CHAPTER II: AESTHETICS AND VALUES

Section I: The Role of Religion in Human Life

"Indian thinking on Humanism is not based on scepticism. It never lost faith in philosophical speculation, nor did it find any reason to discard the belief in an ultimate reality, whether pantheistic or theistic in form. It builds its humanism on belief in God and it advocates service of or regard for the interest of man, by identifying God with man. Unlike Auguste Comte's Humanism, which stems from scientific scepticism, it is founded on faith in religion and philosophy and is directly linked with religion. Tagore's humanism belongs to the second category. It stems from his living faith in God"¹.

It would not be correct however to say that Tagore conformed to any conventional form of religious views. His spirit of independent thinking would not allow him to shape like that. Endowed with a penetrating intellect and an extremely sensitive mind, he kept it open to all diverse messages sent by the outer world. He expressed response with equal fervour to the call of the Infinite as well as to the tiny blade of grass under the feet. His penetrating intellect found delight in the deeper questions of life. He was thus inevitably drawn into realms of religion and philosophy and set himself to the serious task of answering them in his own way. His writings have been profoundly influenced by questions

touching on religion and philosophy.

In the first place, there is the abiding influence of the Upanishads. It seems that he read translations of the Vedas and Upanishads by Ram Mohan Roy. In his sermons and discourses, passages from the Upanishads were frequently quoted. Upanishadic episodes provided themes for some of his most important poems.

Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhaya, the author of the first authentic biography of Tagore, asserts: "Nothing has influenced him more, both consciously and as an undercurrent of thought, than the Upanishads ... I maintain that Rabindranath's entire career is only an evolution and development of his Upanishadic education." This may be an overstatement, but the fact remains that Tagore was able to get more out of the Upanishads than most of his contemporaries. And he could do so because his approach to the scriptures was refreshingly different. He did not seek in them evidence for the superiority of Indian over Western thought. Nor did he interpret them in terms of some pre-conceived metaphysical system. He regarded the Upanishads as a treasure house of inspiring thoughts and ennobling ideals rather than texts propounding finished theories.

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But we should not forget the fact that Rabindranath himself had very little contribution in interpreting the different Upanishads and in propounding the essence of each Upanishad. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Rabindranath's father Devendranath Tagore had already made thorough study of the Upanishads. Devendranath first began his study of the Upanishads from the year 1838 and the first period of his study lasted till 1843. In this period he was mainly assisted by Ramchandra Vidyabagish, who first explained to him the famous sloka of the *Ishopanishad*. He studied the eleven Upanishads at this time, but it was not very thorough. The second phase of his Upanishadic study was during the years 1844–45. Devendranath's new realization of the Upanishadic values are traced in his *Atmaivani* (10th, 11th, 12th and 14th Chapters). In the beginning of the 12th Chapter, Devendranath states that according to Sankaracharya, there are eleven Upanishads, he himself had found out 147 Upanishads. He had gained much in studying Upanishads in this period very thoroughly, for he could now write down the principles of *Brahmopasana* with the help of the Upanishads.

From 1845 to 1848, Devendranath began another effort in analysing the Upanishads for the rift with the Christians. He felt the necessity of studying the Vedas also and sent pupils to Kashi to study the Vedas (Anandachandra, Baneswar, Taraknath and Ramanath) and he himself went to Kashi for 5.

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studying the Vedas and finally came to the conclusion that the Upanishads would not be the ultimate religious text of the Brahmos. He finally composed the Brahmo Grantha in 1848 in his own way and it came to be known as *Brahmopanishad*. He had also kept Ram Mohan as his ideal. Both of them made the 'Gayatri Mantra' as the foremost mantra of the *Brahmopasana*. Rabindranath utilised these Upanishadic interpretations in his literature too.

Rabindranath, undoubtedly owed much to Raja Ram Mohan Roy, regarding his concept of Vedanta and Upanishad. Though, a believer in universal Theism Ram Mohan's religious and philosophical thought remained firmly grounded in the Vedanta. While retaining throughout his life a great admiration for the ethical teachings of Christianity, he none the less regarded Hinduism as metaphysically and spiritually the most advanced religion in the world. This has been testified to by the Abbe Gregoire, Bishop of Blois (France), who says about Ram Mohan: "He asserts likewise that he has found nothing in European books equal to the scholastic philosophy of the Hindus,..." (quoted in 'The Father of Modern India : Ram Mohan Roy Centenary Commemoration Volume, Part II, p. 162).

It seems that Rabindranath went through all the translations of Ram Mohan of the Upanishadic and Vedanta literature. Ram Mohan's exact works on the Vedanta are the

7. 'Tatsabitu Barenya bhargo dhimahi dhiyo jo no prochodayet', Rig Veda - 3/62 10 mantra.
following in Bengali:

a) Vedanta Grantha - Calcutta (1815)
b) Vedantasara - " (1815 or 1816)
c) Talabakaropanishat or Kenopanishat - " (1816)
d) Ishopanishat - " (1816)
e) Kathopanishat - " (1817)
f) Mandukyopanishat - " (1817)
g) Mundakopanishat - " (1819)
h) Atmanatmavivek of Sankaracharya - " (1819)

In Tagore's collection of books, possessed in his personal library, Ram Mohan's books were there. We can cite one such example.

Ram Mohan Roy — Translation of several principles of some controversial works on Brahmanical theology 2nd edition — London — Parbury — 1832.

Another book written by Prasanna Kumar Roy is also noteworthy, which was also found in his library.

"Like all truths realised through life", Tagore says, "the truths of the Upanishads are concrete. Many tendencies of thought have been reconciled in them because life itself is a great reconciler. The Upanishads have received less than justice from their interpreters. Adherants of orthodox darshans approached them in a dogmatic manner, picking out

10. Collected from the Archives of Rabindra-Bhavan, Santiniketan.
passages from them to buttress their own doctrines. Many European scholars saw in them only the negative ideas of illusion, sarrow and denial. But there is a positive element in the Upanishads which is far more important than the abstractions which academic philosophers have emphasized. This positive element, Tagore points out, is seen in the idea of joy, anandam of eternal blissful life of universal rhythm. It is also seen in the idea of personal realization and in the constant search for the Imperishable.

"The inner poetry of the Vedas is to be found in their verses and songs, and it is with the songs and poems of Rabindranath that they often have the greatest affinity. I mean that the poet has directly drawn upon the Vedas from his literary inspiration. His genius is beybund all compare and needs no plagiarism to bolster it. I mean no more than there is a vital connection between his literature and that of ancient India — a continuity of life as inevitable as in the world of biology".

Rabindranath's own spiritual career, his 'Sadhana' had found in them inspiration and sustenence. That his 'Sadhana' received admiration for its philosophic charm, is evident from the reports of the Western World.

West London Post - 27.2.1914 —
Sadhana : "Sadhana, the Realization of Life" (Macmillan)

by Rabindranath Tagore, can be summed up in one simple phase, 'a wonderful and convincing book'. Winner of the Nobel Prize, poet, philosopher and great thinker, the author needs no praise or recommendation from me as to the merits of his publication. It is indeed, extremely difficult for the unromantic, ice-cold Western mind to grasp the idea which the book is intended to convey. But this is not astonishing. When I call to mind the world famous lines of Kipling:

"East is East and West is West
And never the twain shall meet".

The writer was brought up in the midst of a family where texts of the Upanishads were used in daily worship, and in 'Sadhana', it is the wish of the author that his Western reader shall come into touch with the spirit of ancient India and the reader of the book, has no difficulty in gratifying the author's wish.

Many Upanishadic ideas have often crept into some of his sermons and religious songs as well. We must remember that Rabindranath's 'Naivedya' was written as early as 1901, when his more mature compositions of 'Geetanjali' (1913) were not written. It is true, that Rabindranath was brought up in an Upanishadic atmosphere, but the Western influence was also equally deep. His early visits to Europe (1891-93) kept him infatuated for some time; at the same time he was helped to come out of his illusion and develop a critical stand against Europe. His writings like 'Raja Praja', 'Mukhuiye bonam Barunjye' (1894-95) bear testimony of his outlook in this period. At the same time, he was developing a taste for
Upanishadic texts. Some passages in the *Samhita*, with which Rabindranath had the remotest chance of contact, appear to contain the early seeds of some of his deepest poetic ideas. There was of course nothing new about the religious ideas, but the characteristic of the *Naivedya* series of poems was in its composition. Both the lyric and gnomic style are there in these poems. These can be compared with the psalms of the Jewish saints. "In lyric poetry, the poet gives vent to his personal emotions or experiences — his joys or sorrows, his cares or complaints, his aspirations or his despair; or he reproduces in words the impressions which nature or history may have made upon him. The character of lyric poetry, it is evident, may vary widely according to the subject, and according to the circumstances and mood of the poet himself. Gnomic poetry consists of observations on human life and society, or generalisations respecting conduct and character. But the line between these two forms cannot always be drawn strictly: lyric poetry, for instance may assume a parentic tone, giving rise to an intermediate form which may be called didactic; or again a poem which is, on the whole, didactic, may rise in parts into a lyric strain."  

The early initiation of Rabindranath in the faith of the Upanishads finds its reflection in profound utterances in poems 57, 58 and 60 of *Naivedya* (1308 B.S. - 1901). Poem 57 begins: "Oh the Almighty God of all Gods ...". The mantra

VI of Shweatashwatara Upanishad is also of the similar tune\(^ {16}\).
The English translation of this mantra is as following: "He is beyond all the forms of the tree (of the word) and of time, he is the other, from whom this world moves round, when one has known him who brings good and removes evil, the lord of bliss, as dwelling within the self, the immortal and the supporter of all"\(^ {17}\). We also have another translation of this passage. "Him may we know, the Highest, Prince of Princes and king of kings, the summit and God head of the Gods. The High Lord over lords above all highness; the Master of the worlds whom we must worship"\(^ {18}\). The entire poem of 'Naivedya' is a reflection of the well known mantra of the Shwetashwatara Upanishad.

Each and every mantra of the Isopanishad has ever been deeply fixed in the mind of Rabindranath. "That moves and that moves not; That is far and the same is near; That is within all this and That also is outside all this"\(^ {19}\) (Iso 5).\(^ {20}\) "But he who sees everywhere the self in all existences and all existences in the Self, shrinks not thereafter from aught\(^ {21}\).

\(^{16}\) Shweatashwatara Upanishad, Chapter VI, Yajurveda-Krisna, "Tmiswaranangle Paramang Maheswara tang Devatanang Cha dainyam ***

\(^{17}\) Max Muller, Sacred Books of the East (1975), Vol.I, p.262


\(^{19}\) Ibid, p. 64.

\(^{20}\) "Tadejati tannajati tad dure tadantike", Iso 5.

\(^{21}\) Aurobindo, Op. Cit., p.65
(Iso 6)\textsuperscript{22}. "Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Ignorance, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the knowledge alone"\textsuperscript{23}. (Iso 9)\textsuperscript{24}. "He who knows that as both in one, the knowledge and the Ignorance, by the Ignorance crosses beyond death and by the knowledge enjoys Immortality"\textsuperscript{25}. (Iso 11)\textsuperscript{26}. "The face of truth is covered with a brilliant golden lid; that do thou remove, Oh Fosterer (in the inner sense of the Veda Surya, the Sun God, represents the divine Illumination of the Kavi which exceeds mind and forms the pure self-luminous Truth of things) for the law of the Truth, for sight"\textsuperscript{27}. (Iso 15)\textsuperscript{28}. "Oh good Agni, knowing all things that are manifested, lead us by the good path to the felicity; remove from us the devious attraction of sin. To thee completest speech of submission we would dispose".\textsuperscript{29}. (Iso 18)\textsuperscript{30}. 

The idea of transcendent Unity, Oneness and Stability behind all the flux and variety of phenomenal 'life is the basal idea of the Upanishads: this is the pivot of all Indian metaphysics, the sum and goal of our spiritual experience. To the phenomenal world around us stability and singleness seem

\textsuperscript{22} "Yastu Sarvani bhutani atmanaivam pasyati", (Iso 6).
\textsuperscript{24} "Andham tama pravisanti ie vidyamupasate", (Iso 9).
\textsuperscript{25} Aurobindo, Op. Cit., p. 66.
\textsuperscript{26} "Vidyamcha avidyamcha Jastadeva ...", (Iso 11).
\textsuperscript{27} Aurobindo, Op. Cit., p. 67.
\textsuperscript{28} "Hirarnaven Patren satvasanyahitam mukham", (Iso 15).
\textsuperscript{29} Aurobindo, Op. Cit., p. 68.
\textsuperscript{30} "Acme nava supatharave ashman viswani deva vayunani vidyan ...", (Iso 18).
at first to be utterly alien; nothing but passes and changes nothing but has its counter parts, contrasts, harmonised and dissident parts; and all are perpetually shifting and re-arranging their relative positions and affectation. Yet if one thing is certain, it is that the sum of all this change and motion is absolutely stable; fixed and unvarying that all this heterogeneous multitude of animate and inanimate things are fundamentally homogeneous and one. Otherwise, nothing could endure, nor could there be any certainty in existence.

Rabindranath's idea of existentialism was almost the same.

