Atin encounters the miracle of love. He had imagined at one time how Dante and Beatrice had dedicated their lives to a noble cause. In a significant introspection, he questions himself whether there is a noble cause behind their relationship and sacrifice. To Atin the ‘disgusting path of secret terror’ meant the ‘defeat of the soul’. Atin realizes: ‘A web of lies, base shoddiness, mutual mistrust, lust for power, espionage, will one day drag all these people to the depth of absement’. He believes that throughout the world nationalism thunders a false message that we can bring life to the country at the cost of the country’s soul. He says that his mind has often inwardly rebelled in protest.

THREE WAVES OF POETRY

In the next phase, Tagore’s poetic creativity seems to be driven by the three great waves in the thirties. The first wave wafts to us the prose poems of Punascha (‘Post-script’, 1932), Sesh Saptalk (‘The Last Octave’, 19350, Patraput (‘A Platter of Leaves’, 1936), Shyamali (‘The Dark Maiden’, 1936)- mostly prose poems, a from Tagore began to experiment with—and Bithikal (‘the Avenue’,
1935) which carried conventional rhymed verse. Parishesh (‘The End’, 1932, but almost all the poems were written in the late twenties.

We have seen earlier that Tagore opened up the new genre of prose-poems with great deliberation in Punascha. He wrote a special ‘Introduction’ there to say that his aim was to serve poetry in the form of prose, to instill in prose the rhythm of poetry without forcing it into rhyme, and also to discard antiquated words which were exclusively in poetic usage. Thus in his seventies Tagore entered into a new experiment in form, though he continued to write rhymed verses as well. The themes were often quotidian and prosaic life. The very first poem was on the humble stream near Santiniketan and its cadence was in time with what it depicts. The poem has depicted a tribal boy tramping along with bow and arrow, the lumbering bullock cart, the potter carrying his ware, the pariah dog, and the village school master holding an old torn umbrella. The stream ‘finds its semblance in the rhythm of my poet’s verse...crowded with the jarring trivialities of the work-a-day hours’. There is a specific poem on the triabl women employed in building Tagore’s own house: “The building of my mud house has commenced and labourers are busy raising the walls.. I sit on my terrace watching the young woman toiling at her task hour after hour, My heart is touched with shame when I feel that the woman’s service, sacredly ordained for her loved ones, its dignity soiled by the market price, should have been robbed by me with the help of a few pieces of copper” (Poems. Kripalani. Ed. 159).
Some of the poems are almost like short stories. 'A Sudden Encounter' is about meeting a girl and reviving memories of a friendship: 'Those days which are gone, are they truly gone?' she asks. 'The stars of the night remain in the light of the day'-did he juggle with words when he answered thus?' (Shyamali.173-178). In the theme of another poem the man revisits his unrequited love after many years and finds her as distant as ever, now married to another man. He had carried the gift of a diamond broach that remained in his pocket, for precious stone seemed to 'sparkle with ironical laughter'. The prose poem was the form that the poet chose to address themes like this. However, the grand themes Tagore was wont to address are also there in the prose poems. He wrote not less than three versions of a poem on Africa, published in 1936 & 37 and posthumously in 1944. Tagore's own translation of Patraput and Forever Wayfarers has won wide acclaim. Responding to the ardent appreciation of his poems Tagore considered himself as one among those seekers of the wreckers of patterns of traditional poetry. This identification comes out more clearly in a poem where he talks of his own evolution, 'the series of many Rabindranaths', on the occasion of his birthday in 1936. 'Carrying the stream of many birth-days towards the final day of death, moves Vaisakh (the month of Tagore's birth) Twenty –fifth, time has strung 'a garland of many Rabindranaths'. Tagore has recalled how the change came when the world called him and he found himself on the shores of human sea. After the wave of those prose poems, a second wave begins in 1937 at a different plane. The poems Pratnik (Terminal) and Senjuti (Evening Lamp), carry the experience of
forwarning impending death. In some of his poems of this period, Tagore looks on the times after his death: "When I Shall cease to be on this earth/, Should you wish to remember me/, Come to the Shady solitude/ Of this grove in Spring Time" (Senjuti. 134).

Not all the poems of 1937-38 are somber with the near deth experience. Tagore reflects on being a prisoner in the public domain, 'entangled in the meshes drawn by countless gazing eyes'. 'He lives in his solitary cell among the crowd'. He imagines that the youth of the new era asked about him “What is it that sails in his boat towards the setting sun?”. An interesting point in this second wave of creation and celebration of poetry that most of the verses are in rhyme and not prose poems.

The third wave of poems written in the late 1930s was totally different in nature from the second. The poems published in Akash Pradip (1939), Nabajatak (1940), Sehnai (1940) speak in Tagore’s accustomed language and mood known to us in the twenties. In fact from his manuscripts we learn that Tagore no longer makes a fetish of writing prose poems. He expresses the hope that his new poetry would touch the heart and mind of the younger generation in the dedication of the first books to the modernist poet Sudhindranath Datta. In his preface to Nabajatak he has self consciously underlined the new turn of his poetry. Reflecting on his poetic self, Tagore said his creativity underwent changes like the change of seasons in nature. Some of his distinctly ‘modernist’ poems belong to this period. In the poem ‘Night Train’ Tagore compares life to a train going through the dark
to destinations unknown. In another poem Tagore describes the railway station in cheerful onomatopic rhyme: "Rattle, rattle, all the day/ A Storm of crowded coaches, changing motion, swing and sway now east, now west approaches" (Nabajatak. 228). In a mystic vein, of ‘My Fated Kingdom’, Tagore says that my fated kingdom lies in the east and it is remnant of a timeworn and ageless land. In another poem ‘Romantic’, Tagore says they call him Romantic as he brings the fragrance of spring time. Some of the best romantic lyrics written by Tagore became the best songs and memorable love poems. All the poems written by Tagore developed a philosophical outlook and helped him to get over the somber phase in his inner life. Tagore firmly believed that his works of imagination survived and they proved that they are life beyond death.

TAGORE AND THE WORLD

Tagore’s perception of the world has become so significant because it has suffered reduction to the simplest terms in the hands of his interpreters. Many critics have perceived Tagore’s attitude to the world as his attitude to the west and proclaimed this as dire pronouncements on the eve of his death in Crisis in Civilisation. These adverse pronouncements are reduced to a kind of spiritual revulsion against the west. This tendency of reductionism is unhistorical. Although this tendency has homogenized his views, they underwent many changes in different stages of his intellectual evolution. This has created a deeper problem. An undisputed narrative of the life and philosophy of Tagore focuses on Tagore as a sage or a prophet. Actually, one has to perceive the dichotomy in the personality of Tagore. Tagore
Thyagi is seen as a prophet and iconized by his admirers, especially in Bengal. He is perceived as ultimate oracle. There is another Tagore, an intellectual who had a fait bit of knowledge of the history of the world in his own times. From this dimension Tagore as an observer was more balanced in judgement than many prophets. At the peak of his success in 1939, Tagore felt that an icon created by the multitude cannot escape the hunger of the eternal dust. Under the wheel of time any iconic creation would turn to dust. Not withstanding this skepticism, Tagore as a prophet outgrew in the imagination of his contemporaries beyond the common comprehensibility. In 1920s and 1930s contemporary world history was very much on Tagore's mind. His correspondence reveals that his contact with various countries through his travels around the world, his friends and admirers aborad, and in some ways his philosophy of universalism meant a deep and lasting engagement with the global course of events. It was an inescapable engagement though he might have wished for leading the life of a poet in seclusion. Sometimes he was impigned by the politics of the world even in small things. His lecture tour in 1920s in the United States of America to raise funds for Santiniketan was cancelled because the organizers have thought he was unwanted in North America as Tagore was seen as an anti allies agitator during the world war. When Tagore accepted Benito Mussolini's invitation Om 1926, he could realize the role of Mussolini and Fascism from the vacuous comments of Romain Rolland. Tagore has published a kind of apologia in Manchester Guardian: "The principles of Fascism concern all humanity and it is absurd to imagine that I could
ever support a movement which ruthlessly suppresses freedom of expression...and walks a bloodstained path of violence and stealthy crime” (R.T. Andrews Manchester Guardian. 333). Tagore misled by Professor Carlo Formichi, a fascist enthusiast, who brought Mussolini’s message to Santiniketan. Later, when Nazism was getting a grip over Germany, we see Tagore warning his grandson, then a resident of Germany as a trainee in printing technology. He was of the firm opinion that his grandson must keep away from the ‘cannibalistic’ political culture that Nazism had given birth to. Tagore was informed by his friends in Germany about the activities of Nazis. In 1934, Tagore was much informed about the insults offered to Einstein and this has raised doubt in modern civilization. Einstein who had received the Noble prize in 1921 was dismissed by Nazis from his academic position in Berlin in 1932 and thus he was forced migrate to Princeton, New Jersey, where he worked till the end of his life. Tagore was terribly moved by the persecution of Einstein but Tagore has not condemned the persecution of Jews due to lack of information. However, when the appeasement of Nazi Germany was revealed to the world at Munich, Tagore did not keep silent. He reacted with a poem which he sent to his friend Professor Vincenc Lesny, an Indologist in Prague who had translated Tagore into Czech. Tagore wrote to Lesny: “I feel so keenly about the suffering of your people as if I was one of them” and bursted into a prophetic mode: “when men turn beasts they sooner or later tear each other” (Tagore to Andrews. Letters. 1938).
Tagore declined an invitation to visit Japan, as he was fully aware of its depredations in China. It is Rash Behari a colleague of Subhas Chandra Bose who secured Japanese support for subhas’s endeavour managed to send invitations to Tagore in 1937 and 1938. Having learnt his lesson in his trip to Mussolini’s Italy in 1926, Tagore decisively declined the invitations and wrote that he had genuine love for the Japanese people and expressed his doubt about the reciprocation of military authorities in understanding and allowing him to speak his mind freely. China figured inordinately prominently in Tagore’s imagination. He believed which inspired the thinking of Nehru later, that these two oldest civilizations of Asia were linked by destiny in some manner from the times when Buddhism spread to China.

