CHAPTER III: PATRIOTISM, POLITICIZATION
AND THE RETREAT FROM POLITICS
TO INTERNATIONALISM

Section I: As a Patriot

The image of Rabindranath as a patriot has often been interpreted by scholars in different ways. We shall first consider the bare historical facts which gave a kind of incentive to the poet's patriotic fervour. Born in one of the most prominent families of 19th century Calcutta, Tagore's concern for public affairs grew by the 1890s. He later described himself both as part of the mainstream of Indian culture and as an outlaw or outsider. This dual perspective allowed him to participate in the national movement and also to write illuminating critiques of it. This early zeal for patriotism can be traced back to the 1870s when Rabindranath's own family took an active role in the patriotic upsurge of the country. The memories of those days can be found in his 'Jivansmriti', where he says, that apparently there were many foreign customs in their family, but a strong patriotic feeling was always prevalent. This feeling, he says they owed much to their father who had a strong reverence for the country. Infact, that was not the period of patriotism. The educated people wanted to brush aside vernacular language and vernacular culture. In their family, his brothers had always cultivated the vernacular language. So much so, that when a new relative once wrote a letter to Devendranath Tagore in English, the letter

A festival celebrating nationality called the Hindu mela was organised by the initiative of the Tagore family. Nabagopal Mitra was appointed as the Chief architect of the mela. That was the first Westernized organized effort in Bengal to regard India with patriotic sentiment. Rabindranath's mejodada Satyendranath Tagore composed the famous national song 'Mile sabe bharat santan' (all children of Bharata, gathering together) at that time. It was in 1875, at Parshi Bagan, in the ninth session of the Hindu mela, that Rabindranath read out his originally composed poem, called 'Hindu melar Upahar' (The Gift for the Hindu Mela).

By the initiative of Rabindranath's Jyotidâda (his third elderly brother, Jyotirindranath Tagore), a group was organised, whose President was the elderly Rajnârayan Basu, (Head Master of the Midnapur District and Hindu College veteran). This was an assembly of patriots. This group met in a dilapidated house in one of the narrow lanes of Calcutta. Every item of that assembly was packed in mystery. Infact, this secrecy was the only terrific thing of the assembly. There was of course nothing alarming for the government or its subjects. Their door was closed, their room was dark, their discussions were in low tones—this created a great deal of excitement for them.

2. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 25th February, 1875; Pravasi, Magh 1338 B.S.

"Himadri sikhare silasan pari
Gan Byas Risi Vina hate Kari
Kapaya parvat sikh kar kanan
Kapaya nihar sital baya...".

3. Rabindranath Tagore, Jivanamriti (1319 B.S.), Swadeshikata.
So, in his early years Rabindranath's patriotism was merely the fruit of his surroundings. The poet at least could not present any originality in his patriotic fervour. In the late half of the 19th century, Rabindranath composed several patriotic songs like 'Ekasutre bandhiachi sahastri man' (1879) or 'Amra milechi aaj mayer dake' (1886) and particularly some pieces of articles in his 'Europe pravasir patra' which bear his feelings of patriotism. By the beginning of the 20th century, we come to know from his writings that the poet was taking a definite stand towards politicization. But we must remain critical while studying Rabindranath's political writings. The fragments of his political writings do not give us any clear or concrete idea about Rabindranath's political opinion, because Rabindranath's political opinions changed with the changes of time. So, there are ample opportunities for critics to judge him from different angles. But we must note three very important and rigid points in his political thought, a) Rabindranath was aware of the nature of British rule in India and its aftermath, b) Rabindranath gave strong emphasis on the exchange of Eastern and Western values, c) Rabindranath gave the call of self-reliance in order to fight India's enemy.
Section II: Rabindranath's Awareness of the Nature of British Rule in India and its Aftermath

It was from the late half of the 19th century, that is from the 1870s that Rabindranath was becoming critical about British rule in India. In the collection of his stray articles on history, brought together by Visvabharati as 'Itihasa', we find two very early school-boy level essays written in the 1870s, in which Rabindranath expresses considerable criticism about the elements of force in British imperialism and of patriotic resistance by Kunwar Singh and Rani Laxmi Bai during the uprisings of 1857 (Discussed elaborately in Chapter II). These early writings probably paved the path for the mature writings which Rabindranath began to write from the early half of the 20th century.

It was in 1897-98, that is at the time of Talla Riots, that Rabindranath was writing 'Kantharodh', where he severely ridicules British rule in India. The Talla Riot was the first ever large scale riot to break out in Calcutta. It started on 29th June over the issue of the eviction by Court order of a Muslim mason named Himmat Khan from a piece of land at Talla in North Calcutta. Maharaja Jotindra Mohan Tagore held a life interest in the plot of land. Himmat Khan, faced with the Court order, declared his hut to be a masjid of long standing. The mosque was subsequently demolished by the police and this sparked off the riot. It blazed in the northern parts of the

city until 2nd July — Circular Road, Mechua Bazar, Halliday Street, Bhabani Charan Datta Lane, Thanthania, Harrison Road and Rajabazar being the areas affected — while the mill-hands in the outskirts were reported to be restive as late as the 6th. Eighty seven were ultimately sent up for trial on charges of rioting, and eighty one were convicted.

The character of the social leadership that these community conscious working men often sought in this period is remarkably brought out in a letter written by the Imam of Rishra, Nazir Mian, to Haji (Hadji) Nur Muhammad Zakaria, an important Muslim trader living in north Calcutta, (after whom Zakaria Street in which the Makhoda Masjid is located, was later named), asking for help during the Bakr-Id riot of 1896.

"It is informed that in village Rishra, police station Serampore, district Hooghly, the Hindus are going to create row during the Bakr-Id (cow) sacrifice; they say they do not sacrifice here, if you do so, we (Hindus) will create row. Therefore, I request that you all assist us. We are poor people and work in mills. You better give this information to Muhammadens in the Friday Prayers that it is religious act and everybody should assist as possible."

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5. W.B.S.A. - J & L (Pol), Nov. 1897, A No. 22.
6. N.A.I. Home (Public) Jan 1898, A Nos. 55-7; Octo 1897, A No. 150.
Evidence is lacking on the question of how, or what sort of connections were formed between the Haji and the Muslim mill hands. But we may use the Talla Riot in Calcutta of 1897 and the events connected with it to prove indirectly a basic point: a person like Haji Zakaria was accepted by the poor Muslims in and around the city as their protector and guide. It is to men of this sort that they repeatedly turned for leadership in trying to solve their problems.