Rabindranath's implicit affinity with some of the richest thoughts of the Vedas clearly reveals his admiration for the ancient traditions of India. In 'kheya', Rabindranath describes the dawn in this way: "This dawn has torn open the cover of her breast and stands before us in full glory. The sky is flooded with her message of golden light." Some thousands of years ago Viswamitra had worshipped the dawn in almost similar language: "Having thrown away the cover of her breast there walks the glorious Dawn — the queen of Heaven." We can also have the translation of Aurobindo:

"Dawn in her plenitude like one that let fall from her breast a sewn robe moves, the bride of the Bliss; creating Swar, perfect in her working, perfect in her enjoying, she widens from the extremity of Heaven over the earth."

34. "A1 buker basan khani chire phele Darleca ei prabhatkhani..."
We can cite certain similar ideas in Rabindranath's songs and in Vedic hymns. For instance: "Sweet blow the winds. Sweet flow the rivers. May the herbs be sweet to us. May the nights and days bring us happiness. May Heaven, our Father send us happiness. May the trees make us happy with their fruits. May the Sun endow us with happiness. May the directions bring us happiness." Rig Veda. The poem of Rabindranath runs like this:

"E dyułok madhumoy, madhumoy e prithivir dhuli
Antare niyuchi ami tuli
Ei mahamantrakhan Charitartha jivaner vani..."

Sweet is the universe, sweet is the dust of this earth. I have gratefully accepted this sweet hymn in my heart. We can cite another example: "Be united: speak in harmony: let your minds apprehend alike. Common be your prayer: Common be the end of your assembly: Common be your resolution: Common be your deliberations. Alike be your feelings: Common be your intentions; perfect be your unity." Rig Veda.

An almost similar idea is found in one of the Rabindrasangeets:

"Eka sutre bandhiachi sahastrimon
Eka karye sapiachi sahasrajivan - Bande Mataram..."

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37. Rig Veda, Mandala-I, "Madhubata ritavata madhu ksharanti sindhava..."
40. Rig Veda, Mandala-X, "Sangachhadham sangbadadhram sangbo manangsi jnanatam..."
Here, the same essence of unity is presented by Rabindranath, but in a different way.\(^{41}\)

It is however doubtful whether Rabindranath read these Vedic texts for religious interest only. There is a long controversy regarding the character of the Rig Veda — whether it is originally and essentially a religious book or a secular work. L. Renou's view is that although secular subjects are sometimes introduced in the hymns, the Rig Veda is essentially religious in character.\(^{42}\) When we think of religion and philosophy of the Rig Veda, we are at once plunged into the complex of beliefs and practices of a people composed of several racial and cultural elements whose history stretched over at least a millennium. Also during this period this literature was evolving and did not remain static as a finished product; hence it contains traces of the various stages of its development both in mythology and metaphysics.\(^{43}\)

The Upanishads also provided the inspiration for his mature writings in which the urge for union with God became the dominant theme. In his poem 'Pran' he expresses his beautiful realization. "I don't want to die in this beautiful world, I want to live amidst men. In this shiny flower strewn earth I am striving for a place among men. I wish to compose eternal songs of love and tears of human beings. Even if I am

unable to do that, give me a place amongst you. When I will be no longer there, forget me and forget my songs." This love for nature was an eternal source of joy in him. It was boundless; after long years of anguish and realism, he was writing in 1941 more matured poems like 'Arogya'. It can also be traced in his subsequent writings in which the final realization came to him that service of humanity is the best form of contact with God.

The second important source of Tagore's thought is the theistic humanistic tradition, particularly as developed by the poet saints of mediaeval India. This is usually referred to as the 'Vaishnava element'. Tagore became familiar with this tradition at an early age through his study of the Vaishnava poets of Bengal. In his 'Jivansmriti', the poet says, that he completed reading some volumes of Saradacharān Mitra and Akshoy Sarkar at an early age. The Maithili words of Vidyapati were too vague to him, but this Maithili language allured him the most. He used to copy down some words in a note book, which were not clear to him. When he was barely 20, he wrote several lyrics in imitation of mediaeval Vaishnava poetry. These were published under the title of 'Bhanusingher Padavali' (songs of Bhanusinha). Bhanusingh, which is synonymous in Sanskrit with Rabi Thakur (the Bengali form of his name in familiar evocation) means Sun Lion, while Lion is interchangeable with Lord (or Thakur) in North Indian surnames.

Manaber majhe ani banchibare chai..."
45. Ibid, Arogya, p. 833.
46. Rabindranath Tagore, Jivansmriti, (1319 B.S.), p. 64.
They show such a grasp of the spirit of Vaishnava lyrics, that even scholars were deceived. The old Vaishnava poets spoke of divine love, though they used the language of earthly love. We often see in Rabindranath's poetry clear reflections of the Vaishnava poets. In his love-lyrics we get glimpses of what Jayadeva, Vidyapati and Chandidas must have felt.

It should be remembered however that Vaishnavism is only one of the channels through which the non-monistic tradition influenced Rabindranath. The Bauls and other wandering ministerials of Bengal, the Sufisaints, Kabir and Dadu among Hindi poets and the Bhakti school as a whole which at one time dominated India - all these represent the same point of view as the Vaishnavas. The Bhakti Movement was a reaction against the excessive intellectualism of the metaphysians and the mechanical approach of the ritualists and the literalists. The leaders of the Bhakti Movement called for love and devotion towards a personal God in preference to abstract speculation about the Absolute. They stood for Catholocity and tolerance with regard to philosophical controversies, a recognition of the importance of man's everyday life, and a loosening of social barriers. Rabindranath looked upon this entire tradition as a valuable element in Indian culture. And he saw in Vaishnavism only a special form in which this element was expressed.
In some of the early writings of Tagore, one notices a tendency to look upon the Vedic-Upanishadic and the Vaishnava viewpoints as mutually exclusive. For instance, the poem 'Aframatta' in Naivedya (1308 B.S.) is enriched with the devotion of Vaishnavism and the sublime idea of the Upanishads. In another instance we find that the poet who is the seeker of beauty sacrifices his life at the altar of God. The idea of human love probably he got from the Vaishnava texts and that of divine love from the Upanishads. This tends to confuse any attempt to disaggregate Tagore's basic philosophical approach. Some writers see in Tagore's work a perpetual conflict between the two attitudes. Others give a cyclical assessment, and assert that the Vedic and the Vaishnava stand points dominated alternating phases of Tagore's creative career. From this it might almost appear that the poet's mind was like a locomotive shutting back and forth between the two termini of pantheism and theism. Actually, Tagore took from each tradition what he considered to be the most positive. In his world view, there is a place for the warmth and exuberance of the Vaishnava poets as well as the ethical idealism and mystic intuition of the Upanishadic sages.

Buddhism also meant much to Rabindranath at almost every stage of his life. Few modern Indian thinkers, except Ananda Coomarswamy, has written about the Buddha, with such reverence and understanding (C.F. the essays in Bengali: Buddha dharma Bhaktibad and Buddhadever Prati). After his travels in South East Asia and Far East (July 1927), another aspect of Buddhism made an impression upon him: poems were devoted to Buddhist themes, as also a number of plays - 'Pujarini' - Katha (1899). ('Pujarini' was written much earlier which shows that Rabindranath had admiration for Buddhism from his early years), Chandalika (1933), 'Buddhabhakti' - Navajatak (1938). Tagore tried to correct the one-sided evaluation of Buddhism as a doctrine of sorrow and annihilation.

"At the root of Buddhism", said Tagore in an address at Santiniketan, "there is a metaphysical theory. But it is not this that has united people under its banner. Its friendship - its pity and mercy and the universal love preached by the Buddha have helped to remove barriers between man and man". Like the Upanishads, the teachings of the Buddha have generated two divergent currents of thought: the one impersonal, preaching abnegation of the self through discipline and the other personal preaching the cultivation of sympathy for all creatures and devotion to the Infinite truth of love. The latter, represented by the Mahayana, had

50. Times Literary Supplement (7th November, 1914).
its origin in the positive aspect of the Buddha's teaching, which is immeasurable love. It could never, by any logic, find its reality in the emptiness of the truthless abyss. Tagore refuses to see in Buddhism a glorification of contemplation as against action. According to Tagore, the Buddha denounced activity only if it led to evil in thought, word or deed. He preached extinction, not of the active Self, but only of pride, ignorance and lust. At a time when many scholars interpreted Nirvana as annihilation in the ultimate sense and where scholars like Sankaracharya had called Buddhism as 'Vainasika Dharma', Tagore grasped the fact that the doctrine of anatha — non-existence of the self applied only to the finite ego, not to the Imperishable Spirit.

We must also consider the Western influence on Tagore — the influence of European thought, literature and life-style. There was much in Western Civilization that repelled him. But he condemned the tendency to equate the West with gross materialism — a tendency that has vitiated the work of many recent writers and introduced an air of smugness and complacency in Indian thought. Tagore insisted that the quest for value is as much Europe's concern as Asia's, though each hemisphere has evolved its own ways of realising value. He described science as "Europe's greatest gift to humanity". Science, like philosophy and religion has its own heroism, its own grand search for the beyond. The spiritual progress of mankind is indivisible. "If the light of science becomes extinct in

Europe, our own horizon in the East will also mourn in darkness.\textsuperscript{52}.

Tagore was particularly well equipped to appreciate the West. He had the detachment of a far off observer combined with the sympathy of a true cosmopolitanism. He understood the way the Western mind worked. A French writer says, "Nothing in our European culture — our poetry, philosophy, art is unknown to Tagore. If his taste has nothing to gain in refinement from contact with us, his sensibility has become broader through gleanings from European cultures".\textsuperscript{53}.

Gilbert Murray, the famous British classicist, speaks of Tagore's success "in saying things that are in our minds but which we cannot quite bring out". This success was the result of prolonged study and effort. It is seldom realized how earnest were Tagore's attempts to grasp the basic conceptions of Western philosophy. Apart from wide reading, he had opportunities of discussing philosophical problems in personal conversations with many important thinkers of this age: Croce, Bergson, Einstein, Keysterling, Romain Rolland, Bertrand Russell, Albert Schwitzer, John Dewey and others. His acquaintance with the Christian world was mainly possible for his frequent visits to Europe (1878, 1881, 1891, 1912, 1915 etc.).

While speaking of Tagore's debt to the West, a special reference to Christianity is necessary. Tagore was aware of the foundational role of Christianity in the evaluation...\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, p. 98.
\textsuperscript{53} The Modern Review (June 1918).
of European civilization and he carefully studied it in that light. His talks with Stopford Brooke, C.C.J. Webb and other representatives of Western thought, and his study of the Bible and the writings of the mediaeval Christian mystics, undoubtedly influenced his religious views. When the songs of Geetanjali (1313 B.S.) were published, a reviewer of the *Times Literary Supplement* wrote: "As we read these pieces we seem to be reading the Psalms of a David of our Times". Another writer said that "We have been waiting for some indication of the effect of Christian ideas on a representative Hindu mind. Here, surely is the person we have been waiting for".

One particular poem of Geetanjali reminds us of the teachings of Bible in an explicit way. The poem of Rabindranath runs like this — "You are there with the poorest and the meekest, you are there always with the helpless people — I adore you my God, amongst them". The sermon of the Bible runs like this — 3. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for there is the kingdom of heaven.

4. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

5. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

6. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled".

Christ had regarded man as the children of God and he had called for the brotherhood of men. Similarly, in various places of the Vedas also there is the same idea that God is our father. Rabindranath has tried to draw this similarity in his own writing.

But there surely is not any proof in Rabindranath's writing, that he wanted to orientalize Christ. Rabindranath's spiritual thought was inspired both by eastern and western ideas. That Rabindranath read both Eastern and Western books is evident from the collection of his books. We are giving only a few and stray examples.


Tagore syncretised many streams of thought, followed them for over six decades, viewed them and fused them into a world-view. He did this while engaged in creative work of the highest order in poetry, drama, fiction, music and painting.

58. Loc. Cit., p. 11
60. Collection from the Archives of Rabindra-Bhavan, Santiniketan.
God, for Tagore is a primary datum of experience rather than a hypothesis to be proved or an entity that can be argued into existence. "We feel God as we feel light". Like Kant, the poet believed that the intellect can neither prove nor disprove the existence of God. Nevertheless, in some passages he gives hints and suggestions that are reminiscent of the traditional 'proofs' - the moral, theological, ontological and casual arguments to establish the reality of God. The insufficiency of the finite compels us to accept the Infinite. "The mere finite is like a dead wall, obtruding beyond knowledge of the mere finite accumulates, it does not illuminate. It is like a lamp without its light, a violin without its music".

From the side of aesthetic experience, Tagore feels, the idea of God is even more inescapable. "When I try to get a larger vision of the world, I find that it is unwarried, peaceful and beautiful in spite of its ceaseless activity. Through so much of movement and struggle, through the endless cycle of life and death, joy and sorrow, the world does not seem unburdened... How is it possible for peace and beauty to reside in the midst of such diversity and striving? Why is it that all this is not just noise, but there is music in it? The only possible answer is: "There He stands, silent like a tree."

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63. Rabindranath Tagore, Dharma (1315 B.S.), p. 29.
Rabindranath is saying in a poem, that at last man has acquired the power of the bird also. The land and the sea were already under his control, and now he would try to exercise his sway over the blue inviolate sky and destroy the sublime beauty of the sky. The songs of the birds are so sweet, but these monstrous machine-birds have turned the blue beauty of the sky into a crude one and have brought about a sense of terror all over the world. The poet in this poem is again aspiring for the day, when the chirping of the birds would be heard.