The signs of ‘Asiatic unity’ that Tagore perceived was in civilizations terms. In defining the discourse of Nationalism, imagined unities remained closer to Tagore’s heart. There are many individuals who shared the imaginative vision of Tagore. Professor Tan Yun-san teaching at Santiniketan raised funds for building the China Hall in Santiniketan solely from individual contributions. Tagore had invited Nehru to inaugurate the China Hall in 1937, not because Nehru was the president of the congress but because Tagore was aware of the outlook they shared on China and Asia at large. Nehru has expounded the outlook of Tagore in *The Discovery of India* (1946).

The mismatch between Tagore’s ideal of universalism and the reality of conflict between national interests became obvious in the last days of Tagore’s
life. To the world in turmoil, Tagore could respond it in a poetic mode. He wrote in 1937: Hissing serpents poison the very air. Here fine words of Peace ring hollow. My time is up; but before I go, I send out/ my call to those who are getting ready in Thousand homes to fight the demon” (Poems. 2005). As a poet he says to himself of the tragedy of lives lost and creations of civilizations destroyed.

There were streams of events that have inspired hopes in Tagore. Significantly, sitting in a remote corner of north India, he heard on the radio the broadcast of Andre Gide’s translation of his play ‘Post Office’ (Dakghar), on the night before Paris fell to the German invaders on 14th June 1940. This event remained as the symbol of universalism of human civilization. Another significant event was Tagore’s message to Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States from 1933 to 1945. Tagore surmised that all the problems of the world ‘have merged into one supreme world politics’ (New York Times. 1940. Sel. Letters. 522). This was a crucially important movement of realization that the ideal of universalism is inseparable from the domain of global politics where it needs to be worked out in real time. In the light of the history of aggrandizing nationalism, imperialist expansion, economic exploitation and the mindless violence of the western powers, Tagore faced an immense disillusionment. What Tagore and his peers found in European civilization as worthy of admiration and emulation was obliterated by the politics of European countries. Tagore’s perception of western civilization has become an important document. Explicating the complexities and ambiguities in Tagore’s western perception brought the memory of thinkers like
David Hume, J.S. Miller or Herbert Spencer and also the thinkers of human welfare William Wilberforce or Abraham Lincoln. Tagore had mentioned time and again that contribution of countless scholars who built a fund of knowledge of nature and human beings. In his convocation address of the University of Calcutta in 1937, Tagore has mentioned the contribution of Europe for the greater enrichment of civilization animated with a genuine respect for man. But the course of history revealed another truth against the perception of Tagore. Tagore has opined that within the short span of our won life time, we have seen this love of humanity, sense of justice growing feebler and feeblener in Eruope. At the same time, Tagore has cautioned India that it should not make claims to superiority and we should search for the seeds of down fall within us. In particular Tagore pointed to ‘communal separation and dissension’ and ‘maladies born of our poverty, of physical and mental starvation eating away the vitality of Indian society and culture’. Tagore has recognized that European Enlightenment had at one time enriched India’s reawakening and at the same time created disillusionment in India experienced by his generation.

Tagore’s last response to the theme ‘crisis in civilization’ came few weeks before his death. Tagore has addressed his personal crisis. His personal philosophy had been based since 1920s upon humanist universalism. On these lines he had postulated a syncretic Indian civilization of united diversities. But this is obstructed by communal and casteist mindsets. In Crisis in Civilisation Tagore says that Western civilization had at one time carried in its core humanist values;
that is what inspired the reawakening of India in the 19th century. But by the end of the 19th and 20th century, Europe has revealed to be untrue to those values and principles. The nationalist aggrandizement and the inexorable urge to accumulate wealth drove imperialist state power to threaten the basis of human civilization. Declaring his faith in Man Tagore has fought the trend from within to register potential resistance.

AGONIZING REAPPRAISAL

Tagore’s agonizing reappraisal of syncretic civilization in India is presented in the theme of his essay ‘Hindu Musalman’. He has exposed the evils of casteism and Hindu communalism. He has examined the threats to regional identities prioritized over people’s identities as Indians. In an essay on the ‘Congress’ (1939) and another on the notion of ‘Mahajati’ (1939), he refers to the exclusion of Subash Chandra Bose and the consequent feeling in Bengal ‘that the Bengali people are being pushed around or sidelined’. He argues that to believe in a conspiracy of theory is to influence your judgement. According to him in a popular perception the unity between one province of India and another was not alive and strong. There were signs of parochialism and conflict. These were some of the faultlines in the emerging nationhood of India which deeply concerned Tagore. His last message to the people of Bengal was perhaps in the address he gave at the invitation of Subash Chandra Bose on the occasion of the foundation of Mahajati Sadan. In the writings of 1930’s we find that Tagore had lost the self
Thyagi206

confidence in the syncretic character of Indian civilization. Tagore's tormented thinking was almost obvious in his rethinking.

Tagore and Mahatama shared the same concerns about the recrudescence of communalism. Tagore shared the same thoughts with Jawaharlal Nehru. To Nehru, Tagore became a sort of father figure as Tagore and Jawahar's father Motilal were born the same year. Jawahar lal was attracted by Tagore's intellect and Tagore found in Nehru a bridge head into the mind of the younger generation of Congressmen. When he was thirty one, Nehru in the retinue of Gandhi, first visited Santiniketan and after that they met intermittently. Nehru wrote in his autobiography that in 1934 he and Kamala planned to send their daughter Indira to Shantiniketan. In 1936 we find that Nehru sought Tagore's patronage to build and promote his Civil Liberties Union. Tagore wrote back, with his consent to be president. About that time he also sought Tagore's intervention in the debate on Vande mataram.

The patriotic song fell a victim to the communalist trend and M.A. Jinnah on behalf of the Muslim League demanded that the Congress drop the song from meetings of the legislature and various public bodies. The objection was on the grounds that the song was idolatrous and Hindu. Originally, the poem had been purely a description of the beauties of the motherland. But in 1881 the poem was included by Chatterjee in the novel Anandamath and in the expanded version the poem was endowed with militant Hindu accoutrement in the context of the novel. The All India congress Committee had to make some response to the Muslim
community’s objection. Nehru decided to consult the oracle of the cultural world, Tagore. Subhas Chandra Bose, in the meanwhile, approached Tagore with the report that Hindu opinion in Bengal was strongly against any move to discard *Vande Mataram*. Tagore was of the view that the first two stanzas of the song were unexceptionable for they are about ‘the beautiful and beneficent aspet of our motherland. But of the rest of the song Tagore wrote as he was brought up on the monotheistic ideals of his father, he had no sympathy. Further the song was liable to be interpreted in ways that might wound Moslem susceptibilities.