The Bengali bhadralok ('respectable person' of the middle class) in the 19th century, with his education, clean clothes and hands unsoiled with manual labour (the description is from Sumit Sarkar — *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, 1973, p. 509) perhaps felt distant from the world of men who worked in the mills. In the 1890s, with a large number of immigrant mill-hands, the gulf between the bhadralok and working men was only to grow wider. The Bengali bhadralok were not sufficiently equipped culturally to communicate with such groups. Their premier political organization, the Indian Association, reacted to the Talla Riot by petitioning the Viceroy to "open a volunteer corps and train the Bengalis in the use of arms... (which) would help them to resist the rowdy rioters". In healthy contrast to this, Rabindranath showed a much better grasp of the bhadralok's problems, when, in a very perspective essay, written in 1893, he referred to the Talla Riot thus: "Recently a group of lower class ignorant Mussalmans brickbats in hand,

tried to create trouble on the streets of Calcutta. What was surprising about their attempt was that the English were made special targets of it. They (the Muslims) were adequately punished. It is said that if you start throwing stones at others, some will be thrown back at you. These fools threw stones, but were hit back with much harder stuff. We understand that they committed a crime and were punished; but the whole affair is still not sufficiently clear. These lower class Mussalmans neither read newspapers nor do they write in them. What happened was afterall a matter of some importance, yet we know nothing of what went on in the minds of these inarticulate people.\textsuperscript{11}

It was from the early half the 20th century, that Rabindranath was becoming more and more vehement in his expression about British rule in India. It was in the year 1904 that Rabindranath wrote: "England is becoming powerful at the cost of India, at the same time she is trying to undermine India's power. But this one-sided business cannot be endured for a long time. The weakness of India would be the cause of England's ruin. They cannot exercise their hold permanently on Indian regime. This very political programme of weakening a dependent country to impose the policy of 'divide and rule' to crush all sporadic uprisings and to declare British paramountcy had been the fruit of a very significant period. This was the period when Wordsworth, Shelly, Keats, Tennyson, Browning were no longer there and Kipling was\textsuperscript{11, R. R. - XII (15 volumes) (1961), Kantharodh, p. 961.}
the only well-known poet. This was the period when Carlyle, Ruskin and Mathew Arnold had gone into oblivion and Morling was only decorating the stage. Gladstone's silence and Chamberlain's voluble speeches made England totally puzzled. This was the period when literature no longer bloomed in the English fields and only thorny politics had its place. England no longer showed her mercy to the poor and sick people, but she was only infatuated by the lust of her imperialism.

It is the politics of that period when trade had taken the place of religion. But this was a period of real distress. We come to know of truth only in our days of anguish. So, this is a blessing in disguise, because we hope that the English would come to know of their real selves in this period.  

In some of his patriotic songs composed in the early 20s', Rabindranath vehemently opposed British rule in India, for example - 'Bidhir bandhan katbe tumi emnl saktiman...'. 'Are you people so powerful that you can even undo the rules of the Almighty God? You are so proud that you boast yourselves to be our fortune-makers. You always look down upon us, but you should remember that your power would not endure. However strong be your rule, you should remember that the weak people have also got power and you can never exceed the power of God. You can never subside by subduing us'. The earlier songs of Tagore were mostly songs of unity. But this song and a few other songs like 'Oder bandhan jetai sakta hobe' express a vehement note of repulsion against British rule. These protest

songs gave a new impetus to the Swadeshi movement.

Rabindranath even ridiculed British rule in his articles of 'Raja Praja', like 'Mukheive bonam Baruniye' or 'Ghunsaghunsi'. In one passage of 'Ghunsaghunsi', he said - "The English can wound the Indians not only because they have power, but they are the ruling authority. But if the Indians hit the English, it will be regarded as a great crime because that would show protest against ruling authority. This inequality proves the more shameful position of the English. But they are never accused by their own people, rather they are highly applauded in the foreign papers. There is only one consolation, that they are not given the Victoria Cross at least openly."

In another passage he wrote: "If the English ill-treat us, we should definitely object and we would accept imprisonment and even death for that. But we should always assert ourselves in undoing injustice. Acceptance of injustice would mean humiliation on the part of the whole nation. But we should always follow the path of truth and justice and must not make room for vandalism in showing protest against the English."

Rabindranath has very keenly analysed the nature of British rule in these lines of Bharatvarsha, "The English told us we have come to rule your country for your own benefit. Here, there is no discrimination between black and white, there is no difference in caste or creed; we have rather the aim of

Akbar before us in establishing an all Indian empire in India. We have trusted them and we are now demanding more and more rights from them. Disgusted with our demands, they have now declared "What we have conquered with sword, we will protect it with sword". They are rather taking the initiative in showing the distinction between black and white. India once supplied clothes to the world market, today she is hiring clothes from foreigners. Once she prospered in her agriculture, now she is impoverished. The more tragic part of the drama is at least 500 million rupees are being drained off to England every year. But still the Indians are patiently waiting for that polished exaggerated version of the English to come true."

Rabindranath was a far sighted person and he could foresee the fact that by displaying unnecessary dogmatism, the English were digging their own graves. "It is not proper that just because the English possess power, they will ruthlessly violate the laws of nature. How is it that the rulers will never restrain, but the ruled will have to follow restraints. The British writers are alarming the Indians with their pen that they should not raise their fingers against the English; then they would not be relieved in any way. But the English have no cause to be cautious of their designs. God has not given the English so much power to make use of their Penal Code in whatever way they like. If they regard themselves superior to God and even want to violate the law of nature,"

no one can prevent them from their catastrophic fall.  

Rabindranath tried to indicate this catastrophic fall in a two-fold way. Firstly, British rule in India indirectly gave birth to the spirit of nationalism which lay dormant among the Indians and this helped the Indians to raise their arms against British rule. This aspect of Indian political life has been described by Karl Marx as the 'Unconscious tool of history'. The series of violent and non-violent upheavals against British regime slowly weakened the solid foundation and the British too became alarmed of the nature of Indian resistance. In some of his poems of Naivedya (1308 B.S. - 1901), the poet gave a fiery call for standing against British rule. In one such poem, we have the idea that the poet is ready to accept weapon against enemy after discarding all his costly attires and he would no longer spend his time in idle thoughts.