Tagore ascribes personality to God not in the sense of bringing Him down to the level of the human individual, but in the sense of proclaiming Him to be at the root of the highest and best that humanity strives for, but does not attain. "It is not in an individual personality that Reality is contained," he states clearly, "but in Infinite Personality." Unlike Bradley, Tagore believed that personality does not necessarily imply finitude. A personal God need not be a limited God.

If we follow the growth of Rabindranath's poetical thought, we simultaneously understand his philosophy of religion which in its final form gave birth to his Humanism. "Reality", says Tagore, "Can be regarded as personality acting upon personalities through incessant manifestations."

64. Rabindranath Tagore, Navalatak, Pakshimanab, 1938, Rabindra Rachanabali, Vol.XXIV (1971)**.
The nature of God can be understood by us only in terms of our experience as persons. This experience tells us that "if the universe is not the manifestation of a Person, then it is a stupendous deception". A concept of reality which does not take this experience into account can only be an abstraction. Tagore, therefore speaks of the 'touch of personal companionship' between the Ultimate and Ourselves. Without such a feeling of Kinship, God would cease to be our God. He would become an entity to whom nothing can be assigned except bare existence. Only the God of the devotee, not the Absolute of the metaphysician, can make any one feel: "My world is given to a personal me by a personal Being. It is a gift of soul to soul".

Rabindranath’s poetry and his religion thus traversed in parallel courses. It thus appears that Tagore as a philosopher and Tagore as a poet joined hands together and started on an identical mission, the objective of which was to find out a solution for the religious problem of man. The central problem that attracted his attention was what should be ideal form of religion. The path of reason enables us to know God, he says, but it is the path of emotion which makes us feel his presence. According to Tagore, the mode of offering should also help the individual to develop all his faculties, so that in the process, he becomes a complete man. He believed that there are three main urges, namely the urge for knowledge, the urge for love and the urge for work. These

68. Ibid, p. 69.
are the very natural at the same time compelling forces in human life. Tagore believed that the function of religious practice is not merely limited in giving man an outlet for his religious urge, but to unfold his nature. Man is by nature endowed with an intellect, an emotional faculty and a will to control voluntary activity. It is the function of religion to provide scope for the proper exercise of all these faculties in such a harmonious way that devotee can blossom into a complete man. One form of emotional approach is the incarnate form of worship with which we Indians are familiar. Naturally, Tagore rejected this form as unsatisfactory and irrational. At the end of his long journey, he discarded his own brand of Humanism as the true religion of man. The quest started with his advent in the field of nature. The realization of the presence of a pervasive spirit behind nature helped him to form an idea about Brahman or the Almighty. He became familiar with the same spirit in the pages of the Vedas and the Upanishads. From his very early years, we find that he was yearning for deeper knowledge for the unseen through his poems of nature. He wanted to know the Creator of this universe, who was working behind the physical manifestation of beauty. The poems of Geetanjali (1910), Geetimalya (1911) and Geetali (1914), are all addressed to the Jivandevata published between 1910-14. In a song in Geetanjali, the poet says that his heart aches to see the Unseen Spirit. He is ready to sacrifice himself to the Almighty in order to gain his mercy.69

69. Rabindranath Tagore, Gitavitan - Geetanjali, p. 64
"Prabhu toma lagi ankhi jage patha chal sei mone bhalo lage..."
This theme, exercised such a strong appeal on Tagore's mind that he tried to give expression to it through the medium of symbolic dramas also. In fact, he wrote two dramas to elaborate his view on the subject, one of which bears the title Raja and the other Arupratan (1910). The personal God has been imagined as a lover, who meets the human partner imagined as queen Sudarshana only inside a dark chamber, where he can be heard, but can never be physically seen. His quest came to a temporary end by accepting the position that the best medium for direct contact with God through all the principal faculties is man. It became his conviction that we can realise God in a complete form only through man. This feeling is beautifully expressed in his poem 'Vaishnav Kabita', where he makes no distinction between God and beloved in offering his flowers of devotion.70

So, Rabindranath came to believe that there is both nature and spirit in man. He is of nature and also beyond nature.71 Humanity cannot be regarded as a self-contained organism, engineering all its advances out of its own particularity. "In human life", said Tagore, "the proportion between the natural and the extra-natural should be as water is to land on our globe, the former predominating".72

70. Rabindranath Tagore, Sonar Tari - Vaishnav Kabita - 1892, p.42
"Amaderi kutir kanane ... Devatare priya kari priyare devata...

Tagore's comments on the relation between nature and mind, like his remarks on Identity — indifference, have a Hegelian ring. In Hegelian philosophy, Nature is regarded as "petrified intelligence" or "frozen understanding". Reason becomes Nature in order to become Spirit. Asserting that Nature and Mind imply each other, Hegel says: "Nature is far from being fixed and complete as to subsist without mind. In Mind, it first attains, as it were, its goal and its truth. And similarly Mind on its part is not merely a world beyond Nature. It is really and with full proof to be mind only when it involves Nature as absorbed in itself".

But while Hegel interpretes the relationship intellec­tually, Tagore explains the unity of Nature and Spirit in terms of an energy felt in our experience. To this energy the poet gives many names. Life energy, according to him was Jivan Shakti, Stream of life — Jivan prabhaha, Breath current — Prana dhara. But whatever be the name, he suggests the creative dynamic spirit of life, the animating power which Bergson calls elan vital, and in which Mc. Dougall and Jung see the principle of continuity between the human and the sub-human modes of existence.

With this realisation, there was a complete change of attitude in Tagore's mind. This not only actuated him to discard the traditional form of worship but even his yearning for contact with God in splendid isolation within his mind

ceased to attract him. He felt more drawn towards man and his society. It was this urge that made him come down from his ivory tower of poetry and undertake welfare activities at Santiniketan. In his personal life also, sad experiences moulded his mind in a different way. From 1902 to 1908 there were series of deaths in his family: his wife Mrinalini Davi, his second daughter Renuka, his youngest son Samindranath, his son-in-law Satyendranath and his friend Srishchandra. He received blow after blow and came face to face with the hard realities of life. The period of *Naivedya*, where he had worshipped God in splendid isolation, was over. The first such break was in 1905 (Sravan 15, 1312 B.S.), when he wrote 'Kheyar Neve'. This period also witnessed the advices given in his 'Santiniketan' - 1908 (Agrahayan 1315 B.S.). But that was not also enough. He was not satisfied with theistic sermons only. He felt the urge of giving music to his own new realization of God – which realization took shape in the songs of 'Geetanjali' (1910).

His mind thus turned away from his personal God and sought contact with Him through common man. Tagore, saw no point in offering prayers in temples, for he felt God is more intimately manifest to us in the form of fellow human beings than as an installed deity. Rabindranath's humanism is thus the result of a sustained quest for a suitable form of religious expression. He came to the end of his journey by

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humanising God and finding for Him a place among the poor and
the low and the lost. Man becomes the object of love and
service for the rest of Rabindranath's life. This new mode of
thought is depicted in the poem 'Dhulamandir', where the
poet realises the fakeness of worshipping God in isolation.
He feels the presence of God amidst the working people under
the sun and in dust. Man is in vain striving for salvation;
the true salvation is in work where he can feel the intimate
touch of God.76

In order to justify the philosophical ideas of Rabindranath
in Bengal, it is essential in this context to sketch briefly the
philosophical conflict which was going on among intellectuals
in Bengal. Tagore's brand of Humanism was not totally new. The
weakness of Comte's Humanism stems from the fact that
religion has been banished from his positivism. In contrast
to this, in Tagore's brand of Humanism, service to man is
equated with service to God. But both stood on the same ground
by linking piety with Humanism.

The Religion of Humanity was a culmination of Auguste
Comte's work, an aspect of his system which had alienated
many of his European followers. Strangely, it was in Bengal,
an Indian province controlled by Great Britain, and thousands
of miles from France, that Comte's religion gained a number
of followers. This was contrary to Comte's prediction that
his philosophy would first capture Western Europe and

p. 510.
"Bhajan pujan sadhan aradhana samasta thak pare
ruddhadware develayer kone keno achis ore ....
Nayan mele dekh dekhi tul chey e devata hai ghare..."
subsequently other countries of the world as it developed universality. But in Bengal, in 1883 a group of Hindu Positivists celebrated the Festival of All the Dead at the traditional Cremation grounds.  

The Western-educated class in Bengal searched for new social and political models. While, they were not rejecting aspects of Westernization to which their education had introduced them, their earlier desire to imitate Western social and religious institutions disappeared. There was a new spirit of criticism. The Bengali society moved towards a synthesis of the old and the new, the Indian and the Western. A new intellectual and moral maturity was becoming discernible.  

Comte's Positivism was part of the 19th Century philosophical reaction against the attempts of metaphysics to discover the ultimate nature of reality. Comte argued that scientific investigation could lead to universally valid laws that would allow men to control not only the physical environment, but societies as well. The influence of Comte on Indian thinking was mediated by the English Positivists. This was in part because the English educated Indians had no direct access to Comte's French works.

Born during the immediate turmoil caused by the French Revolution, Comte witnessed events which made him adhere to any kind of disorder and value social stability over individual freedom.

Central to Comte's theory was the law of three stages, first developed in "Cours de philosophie positive", which explained the relationship between the evolution of human mind and the progress of human civilization. According to Comte, all minds, all sciences and all societies passed through stages of intellectual development. The first or theological stage was characterized by man's tendency to assume that a divine being governed the world. To Rabindranath, there were no particular stages of human progression. "We learn to perceive the unity held together by the one Eternal Spirit. Whose power creates the earth, the sky and stars and at the same time irradiates our minds with light of a consciousness that moves and exists in unbroken continuity with the outer world." As civilization advanced, Comte said, man entered the metaphysical stage by transcendental forces and finally the last or positive stage when he stopped looking for an ultimate cause. The positive stage, Comte predicted, would be characterized by the attempt to establish universally valid laws through scientific observation. Each individual advanced from one stage to the other, as he grew up, each science advanced through the stages as its body of knowledge grew, and each society passed from

one stage to the other as part of the historical process. But according to Rabindranath, no such stages were necessary for the advancement of individual soul. "In order to attain our world-consciousness, we have to unite our feeling with this all-pervasive infinite feeling. In fact, the only true human progress is coincident with this widening of the range of feeling. All our poetry, philosophy, science, art and religion are serving to extend the scope of our consciousness towards higher and larger spheres. Man does not acquire rights through occupation of larger space, not through external conduct, but his rights extend only so far as he is real, and his reality is measured by the scope of his consciousness." 80

"Just as the individual", according to Comte, "did not have a positive mind at birth, advanced branches of knowledge had not reached the positive stage rather quickly, others were lingering in the theological stage". It was a scheme which envisioned all people, knowledge and forms of social organization moving toward the fulfillment of some carefully ordered plan developed by Auguste Comte. 81 But both Comte and Rabindranath stood on the same ground by linking piety with Humanism. Comte insisted that the Religion of Humanity, based on the findings of modern science and the recognition of man's emotional needs, was the only religion devoted to the progress of Humanity, which successfully synthesized feeling and intellect. According to Rabindranath, to be truly united in knowledge, love and service with all beings, and thus to

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realise one's self in the all-pervading God is the essence of
goodness and this is the keynote of the teachings of the
Upanishads. Life is immense (Praṇa Viṇat Upanishad).  

The three Englishman who acted as the Positivist
missionaries in India and came to India as members of the
ruling class, were Samuel Lobb as a teacher, James Cruickshand
Gades and Henry J. S. Cotton members of the Indian Civil
Service. The early Indian Positivists, on the other hand were
Girish Chandra Ghosh, the editor of the 'Bengalee'; Guru Das
Chatterjee, a school teacher, Krishnakamal Bhattacharyya, a
Professor of Sanskrit and Dwarakanath Mitra, a high-court
judge. Later: Jogendra Chandra Ghosh (1842-1902), eventually
came the leader of the Indian Positivist Society.

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhaya (1838-1894), Bhudev
Tarkabhusan (1827-1898), and Sarat Chandra Mukherjee
(1865-1948) were men who belonged to the revivalist group
through their writings and activities. They were men who were
also well-acquainted with the Positivist theory. Bankim had
probably flirted with the idea of actually becoming a
Positivist. These men borrowed certain ideas from Positivism
with which they used to develop their theories of what was
true Hinduism and how it could bring about Indian progress.
Bankimchandra inspired Rajkrishna Mukhopadhaya to write quite

84. Ibid, p. 73.
a good article called 'Comtean Philosophy' (1874). Auguste Comte had regarded the society as human Goddess. Bankimchandra also had similar regard for society.\textsuperscript{85} One fundamental principle was that God was in man and in nature and could be worshipped through either medium. The principle was to redirect Hindus toward improving the world they lived in.\textsuperscript{86}

Even though Positivism could never replace Hinduism, Bankim thought that there were certain elements of it which were valuable and worth-knowing. The basic idea of the three stages was wrong. Comte had thought that as men learned more about science, he would become less interested in and have less need for a belief in the supernatural. But the teachings on society were particularly valuable. Bankim thought, especially the emphasis on man's responsibility to society and on duties over rights. Bankim thus rejected what John Stuart Mill had found valuable in Comte's system and accepted those elements which Mill abhorred as destructive to individualism and liberalism.\textsuperscript{87} The West was the home of modern science, he agreed and he urged Hindus to look to the West for knowledge about themselves in biology and sociology.\textsuperscript{88} The God he created Krishna, was not separate from the world, but one of Comte's priests of humanity.