The Congress Working Committee decided to accept Tagore’s recommendation in favour of the first two stanzas and dropped the latter portions of the song. The song’s historical associations with the nationalist movement were recognized by Tagore. He himself had first sung the song at the Congress session in Calcutta in 1896. He reminded Nehru of the fact that in the anti-partition agitation of 1905 it had ‘caught on as a national anthem’. This was recognized by the Congress Working Committee in a resolution of which the draft written by Nehru survives among the congress papers. The working committee feels that the past associations with their long record of suffering for the cause as well as popular usage have made the first two stanzas of this song a living and inseparable part of our national movement. Tagore’s published opinion that only the first two stanzas of the Vandemataram song were universally acceptable was against the grain of popular sentiment among the elite in Bengal. He was attacked
in the media as an unpatriotic man and tagore wrote bitterly in a letter to a literary friend that he had no complaint of protest as he was sensitive to all that.

On the whole, the 1930s formed a critical period in Tagore’s life long conviction in the unifying spirit of Indian civilization, the syncretic character of that civilization. He was confronted by the fault lines in evidence in the relationship between religious communities, the disprivileged castes vis-a-vis the uppercastes, and the parochially defined provincial identities. He repeatedly reasserted his faith in the possibility of overcoming the divisive forces ultimately in the manner of Mahatama Gandhi. But the confidence that there was in his earlier assertions, from 1902 onwards, of the fundamental unity of Indian civilization was greatly impaired in the last days of his life. So, Tagore’s faith in the unifying tendency of human civilization was threatened by the evidence he saw in the global trends leading to the world war. His answer to these crises in his convictions was to turn his mind to the message of universal humanism inherent in what he called the ‘religion of man’.

RE INSCRIBING THE ‘RELIGION OF MAN’

Tagore’s description of ‘Religion of Man’ is the subject of three of his works: *Manusheer Dharma* (1933) the text of professorial lectures in Bengali at Calcutta University, *Religion of Man* (1931), an expanded version of Tagore’s text of Hibbert Lectures in Oxford in 1930, and *Man*, lecture delivered at Andhra University in 1933. Apart from these works, Tagore touched upon the theme in his other works, notably in his tribute to Raja Rammohan Roy in 1933. If one
explores the reasons for the significance of the topic 'religion of man' towards the end of Tagore's intellectual life, it is understood that Tagore write in 1930 itself: “Religion of Man has been growing within my mind as a religious experience portion of my writings, beginning from the early products of my immature youth down to present times, carry an almost continuous trace of the history of this growth” (R.T to Buddhadeb Bose. C.P. Vol.xvi, December. 1937).

It is perceived that the inner life of Tagore was characterized by a pervading consciousness of the inner unity of his ideas and writings. This unity in man's creativity and the unity of the individual with the universal are two major themes in the writings on religion of man. The essence of Tagore's ‘Man and the creative universal spirit’ is presented in the light of religious experience ranging from the example of Zarathustra in ancient Iran to the sect known as Bauls in modern Bengal. Tagore believed that his own experience showed him that beyong the ‘ever changing phases of the individual self there dwelss the Eternal spirit of human unity beyond our direct knowledge’. He points to the fact that he was 'brought up in an atmosphere of freedom-freedom from the dominance of any creed’ and it was an idiosyncrasy of my temperament that I refused to accept any religious teaching merely because people in my surroundings believed it to be true’ (Religion of Man.89). Obviously, Tagore was speaking of religion in its institutional form. He had a faith, which he believed was of ‘vedic ancestors’, a kind of pantheistic faith inspired by joy in the beauty of nature. Tagore emphasized that my religion is poet’s religion and it is not that of an orthodox man
of piety and not that of theologian. Tagore reveals that he has conceptualized 'the religion of man' in his early days through his keen sensitiveness. He declared that he had flashes of consciousness of 'the religion of Man, in which the infinite became defined in humanity. Critics have perceived that it is a profound organix unity with universe comprehended by the human mind.

The idea of evolution towards organic unity is explained very well by Tagore. The concept of universal mind is so incomprehensible to the mind of the readers. In *Manusher Dharma* (1933), Tagore resorts to the biological analogy of the cellular structure working towards organic unity. He presents the togetherness of multitude of cells through a marvelous quality of complex interrelationship maintaining a perfect coordination of functions. Tagore insists on to identify the creative principle of unity, possible through continuous self surrender. Tagore ventures to postulate this perception in relation to the Universal mind. Though this is rejected by Albert Einstein in his discussions with Tagore, Tagore believed that just there is organic unity among numerous cells which constitute a biological unity; human minds are part of a unity, an entity which may be called the Universal mind. Einstein maintained a strict empirical position. Einstein presented the view that a table perceived by our mind continues to be in existence, even if no man is in the room to perceive it. The physical truth does not depend for its existence on the human mind. Tagore held an opposite opinion to Einstein's perspective. He said 'Men of Science tell us that truth, unlike beauty and goodness, is independent of our consciousnesses, but he also believed that
truth is also dependent on consciousness. It does not depend on the individual mind of man, but on the universal mind which comprehends the individual. Hence, to Tagore the table exists, even if no one is in the room to perceive it. It is within the perception of the Universal mind. In *The Religion of Man*, Tagore says, Science represents the rational mind of the universal man and it belongs to the human service. To maintain that truth, as we see it, exists apart from humanity is to contradict science. So science can only organize into rational concepts those facts which man can know and understand.

Postulating the ‘creative unity’ of humanity and a ‘human service’, Tagore went on to develop the idea that Man possesses a ‘Spirit of Life’. This is understood to be a surplus far in excess of the requirements of the biological animal in Man. This is what enables human beings to rise above the struggle for existence. In the chapter ‘The Surplus of Man’, Tagore argues that it is the excess of Life Spirit which finds expression in the growth of culture and civilisation. Tagore believed that all the religions have their historic origin in persons who represented in their life a truth which is human and good. Whatever are their doctrines of God, their service must be realized through serving all mankind. For the God in Man depends upon Men’s service and men’s love for his own love’s fulfilment.

The concept of ‘religion of man’ is a reassertion of Tagore’s faith in humanism and universalism. The Hibbert Lectures allowed Tagore an opportunity to present those ideas to the English Speaking readership. At the stage of his none
of friends have ventured to edit what he wrote and thus the book became an amalgam of many disparate pieces of writing. They have distracted many perceptions from the thrust of his assertions. But the spirit of universal humanism came through loud and clear as a last message to the world about his demise.

Resisting the Conventional Discourse of Education

Most of the writings of Tagore on Education were in Bengali and only few of these are available in English. Some of the early writings written during the Swadeshi agitation of 1905-07 and of formative importance to the history of National Education movement have not been translated. Tagore’s educational ideas in Personality (1917), Creative Unity (1922) and The Centre of Indian Culture (1919) are partly available in English. From another perspective, the commentaries by a number of scholars on his writings are unfortunately insufficiently sensitive to the evolution of his ideas in interaction with the intellectual and social environment. It is from this necessity; Tagore’s educational philosophy was a creative intervention in the conventional discourse of education in his times. Tagore’s first essay on India in 1892 was not claimed as an authority on Education, as he was only 31 years of age. This was entitled ‘The Mismatch of Education’ (Shikshar Her-fer). In this Tagore made a searing critique of the colonial pattern of education. From his own experiences childhood and schooling, he observed that the system instituted by the British Government is an incompetent imitation of the English model which educated only elite section of the society inadequately. This critique of Tagore constituted an agenda for
developing a truly Indian educational institution. This led to the shape of the ashram he founded in Santiniketan in 1901. The aim is to locate the institution in the lap of Nature, away from the colonial metropolis of Calcutta. Its purpose is to build a cultural ambience that would be responsive to the culture of the country and its people. It’s goal is to offer education in the mother tongue to promote the acceptance and dissemination of knowledge. In the very inception, Tagore took only five students in the first instance and wished to construct a microcosmic society complete in itself. Tagore’s aim was to mould the personality of the students with the discursive practices of education. In the first phase, Tagore was of the view that the alternative to conventional education lay in the ashram concept of classical India.

During the times of Swadeshi and National Education movement in Bengal Tagore’s views on Education underwent a great change. He took a leading role in articulating the nationalist ideas on education in the second phase of nationalist movement from 1905 to 1915. However, he retained his individuality and it was clear to him that his ideas were not always congruent with those of the political leaders of the Swadeshi agitation. Tagore was skeptical whether merely boycotting of Government institutions and setting of National institutions would create an alternative to colonial education. He lucidly explained that when we see a foreign university, we see a body, its building, furniture and regulations. The academic syllabus, the larger body is not visible to anybody. Just as the kernel of the coconut is in the whole coconut, in the case of Europeans, their society is present
in numerous activities of corporate life. The organic unity of mind and life of the westerns is obviously published and disseminated through them. The Indian students have to rely upon books of west and be anemic in their intellects, like babies soley fed with artificial food. So, Tagore began moulding the school at Shantiniketan on these lines of perception. To him the regular type of school ignores the idea that the young mind should be saturated with the idea that it has been born in a human world which is in harmony with the world around it. Our school system forcibly snatches away children from a world full mystery of god’s own handiwork. It is a mere method of discipline which refuses to take into account the individual. Tagore disagrees with the idea that we should give up the schools for the children to preserve their mental health and development skills. It should be an ashram where men gather for highest end of life.