He wrote in 1914 - "Those who are ruling our country with relentless ardour can boast of their political achievements, but they cannot suppress the youthful spirit of the day. We need both our practical senses and our impractical relentless spirit to proceed towards our cherished mission".  

"Aqhat sanqhat majhe darainu asi \nAngad Kundal Kanthl alarikarrashi..."  
course at first was enthusiastic about both the violent and non-violent ways of resisting British rule. But later, he began to show his apathy for the former path. We shall discuss that aspect of his thought in due course. Initially, what Tagore felt was, that too much oppression gave way to depression, but out of depression emerged certain positive efforts in undermining British rule in India.

The catastrophic fall of the British is indicated by Rabindranath in another way also. The international turmoil which began from the early half of the 20th century lured most of the European powers to take part in it and of course England took an active role in this. England had expressed her colonial lust from the early half of the 19th century and the Afro-Asian powers were mainly her preys. The French Revolution of 1789, the Vienna Congress of 1815, the Industrial Revolution of the 1860s and Bismarck's policy of German imperialism in the 1870s slowly created an international hysteria and England could not remain immune from it. The result was the First World War of 1914. In 1901 only, Rabindranath could anticipate this ensuing danger. "The inevitable result of selfish interest is conflict. Europe is now a victim of that conflict which is leading to a world wide upsurge. Europe is openly ignoring religion, in order to protect her state interests. She is openly boasting of her naked imperialism. Individual religious interests are no longer safeguarded by the state. The state has become a total fake machinery. Humanism has lost its ground in
In Ezra Pound's famous review of *Geetanjali* similar sentiments are expressed in no less forceful language - 
"Europe has found her new Renaissance. As the sense of balance comes back upon Europe in the days before the Renaissance, so it seems to me that does this sense of a saner stillness come now to us in the midst of our clangour of mechanisms...".  
Ernest Rhys, two years after this review, come to the same conclusion. "It may prove to be the vision of India from which we are to get a fresher sense of nature and life".

Rabindranath could exercise some influence over Germany in his own way. "The German soul, must regain its former health through German strength. But that Tagore has pointed out the way in those evil times, for this we Germans owe him a debt of gratitude". But this is only a partial reaction of Tagore's influence on Germany. The decline of the West is due to a breakdown in the cultural tradition of Europe brought about by an indiscriminate acceptance of admiration for Eastern ideas and ways of life. Rabindranath's message appealed to the German middle class people to a certain extent; the very same who had come back from the battle fields of Flanders and who ten years later, after Rabindranath's name had been long forgotten by most of them, started gigantic preparations for a renewal of the futile attempt at self-destruction. But it is true, that European defeatism which reached its climax in the years of the great war found a reaffirmation of its own fears and a new consolation in Rabindranath's writings.

Rabindranath's influence was more limited in America, the masses did not respond so wholeheartedly and the intellectuals, even when criticising Rabindranath, were hardly as conscious of this cultural and spiritual antagonism. And their own culture is perhaps too much part of an unconscious tradition, too much part also of their firmly established social life to be actively opposed by anything foreign. He wrote from New York to his friend Andrews: "In this country I live in the dungeon of the Castle of Bigness. My heart is starved ... Here I feel everyday what a terrible nightmare it is for the human soul to bear this burden of the monster Arithmetic. It incessantly drives its victims and yet leads them nowhere. It raises storms of battle which are for sowing broadcast the seeds of future conflict."29

Sometimes, Rabindranath felt very agitated, when he wrote: "To me humanity is rich and large and many-sided. Therefore I feel deeply hurt when I find that, for some material gain, man's personality is mutilated in the Western World... The same process of repression and curtailment of humanity, is often advocated. Such deliberate impoverishment of our nature seems to me a crime".30 In another place he wrote: "The whole world is suffering from this call of Devil worship... and I cannot tell you how deeply I am suffering, being surrounded in the country by endless ceremonials of this hediously profane cult. Everywhere there is an antipathy against Asia vented by a widespread campaign of calumny. Negroes are burnt alive, sometimes, merely because they tried to exercise their right to vote.

30. Ibid, (Letters to a Friend, pp. 115-16), p. 73.
given to them by law. Germans are revived, conditions in Russia are merely misrepresented.  

A French paper described how popular feelings were like at that time in France. "Rabindranath is a kind of Tolstoy. As one might have expected, Germany uses him for propaganda purposes; and he exalts pan-Germanism in a whole hearted and pain staking manner for which the press beyond the Rhine, for the last few days, pays him unanimous homage. German civilization alone is capable of saving the world, proclaims Tagore during his tour of lectures across the Reich. The Germanic Civilization conforms in its details as well as in its general outline to oriental civilization and from it done one can expect a rejuvenation of the modern mind. And yet during his recent stay in France, Tagore has abstained from making statements which would have shown him to be insensible to the charm of our country to its artistic beauties and its innate sense of courtesy.  

Rabindranath's visit to Italy was one of the major events of the century. There was eager expectation of the news of the meeting of the philosopher poet Rabindranath with the fascist dictator Mussolini.  

"All the newspapers of Italy expressed their joy after the poet's visit in Italy. Tribuna, which was the main newspaper during the time of the Fascist movement, published a long  

31. Loc. Cit., p. 73.  
32. L'Eclair, Paris, 20th June, 1921, (Quoted from Alexander Aronson - Rabindranath through Western Eyes, pp. 55-56.,
account of the meeting between Rabindranath and Mussolini and it also exposed a hand-written statement of the poet. The statement ran like this: "I dream of the day when the immortal spirit of Italy will usher in a new dawn of civilization".

But Senator Kiapeli, the veteran Professor of History did not believe that Europe would accept the philosophy of the East. 'Tagore has met Mussolini! What great contrast! There is no parallel to them in representing both the meditative and the active symbols from both the East and the West. A country which is in the making of its future destiny would have to discard all idle dreams and develop a character of his own'.

Abanti Sanyal has very aptly shown in one of his articles in 'Ekshan', that Rabindranath's initial admiration for Fascism was primarily based on the propogandas focussed through various newspapers at home and abroad. Moreover, Mussolini's invitation to Rabindranath through the orientalists Tuchhi and Formichhi, also led the poet to Cherish certain broad ideas about Mussolini.