\textsuperscript{87} Hirendranath Dutta, Darsanlik Bankimchandra (1347 B.S.).
Bankim, was in Rachael Van Meter's terms, a true child of his times; he was involved in a 'swirling flood' of new ideas and scholarly investigation, while admitting the need to borrow from the West, he continued to defend a Brahmanical heritage which he himself had defined. Rabindranath was a child of the late 19th century Renaissance and it is quite evident that he could not remain aloof from a dynamic personality like Bankimchandra. Rabindranath was an admirer of Bankimchandra's writings and he also adored Bankim's philosophy. But it was not in the nature of Rabindranath to be totally carried away by anyone's philosophy of life. His idea of theistic approach towards individual and the Universe remained same.

Bankimchandra differed from members of the Positivist group in his attitude towards Auguste Comte; Bankim respected him, but did not revere him. The moral inadequacy of the culture of the new middle classes remained a recurring theme in Bankim's writings. Was Positivism the moral code they needed? Bankim turned to Comteism when his contacts with Positivist friends Jogesh Chandra Ghosh and Krishna Kamal Bhattacharya were renewed in 1883. He quotes from Comte's Catechism in his novel 'Devichoudhurani' (1884), in an essay entitled 'Chittasuddhi' (1885) and extensively in his work 'Dharmatatta' (1888).

But it was Bankimchandra, who wrote in his 'Dharmatatta' that one question arose in his mind from his early years that what he would do with his life? He searched for this answer throughout his life. "After much studies, much writing and much discussions, I have come to the conclusion that devotion to God is the source of human element in an individual. I have come to know this answer seeking throughout my life." Here, we find that Rabindranath and Bankimchandra finally come to the same realisation, both after their long endeavour to know the truth. Both were the offshoots of the Bengal Renaissance, and both of them were enriched with Eastern and Western philosophical ideas. Apparently, their views also stood apart, the latter being the admirer of Auguste Comte, but in the long run both of them turned to God as the solution of all problems.

The difference between Vivekananda and Rabindranath was that while Vivekananda (who was a contemporary of Rabindranath) renounced the life of a householder and turned an ascetic, Tagore led the life of a householder. Rabindranath loved man and wanted to live among them. He himself said that he would never seek salvation in a mendicant life.

On the other hand, though Vivekananda also had some poetic qualities, he always preferred an ascetic life.

Vivekananda also loved man and worked among them. He was never carried away by romantic illusions, one which was the main drawback of Rabindranath. What Vivekananda believed, he did; but Rabindranath always could not achieve what he believed, because the ideas of Vivekananda were practical and that of Rabindranath were Utopian. Vivekananda could inspire thousands of young Bengali souls, in the sermon of sacrifice and revolution. But Rabindranath's appeal was to a very limited section of people. The main limitation was that although he loved man, he could not blend with them. But Rabindranath was more practical in one sense, because he could think of all reforms and changes keeping himself restrained within the bounds of a family life. He did all that he could do as a loving husband and a loving father. But Vivekananda never did lead a grihastha life, and in that way he was far from his own people. But their humanism shares two common features. Both drew their inspiration from the emotional faculty and both equated humanitarian work with service reaching directly to God.

Section II : The Impact of Humanitarian Thought on Society

With his maturing mind, Rabindranath had come to understand that the mal-adjustment of all human relations arose from the sameroot — the loss of social balance. Nothing has more decisively influenced the current of Indian life in a certain direction than the spread of English ideas in an eastern society. The contact and even occasionally the clash of two great cultures — the one in its state of decay and the other in its state of bloom, so different from each other — has proved to be one of the turning points in the history of Asia and even of the world. The fierce attack of Christian missionaries on the weak masses of Hindu social life and thought had induced a spirit of intelligent criticism among educated men. Never were the anomalies of Hindu society so glaringly brought into light. While Ram Mohan, Akshoykumar, Vidyasagar, Keshub Chandra, Surendranath and other great thinkers were mainly inspired by the European Renaissance, Vivekananda was inspired by India's past. Rabindranath also, to a certain extent was influenced by the rich values of India's past, at the same time he also appreciated the worthy values of the West. Over and above, Rabindranath's appeal was directly to the human heart and his goal had been mainly to enrich human values. He certainly represents the climax of our renaissance.

94. Moganlal A. Buch, Rise and growth of Indian liberalism (1939), p. 45.
He rode on the crest of the tumultuous waves of our 19th and early 20th centuries; he gave his riches and the most glorious expression to the movement as a whole. It is equally true that all the cross currents and contradictory trends of this same movement found their echo in Rabindranath's sensitive mind. He could never turn away from the world seething round him or shut himself in an ivory tower.96

Profoundly religious himself, he was completely free from religious superstitions. He was only too conscious of the havoc they had wrought in his countrymen. He respected the classic virtues associated with Hindu social organization and he was a severe critic of the caste system. It was in his opinion an anachronism. The great need for India was inner cohesion which the old caste failed to achieve. His views on inter-religious or communal issues were for the same reason marked by a breadth of vision which contrasted with those of the orthodox leaders. To Tagore, religion was a reconciler not a divider; that is why he gave repeated stress on fundamental readjustment of Hindu-Muslim relationship.97

It is interesting to observe that the poet's instinctive sympathy for woman, shown with such tenderness and passion in his writings, at first lacked any intellectual stand, but gradually grew into a positive outlook. The element of pity was the dominant note in his early works, which idealised

women, sympathised with their sufferings, appealed to man's sense of justice, but never really questioned the underlying assumptions of society in regard to women's position of subordination to male's domination. The complementary character of woman in the social arrangement was stressed, but it was still the passive role, not the active partnership claimed by modern women. The character of Surama which we find in his 'Bou Thakuranir Hat' (1882-83) had a revolutionary spark, but it was in a subdued form. The revolutionary spell was much better expressed in the character of Ela in 'Char Aśhyaya' (1934) in his later years. The independent attitude of Ela and her intense desire for assisting Atin in their field of work, as expressed in this novel, had been a bold gesture by Rabindranath. The truth is that, far from decrying the demand for the equality of women with men, Tagore advocated a further broadening of its basis. The character of Sucharita in 'Gora' (1909), Bimala in 'Ghare Baire' (1916) or Labanya in 'Sesher Kabita' (1335 B.S.), stand as symbols of problems of liberation of women. But none of them could claim any equal status with men. Probably Rabindranath had no intention of establishing such a status. His Gora in 'Gora', Nikhilesh in 'Ghare Baire' or Amit Ray in 'Sesher Kabita' also did not compete with the women characters in establishing their position. We will however, have to admit that the women characters of his books are all distinct in their originality and these characters, if singled out, would leave a particular impression in the reader's mind for their love, sacrifice, suffering or passion.
The characters of Charulata in 'Nastanir' (1915), Ashalata and Binodini in 'Chokher Bali' (1902), Kumudini in 'Yoga yoga' (1929), Nandini in 'Rakta Karabi' (1926) are all depicted by the poet with the same liberal humanitarian viewpoint. Charulata, the love-lorn lady of 'Nastanir', Ashalata and Binodini the two rival ladies of 'Chokher Bali', present the crisis of love in different colours. Nandini is also the symbol of love, but through her Rabindranath shows the glory of womanhood. Kumudini's quest for love never ceases, because her womanly desires are not fulfilled.

A similar observation may be made in respect of his attitude towards the masses of the people. He had always felt for them, pitied them, but never finding answers to the contradictions of the basic social arrangement, he found no satisfactory solution for their problem. True to his own inner development, however he began to recognise the fact that no permanent good could be done to them by mere charity. His interest in economic problems arose primarily from his early experiences, when through the accident of family circumstances, he first came into contact with the lower class population, the old village economy still retained some of its traditional character. The age old dichotomy of India's political and social organization was thus borne in upon him through personal knowledge. It was a pluralistic conception of society which stood between the state and the individual. As a Zamindar himself, the poet had firsthand knowledge of the hardship and
helplessness of the country people. He was aware of the causes at work as well as of the fact that the clock of history could not be put back. Hence, from the earliest days, he directed his public efforts mainly towards linking the economic problems of the country-side with the political struggle of the common people.

"The solution of the agrarian problem was the critical task for him." Like the Irish poet George Russell, Tagore firmly believed that the poverty, disease, depopulation, joylessness and backwardness of the rural areas could and should be removed by co-operative efforts. The ideal that he held up to the rural communities was modern in spirit and cooperative in activity. It is evident that although the advocacy and collective action did not meet with immediate response from the public, his ideas have exercised a deep influence on recent Indian developments.  

Rabindranath's daily contacts with the peasants on his family's estates also led him to value Indian traditions more highly than he had in his more urban middle class youth. Separated most of the year from his wife and children, he spent much of his time on the houseboat with which he navigated the many rivers of East Bengal. As his boat was carried by the current or poled upstream by his boatmen, the constant change of scene soothed his restless spirit; this mood is reflected in the pages of 'Chhinnapatra' (1890-94).  

98. Ibid, pp. 13-17.
In more active moods, he found an outlet for his energies in abundance of creative writing. Many of his short stories deal with the lives of the villages, and his poems show a deepening love of his natural surroundings. Indeed the beauty, simplicity and harmony with nature of rural life grew congenial to him during the 1890s. Yet in this rural world, whose inner life he depicted in *Galpaguccha*, he also showed up the pettiness and meanness and often, the sheer brutality of family life, the treatment of poor and yet old relatives and servants by younger more affluent people, the hypocrisies of ritualism, the dominance of the *Zamindari - mukhteari* — semi-Anglicized families in the mufassil. Though from henceforward, Rabindranath generally juxtaposed a more insullied morality, against the aggressive nation — states of the West, he never idealized this moral life in a populist manner.

His visits to the Euro-American countries and particularly to the Asiatic countries opened his eyes. His first visit to Europe was in 1878; then the consequent visits followed in 1881, 1891, 1912, 1920 1925, 1926, 1930. His visits to America were in 1912, 1915, 1924. He visited all the South East Asian Countries in 1927, Japan in 1916 and China in 1924. His visit to Soviet Russia was in 1930. Rabindranath saw how underdeveloped countries like China, Japan and Russia had gone through hardship and distress and yet given shape to advanced civilizations. The contrast with India became more acute in his mind and the feeling for the distressed became more clarified. He was writing in 1930: "I am overwhelmed
to find what they have achieved only during these thirteen years after their revolution. These Russians once sent the disarmament proposal at the fake peace conference of the League of Nations in 1920. On the face of it the image of Russia is not at all glamorous comparing to the other wealthy countries of Europe. Here everyone is equal in attire. The so-called middle class is absent here. I think of the peasants of my country. Ten years ago, these Russian peasants had almost the similar condition like the Indians. It is most surprising how they have been able to unload the heavy traditional burden and erect a socialist set up in such a short span of time. The difference is that the change in social order in Russia was not accompanied by any sophisticated code of law and order which has completely disillusioned the Indian minds.

Rabindranath's effort to apply his humanitarian ideas on society was mainly projected through his experimental work at Santiniketan and Sriniketan. Otherwise, his ideas remained on an utopian panel. In that way, his contemporary stalwart Gandhiji was more successful in applying humanitarian ideas on society. Gandhiji's thought had a certain rustic strength, like that of the rough homespun cotton he wore. Tagore's ideas were delicate and subtle; they had the sophistication and glossiness of his own silken toga. Gandhiji's approach was rigoristic, his outlook essentially ascetic and his imagination...

is curbed by categorical imperatives. He expected from others the same unanswering adherence to cardinal virtues that he imposed upon himself. Tagore's approach on the other hand, was aesthetic rather than ethical. His thought is anti-ascetic through and through. And he shows towards human fraility an indulgence which only a poet can afford.\textsuperscript{100}

When Gandhiji came to Calcutta in 1921 and called on the poet at his mansion to enlist his support for his non-cooperation movement he failed in his mission. As they talked, a commotion arose outside, "Come and look over the edge of my verandah, Gandhiji", said Tagore,"look down there and see what your non-violent followers are up to. They have stolen (English made) cloth from the shops...They have lit the bonfire in my courtyard and are now howling around it like a lot of demented dervishes. Is that your non-violence? Can you keep these emotions under a strict control with your non-violent principles". You know you can't". "Well", Gandhiji countered "if you can do nothing else for me you can at least...lead the nation and spin handspun yarn....". "Poems I can spin, songs I can spin," Tagore rejoined, "but what a mess I would make, Gandhiji, of your precious cotton".\textsuperscript{101}

In the eyes of the poet education was the great liberating force to which all others were subordinate. Rabindranath felt that the human child abstracted from his

human surroundings could not grow into full manhood. The fragmentary nature of his development is, therefore not only a derogation of his personality, but also a source of social disequilibrium. Here, the first duty of an educationist is to restore the child to nature, for nourishment and sympathy. From this follows the second premise that sympathy is the ultimate basis of true education. Education should always be imparted in a child's mind through love and sympathy.