In the third phase of the evolution of Tagore’s educational philosophy, we discern that his mind turns towards an aspect of European nationalism. He thought that global struggle between imperialist powers was the outcome of aggressive and exploitative European nationalism and that kind of nationalism was alien to Indian civilization. To him, Indian civilization had always been syncretic, pluralistic and open to inter cultural exchange and understanding. He envisioned that India needs an institution where knowledge will be exchanged and the perspective of knowledge acquired by the entire mankind. It is on this the concept of Viswa Bharathi took shape and it was formally founded in 1921. The central idea of Viswabharathi was captured well in the words of Tagore as motto of the
university. This is termed as the place where the entire world meets in a single nest in the persuasion of knowledge. The educational thoughts in this phase are touched upon in Tagore’s Centre of Indian culture. This has become an Eastern University for the practical realization of Creative Unity.

CONTEMPLATIONS ON MUSIC AND LANGUAGE

Tagore is a dispassionate poet and he composed the songs with ease and spontaneity. His responses to poetry are philosophical and of high level of intellectual integrity. He firmly believed that his heart felt shy to bring to bring the lyric of secrecy and the meaning missed in rhythm. Tagore’s role as a poet is as important in creating these songs as his as a music composer. If one breaks the magical marriage of the lyric and the music, one loses the essential quality of these songs in understanding. In an essay on ‘Music and Poetry’ (Bharati. 1981) Tagore developed a theory as a lyric writer and music composer. He says: “Mankind has two means of self expression- words and music. In fact even words depend upon the tone... When we write poetry we depend more on words and in songs we depend on the language of music” (75-78). But there is difference between the two. Words must add up to express an idea. Music can attain expression without words. As a result poetry has been compelled to cultivate the art of expressing ideas and music has fallen behind that respect. Tagore was aware that there were stereotypes of association between a raga and a bhava. Nevertheless he thought that the cultivation and expression of bhava had declined in music as compared to the poet’s world where the poet cannot do without bhava to be expressed in words.
Tagore has opined that music ought to be open to bhava conveying that poetry should be a close companion of music.

Tagore has developed this perception at the age of twenty to the dismay of many scholars who gave serious perceptions on music. As a scholar and a composer of the songs, Tagore believed that a union between the two creative functions is a necessity. So the lyric, he wrote mattered to him as much as he composed and neither of these two was complete without the other. Another significant original characteristic of Tagore's thinking on music was his effort to understand and situate the practice of producing music in its social context. For instance, he reflects on the decline in the appreciation of classical music in early twentieth century north India. At one time the wealthy would patronize musicians and there was an appreciative audience in the durbar of the kings and royalty. This situation has changed to the plenty of public meetings and the taste for music has become the thing of the past. In the contemporary situation, it is difficult to find anyone who will willingly face the full length performance of a classical musician. As India's musical tradition is considered a sleeping beauty incarcerated in the midst of her limitless wealth. He believed that music in Europe drew sustenance from contemporary culture and social support on the other hand. In *Pather Sanchay* Tagore says: "At one time in every country the rich aristocracy patronized art and literature and music. In Europe today the commoners have taken the place of those traditional patrons... But the wealthy in our country to day have no sense of their obligation...And the commonalty have neither the money
nor the taste (for that music)...We have lost the contact between our life and our arts” (683-87). Tagore believed that the exclusiveness of tradition and its practitioners and patrons stood in the way of opening up the world of classical Indian music.

Tagore has made serious and potential observations elucidating the creative encounter between India and the West. During his visit to England in 1912-13, Tagore witnessed Handel festival at the Crystal Palace, London, where four thousand performers played his music. This was the celebration of the two hundredeth anniversary of Handel’s migration from Germany to England in 1712. Tagore was impressed with the organized energy of so many musicians performing together. Tagore recognized that there were basic difference between the European and Indian musical tradition. According to his perception, European music is based on the principle of harmony. Indian music is on melody. European music celebrates life in all its contemporaneity. Indian music addresses and explores the individual quest for the eternal. Nonetheless the confluence of the two streams is desirable. Tagore is specific in recognising the vivifying the impact of the West and he strongly felt that India needs to dismantle the iron chest of the customary practices in music. Tagore went on to say that Indian music would be appreciated in India again if it were to receive appreciation in the west. Once we send our music overseas we will then welcome it back and begin truly to appreciate it. India has been far too long in our domestic corner to know the true value of our own things. We are unfit now to evaluate what is our own and to
understand its glory. These perceptions of Tagore are more prophetic in one sense than one.

Tagore has developed his argument further in the essay ‘Liberation of Music’. He read out the text at a meeting in Calcutta and created a controversy with proponents of ‘purity’ of Indian music. Tagore has argued that in Bengal there had always been a tendency to question the infallibility of shastric prescriptions. To him, it was inevitable that music too would claim freedom from rigid formats and forms. True creativity requires such freedom for self expression. Tagore has opened the debate on the same subject in his essay on metre which he compared with the beat in music. The innovations he made in early 1930s, the form of prose poems led to the discussion with music experts. Many of the innovations of Tagore on Music emanated from the theoretical perspectives. It is pertinent to understand that Tagore has virtually created ‘musical drama’ in Bengal. This has reached the audience wider than the audience at mehfils or majlis. He brought respect for commercial stage shows. In order to raise funds for his school in Shantiniketan, Tagore began stage performance by his students, men and women. Then, he synthesized music of different traditions in the music he composed. This practice has crossed the conventional boundaries between western and Indian music, folk and classical traditions within classical and regional boundaries. Needless to say approximation between different musical traditions was not known in earlier times. Khayal and dhrupad found acceptance as classical. There was cross fertilization between different gharanas and this has
traveled from one prince's durbar to another. These musical notes have widened the range of crossings across the boundaries. In presenting dance with his songs Tagore created a unique art form where dance styles of several Indian cultures were belended in an operatic form which paralleled the Europeans operas of the 19th century.

All the writings of Tagore succeed in establishing the importance, he attached to his musical creations, known initially as Rabi-babur gan and later as Rabindra-sangit. Tagore's eclecticism was evident from the very beginning in his use of Western tunes in the earliest musical dramas he composed, Valmiki Pratibha (1881), Kal- Mrigaya (1882) and Mayar Khela (1888). Tunes like of 'the Vicar of Bray', 'the British Grenadier', 'Ye banks and braes', 'Go Where Glory awaits thee', 'Nancy Lee' were used along semi classical Indian music. During his early days Rabindranath's brother Jyotirindra played an important role as the pianist and composer of tunes. Tagore’s early training in classical music, of the Bishnupur gharana, showed in his range of pickings from classical schools. He picked protions and not the whole of a composition and hence he called these bhanga gan or pieces of songs. A recent compilation of such songs lists over 230 taken from Haridas Swami, Meera, Thyagaraja, Dikshitar, et al. These are acknowledged by the author or associates as musical pieces from a specified source. This practice of picking a piece to work it into a new composition can be seen in the early years of Tagore’s life. Thus, Tagore has composed nearly 190 songs.
Tagore drew upon folk songs extensively, from the Baul School in the middle period of his life. It is during this period, Tagore wrote the largest number of swadeshi or patriotic songs which were ideally suited to the folk idiom of music. He entitled his earliest collection of patriotic songs *Baul* (1905). The folk tunes were derived from baul (songs of a sect of mendicants with affinity to Vaishnavism and Sufism), Kirtan (Vaishanava songs about Radha and Krishna), Ramprasadi (songs in praise of the deity Kali, known by the name of the eighteenth century author of the genre, Ramprasad), bhatiali and sari (boatmen’s songs) in origin. We may connect this development in Tagore’s creations with what we have noticed earlier- his increasing involvement with the supervision of the Tagore estates and tours in rural areas from 1890s.