Though Rabindranath's statement was published in the Italian Newspapers, and sometimes he openly applauded the personality of Mussolini, he had some doubts about the real character of Fascism. When Rabindranath reached Switzerland, he went to Villeneuve village to meet Romain Rolland. The latter

34. Abandi Kumar Sanyal, Ekshan (1384 B.S.), Quoted from Chinmohan Sehanavis - Rabindranather Antarjatik Chinta, pp. 74-75.
helped the poet to develop contact with some exiled scholars of Italy and Rabindranath now gradually became aware of the real nature of Fascism. Romain Rolland wrote: "Rabindranath Tagore came to see me in those days at Villeneuve (June-July 1926) after completing a tour through Italy, during which Mussolini had been able to play upon his candour, upon his trustfulness, upon his ignorance of European politics and of the Italian language; for he arrived charmed with the flattery and the advances of the big purring brute... I revealed to him the real face of Fascism. I put him in touch with the victims of its violence. Deeply moved, Tagore publicly dissociated himself from Fascism, which was exploiting his adherence to it. He did it in the form of letters to his Italian friends and to C.F. Andrews. 35

It was Rolland in fact, who had made Rabindranath and the whole of India aware of the future designs of Fascism. Millions of anti-Fascist Indians are indebted to Rolland for this friendly alarm which he gave beforehand. Romain Rolland himself wrote to Rabindranath on this issue. "I have often reproached myself for having disturbed your peace of mind by depriving you of the confidence you felt in your Italian hosts. But I am more solicitous of your glory than of your repose. I did not like it, that the monsters should be able to abuse your name in history. Forgive if my intervention has perchance given you some uneasy hours. The future will show you that I...

have acted as a vigilant and faithful guardian”.

Rabindranath's message has frequently been identified in Europe and in America with certain Pan-Asiatic political ideologies. The poet's visit to the Far East, especially to China created a good deal of mental unrest in the West. For there was no doubt that "Chinese students rejoiced at the news of his coming, for Tagore represents the intellectual triumph of Asia over Europe and America and his visit will probably mark the beginning of a Pan-Asiatic movement, just as the visit of Bertrand Russell helped to foster a more radical mentality among the students."

Rabindranath's initial impressions of the Asiatic country, Japan had evidently disappointed him, for he continued, "the whirlwind of modern civilization, has caught Japan as it has caught the rest of the world, and a stranger like myself cannot help feeling on landing in your country that what I see before me is the temple of the modern age where before the brazen images an immense amount of sacrifice is offered and an interminable round of ritualism is performed". But this is not Japan. Tagore contrasted the very ease with which he had travelled to Japan with the arduous journeys of India's Buddhist monks of old and lamented, "In the days of heroic simplicity it was easier to come near to the real man, but in modern times it is the phantom of the giant time itself, which is everywhere and man is lost beyond recognition". "But I must not lose heart", 36. Loc. Cit., p. 77.
"I must seek and find what is true in this land — true to the soul of the people — what is Japan, what is unique, and not merely (the) mask of the time which is monotonously the same in all latitudes and longitudes". The sentiment seems to have touched his hearers, for the speech was reported to have elicited cheers and acclamations. However, the Tokyo Asahi, "the nation's most influential newspaper, displayed a more negative attitude, toward his message, reporting it under the heading, 'Tagore curses civilization'.

Tagore expressed the fear that 'the dignity and .... reticent power of beauty' in Japan would be overwhelmed by "the huge heterogeneity of the modern age, whose only common bond is usefulness."

Tagore had originally decided to visit Japan for two rather different reasons in looking back on his 'three months' stay, he evidently had mixed feelings about what he had accomplished there. On the one hand, the novelty and beauty of the land and its people must have helped to relieve the painful restlessness which had driven him to leave India. On the other hand, he was disappointed that the lofty ideals he set forth in his three public lectures seemed to have fallen on deaf ears. "Some of the newspapers praised my utterances for their poetical qualities, while adding with a leer that it was the poetry of a defeated nation", he said after leaving Japan. I felt they were right. Japan had been taught in a modern school the lesson

of how to become powerful. The schooling is done and she must enjoy the fruits of her lessons. Eight years later he told an Anglo-American audience in China, that in Japan he "realised for the first time the terrible suffering with which the whole world was afflicted."

Robert Young, the founder and editor of the respected Japan Chronicle and a Kobe resident since 1888, probably wrote the unsigned editorial on 'Tagore and His Critics' in the newspaper's weekly edition. Japan had rejected the poet's message, the editorial said, and it ascribed his failure to a single cause: "Tagore's contempt for mere nationalism is naturally the bitterest pill for the Japanese to swallow, since from the cradle to the grave the importance of being Japanese is firmly impressed upon them. How can they put nationalism behind them? Surely such a doctrine can only be preached by a man whose country has lost its independence — by an inhabitant of a pale decaying land, where all things droop to ruin." Tagore's appeal for a revival of 'spirituality' touched only two Japanese philosophers, Abe and Watsuji, both of whom had been strongly influenced by German idealism and by their Russo-German teacher, Raphael Von Koeber. The Neo-Kantians Kaneko and Kuwaki refused to take his message seriously.

38. Rabindranath Tagore, Nationalism, p. 53.
while the nationalist philosopher Inoue denounced it as dangerous, just as Christian Sugiura had.\footnote{Ibid, p. 111.}

The causes of Tagore's failure must be sought elsewhere. His own poetical manner of presenting his ideas was partly to blame, for he was vague to the point of obscurity. Nor did he seek out the leading intellectuals of the day to talk with them personally; he was content to give three formal lectures and to remain relatively secluded during the rest of his stay, granting occasional interviews to those who sought him out. In his lectures and statements to the press, the lurid contrast he drew between the materialistic civilization of the West and the spiritual civilization of the East was not only unfair to the people of both hemispheres; it conveyed the false impression that he was an arch conservative, an enemy of progress. Had he chosen to recount in some detail his own experiences in India as an opponent of fantastic patriotism and unthinking obedience to degrading customs or had he applied his ideas to the concrete realities of contemporary Japanese life — his words would have had a more convincing and constructive effect.\footnote{Loc. Cit., p. 111.}

The China which Elmhirst visited in 1923, and which Tagore himself toured in 1924, was a land in the throes of a prolonged and complex revolution. The spirit of China and the spirit of India merged, in Tagore's mind into the spirit of Asia. Reminding his first Chinese audience of "the day when India
claimed you as brothers and sent you her love, he called for a renewal of their relationship, which was hidden in the heart of all of us — the people of the East. The path to it may be his path of friendship between India and China, could also bring together our neighbours all over Asia. This Pan-Asian revival would be purely spiritual, he insisted, "Asia is again waiting for such dreamers to come and carry on the work, not of fighting, not of profit making, but of establishing bonds of spiritual relationship".