Rabindranath also believed that education is the only means of enlightening our minds from deep set ignorance and prejudices. He believed that without education human minds would remain in the dark and the task of worshipping God through human soul would remain incomplete. In his letter to Hemantabala Devi, a lady of the Gouripur Zamindar family, he wrote in 1931: "I want to see my God established in that temple where He is free from all superficial customs. I want to realise His presence in the natural environment through love and happiness. I really feel happy when I find He has unfolded His presence partially in Europe. I feel humiliated to find people are carried by blind beliefs and superstitions in His name".102

Rabindranath, thus wanted the society remodelled in a way that would make room for a healthy generation.

Section III: Art and Aesthetics

From his very young days, Rabindranath had an admiration for physical structure of human beings. He himself, had to go through physical training in his childhood. In the pages of *Chelebela*, we can get a glimpse of it, where he says that: “We rise very early in the morning and get ready for wrestling; during the winter days we literally shivered. There was a famous wrestler at that time in the city, called Kana Palwan, who taught us wrestling. There was a barren plot on the north side of the building, called Golabari and our wrestling den was near the wall of this Golabari. One inch deep mud was dug out and one maund mustard oil was poured on it to prepare our wrestling ground. It was really ridiculous for me to wrestle with that famous wrestler. It was only a joy to be clad with mud and to change my clothing after it.”

"A low lying people in a low lying land" — so ran a favourite British sneer at Bengalis about the turn of the century, to which a high official added. "With the intellect of a Greek and the grit of a rabbit", Bengalis were effete, that was the stereotype all through the period of British rule.

By the 1860s and 1870s, not only the Tagore connection, but some other Bengali intellectual and social leaders had themselves taken over the stereotype. These early products of English education were convinced of their own effectness.

Bengalis, they admitted were "lilliputian in size and weak in constitution, physically the weakest people in India..." "Educated Bengalis were broken in health....the term of life accorded to the Bengali constitution has been rapidly decreasing".

What was the cause? The explanation put forward by 19th century Bengalis ran often on positivistic lines. The environment was to blame; either the climatic or the fertility of the soil, which made it unnecessary to exert oneself, or both. Diet was often invoked. Educated Bengalis ate too much; or they ate too little. But the most important explanation of Bengali 'effeteness' was historical and cultural. We may call it a myth of physical downfall holding out hope of resurgence.\(^{104}\) It was this lack of physical strength of the Bengalis, which instigated Tagore to think of physical training seriously.

Rabindranath's appreciation for human physique can be found in the pages of 'Japanyatri'. On his way to Japan, he halted at Hong Kong sea-port for two days. 'The first thing which we observed at the sea port had been the activities of the Chinese labourers. In their blue pyjamas and bare body their physique was striking. There was no extra fat in their body. They worked with enthusiasm, there was no sign of fatigue or unwillingness in them. I was really so happy to witness this scene at the sea port. Here probably I realized the depth in the literature work and the rhythm in human body. Even the

\(^{104}\) John Rosselli, 'The self image of effeteness : Physical Education and Nationalism in 19th Century Bengal - Past and Present (February 1980), No. 86.
women could not compete with them in physical beauty because the men exhibited power and fitness in a splendid blending."105

When the poet visited Japan, he was so impressed that he brought the Japanese wrestler Takagaki to Santiniketan as the teacher of gymnastics. But unfortunately Rabindranath could not afford to meet this expensive programme of gymnastics. Still he retained the hope of at least keeping Takagaki in Calcutta and in that way he needed the cooperation of men like Bidhan Chandra Roy and Subhas Chandra Bose. He wrote his first letter to Subhas Chandra who was the mayor of Calcutta in 1931, requesting him to keep Takagaki in Calcutta for some time because the Visvabharati funds failed to meet the expense. But the poet's effort was in vain. Neither Subhas Chandra nor Bidhan Roy did take any initiative. They were more busy at that time with the subtler issue of mayorship in Calcutta. Subhas Bose was also engaged in a dispute with Prafulla Chandra Roy, so the matter was totally ignored. Rabindranath felt hurt. This even led to a kind of misunderstanding between Rabindranath and Subhas Bose.106

Tagore, in his fervour for physical strength wanted to give it a new colour by putting aesthetic charm in his literature. His 'Chitrangada' is a classic example, where the princess Chitrangada first wanted to enchant Arjun by her love only. After receiving a rebuff, Chitrangada in her despair

prayed to Madan and asked for a boon of beauty. Arjun, though overwhelmed at the sight of this new form of the princess, later began to yearn for the Chitrangada who had been the symbol of strength and energy. Arjun, at last was really impressed by the masculine beauty of Chitrangada. In her he found a proper wife, a real companion who would stand by him in times of need also. We can remember the last passage of Chitrangada, the gist of which runs like this: "I am Chitrangada, I am no Goddess; I am just an ordinary woman. Neither I am worthy of your worship, nor I am to be pitied by you, but if you share your thoughts with me and if you regard me as a suitable companion in your days of distress and happiness, you will find me in my true self."¹⁰⁷

Rabindranath believed, that every individual should grow up with mature human values and an able physique, so that he can prove himself as an asset to his country in times of need. Physical exercise was thus equated to Indian patriotism. It is worthy of note that this was part of the original ideology of the early revolutionary terrorist group such as the Anusilan Samiti, which saw physical strength as the last refuge of a disarmed population under imperialism.

Music had been the core of Rabindranath's life. It was through music that his love for man and love for nature were best expressed and it was through music that the poet could establish a close link with the Almighty. For example,

he expresses his love and devotion through this song in a beautiful way when he says that he wanted to see the world through music and music not only helped him to feel the depth of the world, but the individual human souls. He felt the beauty of the nature in its true self through music and that gave him the true knowledge of the Creator and His 'Creation. Some other songs of the 'Pooja' reflect the same mood of Rabindranath.

Rabindranath's life had been full of music and music was made one of the vital subjects of his school at Santiniketan. He got his first musical training at home; his brothers like Satyendranath and Jyotirindranath had also assisted him a lot. Now, it was the task of Dinendranath Tagore and others to give tune to his music. Tagore composed his songs based on various Ragas. He himself gave tune to many of his songs and some of his songs got new colour in his disciples' hands. The pupils at Santiniketan were taught music. This music was radiated into their thoughts, in their actions and in their realizations.

Rabindranath himself says in 'Jivansmriti' that some of his musical plays were influenced by Western music that at

their house in Jorasanko, they had 'Irish Melodies' composed by Thomas Moore (1779-1852). Tagore was very fond of listening to the recitations from 'Irish Melodies' by Akshoy Chandra Choudhury, one of their family friends. This created a world of fantasy for him. Tagore often imagined that he would learn the tune of the 'Irish Melodies' and sing them to Akshoy Chandra Choudhury. But he could not fulfil this dream. When he went to Europe, he learnt some of these songs, but the tune could not bring back the old dreamland before him, though some of the songs seemed very sweet and pathetic to him. 'Valmiki Pratibha', Tagore notes was the composition of this Western touch (1881). He could not avoid Easteminfluence too. 'Kalpnaqaya', (1882), another musical play was also influenced by the tune of this 'Irish Melodies'.

Again, some of his songs were influenced by the Vaishnava Padavali. It was a rainy afternoon in 1877 (1284 B.S.), when Rabindranath was only 16 years old, that Rabindranath felt overwhelmed with joy that he wrote "Gahan kusumkunja majhe" (Mahajan Padavali - 1872-1279 B.S.). This was his first attempt to compose Padavali songs. The poem which was first published in 'Bharati' was named 'Bhanusincher Kabita'. The first line ran as "Saijani go anghar rajani ghor chanaghata chamakata damini re" (Oh my dear friend, the lightening is flashing in the dead of night). The tune was in Mallar. That Rabindranath had admired Padavali songs from his childhood, is

112. Bharati, Aswin 1284 B.S., p.135 (There are some changes in the revised edition).
evident from one of his letters, where he writes that when he was only 13 or 14 years old he began reading *Vaishnava Padavali* with intense joy and interest and the entire thing impressed him very much.\(^{113}\) Nagendranath Gupta writes that when Rabindranath started writing Vaishnava poems, at that time *Vaishnava* poetries were only sold in cheap markets (Bat tala).\(^{114}\) It was through the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (weekly) that the intellectual Bengali middle class first became aware of the *Vaishnava* poetries.\(^{115}\) But it was Jagatbandhu Bhadra, who first edited 'Vaishnava Padavali' with elaborate critical notes on Vidyapati and Chandidas. We know that Rabindranath read this book.\(^{116}\) After that, Akshoy Chandra Sarkar (1846-1918) and Saradacharan Mitra (1848-1917) edited the book called 'Prachin Kabva Sangraha' (1-3 volumes — Chinsura — 1874-76). Rabindranath himself says that he read this book and he also says as that the elders in his father's house were not much interested in this book, so he became a regular reader of it.\(^{117}\) Rabindranath also writes in his 'Jivansmriti' (1319 B.S.), that he had listened to the poems of the young poet Chatterton from Akshoy Chandra Choudhury (Thomas Chatterton — 1752-70). There was a melodramatic thrill in them.\(^{118}\) Chatterton actually had imitated the

poems of some ancient writers and most of the people were quite in the dark about the authorship. He committed suicide in a church in Bristol when he was only 18 years old.

Rabindranath writes that "leaving aside that suicide episode, I now tried my best to become a second Chatterton". He also made one of his friends to listen to his poems written in the pseudonym of Bhanusingha and pretended that the poems were written by an ancient Padavali writer. Later the poet was discovered.

Love is not without tears and the poet was very much aware of it. The poet in a song sings the farewell song of spring. This symbolizes both the spring and the individual. The poet knows that his beloved would forget him, but only a few drops of her tears would console his aching heart. The next spring would probably bring a new message to his beloved, but he would be no longer there by her side.

As a humanist poet Tagore emphasised on human relationship, the agony and ecstasy of human hearts and this was best exposed through his music in a very sensitive manner.

Rabindranath's political message was best expressed through his music. It was from the late half of the 19th century, that he began to write his patriotic songs which gave patriotic impetus to the Indian people. For example, where he

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gives a resonant call for the service of motherland.\textsuperscript{122}

The message of democracy is revealed in this song, where he says that the spirit of unity must remain among all individuals. The poet claims for equality of rights in the British regime.\textsuperscript{123} Though the political role of Rabindranath has often been interpreted in different ways, it is undoubtedly true that his patriotic songs definitely helped to form public consciousness in a certain way.

Rabindranath's immense love for human beings made him too sensitive. He wanted himself to be remembered by all and that was expressed by him in a very sensitive way. He asks whether when he would be no longer here in this earth, would the people of the morrow still cherish his memory?\textsuperscript{124}

Rabindranath took initiative in order to bring dance in the curriculum of the Santiniketan syllabus. He wrote a series of dance dramas, which were staged at different places from time to time. 'Natir Puja' was the first dance drama which was staged in January-February, 1927 (Magh 1333 B.S.) and which was applauded in many ways. The Ananda Bazar Patrika review noted that the reserved and devotional acting of the girl Gouri had really touched the hearts of many. Following the success of 'Natir Puja', the

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid, p. 245, "Ebar tor mera gange ban esheche jay ma bole bhasa tari..."
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid, p. 247, "Amra sabai raja amaderi rajar raiyate..."
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid, p. 549, "Jkhan parbe na mor paver Chinha ei bate, ami baiho na mor kheya tari ei chate..."
other dance dramas like 'Sapnochan' (1933), 'Chandalika' (1933), 'Taser Desh' (1933), 'Shyama', (1933), 'Mavar Khela' (1933), 'Chitrangada' (1936) were also staged. Pratima Devi (Rathindra Tagore's wife) wrote that it was for the first time in 1934 (1340 B.S.), that dance and drama were combined properly. Tagore's 'Chitrangada' created a sensation. It had been staged at Empire Theatre for three nights, that is on 11th, 12th, 13th March, 1936. The Statesman reviewed, "The form of the dance drama 'Chitra' makes it embarrassing to label it by a class name. It is a ballet, yet rebelling against its accepted conventions, it is pageant of dance, yet its theme, dramatic elements and continuous story carry it on a place higher than recitals of thematic dances; it is a drama, but the dialogue is reduced to a minimum, and its movements are expressed not through events and happenings, but through songs and dances.... The production has the dash and colour of the ballet, the piquancy of a drama, the fragrance of a lyric, the symbolism of a Tibetan mystery play and the pageantry of lavishly staged dance recitals." 125

'Shyama', which was the dance form of the poem 'Parisodh' in 'Katha O Kahini' was also unique in its presentation. 'Mayar Khela' was originally a lyrical drama; later dance was introduced in it. Tagore introduced various dance forms, like South Indian, Manipuri and purely Indian Classical type, even some Western dancing steps were also

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introduced. Thus his universalist syncronism was expressed in practice. According to Deviprasad Roy Choudhury the group composition planned by Rabindranath in dances had been something new; he gave much liberty to the dances to come out of their traditional and mechanical dancing pattern. Nandalal Bose influenced a kind of 'severe simplicity' in stage decoration. The entire drama presented a kind of 'balancing asset'.

Rabindranath was also much influenced by the pattern of the dance dramas written by Jyotirindranath Tagore. His visits to Java, Bali (1927), China (1924) and Japan (1916) had a deep impact on this particular branch of art. European ballets also gave him many ideas.

The principal object of art, also being the expression of personality, and not of that which is abstract and analytical, it necessarily uses the language of picture and music. This has led to a confusion in our thought that the object of art is the production of beauty; whereas beauty in art has been the mere instrument and not its complete and ultimate significance. In Art the person in us is sending its answers to the Supreme Person, who reveals Himself to us in a world of endless beauty across the lightless world of facts.