The first wave of swadeshi songs and music composition was provoked by the Partition of Bengal but such composition continued unabated even after Tagore drifted away from the rest of the nationalist leadership from about 1907-08. Some of the patriotic songs were based on classical rgaś, eg. *Jana-gana-mana-Adhinayaka* composed in 1911 and destined to be our national anthem. One need to understand the myth and refute the misconstrued understanding. It is on record that the song was written on 11 December 1911. On 12 December 1911 the Delhi Durbar met to honour King Emperor George V. Obviously a poem written on 11 December could not be intended for an event the following day. The song was actually sung at the twenty-seventh session of the Indian national congress, Calcutta, on 28 December 1911, as the opening song at the beginning of the day’s
proceedings. There after it was also sung at the foundation day anniversary of Adi Brahma Samaj in February 1911 and included in their collection of psalms, Brahma Sangit. Many years later fertile and malicious imagination connected the composition of the song and the Durbar and it was rumoured that Tagore’s poem was meant to be sung in Delhi Durbar.

Tagore used to indicate the raga and Tala as custom demanded. If one examines Rabichhaya (1885), Kavya Granthavali (1898), Kavya Grantha (1903) edited by Mohit Chandra Sen, Tagore gave up these traditional markers. The synthesis he often aimed at did not accommodate rigid classification. As regards lyrics, some of Tagore’s finest poems are in his books of songs. Some were translated by Tagore: ‘Thou will dwell in my heart/like the full moon in the summer night’ (1896). According to the evaluation of Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee, an authority on Tagore, the total number of songs written by him was 2232. These are the songs included in the collection of Gitabitan. So, the elucidation of the songs throws the light on the incomprehensible perceptions of Tagore on music and other aspects of literature.

INTERROGATING THE PUBLIC SPHERE

It is only from the beginning of 1890; Tagore has entered the public sphere. He became the literary editor of a journal Hitabadi in 1891. He became one of the founders of the first Bengal Literary Academy, later known as Bangiya Sahitay Parishad. He acted as the editor of the journal Sadhana in 1894, and later of the journal Bharati (1098-99) and Bangadarshan (1901-05). It is during these years,
he has produced series of political writings and appeared in public forums to express his opinion on the then contemporary political issues. He gave a voice to the spirit of Swadeshi movement through poems and songs. He has initiated the idea of *Rakhi Bandhan* as a means of reasserting Bengal’s unity despite the partition made by the Government. His public role as an ideologist of a national education movement and the builder of his school in Shantiniketan became a historical role. Tagore’s public participation is a great transformation from a private poetic soul of enchanted solitariness to the interrogation of public spheres.

**PERSONAL PREDICAMENT**

Tagore’s personal life is commonly unknown. His life story is pieced together from the letters which have survived. His autobiographical accounts reveal a great deal about the elders of the family in the ancestral home. He is reticent about his wife and his own immediate family. Many of his letters in general do not disclose his relationships. But some letters written by him to his wife bear witness to a loving relationship. It is understood Tagore was away from home a good deal since he had to supervise the estates of Tagore’s family. We have seen that his first child, Madhurilata, nicknamed Bela was born in 1886 and the second child Rathindranath in 1888. Three other children were born to Rabindranath and Mrinalini: daughter *Renuka* (1891), the third daughter *Mira* (1894) and the youngest son *Samindranath* (1896). Despite his severe critical writings against child marriages, he arranged the marriage of his daughters at a very early age. His two elder daughters were married off in 1901 and the third in 1907. Tagore faced
difficulty in getting suitable matches for his daughters due to the degraded social status as Tagores are ‘Pirali’ Brahmins. The social degradation is on account of their ancestors association with the Muslims many generations ago.

Tagore faced many hard times in his forties. The death of his wife Mrinalini (1902), his second daughter Renuka (1903) of tuberculosis, his father Debendranath (1905) and his youngest son Samindra (1907) left him a lonely man. He sent of his eldest son Rathindra to Illinois, USA to study agricultural science in 1906 and married of his youngest daughter Mira in 1907. During these years, his family life was strenuous and unbearable. Many critics were of the view that Tagore must have needed enormous mental resources to withstand these deaths and the dispersal of the family. It is during this period of mental grief Tagore’s devotional and spiritual oriented poems and songs were written. The composition and thoughts for *Gitanjali* grew out of these days.

It is pertinent to understand that Tagore’s financial situation was always insecure, contrary to the public perception. Tagore was literally looking after his wife and children and was financially dependent on his father. According to his close associate Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee, Tagore’s income was about Rs.250 per month in 1890s. It is only at the age of forty four, Tagore came into money. In 1900 Tagore borrowed a large sum of money from a family friend, Sri. T. N. Palit to meet the liabilities of his company. He had to repay this debt in instalments for eighteen long years from 1900 to 1918. When Tagore received the noble prize, the major part of the money was spent for the benefit of farmers in the Tagore
estates. Contrary to the commonly held impression, Tagore and his family did not lead a life of opulence.

_Understanding the New Directions_

The period 1919-1929 was marked by two significant events in Tagore’s intellectual life: resigning the knighthood & founding of Visva-Bharati. Resignation of Knighthood marked the point of departure for Tagore and he became a suspect in the eyes of British and was under constant surveillance of informers. It is during this time, the foundation of Visva Bharati was the fulfillment of Tagore’s dream and the decadence was marked by another turning point. This period was marked by Sesher Kabita (‘The Farewell Song’, 1929), a book of verses, _Mohua_ (1929) and a host of poems. This period saw the publication of three other remarkable works: the plays _Mukta Dhra_ (‘Free Current’, 1922), _Relationships_ (1929). In each of these works Taogre has explored new directions. In the two plays the reasons of the state and systems of exploitation were counterposed to humanistic values and the emancipation of man from oppression. In the novel _Yogayog_ Tagore broke away form the tradition of romantic novel and the mealy mouthed treatment of gender relationships in Bengali literature since the late nineteenth century. In 1920’s Taogre launched himself into the world of an art new to him and at he age of sixty nine held the first exhibition of his paintings and sketches in Paris in 1930. The ideal of universalism Tagore had often spoken of earlier would have remained just words if he had not tried the experiment of of founding Visva-Bharati (1921).
became a kind of traveling missionary in these years. His missions abroad were partly aided by the climate of opinion at this juncture.

*The Debate of Tagore & Gandhi*

There was always a mutual respectable disagreement between Tagore and Gandhi on many of the crucial issues of India. Tagore always felt that an instrumentalist view of ‘Satyagraha’ would reduce it to a mantra. The instrumentalist and mindless application of ‘Satyagraha’ by politicians would only become a futile exercise. To him, it would only strengthen the existing bigotry and inertia. Tagore was against the idea of boycotting the Govt. schools and colleges without creating an alternative system of education for the downtrodden people. He had always been the severest critic of the colonial educational system. He opined that in the absence of an alternative system, the students would naturally return to the colonial institutions. This was resolved, where national schools have offered an option. Tagore was skeptical of the ritual of burning foreign clothes in the absence of the cheaper clothes available to the people. He also questioned the economic rationale of depending on *charkha* as the panacea when the issue was to build industry with ability to compete. Tagore has viewed this from a socio economic perspective. The question of using or refusing a cloth of a particular manufacture belongs to the economic science. There was widespread tendency, the foreign cloth is impure. It is perceived that a fictious moral doctrine is into its place in the absence of economic doctrine. Taogre has questioned the boycott of foreign goods and raised a pertinent question about the longivity and endurance of
such boycotts. These questions raised by Tagore were published in *Modern Review* and the answers of Gandhi were published in *Young India*. In his often quoted article Gandhi has depicted Tagore as ‘the Great Sentinel’ against bigotry, lethargy etc. Gandhi was of the view that Tagore’s information about the Independence movement is drawn from the table talk. Tagore’s remarks and responses were considered under ‘poetic licence’ and were not considered as serious remarks. Gandhi particularly pointed out that his recommendation of spinning Chakra for half an hour is not an economic message which is not confined to mere Chakra but extended to the chain of activities of rural reconstruction and cooperation.

Gandhi and Tagore agreed to live with their disagreement on several issues. Tagore had a deep faith in Gandhi’s political sagacity. Gandhi’s genius is essentially practical. His practice is immeasurable superior to his theory. He admired Tagore as a man of ideas. In *Young India* he wrote: “the Poet lives in a magnificent world of his own creation- his world of ideas” (*Young India*. 1925). Gandhi has generously allowed for Tagore’s individual point of view. He firmly said: “Our friendship becomes all the richer for our disagreements” (*Young India*. 1925). Despite the generosity of Gandhi in understanding Tagore, many nationalists turned against Taogre and his critique of Gandhian path is misconstrued by everyone. But arguably, Tagore’s attention was focused as much on the Gandhian path as the intractable issue of communalism. From 1926
onwards Tagore was obsessed with communist imbroglio as he witnessed a communial riot on his doorstep in Calcutta.