These were Tagore's parting words to his Chinese listeners: "I have done what was possible — I have made friends, I did not try to understand too much, but to accept you as you were, and now on leaving I shall bear away the memory of this friendship. But I must not delude myself with exaggerated expectations. My evil fate follows me from my own country to this distant land. It has not been all the sunshine of sympathy for me. From the corners of the horizon have come the occasional growlings of angry clouds.

Some of your patriots were afraid that, carrying from India spiritual contagion, I might weaken your vigorous faith in money and materialism. I assure those who feel thus nervous that I am entirely inoffensive, I am powerless to impair their career of progress, to hold them back from rushing to the market place to sell the soul in which they do not believe. I can even assure them that I have not convinced a single sceptic.

that he has a soul, or that moral beauty has greater value than material power. I am certain that they will forgive me when they know the result.

The West, for these young Chinese intellectuals in 1924, was no longer one but two: the old West of Britain, France and the United States, and the new world of Bolshevik Russia, where revolution was said to be solving what seemed to be social, political and military problems similar to China's. Tagore appealed to China's youth to save the spirituality that was specific to the West, and that to save China from a similar fate they were importing materialist doctrines from the new West, the Soviet Union. Their political goal—a strong, united and progressive China—was alike dictated by the age old assumption in Chinese thought—that good government was the indispensable pre-condition of the good life, and by the evils and perils inflicted on their country by corrupt and warring military adventures. Nothing, the Indian poet said could divert these ardent patriots from their pursuit of a new and more viable political order.

That Rabindranath had both sympathy and goodwill for the Chinese people is evident from other factors also. On 30th April, 1927, 'The Oriental Press' which was published from New York focused on an article of Rabindranath called 'China, India and English Imperialism', where he rebuked British policy in China. "Let the English indulge in the free exercise of..."

their arbitrary will within India, but let them not compel us to participate in this colossal crime against humanity in China.\footnote{Rabindranath Tagore, "China, India and English Imperialism", The Oriental Press, Director Basanta Koomar Roy, April 30, 1927, New York.}

The fact, that Europe, even before the last war, was in search of a "new religion and that therefore, Rabindranath's political appearance took place at the right psychological moment, is obvious from many statements made at that time by leading Western Writers, especially those who had been to India and were in touch with Eastern religions. We can distinguish three stages in the spiritual response of the Western public to Rabindranath. The first is based on their expectation of a rejuvenated mysticism from the East; the second identified Rabindranath's poetry and message with the teachings of the Christian Church; the third which is also the most ambiguous, while accepting Rabindranath as a 'mystic' rejects his work because of its pagan, that is un-Christian origin. Rabindranath seemed to be a kind of reincarnated Christ who came back on earth to preach and put into practice the gospels again. As regards the numerous attempts at establishing a World Church, a new international kind of religion, we find that many of these religious thinkers and innovators found themselves in agreement with Rabindranath. There is no doubt, however that his name was frequently used, both in East and in West, for pseudo-religious international movements; on the other hand, however the very fact that Rabindranath never preached any
definite form of religions, made him one of the leading religious reformers of our time, and his name was freely and rightly used wherever attempts at unifying religious beliefs in the West were made.

The spiritual impact of Rabindranath's personality on the West must have been tremendous. The vehemence with which some influential circles both on the Continent and in the Anglo-Saxon countries attacked Rabindranath for his spiritual convictions, can serve as a criterion by which to measure the overwhelming force of this impact. Nietzsche's lyrical ecstasy and Tolstoy's moralising attitude to art and life are a different level of awareness from Rabindranath's joyful acceptance of the universe.47

While Rabindranath was making an earnest effort to convince the people of the West about Eastern philosophy, he was also trying to awaken his countrymen from their lethargy and inactiveness. But he always tried to alarm his countrymen that sheer imitation would not bring any benefit in the long run. "Idle respect is of no worth. We are imitating the English in every way, but this sheer imitation is depriving us from the proper English values".48 In another passage he declared, "there is no doubt that the people who are isolating themselves from their own society for the pleasure of sheer imitation will be ridiculed by the next generation. It is the duty of a friend

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to make the person conscious of his ridiculous attitude. It is easy to imitate the Europeans, but it is difficult to accept the real culture of the Europeans.\(^{49}\)

In this context, we can remember the so-called sophisticated 'Babu culture' which prevailed in Bengal for quite some time. No wonder, this 'Babu culture' was the result of the imitation of the Europeans. Rabindranath highly detested this kind of superficial culture and repeatedly warned his countrymen not to accept all English values. What Tagore preached to his countrymen, was to dismiss this superficial Hinduphobia, and to accept the essential creed of Western philosophy and science with an open mind. "The history of India never did denounce the ultimate superiority of Hinduism in India. The spirit of India wanted to bind all men in an essential chord of unity, she had no narrow intentions. At present, the Hindus, the Muslims and the Christians are all distorting the true image of India. We can never endure, if we always try to claim our superiority. Peaceful co-existence should be our goal and it is our responsibility to retain the ancient glory of India, and this event is nothing unusual. We should never be lethargic and we should always be on the move to achieve new things with newer zeal."\(^{50}\)

Rabindranath implored his countrymen to discard their narrow beliefs and to visit Europe for once. He wanted to present before his countrymen a broader arena, he wanted to give

\(^{49}\) R. R. - XII, Samaj - Nakaler Nakal - 1901, p. 235;
\(^{50}\) R. R. - XII, Samaj - Purba O Paschim, 1908, pp. 262-64.
them a new outlook, so that they would come out of their traditional prejudices. "If we go to Europe with an open mind, we can definitely learn something from the Europeans, we can adore them for some of their qualities. The Europeans too do respect the proper image of India in spite of her decadent conditions. We must not be only fascinated by the apparent glamour of the European civilization, but we must try to find out the inner self of the Occident. There is a common saying that the European civilization is purely materialistic and it has got no philosophical appeal. But we must always remember that philosophy is always serving the purpose of the key to progress. Even if we accept the theory of materialism, we will also have to admit that this vivacity is the mainspring of a civilization. Europe is going through a changing phase, but that does not indicate the lack of deep thinking. The world is always on the move and our saints have pronounced that happiness is the origin of all changes. So, Europe is enriched with a high spirit and we will have to acknowledge that spirit".51 He was, we should remember to a large extent influenced by the utilitarian philosophy of England preached by Bentham, James Mill and John Stuart Mill.