127. Soumendranath Tagore, Rabindra Nritya Natya — Rabindra Bichitra (1386 B.S.), p. 144


"In my case", Tagore said, "my pictures did not have their origin in trained discipline, in tradition and deliberate attempt at illustration, but in my instinct for rhythm and my pleasure in the harmonious combination of lines and colours."

This gives in a nutshell the story of Tagore's entry in the field of arts. Pre-occupied from his early teens with his favourite pastime of writing poetry, he never found leisure to undergo training in painting. His elder brother Jyotirindranath had been deeply interested in drawing portraits of the family members and his nephews Gaganendranath and Abanindranath, became famous Indian painters. But Tagore was more deeply involved in literary activites. However he encouraged the teaching of painting at the Kala Bhavana in Santiniketan.

Towards the late sixties of his life, a new love for painting displaced his literary activities; which continued to engage his attention, but did not monopolise it. In consequence, we find that in his late sixties and early seventies, painting became increasingly an absorbing pastime for him.

This enabled him to start on his new experiment with an altogether independent mind, unfettered by any traditional line of approach. It was roughly from the year 1926, that the beginning of Rabindranath's paintings can be traced. From his old bunch of letters, we come to know that he had had a knack for painting, but probably it was not too strong. But by 1938

or 1939, he completed at least 3000 pictures. Nandalal Basu says that even the renowned artists could not paint so many pictures within such a short span of time. Rabindranath was first inspired by his own scribblings on manuscripts to draw something. He says, "When the scratches in my manuscripts cried like sinners for salvation and assailed my eyes with the ugliness of their irrelevance, I often took more time in restoring them into a merciful finality of rhythm than in carrying on what was obvious task".131

This account shows that the artist in him was in the making. Peculiar configurations took shape, which mostly carried no meaning, excepting the rhythmic quality of their shapes. Sometimes, they assumed strange forms, taking after mythical beasts or even pre-historic birds or reptiles.

These products were evidently abstract in character. This particular feature of Rabindranath's art may give the critics the idea that he was the propagator of primitive art. But according to Nandalal Bose, these paintings were modern and intellectual in spirit.132

In a different place Nandalal Bose says, "that which lends charm to poetry and clothes it in beauty is the same element which gives life and colour in art compositions. When Gurudev began to play with his brush — he was 70 at that time — he had already passed through the travail of a great Sadhana and has attained siddhi in the cognate spheres of literature and music....Gurudev had already developed in

himself the three essential qualities of an artist before he took up the brush, namely a sense of rhythm, a sense of proportion and a sense of identity.\textsuperscript{133}

In the words of Tagore, "The greatness and beauty of Oriental Art, especially in Japan and China, consist in that there the artists have seen this soul of things and they believe in it. The West may believe in the soul of Man, but she does not really believe that the Universe has a soul. Yet this belief of the East and the whole mental contribution of the East to mankind is filled with this idea. So we, in the East need not go into details and emphasize them; for the most important thing is the universal soul, for which the Eastern sages have sat in meditation, and Eastern artists have joined them in artistic realization."\textsuperscript{134}

Nandalal Bose described Gurudev's art as "real without being realistic."\textsuperscript{135}

Tagore, in his introductory remarks to \textit{Chitrallipi}, had something to say about his own pictures. This is what he says: "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 the thoughts to explore and words to describe and if that appearance carries its ultimate worth then they

remain, otherwise they are rejected and forgotten even though they may have some scientific truth or ethical justification.136

According to Jamini Roy, even the great artists like Picasso could not free himself from this touch of realism and Jamini Roy has admired the very robustness of the character of his painting.137

Rabindranath's paintings were exhibited in various parts of Europe and America in 1930 and in India later. When his paintings were subsequently exhibited in Berlin, they were given a warm reception. The newspaper Manheimer Tageblatt observed that, "Tagore showed an amazing taste in colours" and that his paintings are "full of rhythm and inner melody". The most comprehensive and perhaps accurate assessment however comes from the pen of the art critic Joseph Southall, following the exhibition of Tagore's paintings in the Birmingham City Art Gallery. "Tagore's drawings are, as I see them the work of a powerful imagination seeing things in hue and colour as the best Oriental sees them, with that sense of rhythm and pattern, that we find in Persian or Indian textile craft. The colour sense is indeed superb...But there is much more than this; there is a deep feeling and apprehension of the spiritual life and being of man and animals expressed in their features, their movements, their outward forms, hues and colours".

It was from the late 1920s that Rabindranath was thinking of introducing some kind of technological education

136. Chitralipi, Q. Cit., Vol. II.
at Santiniketan because he came to believe that without technological training a man's education would not be complete.

When L. K. Elmhirst, an Englishman joined Santiniketan in 1922, the opportunity came for Tagore to fulfil some of his dreams. Elmhirst set up a workshop at Sriniketan and the neighbouring village was selected where the experiment of home project would be taken up. After two years it was decided that a permanent workshop would be set up to give basic education to the poor and orphan children.

In July 1924, the Siksha Satra was established at Santiniketan. Elmhirst wrote, "The aim of Siksha Satra is ... to provide the utmost liberty within surroundings that are filled with creative possibilities, with the opportunities for the joy of play, that is work — the work of exploration and the work that is play — the reaching of a succession of novel experiences, to give the child that freedom of growth which the young tree demands for its tender shoot, that field for self expression in which all young lives find both training and happiness." 138

It was in 1935, that two Swedish ladies were brought to Santiniketan by the initiative of Lakshmiswar Singha, to give Sloyd training. These ladies were Miss Jeanson and Miss Cedarblom. Lakshmiswar Singha was already engaged by Tagore to give training in carpentry and tannery to the students of Sriniketan. It was reported in Visvabharati News, "Not that"

we did not have handicrafts before — indeed Rabindranath had all along insisted on their being included in the Ashrama activities — but lately thanks to our friend Lakshmiswar Singha, a new life has been put in the work of the hands.\(^{139}\)

In 1919, Rabindranath delivered a speech in Madras reading the prospects of education. This speech entitled, "The Centre of Indian Culture". Our Centre of Culture should not only be the Centre of the intellectual life of India, but the Centre of her economic life also. It must cultivate land, breed cattle, to feed itself and its students, it must procure all necessaries, devising the best means and using the best materials. Calling science to its aid, its very existence should depend upon the success of its industrial ventures carried out on the co-operative principle, which will unite the teachers and students in a living and active bond of necessity. This will give us also a practical industrial training whose motive force is not the greed of profit. In a contemporary writing we find: "We are giving our pupils such training, so that they can develop their I.Q., become efficient in works of handicrafts and get themselves acquainted with the natural products. We have tried to afford as much money as is possible for this venture. We have not yet met with much success, because our pupils being accustomed with textual lessons have become somewhat idle. We can very easily give book knowledge to them; but we are giving too much thought how to give work training to our students. Training of the physique is very much necessary for mental development."\(^{140}\)

\(^{139}\) Visvabharati News, November 1932, p. 35.
\(^{140}\) Sartinketen Patrika, Udyog Siksha, Aswin-Kartik, 1326 B.S., p. 5.
Section IV: The Importance of Social Values

Rabindranath, the philosopher poet gave immense importance to social values and norms as to be practiced by men. Some of his own thoughts can be reflected in this context. Society - "Society is the expression of those moral and spiritual aspirations of man which belongs to his higher nature". Culture - "Communication of life can only be achieved through a living agency. And culture, which is the life of mind can only be imparted through man to man. Book learning or spiritual texts may merely make us pedants. They are static and quantitative; they accumulate and are hoarded up under strict guards. Culture grows and moves and multiplies itself in life. Man's intellect has a natural pride of its culture. Culture only acknowledges as the excellence whose criticism is in its inner perfection, not in any external success. When this price, succumbs to some compulsion of necessity of lure of material advantage, it brings humiliation to the intellectual man". Conscience - "Obey your own conscience, if you put the blame on the outside elements, they cannot defend themselves, but the, real reason is known to the inner conscience. Only one's own conscience can tell who is advancing and who is backsliding. We often needlessly exercise ourselves misjudging things from the outside. Those whom a sudden gust of passion brings down to the dust can rise up again with a new strong impulse of goodness. But those who, day by day become dried up in the very fibre of their moral being, those who by some other parasitic growth choke the inner life by slow
degrees — such men reach one day a deadness which knows no helping. Administration — "Mere administration is unproductive, it is not creative, not being a living thing. It is a steam roller, formidable in its weight and power, having its uses, but it does not help the soil to become fertile." 141

Rabindranath's conception of the sense of values once again emerged from the philosophical pursuits of ancient India. In that way, Rabindranath had deep respect for men like Raja Ram Mohan Roy or Vidyasagar who paved the path for a better cultural destiny of India. He wrote: "When Ram Mohan Roy was born in India, we were amidst total gloom of ignorance. All our ancient values were dead. Ram Mohan had to fight against evil and ignorance. Out of ignorance comes despair; we were living in that desolate graveyard when Ram Mohan appeared in the limelight. We are not able to appreciate the worth of his task which he accomplished with his lone hand. It was really a difficult job for him to stand against the age old traditional values. Ram Mohan had to face severe opposition from the traditional Hindu society which had a very powerful voice at that time." 142

He wrote about Vidyasagar: "Vidyasagar played a lonely hand in Bengal in his time. He was not happy, because the people around him were lacking in those human values with which his soul was enriched. He was never rewarded for his generosity and he himself did not receive any help in times.

of need. He observed that we talk much and work less, we do not carry out our mission successfully. We like to criticise others, we cannot sacrifice anything for others' sake; we are proud, we like to imitate others and we are eager to receive others' favour. We are engaged in dirty politics and we are fascinated by our own words... With our gradual sense of maturity, we will come to know that the speciality of his character was his vigour and he was gifted with extraordinary rich human values. This understanding will educate us in a new way.  

Rabindranath, thus inherited a cultural heritage from the Upanishads and also from the achievements of the pioneers of the Bengal Renaissance. He himself wrote in 1898 - "Our society is gifted with a conscious self which is always helping us to fight against idleness, assisting us to develop our refined senses and which is advising us to show our piety to people. Europe ridicules this norm of piety and terms this unsuitable devotion as snobbary."  

Though India had faced vicissitudes of fortune and Rabindranath also criticised the malignant social order of India from time to time, he never really lost hope in the making of prosperous civilization. He wrote in 1904 - "We have gradually become selfreliant because we have got faith in our own capabilities. This selfreliance is not the fruit of English supremacy over us... Our effort of reforming the..."  

144. R. R. XII, Samaj - Ajoyna Bhakti, pp. 251-52.
society would become futile if it is not properly channeled for native interests.\textsuperscript{145}

But throughout his life, Tagore remained grateful to the Asiatic countries and to the West for the rich values which he received from them. In a long letter, full of perceptive comments, written to William Rothenstein, his closest European friend, he summarized in painterly language his impression of Japanese civilization.

My dearest friend,

I have nearly come to the end of my visit to Japan. I had my idea of Japan of the bookland - the Japan which had no soul of her own (and which) therefore had no difficulty in getting into the bodies belonging to others. I fully expected to find one monotonous mist of the modern everywhere and very little Japan behind it. But to my surprise I find that the mist is not continuous and Japan is still visible. Her features are distinct and what is more, she is human. It is not a mask of modern science and organization with no living face inside. I can see that Japan has had all the advantage of the smallness of her area, security of her sea and homogeneity of her inhabitants. She is like a skilful gardner, having a small piece of land, compelled to take recourse to intensive culture, making every inch of the ground yield its best. She has not been burdened with a bulk which breeds slowness and negligence. It is wonderful to see how the mind of a whole people has been trained to love beauty in nature and bring it out in art. It had been their conscious endeavour to make their daily life in all its details perfect in rhythm of beauty. There is no sign

of oversight or vulgar display in their houses or their manners. The reticence in their taste shows their natural sensibility for the beautiful. Because their enjoyment is true, for them the enough is better than the more and right proportion than profuseness.

This has been made possible because for their expression they seem to have concentrated all their resources in the picturesque. Their genius has taken the course of the definite — they revel in the rhythm of pro-deeper currents of poetry which deals with the ineffable. They have acquired a perfect sense of the form at some cost of the sense of the spirit. Their nature is solely aesthetic and not spiritual. Therefore, it has been easier for them to make their ideals almost universal in their peoples. For those ideals are more in the sense of the decorum and debtless of mind and fingers them in the sense of the infinite in man — they are more of the dress than of the health. However, it is wonderful to see perfection achieved and made the common property of a whole race of man.

Yours

Rabindranath Tagore

Tagore sought for rhythm in his literature, he also tried to innovate rhythm in society, and this he thought would be possible by following certain social regulations. "The responsibilities of human beings toward mankind are immense. A country is enriched not only by its geographical products, but by its mental riches and men have the greatest contribution in attributing it to the country. We should always cherish in our hearts the glorious history of our ancestors and we must

146. Tagore to Rothenstein, Yokohama, August 2, 1916.
try to pave a similar path for our successors. The names of our ancestors are immortal even to this day and we shall create another history of immortality.  