THE TRAVELLING EXPERIENCE

From 1919 Tagore spent almost three and a half years traveling abroad and this has enriched perspectives on literature. He traveled a good deal because in the inter war period made travel possible. His travels were in part because his fame after the Nobel prize brought him numerous invitations. Above all, it was because of Tagore's restless spirit, a matter of his inner life. He sought refuge in nomadism in 1920-21, 1922, twice in 1924, twice in 1926 and in 1929. In a letter to E.J. Thompson Tagore wrote that along with his literary career, he had run against the countrymen. The recognition that came to him from the west came with a shocking surprise. Tagore expressed his intellectual satisfaction and companionship when his works were accepted. Intellectual acceptance was something that drew Tagore to the west. But Tagore always acted with caution, in accepting the growing temptation of the west. But he reads there is an immense amount of unreality in the literary reputation and he aspired for the easy access into the heart of universe that he had enjoyed during his young days. These perspectives illustrate vividly the complexity of Tagore's mind. Tagore sailed forth many times in 1920s to meet the audience. He went to USA thrice during 1920, 1929 and 1930. But even before these visits, Rabindranath visited US, before attaining the noble fame. Gitanjali was published on 1 November 1912 and the appreciation of the intellectuals was instant. In US, Extra Pund introduced
Tagore’s writings to Harriet Monroe, who published the extracts of *Gitanjali* in the journal *Poetry* and invited Tagore to lecture in Chicago. He was invited by Professor Woods to lecture at Harvard University in January 1913. The content of the Harvard lecture forms the part of the book *Sadhana*. Tagore’s first visit was a quite successful affair as he made impact in the intellectual circles. His second visit during Sep 1916 to January 1917 was grand as he was famous as the first Asian recipient of the Noble prize. As it was organized by professional agents, Tagore spoke in twenty five major cities. When he was in California, Tagore conceived the idea of a cultural centre in India which would push intellectual and creative work ‘beyond the limits of the nation’. This had later developed into Visva-Bharati. Tagore’s third visit during 1920 to March 1921 was marred by his critique of nationalism in the west. His comments on the European hegemony created adverse reaction in America. These comments were understood in the context of the role of US in the Second World War. His 1929’s brief visit through the West Coast of US was not of intellectual significance. He was in transit from Canada and Japan. Except the few critical statements on Katherine Mayo’s book on the woeful status of women in India, his strip of intellectual insignificant. It was only in the fifth and last trip in 1930, Tagore was most successful. He was invited by President Hoover to the white House. Popular Historian Will Durant introduced Tagore at a Broadway theatre special performance arranged in his honour. Eminent art historian Ananda Coomaraswamy curated an exhibition of Tagore’s paintings in New York. Tagore was feted with Franklin Roosevelt and
the noble prize winner Sinclair Lewis was among the celebrities who attended the dinner. Tagore’s image in the US was also enhanced by the eminence of his intellectual contacts in Europe, such as Einstein, Bernard Shaw, Romain Rolland, Andre Gide et. On the other hand, Tagore’s vehement criticism against the evils of national aggression in the West and the subordination of the people of Asia and Africa did not endear him to the public. Moreover, there was also a strong reaction among the émigrés in America against the approbation Tagore had expressed after his recent visit to the USSR.

On the whole, assessing the experiences of Tagore, it has been said, Tagore’s main objective was to raise funds for his institution. It is arguable a mistake to look upon his visits as his main aim. Several times Tagore had declined offers to visit the countries. He showed a strong cultural distaste when confronted with the prospect of being. In a letter to Harriet Monroe, he expressed this as “a show lion in a circus”. He could not give up standing against the evil of national aggrandizement and the exploitation of poorer countries by the rich nations despite his poor reception in the West or in Japan. In one of his lectures in US in 1930, addressing the American audience, Tagore has stated: “a great portion of the world suffers from your civilization” (Dutta and Robinson. Rabindranath Tagore: the Myraid-Minded Poet. 203-208).

THEORY OF ART

During 1920s Tagore ventured into a new medium through his paintings. He deliberately departed from the path followed by most contemporary Indian artists.
This was indeed an adventure towards new direction. He criticized and broke away from the school of ‘Oriental’ art. Oriental art has dominated Indian art for many years. In view of this, Tagore has developed a theory of art on new aesthetic postulates. In 1920s he was skeptical of Oriental art which at one time received his patronage in the person of Abanindranath Tagore and his followers. Tagore firmly believed that the artist must look beyond the replication of Ajanta murals or Mughal miniatures. In 1929 he was decisively of the opinion that a young artist must look towards Western art without losing individuality. Earlier, in 1926, he delivered a tirade against ‘Indian art’ in a lecture in Dhaka, East Bengal. His critical attitude to art that subsisted on the past and appealed to the ‘national’ imagination was, one can surmised, connected with his critique of nationalism from 1917. Why should art remain only national, and not universal? This approach in the 1920s was new and far from being popular with artists of the Bengal School. Incidentally, Tagore seems to be aware of a certain defect in his colour vision when he writes to Amiya Chakrabarty: “I do not see all colours with the same intensity, I am partial to some, who can say why”? (R.T. to Amiya Chakrabarty. British Journal of Aesthetics 1987). Towards the end of his life Tagore was reconciled with the thought and he found contentment in the life of an artist. He wrote to Jamini Roy shortly before his death, that a full demands that man uses all the sensory organs given to him. He wrote a good deal on the theory of Art, more particularly painting: ‘What is Art’, a chapter in the Book Personality (1917); construction versus Creation’, an Address to the Gujarati Literary
Conference (1920); 'Religion of an Artist' (in various versions in 1924, 1926, 1936); 'The Meaning of Art' (1926), a lecture in Dhaka University; and a series of brief essays on 'My Pictures' (1930). The latter of set of essays is more relevant for this biography, than the other writings which are generalized statements. In 1930 Tagore writes an introductory note for the exhibition of his paintings in Boston, curated by Ananda Coomaraswamy, “people often ask me about the meaning of my pictures. I remain silent even as my pictures are. It is for them to express and not to explain. They have nothing ulterior behind their own appearance for thoughts to explore and words to describe...” (R.T. My Pictures. 637). This was almost a rebuke to any attempt to offer explanations theoretically, for 'It is enough that a flower exists as a flower'. About this time in 1930 Tagore wrote two other brief essays by way of introducing his paintings. He insisted that the sole inspiration behind the pictures was 'pleasure in harmonious combination of lines and colours'. He also wrote that the scattered corrections and scratches in my manuscript cause me annoyance and therefore he tried to bring the scratches on these pages 'in a rhythmic relationship and transform accumulation into adornment. This has been my unconscious training in drawing' (R.T. 636). This was Tagore's simple confession in respect of his paintings. He was pursued by his appreciative critics to believe otherwise. Tagore produced a elaborate credo in his writings. He made three basic points restated in different phrases and metaphors. First art has to come out of some impulse of expression. It is the impulse of being itself. Secondly, Tagore tried to define time and again the act of creation in art. To
him creation is the revelation of truth. It has a rhythm of form. As a third aspect, Tagore has proposed the term of practice. He has opined intellectually that art is not a gorgeous sepulcher immemorially brooding over a lonely eternity of vanished years. There was a time when ‘human races lied in comparative segregation’ and thus art settled into narrow grooves of certain traditions, but in modern times artists should have greater power of receptivity to the world at large.

Tagore’s theory of art acted as a manifesto of liberation to many of the artists. Indeed, Mulk Raj Anand perceived the ideas later as a great prelude to the history of paintings. It was a also prelude to Tagore’s Painting exhibition in Paris and the triumphal march of his painting exhibition through Europe and North America. It is pertinent to understand that Tagore created a new era of creative work at the age of seventy. He succeeded against heavy odds. His attitude to new art is that of a mother towards the most vulnerable children. He jealously defended it and mistrusted Indian response to his art till the end. India would have to wait for a later generation of artists and critics to respond adequately to the intervention of Tagore in the history of Indian art.

CREATIVE WRITINGS IN 1920S

Tagore’s creative writings were influenced by the travellings abroad, his flirtation with art and romantic involvements. Krishna Kripalani as a student, teacher and an observer at Santiniketan gave a different perspective. According to him “the poet was losing to the prophet, the singer to the preacher and Tagore’s efforts to preach all over the world the message of international harmony was at the cost of ‘his
spiritual and creative progress...something that cannot be defined and categorized” (Rabindranath Tagore: A biography. 348-349). In this context, it is pertinent to observe the mischievous comment of Jacob Epstein (1880-1959), who made a famous bust of the Tagore. He perceived Tagore as a holy man...aloof, dignified and cold ... inspired in his followers awe and craven obedience” (Let there be Sculpture. Cited by Krishna Kriplani).