But unfortunately enough in spite of Rabindranath's repeated warnings the Indians were obviously more influenced by the materialism of the West. Even then, the poet did not lose heart and had ultimate faith in India's own culture. "India has developed a materialistic notion from the West and she has learnt

to give first preference to philosophical pursuits. Ironically enough, we were always blaming materialism, but we have accepted the creed also with a ready heart. I want to preach through Visvabharati that India is not yet devoid of her philosophical riches and India can radiate this truth throughout the World.\textsuperscript{52}

But Rabindranath never ceased to appreciate the overwhelming progress of science in the West. In spite of many destructive and materialistic straits, the poet always welcomed the dynamism and the constructive force of science. "It is undoubtedly true that Europe has spread her influence all over the world. It is true that Europe is engaged in laborious activities in her colonial world. But in spite of this image, she has a great contribution to the world — her science. Europe has enriched the entire history of human civilization through her sciences. Europe has on the one hand, isolated the world powers through her destructive activities, on the other hand, she has invited the world to her door through her constructive activities. It is in the latter field that the West has unfolded her truth. We should also think of our own riches and try to contribute something to the world performance.\textsuperscript{53}

Though Rabindranath was a patriot and as a political thinker also, he has left some of his messages to the world, his true image was of a humanist and as a lover of mankind. Hence, it was his earnest endeavour to bring about an union between the East and the West. It was for this attempt of unifying the

\textsuperscript{52} R. R. - XXVII, Visvabharati, 1923, p. 379.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, 1925, pp. 394-95.
East with the West, that his political role has often been misjudged. The Westerners suspected him as a hoax politician, delivering tall solemn speeches. Very often his mission in Europe proved futile because of adverse criticisms, especially in America. In India too, people misjudged his appreciation for Western culture. His image of patriot was often blurred by the criticism that from his early years, he had a terrific pro-Western bias. Unfortunately, the poet could not make his people understand that his cultural appreciation for the West did not stand in any way for the love of his own country. It is true, that some of his writings of 'Raja Praja' and 'Purba O Paschim' stand as high contrasts, but we must not forget the fact that, in order to analyse Rabindranath's thought, we must judge him both as a politician and as a humanist. With a rational and modern outlook, Rabindranath criticised the materialistic and imperialistic attitude of the West, at the same time he appreciated the worth of Western science and dynamism. And he also believed that with the exchange of cultural values, both the East and the West would make their way towards betterment and fulfilment of knowledge and posterity. The essential core of his thought in this context can be found in his famous poem 'Bharat tirtha', where he says he believed in unity in diversity; Europe was lacking in that sense of unity, and he aspired for the day when India would offer her code of unity to the world citizens.  

Section IV: Rabindranath's Call for Self-reliance

From his early years Rabindranath gradually came to believe that sheer idealism and advice would not help the Indians in any way to achieve their independence. Rabindranath took up the very difficult task of inspiring his countrymen to become self-reliant in order to fight their enemy and to shake off their lethargy and inactiveness. In the year 1893, he wrote: "We have gained something out of our conflict with the English. We have got back our power, energy and stamina. We have learnt to judge everything by means of logic. We have renewed our interests in ancient literature of our country. It is a blessing that we have come to criticize ourselves, accuse ourselves. At the first outset, we are clinging to our culture, but gradually we will be able to bring about a synthesis between right and wrong and we will be in our path to progress and education".\(^55\)

It was in the same year, that Rabindranath wrote his famous poem 'Ebar phirao more', where he says: "Come and stand beside the helpless teeming million of your country. Help the lot who are being exploited, humiliated and who are seeking for justice. Look at these dumb million of people, who are only suffering for ages. As long as they are alive, they are bearing all misfortunes without any complaint and without blaming God. They are keen for mere subsistence and the next generation is victimised in the same way. If this distressed lot find that...

even this little share is being looted, they hope for justice, there is no redress and they only die quietly. We will have to spread messages of future hope among these helpless people; we will have to unite them under one banner. We will have to make them believe that this united force will in the long run threaten the ruling class and no one will come in their aid, not even God. The ruling class will have to make way for the down-trodden people". In the same poem, he again says, "Come along, poet and try to heal the poverty, despair and gloom of the distressed lot. They must have food, life, light, free air, health, strength, longevity and courage. Poet, do bring from heaven the blessed light of faith among your people". We should also remember one famous poem of Chaitali - 'Bangamata', where the direct accusation towards mother Bengal is heard.

It was from the late half of the 19th century, that Rabindranath took up the task of spreading the message of unity and self-reliance. The songs like 'Eka sutre bandhiachi sahasrati mon' (1879) or 'Age chal age chal bhal' (1887), show Rabindranath's awareness of the necessity of self-reliance. Rabindranath realized that this self-reliance of the nation would not be possible by any individual effort. So, he emphasised on the motto of 'unity is strength'. He wrote in 1904: "We will not lament and we will not repent, but we will face the challenge in an united spirit. No

58. R. R. - V, Chaitali - Bangamata, 1896, p. 32. "Sat koti santanere he mugcha jana
• Rekhecha Bangali kore manush karoni...".
outer force can really separate us. So long we were united in
an idle way, but now we shall get united with a fresh impetus.
From the very ancient times, the natural as well as the cultural
unity had given Bengal a distinct shape. We should not be afraid
of the proposals of the partition and it will be our task to
establish that old bond on a firmer basis."

The 19th and 20th century intelligentsia remained
satisfied only with tall speeches and sharp writings, but they
would never come forward to any practical aid of the
countrymen. They were rather careful about their unsoiled lords
in performing any work for their own country. In order to boost
them up, Rabindranath wrote in 1906 - "No one can deprive us of
the right of performing welfare for our own country. This is a
God-sent right. Dominion status is always ours. Even if the
English show their extreme annoyance, they cannot take away
this right. If we lose this right or if we misuse our right,
that will be solely our fault. It will be useless to blame others.
No one is there to shoulder the task of welfare. It will be our
duty to fill the vacuum."