But the poet repeatedly received rude shocks in witnessing the tragic distortion of social values both in India and in other countries. He wrote in 1933: "The social regulations are introduced in order to safeguard the interests of a particular section of people. The ignorant mass are kept under a spell of infatuation. These social regulations are on the one hand under the garb of sacred pretensions, on the other hand they seem to be too crude."  

Tagore was not only aware of the distortion of social values, but he tried to evolve certain reasons for it. In Tagore's free society, there is the eternal struggle for the achievement of the higher purposes of society. According to Tagore, society stagnates, when the relations between different sections become artificial. Tagore's basic social philosophy is enunciated in 'Kartar Ichchay Karma' (1917) and in 'Satyer Ahvan' (1917). His 'Taser Desh' is a satire on a country whose society has lost its mobility. Tagore's theory of mobile society was powerfully proclaimed in 'Achalayatan' (1912). Social institutions have their rules, religion develops customs, society encourages traditions. All these are necessary for growth. But when they hamper growth, they

generate, blind forces, which enslave human minds, discourage new experiments.

"There are certain fundamental postulates with Tagore. First, the journey to progress is endless. Secondly, when we are caught up in the labyrinth of inaction or indifference, our ruination starts. Thirdly, man's obligations grow with the progress in society. Fourthly, when society is active, it forges ahead for a higher synthesis."

Tagore was not an anarchist, but an individualist who believed that the function of the state is to maintain the conditions necessary to the best life, and that the function of society is to promote good life and to help the expression of those moral and spiritual aspirations of man which belong to his higher nature. As an individualist, he refuses to "associate truth and justice and right automatically with the possession of physical power".

He had profound faith in social cooperation and was not indifferent with fellow one's aggressiveness in avoiding collisions with fellow creatures. Tagore's political ideals spring from an idealist theory of the state and dynamic view of social cooperation owing obedience not to any specific organ of coercion but to the moral instincts of man. The history of humanity, it can be shown, is a protest against the doctrine that justice is the will of the stronger and that

moral obligation is less compelling because it may end in failure.\textsuperscript{150}

With Hegel, the stress is laid on the achievement of actual unity under the State and self-realisation of man as a member of the State.

The recognition of private and group interest of a citizen is subordinated to his devotion to the State as 'embodiment of the Universal Idea'. With Rabindranath, the emphasis is on evolving a social unity, with which all the different peoples can be held together, while fully enjoying the freedom of maintaining their own differences. The definition of the State is absent, as the end to be sought is the spontaneous self-expression of man as a social being, so that "man can develop ideals of life in co-operation with one another". In Tagore's doctrines of social classes, as with Hegel, there is no room for class-struggle, and each class gets a definition in a whole. Hegel wanted the unifying influence of the State; Tagore believes in the harmonising strength of social instincts. According to Rabindranath, the ideals that strove to take form in India's social institutions had two objects; one was to regulate our passions and appetites for the harmonious development of man, and the other was to help him to cultivate disinterested love for his fellow creatures. These social ideals are creative; they do not stimulate like wine and lead to abnormality; they help the •

natural regulation of human relationships. The social instincts which impose restrictions upon greed and hatred, as emphasised by Tagore, cannot but lead to the growth of social conscience which is involved in the modern concept of the social service state. The motive power in Tagore's sociatarian ideals are service and sacrifice — service to fellow citizens and sacrifice of one's exclusiveness. This correspondence to the ideals is inculcated by the modern social service state.  

The core of Tagore's philosophy was the race for the maintenance of balance and rhythm in social activities. This philosophy was powerfully enunciated in 'Kaler Yatra'. In 'Russiar Chithi', Tagore elaborated his social philosophy. Socialism had always been a favourite code of Tagore and the pattern of Socialism as practiced in Soviet Russia impressed him in 1930. In 1932, he was writing his 'Rather Rashi' where he gave special importance to the community whom he compared with Sudras in Indian Society, i.e. workers of the lower rank. The symbolic chariot could not be made to move by the Brahmanas or the Kshatriyas even by the Vaishyas. It was finally made to move by the Sudras. It was the favourite theory of Tagore that the weak have to be awakened before real progress comes.

If opportunities and advantages are heaped on one side of human society, the balance of society is disturbed. We must give strength to the weak. According to Tagore, man has to prove his kinship with the Infinite. In knowledge, love and...
activity, he is to express the greatness that is inherent in his life. Man has two aspects, one is personal and other social. When man is self-centered, he is savage. The social aspect of man makes him enlightened, helpful and civilized. In his poems of 'Naivedya', this aspect of his thought is beautifully portrayed.

Tagore's social and political philosophy is a synthesis of three elements. His deep appreciation and humanistic interpretation of the truth, beauty and harmony underlying the Indian concepts of society and civilization have provided the material for foundation. Analysing the causes of decay, he found three historical forces, largely responsible for the present state of affairs. First, there has been the impact of the system of large scale organisation of production which is based on the principle of centralized direction. Secondly, the new industrial economic system with its emphasis on the profit motive and material self-aggrandisement has cut the root of the Indian social system. Thirdly, with the advent of the British, the State power emerged in a more ruthless and all persuasive form. The authority and power of the society as an organisation were handed over to the British Government. The society lost its self-proportion mechanism. He wrote in 1911:

"Class distinction leads the way to the destruction of human values and the final outcome is either revolt or revolution. The flow of human intellect cannot be stopped by any kind of

mechanical device. People become selfish for their own interests, that is why they do not want to educate all sections of people — particularly the low caste people because they are afraid of being deprived of certain privileges from them."  

His play 'Raktakarabi' (1926) is a classic example of exploitation over the low caste people for the accumulation of extra wealth and there Nandini, Ranjan and Bishu Pagal stand as symbols of protest.

Tagore was not against private property; but he was strongly in favour of social control and regulation of the enjoyment of property. Rural reconstruction, according to Tagore, is not to be looked at as a scheme or a project with limited objective. To him, it was a movement for nation building with the goal of social, economic and political freedom for the individual. "We have become comfort loving, because we have accumulated more wealth. But the money which was spent for the benefit of the common people, is now spent for personal comfort only. As a result of this, the towns are becoming more and more prosperous and the villages are put to impoverishment. The vitality of village life is becoming gradually quiet."  

The poet wrote to Kalimohan Ghosh in 1930 from Berlin that after visiting many parts of Europe, he had become much depressed comparing his own country with these European countries. So long, he had been tired of saying that production

by cooperation would be the best means to save the villages from dire poverty. "After my experiences in these countries, I have come to realise that everything cannot be solved by book knowledge only. India needs such men who have wide imaginative power and generous hearts." Tagore's ideas and actions were interlinked and constituted a harmonious system. Harmony was the keynote of his philosophy — harmony between man and man, man and nature, city and village, science and society and society and state.

There is a process of evolution noticeable in Tagore's ideas. Their initial formation can be traced back to the experiences in boyhood and youth. The religious and cultural training that he received in the early years of his life, provided the framework of attitudes and values; while the opportunity he had in youth to observe at first had the social, economic and human conditions in the villages in his estate and the data essential for observation. But Rabindranath's attitude towards life had been often misunderstood by critics and the poet himself was aware of this criticism. At the fag end of his life, that is in 1940 also, he was reproached for his attitude towards life. "Some people have accused me that I have all along ignored human appeal in my literature and I have also tried to put diverse elements into it".

It was in Rabindranath's literature that we really get Rabindranath in a flowering form. In his poems, short stories, plays and novels, he tried to depict the human values in very many ways. He felt ecstatic joy in being an invitee in this world of happiness. In a song he says: "I am really grateful, because I am an invitee in this world of happiness. My eyes know no rest in searching the beauty of this wonderous world and I never cease to feel satiated in listening to the sweet melodies of the earth. It is my great pleasure that you have given me the task of playing a tune of glee and tears in this world. I am ready to go to you and offer my musical composition to you". 

Rabindranath himself said, "all our literature, all our music and fine arts are tending towards the true, whether consciously or unconsciously, all of them seem to try to bring the true into prominent focus. That which was untrue to us because it was unperceived so far, the poet brings within our range of vision. In this way the extent of our joy of the true is becoming wider, vaster. Our literature is putting the hall mark of artistic beauty on all that appeared to be petty and went unnoticed, it makes a friend of a mere acquaintance and a thing of beauty out of every visible object." The poet has said: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." The Upanishads too tell us: "Ananda rupam yadvibhat", all that is, is manifestation of His joy, His deathlessness. From

the speck of dust at our feet to the stars in the heavens —
all is a manifestation of truth and beauty, of joy and
immortality".159

In some of his short stories particularly, the human
values are elegantly depicted. In his story 'Kabuli walah'
(1892), he presents a friendship between a Kabuli walah and a
five year old girl Mini. The memory of his own daughter,
living in distant Afganistan led the Kabuli walah (money
lenders from Kabul who came from Kabul to earn their own fate)
to establish that sweet relationship with the girl. At the
news of Mini's marriage after several years, the reaction of
the Kabuli walah was natural he remembered his daughter's
face, who must be by that time old enough to get married also.
The sympathy of Mini's father towards the Kabuli walah and
his offer of money to him, for going to his daughter in Kabul,
is one of the examples of Tagore's belief in human values. The
story 'Anadhkar Pravesh' (1894), shows that how Jaikalidevi,
a very strict principled widow, who was in charge of a temple,
was also able to soften her heart and give shelter to a pig,
because of the cruelty shown towards the animal by a group of
Chandals. 'Megh O Roudra' (1894), pictures the image of
incomplete childhood love between Giribala and Sasi which took
a very matured turn in the later years. At the same time, the
kind of social injustice which was carried on in those days
is also pictured here. 'Ulukharer Bipad' (1900), is the story
of a broad minded village Brahman who rescured a helpless girl

charged of theft and how the Brahman himself got into danger instigated by his village people. Most of the stories of Galpaguchha are enriched with this human touch.

We get the complete vision of a truth, a synthesis of realization, in all his symbolic dramas from 'Sarodatsab' (1908) down to 'Dakghar' (1911), 'Phalguni' (1916), 'Muktadhara' (1922) and 'Raktakarabi' (1926). "This world in the last analysis is a world of pure fantasy is powerfully active and quite suspends the intellect and builds up a mysterious world of evocations and implications which reason cannot analyse."¹⁶⁰

There are words in 'Phalguni' and 'Dakghar', whose meaning it is difficult to grasp — and indeed it is not the poet's purpose that we should do so. What he aims at is to build up out of suggestions and associations an emanation of the total atmosphere a world whose existence cannot be perceived by any of the senses but only felt as a realisation. Hence there is an amount of obscurity, a lack of clarity in symbolist drama or poetry. Amal cannot give a language to his intimations of infinity, Ranjan cannot put his love in words, the entangled passions of Nandini have to remain equally silent or half-expressed. The vision is intense, the realisation over whelming in its completeness. Rabindranath, in these plays is not concerned with the creation of beauty, but with a subtler task: the exploration of the sources of beauty.

With regard to the novels, 'Chokher Bali' is unique in unravelling the tangles of the mental conflict. In 'Rajarshi', Tagore's criticism of life becomes fuller and more harmonious, closer with reality. Govindamanikya is a more matured version of Basanta Roy of 'Bou Thakuranir Hat'. 'Gora' is one of Tagore's master-pieces, describing a defiant soul in struggle for a noble cause in the midst of the passionate conflict of religious sects. In 'Ghare Baire', the triangular love set among Nikhilesh, Bimala and Sandip reflect the specific straits of the characters and show very aptly how the human values become estranged when they are in constant discord with each other.  

As the early poems of Rabindranath mostly carry a romantic and divine message, the later poems of Tagore carry much weight, because of their matured form and also of the changed out look of the poet. The poems of 'Prantik' (1937) tell us about his social consciousness. One such poem's message is - "When I became conscious of my surroundings, I was astonished to find out the crude culture prevailing in our society. Ignorance and cowardice, lust and vanity were the ruling factors of society. The heads of the states were unable to bring remedies, because of their hesitant attitude. On the one hand, our civilization has become a pray of barbarous interests, on the other hand posterity is in vain crying for peace and solidarity".


162. R. R. - XXII, Prantik, 1937, pp. 18-19. "Cedin Chaitanya mor ... Chitar bhasmanale".
There are a few specimens of incipient 'historical consciousness' in 'Navajatak' (1940). The poems are of unequal worth, but symptomatic of the poet's reaction to the world around him. In 'Hindustan', he presents the history of India as a series of inroads and military infiltration. Pakshi manab and some other poems carry versions of science. But the goal of Rabindranath had all along been to safeguard the image of beauty against all odds.

163. R. R. - XXIV, Navajatak, 1940.
Section V: Aesthetics and Nationalism

The nationalistic thinking of Rabindranath was a part of his philosophy. In other words, Rabindranath's nationalism was permeated by his philosophical outlook. Throughout his life, he hoped for balance and harmony among the nations of the world. He came to believe that all the problems were interlinked with each other. It was this outlook that helped the poet to treat Indian nationalism not as separate dogma, but as an offshoot of internationalism.