However, it is not entirely true that the prophet prevailed over the author in Tagore. In Lipika (1922), a new genre of prose poems was opened up while Mukta-Dhara (1922) continued the Tagorean type of dramatic symbolism. Purabi (1925) struck a new of note of romanticism, inspired by Victorian Ocampo. After fussing over the manuscript for over three years Tagore published Rakta-karabi (1926) along with Natir Puja (1926). In 1927 Tagore began to write massive novel entitled Tin Purush to be published later as Yogayog (1929). In the last years of the decade he wrote the poems of Mohua (1929) and surprised everyone with a novel in the ‘modernist’ style, Sesher Kabita.

Mukta-Dhara and Rakta-Karabi

Mukta-Dhara demands our attention more than many of Tagore’s plays. The play succeeds in echoing and anticipating many of the vital issues which influenced the intellectual discourse of the future of India. The play presents a dichotomy between environmental concerns and political economic agenda of the state regarding exploitation of nature. It examines the anitnomy between machine and man elaborating the hegemony of mechanization and the human values. The sub
text of the play echoes represented Gandhian agenda of nonviolent non-cooperation in its juxtaposition to the resistance of the ruler. *Mukta-Dhara* is a mountain spring and is the source of a river. A huge dam has been constructed by the great engineer (*yantraraj*) Vibhuti to divert water away from Sivatarai to another country which rules over Uttarakut. It is to the advantage of the king of Uttarakut to control the water that feeds cultivation in Sivatarai, the king and the people celebrate the creation of Dam. In the meanwhile the subjects of the king in Sivatarai face famine due to lack of water. However, the crown prince of Uttarakut, Abhijit, stumbles on the fact that he was actually not born into the royal family but a foundling who was found near the stream Mukta Dhara. Abhijit thus identifies himself with the mountain spring that the dam had imprisoned. He gets to know the weak point in the dam and also that only at the cost of one’s life; one can attack the dam to bring it down. He attacks the dam at its weak point, destroys it, but he himself gets washed away by the flood of water that again begins to irrigate Sivatarai.

The theme of damage to environment has emerged as a matter of global concern in relation to the future of the planet. If one examines the background for Tagore’s critique, it is understood that Tagore’s pantheist tone is evident on his emphasis on the importance of the forest and the tapovan in ancient Indian culture. Tagore also gave appreciative support to Elmhirst’s environmentalist tract on the *Robbery of the Soil*. But Tagore’s ideal human relationship with nature was reflected in the education in natural surroundings at Santiniketan. Though, in the
21st century education has acquired techno-scientific knowledge, the more elaborate grounding in this direction was laid by Tagore. Apart from these contentious issues, the play has reopened the issue of man versus machinery. The attitude of the builders singing anthem to the machines, is projected as allegory of the prostitution of science for purposes of domination.

*Rakta-Karabi* was written a few months after *Mukta-Dhara*. In this Tagore has expressed a deep concern with the reduction of man into a mere tool in a vast machinery for mining gold. In many poems Tagore has condemned the depredations of monster machine. But Tagore’s perspective is entirely different from that of Gandhi who declared war on machinery and materialism of the West in *Hind Swaraj* (1909). Tagore believed that science and technology was necessary for the advancement of civilization and human welfare. Tagore presents the idea that diabolical machinery and the cruel oppression of the rulers can be effectively fought with the moral force. The character of *Dhananjay* effectively carries this message. The core ideas are presented as allegories by Tagore. In fact, the articulation of these ideas constitutes the text of the play. Tagore himself wrote a commentary to emphasize the central theme of renunciation. The play was translated by Mrajorie Sykes and Tagore believed that translation would definitely initiate the much expected social transformation.

Tagore himself translated *Rakta-Karabi* under the title *Red Oleander*. In 1924 Tagore wrote the speech introducing the play. But the play was never delivered and could not be staged in Tagore’s life time. The play is about the
individual man and man as a member of a class. It depicts the life of a woman Nandini. The play presents her emergence as an individual in the middle of the oppression that surrounds her. If one looks at the whole picture, one might find the hidden meanings under the petals of the red oleander. The events in the play take place in Yakshapuri (Mammon’s land). The king stays behind a screen and his rule depends on a few sardars (satraps), who are veterans in the art of domination. All the others are ‘diggers’ who work in the bowels of the earth to dig up gold. They are known not by their name but the number assigned to each. Some diggers rise to the rank of headmen. There is a Holy Man, who takes the name of God, but he takes his salary from his sardar and he is of great use in Yakshapuri. In the web of this story Nandini appears to be destined to break down the screen behind which the king hides. Nandini and her lover and comrade Ranjan provoke a rebellion of the diggers against the regime of satraps and headmen. She lures the king from his secret chamber and they discover that his henchmen have killed Ranjan. In the climatic scene the king joins Nandini in demolishing the regime of exploitation over which he had ruled. This stereotype of the awesome power of the eternal woman occurs recurrently in many other dramatic works of Tagore. In the last dramatic allegory Woman as Shakti liberates the people from oppressive regime.

Tagore himself has provided different interpretations of the play in many of his speeches. Given the ideational background, Rakta Karabi is commonly regarded as a landmark because it was Tagore’s severest indictment of the injustice and oppression the toiling classes suffered in systems based on
acquisition of wealth by another man’s labour. Considering the question of the realities of socialism as a system, Tagore was torn between two perceptions. Four years after the publication of this play Tagore visited Soviet Russia (October 1930). In *Letters from Russia* (1931) Tagore looked optimistically at the drastic diminution in the difference between living standards of various strata of society. It is from his experience; Tagore grew suspicious about the basic question of dispensation under socialism in Russia.

**THE COMPLEX NOVEL**

The novel *Yogayog* (1929) explores the cruel scalpel gender relations in Hindu society. The incomprehensibility of conjugal relationships are elucidated by Tagore. The novel ends with tragic denouement that a loveless marriage is a rape legalized by the institution of marriage. Tagore wrote the novel for two years and wrote an essay as a prelude to understand the novel. Tagore in the essay ‘The Indian Ideal Marriage’ (EWRT) wrote: “in every country marriage is still more or less of a prison house for the confinement of woman with all its guards wearing the badge of the dominant male... (Man) by dint of his efforts to bind woman, has made her the strongest of fetters of his own bondage... the married state is still one of the most fruitful sources of the unhappiness and downfall of man” (524-37). Tagore believed, this was due to the failure of man to appreciate the *Shakti* in the woman, and man’s tendency to use it for the purpose of his individual enjoyment. *Yogayog* brings in the essence of the human perception. Kumudini is a piece of property for her husband Madhusudan. He refuses to realize the life
beyond the pleasure of possession. The irony is Kumu accepts her god given duty
to play the role of a Hindu wife devoted to a husband not her own choice. She too
has a rebellious moments clouded as it is by her conception of traditional
prescriptions and proscriptions binding a Hindu woman in holy matrimony.
Madhusudan is also driven by the idea which pervades the novel that the counter
position of the acquisitive instincts which drive Madhusudan to gain wealth as
well as power over his wife. This stands in contradiction to the upbringing of
Kumudini in an aristocratic family. This cultural dissonance is often depicted by
Tagore as a stereotype in his writings. It is on the advice of her brother Vipradas,
Kumu realizes that it is only through experiencing grief and insult she attains
abiding peace. She had to reconcile to her fate and returns to her duties as a Hindu
wife. The novel ends with Vipradas seeing before him ‘only an abyss without
end’. Tagore explores the idea of marriage as an institution beyond question. He
questions the institution ruthlessly and the ideational basis of ideal marriage.