In spite of Rabindranath's and others' utmost opposition,
the Partition of Bengal came as a rude shock in the year 1905.
"For a long time History gave us the lesson that we belong to
one country, one nation. Our fortunes had been tied together. We
knew it, but we did not have the inner eye to appreciate its

worth. We were quite unconscious of this bond. Perhaps we would have remained in the whirl of unconsciousness, if Curzon had not given us a thorough shaking through the declaration of the Partition of Bengal. We became dumb with agony and we thought that our united appeal would soften the attitude of our white overlords. But out of extreme despair we saw a light of hope. We determined to boycott British goods and plunged into a massive programme of non-cooperation movement. We were really surprised to discover that we possessed so much strength in our minds. The happiness that we have achieved through this strength has also given us the power to accept all miseries in our ensuing mission. Sheer anger cannot give fruit to such patience. We are accepting everything with this patience, otherwise we could not stand against our powerful enemy with any other quality.61

It was the Partition of Bengal which modified Rabindranath's view to a large extent. He gave the call of building a 'Mahajati' in our land. By 1904-5 (the 'Swadeshi Samaj' address at the Minerva and Curzon theatres, 7 and 8 Sravana, 1311 3.S.), Rabindranath's political ideas had attained the clarity of programme. Turned away from the old style politics, the poet advised the volunteer's to go to the villages and spread the ideas of social reforms through melas and magic lantern lectures. From July 1905, reliance on self-help or Atmasakti seemed to have become for a time the creed.

of the whole of Bengal. The air was full of swadeshischemes
textile mills and improved hand looms, river transport concerns,
match and soap factories, earthen ware and tanneries — the
Prabasi of Kartik 1313 B.S. (1906) gives what appears to be a
fairly constructive list of the first fruits of this upsurge.
Rabindranath had already taken up the scheme of village
reconstruction efforts in his Central Bengal estates and
educational experiments at Santiniketan.62

It was during this period that Rabindranath presented
his countrymen with a bunch of patriotic songs. In one such
song he says: "Do always hope that you would succeed in your
goal. Come forward to help the inactive, the dumb people. Time
is ripe, no longer spend your days in sheer despair. In course
of time you would find many more companions in your path".63
Many other revolutionary songs were composed in the same period
- "Jadi tor dak sune keyu na ashe, tabe ekla chalere" (1905)64,
"Banglar mati banglar jal" (1905).65 The latter song was sung on
the Rakhi Bandhan Day (16th October, 1905). The day was observed
as a protest day against the Partition of Bengal scheme by Lord
Curzon. Rabindranath himself acted as a volunteer in this
programme.

Rabindranath came out with a series of immensely
important essays during 1907-8. We see a decisive break with
the temper of much of his own earlier Swadeshi writings and a
64. Ibid, p. 244.
65. Ibid, p. 255.
return to a basically antitraditional and modernist approach. That the riots contributed significantly to the change is evident from Rabindranath's continual harping on them in practically every one of these essays. Three points stand out in Rabindranath's new approach. First, he triumphantly brought out his protest against the British policy of 'Divide and Rule'. The root of the evil lay in the social tradition of the Hindus which have made them look upon Muslims as socially inferior aliens. Deb Kumar Roy Choudhuri, in a pamphlet written in 1906, had made a similar point, urging the Hindus to modify their traditional customs for the sake of greater ideal of national unity — and Rabindranath now warmly praised this little known essay published from Barishal. Where he went beyond Roy Choudhuri, however was in connecting the communal barrier with the gulf between the predominantly Hindu educated elite and the masses. Secondly, Rabindranath condemned terrorism, because he found that this was a short cut process to success. The alternative, which Rabindranath puts forward is, as before, patient, sustained unostentious constructive working in the villages — organising associations, introducing co-operative techniques in agriculture and handicrafts, instilling a sense of unity and self-reliance among the ryots, so that national consciousness really reach out to the masses. The second major plea thus became a passionate plea for mass contact through constructive work.

In the third place, the riots led Tagore to pose the most general problem of India in a new way. What is demanded now is a wholesome breakdown of walls, a decisive rejection of sectarion barriers and the building of a Mahajati in India on the basis of broad humanism. Antitraditionalism in fact was to pervade virtually all of Tagore's post 1907 writings. The vision of an India united on a modern basis transcending all barriers of caste, religion and race inspired the last pages of Gora (1909); it found magnificent expression in three famous poems of Geetanjali written interestingly enough on three successive days — Bharattirtha (18-20 Asar-1317 B.S., 1910); Diner Sangi (19 Asar-1317 B.S., 1910); Apamanita (20 Asar-1317 B.S., 1910).

Rabindranath was quite unsuited temperamentally to be a political leader; his repeated pleas for constructive work, apart from their obvious lack of appeal to a Bengal in throes of emotionalism and terrorism in 1907-8 also left unanswered the questions as to what methods to follow if the British interfered — as they were bound to do if and when the movement for autonomous development became really formidable. Above all, Rabindranath could not really suggest any concrete social or economic programme with which to rouse the uneducated masses. His constructive rural work amounted to little more than humanitarianism, the appeal to zamindars was surely utopian and the basic problems of land relations remained untouched.
Thus, while aware of the crucial need to bridge the gap between the bhadralok and the masses, Rabindranath could not suggest any real solution to the problem and his growing isolation was only to be expected. And so Gora's realization can find no co-relative in action and we meet instead the noble but rather ineffective figure of Nikhilesh of *Ghare Baire* (1916), the enlightened and progressive zamindar who had tried to promote self-reliance and swadeshi long before these became fashionable, but who now faces isolation, ridicule and hostility due to his opposition to the coercive methods being used by political leaders, like Sandip against his tenants who are too poor to afford swadeshi goods. A believer in the emancipation of woman, he was to watch Nikhilesh's wife Bimala, being swept off her feet by the virile but essentially nihilistic personality of Sandip. The novel ends with Bimala staring out over the deserted fields towards the blood red horizon awaiting the return of her husband who had gone out alone to stop a communal riot. The complexities of the swadeshi age — its grandeur and its pettiness, its triumph and its problems and tragedies have indeed been immortalized in the writings of Rabindranath.\(^67\)