Some of the poet's very early writings, like 'Jhansir Rani', which was published in 'Bharati' in 1877 (Agrahayan 1284 B.S.), bear his emotional patriotic fervour. The poet describes how men like Kunwar Singha and Tantia Topi fought against the British during the 1857 uprising with utmost determination. It is worth remembering that 80 years old Kunwar Singha fought vigorously against the British, holding swords in both hands or how Tantia Topi, patiently continued his struggle in central India without sufficient food or equipments. But Rabindranath has given greater stress on Laxmi Bai the deposed Rani of Jhansi who fought against British rule with manly valour in order to protect her principality of Jhansi the succession of which to her son had been prevented by Lord Dalhousie's Doctrine of lapse. The British began to give a minimum allowance after the death of her husband. Moreover the Britishers began cow-slaughter in her Kingdom to which the Rani objected. The British paid no heed to her. She was even able to briefly
re-capture her last principality from the hands of the English in 1857. Tantia Topi came to her aid. Unfortunately the Rani could not prolong her resistance; even then she did not succumb to British rule, but died in the battlefield like a martyr.¹⁶⁴

In another essay, 'Bharatvarse itiheser dhara', published in 1912 (Baisakh 1319 B.S.) Rabindranath traces the glorious traditional past of India in the days of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and in the Vedic period. In the last passage of this essay, Rabindranath tries to put forward the view that India had never lost her ancient values in any period of disaster. She had never totally sacrificed herself to invasion. Once again, the poet says this was also a period when India would realise her truth and recognise her national character.¹⁶⁵ Authors like Bankimchandra Chattopadhaya had already stressed this point earlier in his 'Anandamath' 1880-82 (Bangadarshan - Chaitra — 1287-89 B.S.). So, there is no novelty in such a view. This same stress on ancient values or unity in diversity can be found in his more matured writings of 1890s like 'Raja Praja' or 'Bharatvarsia Samaj' (R.R.-X).

From the days of his youth, that is from the 1880s, Rabindranath became aware of the political reshuffling that was taking place in India and also in the far-away countries. Rabindranath's mission had been to instigate a reforming zeal

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, Bharatvarse Itihaser Dhara, pp. 54-55.
among the ignorant Indians in order to give them a sense of awareness and reverence for the country. During World War I, the problem of antagonism among different sections, exercised the poet's mind. Neo-nationalism, the poet singled out to be the root cause of all misunderstanding among the various countries of the world. He held the so-called nationalism responsible for some of the major evils of the present age and looked upon it as a peculiar product of the European Civilization. In his opinion, it was an artificial creation, a negation of man's social instincts of which the main element is greed and jealousy. It is obvious that the underlying assumption of Rabindranath's views on nationalism was based largely on predatory imperialism. Probably he could not and did not make any distinction between that type of nationalism, which was a reaction against colonialist domination in what are now known as Third World countries, and the other and easier type of aggressive nationalism, which produced imperialism itself. Actually, what Rabindranath had resented all along, was the excess of nationalism that is chauvinism. This narrowing of the definition of nationalism led Rabindranath to become the victim of misdirected criticism. The misunderstanding of his nature of nationalism led Rabindranath to claim that India had a predominantly social and not political destiny. But it was not possible to achieve any social progress as the poet desired, without political and consistently anti-colonial struggle. In his opinion, "neither the colourless vagueness of cosmopolitanism, nor the fierce self-idolatry of
nation worship is the goal of human history. Rabindranath's book 'Nationalism', is thus one sided and suffers from lack of comprehensiveness. Rabindranath, for example, was not himself very clear about the proper definition of 'Nation'. In the book 'Nationalism', he gives a definition of 'Nation'. "A nation, in the sense of the political and economic union of a people is that aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for a mechanical purpose". But Rabindranath has not mentioned here that what is that 'purpose' or why it may be described as mechanical. On the other hand, he says that "Society as such has no ulterior purpose. It is an end in itself. It is a spontaneous self-expression of man as a social being. It is a natural regulation of human relationships, so that man can develop ideals of life in co-operation with one another. It has also a political side, but this is only for a special purpose. It is for self-preservation. It is merely the side of power, not of human ideals. And in the early days, it had its separate place in society, restricted to the professionals. But, when with the help of science and the perfecting of organization, this power begins to grow and brings it harvests of wealth, then it crosses its boundaries with amazing rapidity. For then, it goads all its neighbouring societies with greed of material prosperity, and consequent mutual jealousy and by the fear of each others' growth into powerfulness. The time comes, when it can stop no longer, for

166. Rabindranath Tagore, Nationalism, 1918, p. 5.
the competition grows keener, organization grows vaster and selfishness attains supremacy. Trading upon the greed and fear of man, it occupies more and more space in society and at last becomes its ruling force. In another place he says, "When this organization of politics and commerce, whose other name is the 'Nation' becomes all powerful at the cost of the harmony of the higher social life, then it is an evil day for humanity ... when this engine of organization begins to attain a vast size and those who are machines are made into parts of machine, then the personal man is eliminated into a phantom, everything becomes a revolution of policy carried by the human parts of the machine, with no twinge of pity or moral responsibility." Rabindranath's views are explicit in the following passage from his book 'Nationalism', "Nationalism is a cruel epidemic of evil that is sweeping over the human world of the present age and eating into its moral vitality." "The time has come when, for the sake of the whole outraged world, Europe should fully know in her own person the terrible absurdity of the thing called the Nation." "Nationalism is a great menace; It is the particular thing which for years has been at the bottom of India's troubles." Purely aggressive nationalism can indeed be a menace in any period of history. While national feeling is a boon for the country it unites and can make it great and also helps a country to fight against all odds, Rabindranath emphasised the dark side of 'Nation' or 'Nationalism'. All the revolutions...
of the world, namely the Glorious Revolution of England (1688), the French Revolutions (1789, 1830, 1848), American War of Independence (1783), Russian Revolution (1917) were fought for nationalistic aspirations. However, the English, U.S., and French bourgeoisies which came to nationalist power on the crest of these Revolutions, became imperialist. Even Soviet Russia more than seventy years after its national revolution, finds itself in the invidious position of having to match its strength against the U.S. machinations by having to occupy Afghanistan, to maintain the Communist regime there against tribal rebellions. Of course, countries like Germany under Hitler, Italy under Mussolini, or England for her Colonial lust lost the national epithet of nationalism and what these countries began was the misuse of nationalism, which may be termed as 'Chauvinism' or 'Imperialism'.

'Imperialism' in the late 18th and 19th century meant the colonial expansion of some of the European countries and the exploitation exercised over these colonial estates. Imperialism can be also termed as another distorted form of nationalism. Rabindranath has never used this term 'Chauvinism' in his entire book 'Nationalism' and perhaps he wished to draw the attention of Indians engaged in the national movement to the evil effects of Nationalism only.

As a humanist however, Rabindranath's idea of nationalism was never restricted in a narrow shell conceptualised as motherland. The poet's message of peace was radiated in every corner of the world in all moments of crisis. He was a lover
of mankind and throughout his life he sought for love and harmony amongst men. This vision, which affected the thought of country's leading personalities can be expressed in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru. "Rabindranath Tagore has given to our nationalism the outlook of internationalism and has enriched it with art and music and the magic of his words, so that it has become the full blooded emblem of India's awakened spirit. In his intuitive way, the poet has reached the conclusion that international understanding and collaboration were the supreme tasks of the age...". Infact, Rabindranath's conception of nationalism and internationalism began to blend together from 1914, that is from the period of the out break of the First World War, when he was writing poems like, 'How you have revealed yourself to me, Oh, the Lord of the Universe'.

He saw no difference between national and international facades. That he was a messenger of peace, can be realised from songs like:

"The earth is full of jealousy and dispute
It is making its way towards distrust and lust
The people of the earth are yearning for a new birth
Bring the ray of bliss, Oh Lord and protect Thy people
Bring your message of peace and love and let them have their lessons in sanctity
Come there, the Calm soul, the Liberated and the Eternal soul
Make the earth free from all evils by Your hands of mercy".

173. R. R. - X, Utsarga, 1914, pp. 31-33

"Hinsay unmeta Prithwi nitya nithur danda
Ghor kutil pantha tar lobha jatil bandha..."
Even though, the poet was fully conscious of the malicious designs of the international powers his romantic mind never ceased to dream of a peaceful and blissful society. It is this Utopian concept that eventually came into conflict with the rude barbarities of the present century and led Rabindranath to shrink back from the magnitude of his task. Although, Rabindranath correctly diagnosed the need of his times, his approach to international and to domestic questions remained emotional rather than rational. His ultimate hope, he told an Anglo-American audience in Peking in 1924, "Gradually World ideals will grow in strength until at last they have fulfilled their highest mission — the unification of mankind." His unique contribution to this aim was to articulate and strive to exemplify in a modern setting the ancient Hindu ideal of man as identical with that eternal and Universal self who dwells in all men. "My religion", he explained to Albert Einstein during their conversation at Einstein's home near Berlin in 1930, "is the reconstruction of the Super-Personal Man, the universal human spirit in my own individual being".

It was a moral and humanist approach rather than a scientific grappling with intricate problems. His knowledge of international relations was not based on any deep study of the political, economic and social issues underlying them. But his restive mind had always responded to any new idea or movement taking shape in any part of the world (We have discussed this aspect in details in Chapter III). 

The poet's message of spirituality has often been misunderstood by the World audience, for at that time they were mostly under the spell of imperialistic aspirations. Actually his basic liberalism always permeated his ideology. Like, many European socialists, Rabindranath always remained a firm believer in what has contradictorily been called 'revolution by consent'.

Rabindranath's flight to international politics, has often been discussed by scholars from different view points. Some scholars have pointed out that Rabindranath as a humanist could not remain immune from the international strife of the century. It seems some times that Rabindranath's international interest was an escapist move. When the poet received a cold rebuff at home and he could not make his place properly in Indian politics, he made his way to international politics and thereby tried to earn his fame as an international figure. The acts of violence in the name of patriotism at home (the revolutionary terrorism of Kshudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki, the Maniktala Bomb factory incident — from 1908 onwards) shocked him deeply. It is not that he withdrew himself from the country's interest, rather he brought back the experiences he learnt at Euro-Asia and America and presented to his countrymen the idea of the genesis of the Western Civilization. "Rabindranath personified to the West, not only his poetry and his message, but also India. The East which had been popularly known in the West, preciously on
account of its vague influence on Schopenhauer's philosophy and by the popularised Victorian translation of Omar Khayyam by Fitzgerald had suddenly been 'humanised' by Rabindranath. His personality stood for everything India, indeed for everything Eastern. Infact, it was this aesthetic appeal to mankind which he represented, was misunderstood by people from time to time. But it was also Rabindranath, who at times is even said to have justified war and induced men to fight and conquer — because he would never ask men to tolerate injustice or wrong and remain vanquished for ages.

India, Rabindranath believed should lead the way towards the proper integration of nationalism with humanity as its emblem. Though he believed that science and cultural exchange should be our goal for progress, he fully agreed with Gandhiji in brushing aside violence and emphasized spiritual regeneration and freedom from the spirit of violence and hatred as the initiator of the crucial freedom that our nation and the world community of nations needed.

Like Gandhiji, he never minimised the value of national inheritance or our continuing national advancement, which was in full harmony with the welfare of the humanity. Rabindranath also believed that international harmony could not be generated while obvious wrong and injustice remained unrectified whether in our social system or in colonial and in other forms of

occupation and subjugation of one nation by another. Rabindranath frankly expressed his view about Gandhiji, when he met Romain Rolland in June 1926. "If Gandhiji, has firmly fought against the crime of 'untouchability', he has never sought to break caste divisions. No doubt for Gandhiji, this is a question of choosing the right moment. At present, he wants to solve the political problem, which is relatively easy. He does not want to tackle the infinitely more complex and dangerous social problem yet".

"But", said Rabindranath, "how can one solve the political problem, without first solving the social problem? Its like building one's house on the sand." While political freedom was the high light of Gandhiji's nationalism, Rabindranath's brand of nationalism was primarily based on social reformation, so that he laid so much stress on remodeling of education and village reconstruction.

Rabindranath vehemently protested against the excess of nationalism, because the artist in him could not tolerate the distortion of human values. But Rabindranath's image in India, particularly in Bengal in the early half of the 20th century stands as a nationalist or as a patriot, who inspired thousands of young Bengali souls with his beautiful songs full of patriotic fervour, where he gave the inspiring call of marching alone for country's sake with an undaunted spirit:179 or in songs, where he describes the beauty of Bengal in his lyrical cum patriotic style:180

178. Extracts from Romain Rolland's Diary, Amrita Bazar Patrika, October 1976.
ti..."
180. Ibid, p. 243, "Amar sonar Bangla ami tomay bhalobashi..."
so long as it ran in accord with his principle of aesthetics. But whenever the two concepts in reality split on opposite poles, he became a critic of nationalism and the poet in him became the victim of criticism both at home and abroad.

The intention of Rabindranath had been actually two fold. As a humanist, he believed in the fullest development of human values. Again as a nationalist, he gave stress on Atmasakti or self-reliance, so that the masses would stand against their foes one form footing in the days of turmoil.

By the word 'Atmasakti', Rabindranath meant self-confidence. It was this want of confidence that was the cause of moral degeneration of an individual and the decay of an entire generation. Work and knowledge which were the goals of his education, would help an individual to stand on his own legs and would instil confidence in him. Like this, every individual would attain confidence and would help to cure the maladies of the decaying generation. That was the basic weakness among individuals, which Rabindranath realized. He wanted his people to come out of their narrow boundaries and get themselves akin with the outer world through work and knowledge and that would be the best way of blending one's soul with the celestial charm of the universe.

"Apan hate bahir hove baire dara
Buker maThe viswaloker pabi sara..."