_Liberation in Sesher Kabita_ (Farewell Song)

Tagore’s _Sesher Kabita_ (1929) created a sensation and remained one of the
most popular of Tagore’s fictional works. It was perceived as Tagore’s response
to the challenge of modernism. The novel was considered as a brilliant instance of
Tagore’s literary craftsmanship. The novel hinges on the protagonism of Amit
Raye and Labanya Datta, who were kept in the wings by and large by Ketaki or
Katy Mitter and Shobhanlal. The romantic encounter between Amit and Labanya
ends in the decision of Labanya that she was ready to be friend but not a wife to
Amit. Thus fate neatly fairs off Amit with Katy, and Labanya with Shobhanlal. Through this narration Tagore quizzically looks at the younger generation of Bengali intellectuals with aspirations for modernity and creates in Amit a protagonist who outdoes the best of that species. Outwardly, Amit is a brilliant and amiable snob who plays effortlessly the games intellectuals play. He shows of his ability to put words together to versity in a play engagement with the Muse of poetry. His social grace in playing the ‘romance’ game with suitable girls, his originality as a literary critic, his skill in honing the innate contrariness in debates on subjects shows his external active nature. He sees Labanya and entices her with his entire dream like description of their story as a love cruise along with the fascination of the ring and the nest. The reality intervenes through the character Katy Mitter. Her visit is a disaster to Amit and to Labanay because it brings the message of imagination which never materializes. But social factor was a factor in the outer world. In Labanya’s inner most thoughts much more important was the idea of love that liberates. She thinks that if she were to marry, she has to emerge as an ordinary woman not as his own creation. She wishes to be his friend but not a wife to Amit.

The novel was perceived great in its own way. Tagore achieved this achievement at the age of seventy six. Departing from his usual practice, Tagore locates his narrative and character in the contemporary terrain. It was perceived as contemporary as it was Tagore’s response to the challenge of modernists. The language in this novel drew a distinctive attention and established a style in
Bengali which attracted many imitators. The novel has shared some of the stylistic features of the ‘prose poems’ that Tagore began to write in the last years of his life. With all its dazzling brilliance on the verbal surface, Tagore has tried to answer some of the questions like: What is modernity? What is love without consummation in marriage? He greatly reflected upon the relationship between theoretical ideas and the magic of ‘literary’ artistry.

THE SAGE OF SANTINIKETAN

The history of the world was dominated by World War I during 1909-1919. Fortunately, Tagore has visited Europe from June to October 1912, before the outbreak of the world war. If it were to be otherwise, his poetry would have failed him in securing Noble Prize and would have received little attention. Tagore was deeply disturbed by the war situation and his tours in Japan and US marked his ideology of aggressive nationalism. He proclaimed that aggressive nationalism is the root of the world war. This made him unpopular in Japan and other allied nations. Notwithstanding these disturbances, Tagore carried on his campaign and published critique of Nationalism (1917).

Tagore’s crique of Nationalism created a great impact and alienated many political leaders in India. Tagore was skeptical of the tactics of individual violence. In 1909, an obscure Lawyer, M.K.Gandhi published a tract entitled Hind Swaraj. The actions of Madan Lal Dhingra and Aurobindo ghosh were almost similar and stood in complete opposition to the ideas of Tagore. Gandhi’s passive resistance movement against apartheid and Champaran Satyagraha (1917)
became popular instances of non-violent protest movements. Tagore kept himself aloof from active politics and wrote against the oppression of the government and remained immersed in writing literary works and the taks ahead of the school of Shantiniketan. But moved by serious political events, Tagore tried to mobilize the political leaders to protest against the atrocities in Punjab and particularly Jallianwala Bagh massacre. As a form of personal resistance, Tagore wrote a famous letter to the Vice Roy renouncing his Knighthood. This renunciation was hailed as the return of Tagore to public sphere. During this period, the award of Noble prize is commonly held as a central event. It was also during this time; Santiniketan was at the centre of his life. This phase was also signaled by the poems collected in *Gitanjali* (Bengali) and *Balaka*. This has also marked the writings as *Gora, Dakghar, Achalyatan* and *Ghare Baire*. Most importantly, Tagore was hailed as *Visva Kabi* (the poet of the World).

**THE IMAGE OF SAGE**

Santiniketan began as Tagore’s school with just five students in 1901. Tagore settled there with his own wife away from her domain. He was compelled to sell even his wife’s ornaments to pay for the expenses of his school (1902). His service to the national education movement from 1905 was only an extension of his own experiments at Santiniketan. This innovation marked the beginnings of a new culture of celebrating the seasons. In 1910, after the marriage of his son Rathindranath with Pratima Devi, Tagore virtually reconstituted the family on the lines of Santiniketan’s family. After the death of Debendranath Tagore, Tagore’s
ashram has become a well known school. His personal charisma began to attract people like William Rothenstein and Ananda Coomaraswamy (visitors in 1901). The Noble prize award turned the trickle of scholarly visitors to Santiniketan into a flood tide. As a response to winning the Noble prize, Tagore was awarded a DLitt by the University of Calcutta in December 1913. The more important from the longer perspective was the visit of M.K. Gandhi and his school boys from South Africa in 1914. In another significant development, Tagore has developed cultural outpost in Vichitra club in Calcutta in his home. For the event of Vichitra, Gandhi, Tilak and Annie Besant were among the spectators. Santiniketan attracted students from many other parts of the country- Gujarat, Kerala, Punjab and other neighbouring provinces. In the meanwhile, while touring the United States, Ragore wrote to his son Los Angeles that Santiniketan must become a centre of human studies regardless of nationality and parochialism’. In October 1918, the idea took concrete shape in a conversation with his son Rathindra and friend Charles Andrews. In December 1918, the foundation building for Visva Bharati University was laid. However, the evolution of this ashram into Visva Bharati is not central to Tagore’s inner life.

There are several factors that went into the making of Tagore’s image as a sage, a mystical poet, a man with a spiritual message. One significant factor was his withdrawal to Santiniketan from the active public life of Calcutta. Connected to this is the agenda of the ashram and the demands of the role of the head of the institution at Santiniketan. During this period, Tagore’s writing in Bengali at this
time were heavily redolent of Upanishadic philosophy. His sermons have been collected in not less than seventeen volumes. The poems of *Gitanjali* in Bengali began to be written about this time. It is pertinent to note that *Gitanjali* in Bengali is not the same as the more famous English book bearing the same title. The predominant not of *Gitanajali* is spiritual, the style is that of late medieval mystic poets. The notion of divinity in the poems was commonly traced to the Upanishads which were a foundational text to the Brahma Samaj. *Gitanjali* in Bengali was published in 1910, followed by *Utsarga* (‘Dedication’), *Giti Malya* (Garland of Songs) and *Gitali* were published in 1914. This cycle of writings came to an end with *Balaka* (1916) which strikes a totally a different note, stylistically and thematically. In between 1910 and 1912, Tagore departed for England and the series of events that took place, led to the publication of his translations. Upon the publication of Gitanjali in English in *The Times Literary Supplement* Krishan Kripalani in *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* says: "As we read his pieces we seem to be reading psalms of a David of our own times" (251). The rest is history known to the world.

**THOUGHTS OF DEATH AND LAST DAYS**

In the last phase of Tagore’ writings the theme of death recurred frequently. Even the titles he gave to his books reflect the tendency of thought: ‘The End’, ‘Terminal’, ‘The Evening Lamp’, ‘Sick Bed’- published during 1940. The theme of death has been part of the romantic imagination of early 19th century poets. But from the beginning of the 20th century the thoughts on death had acquired
inevitable significance. With the thoughts on Death drawing the attention of all the poets and critics, Tagore’s *Religion of Man* (1930) and his other writings became popular. This sudden turn of contemplation has become Tagore’s mode of thinking deciding his character. The poem entitled ‘The Skeleton’ was inspired by Tagore’s conversation with Victoria Ocampo almost similar to the theme by Baudelaire (Poems, Kripalani ed. 109-110).

A last series of poems starts from September 1940 when Tagore fell a victim to another spell of illness which eventually led to his death in less than a year. In *Rogsajya, Arogya* (‘Recovery’, 1941), *Janmadin* (‘On the Birthday’ 1941), *Sesh Lekha* ( ‘Last Writings’, poems dictated by the poet during illness, published posthumously, 1941 )- small collections of his writings, often left unrevised because Tagore did not live to revise them into a publishable form-Tagore’s last words are inscribed.

After September 1937, Tagore was gravely ill and remained unconscious for two days and his recovery was slow. He lost some of his close associates during the following four years: friend of his youth Jagadish Chandra Bose (1937), the artist Gaganendranath Tagore (1938), his close confidant Charles Andrews (1940), Surendranath Tagore (1940) his nephew and the son of his mentor Satyendra nath, Kalimohan Gosh (1940), who had served Santiniketan and Sriniketan since 1907. Upon hearing the grave illness of Tagore, Gandhi wrote a touching letter ‘stay yet awhile’. This was Gandhi’s last letter to Tagore. The poet
died on 7 August 1941. Tagore wrote about ten days before his death: 'The Great Unknown':

The fiest day's Sun asked  
At the manifestation of being-  
'Who are you'.  
No answer came.  
Year after year went by,  
The last sun of the day  
The last question utters  
As the western sea shone in the silent evening-  
'Who are you'  