The plea of *Atmasakti* or self-reliance continued to be the slogan of Bengal for yet another decade and Rabindranath's pen also did not stop to make its emphasis on self-reliance. It was in the year 1914, that in some of his poems of *Utsarga*, we still find the strong determination. In one such poem he says: "I am taking the vow on this New Years' Day that I will

henceforth be trained in my national cult. I will give up everything foreign. I may be poor, but I will no longer beg at the door of the foreigners. We may not live in palaces, but we have our own cottages. We may not dwell in towns, our rural tracks are none the less beautiful. Whenever I had gone astray from you, I felt miserable. I feel today that you are my eternal friend, I prefer your hay hut. So long I had been fascinated by the fanciful words of the foreigners and I had tormented you so much. Today, I feel repentant, I will get into the task of serving my own land. I will take up my own religious belief, my own work. I shall remain determined in my future mission.

Again, some of his poems of 'Balaka', written in the same year show his awareness of the social degradation and the strong will to establish the notion of self-reliance brushing aside the pertaining evils. The content of the famous poem 'Sankhya' runs like this: "I will not let our social system fall into decadance. I will try my best to protect it from all evils. So long, I had been engaged in a fruitless task of worship and I was seeking solace in flowers of devotion. I am now ready to serve my country with my youthful spirit and I will face all oppositions in my path to bring about justice and order. Now I feel ashamed that so long I was seeking comfort from you. I will now proceed in my goal with a fearless soul."  

69. R. R. - XII, Balaka - Sankhya, 1914, pp. 6-8.
Rabindranath was also aware of the possibilities of the misinterpretation of the term 'Atmasakti' or misuse of Swaraj. 'Atmasakti' did not mean to him any kind of individual glory or prowess and he was under the firm conviction that this 'Atmasakti' would give strength to the national character of India and henceforth the path of Swaraj would be also accessible. But what the poet wanted was that each and every individual should become aware of his own responsibilities towards nation and individual effort would give shape to co-operative effort.

"We must accept the creed of patriotism in our heart and perform our responsibilities in very many channels. We must do something active for the welfare of the common man. Sheer advices will not solve any of the vital problems of the day. In order to bring about an all round progress in health, knowledge and work, we need each others' co-operation. The Charka and the Khadi only cannot give us the ultimate remedy. We must concentrate our attention in creative work and we should remember the saying of the Gita that work is assessed by its quality and not by its quantity". 70

Rabindranath often had differences of opinion with Gandhiji regarding political ideals of India. We can also get traces of this conflict in a foreigner's diary.

Extract from Romain Rolland's Diary —
21-29 June, 1926 (Villeneuve) — Visited by Rabindranath Tagore.... He speaks of his differences (of thought) with Mahatmaji. He enjoys dwelling on his political errors. He shows that in supporting the Indian Muslims, as he

did in the Khilafat affair, Gandhi was not working, as he hoped, for the unity of India, but for the pride and force of Islam, factors which are at present emerging in violent Hindu-Muslim differences of which the latter, cunningly supported by the British Government, are the instigators.... Tagore also returns to his quarrel with Mahatmaji about Gandhi's ban on the use of foreign cloth as 'impure': for it is by these religious reasons alone — Tagore calls them 'idolatrous' — that the Indian people can be touched; they remain unmoved by reasons of reason and economics.

Let us now see the opinion of Saumyendranath Tagore about the political attitude of Gandhi and Tagore.

Conversation between Romain Rolland and Saumyendranath Tagore - 1933:
S. Tagore — I do not acknowledge the 'non-violence' of Gandhi. I am always surprised that the intellectuals in Europe have not seen the nothingness of it. Gandhi justifies every social violence; the existence of classes, of castes etc. How can anyone who justifies such things be called 'non-violent'? Gandhi has shown himself utterly incapable of tracing violence to its source. If he had agreed that capitalism in itself was violence, that class domination was a form of violence, one would have seen that he had really grasped the problem. When Rabindranath Tagore was in Europe in 1930, I discussed the question of non-violence with him and he told me that he would write an article about it. But upto now he has not done so. His idea of non-violence is as incomplete as that of Gandhi, for they believe in the necessity of class division. They are not with the masses. Tagore sees the problem from the intellectual point of view — Gandhi does not see it at all.

Romain Rolland — what Tagore discerns through his intelligence, Gandhi's instinct that can penetrate the minds of the masses, reveals to him.

S. Tagore — In spite of all his attempts at simplicity, Gandhi has no sincere love for the masses of India. It was no effort for Lenin to be simple. He was not with the masses not only in Russia, but all the world over. But Gandhi has made use of the Indian proletariat to serve the interest of the Indian capitalists.\textsuperscript{72}

Another instance may be cited: Saturday, 25th November, Second Conversation between S. Tagore and Romain Rolland:

S. Tagore — I have come to say good-bye. Before leaving I want to explain to you that our struggle is not concerned with persons — it is a conflict between two different conceptions of the world. Gandhism and Communism are mutually exclusive. We very much wish to have you in active co-operation with us.

Romain Rolland — I do not believe that Gandhism and Communism are necessarily mutually exclusive at the moment. On the contrary, I consider that they could and should unite. The time will come without doubt when Gandhi will have to make his position clear in the fight between labour and capital. Then it will be time to decide.

S. Tagore — That has long passed for us. Those among us who at one time wholeheartedly supported Gandhi have discovered that (even leaving out the new world, the new relationship between human beings for which we work and to which we aspire) it is impossible to gain national independence by his methods.\textsuperscript{73}

Rabindranath, of course did not have that political accumen with which Gandhiji was gifted, but he could also foresee the fact that Indians were in vain clamouring for

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, p. 286.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, p. 290.
Swaraj; but most of the people were not enlightened enough to grasp the full meaning of Swaraj and they would only misuse their liberty in near future. So, what Rabindranath suggested was to chart out a programme for future and to become enough self-reliant to utilise the benefit of Swaraj. "We must give ample proof of our work before we get Swaraj and we have got ample opportunities also to perform our task. If we wait for the Swaraj and then start our work, probably our cherished mission will prove futile. When a person waits for his fountain pen to write down an epic, the epic is never written. An artist, was always fussing about his studio; when the studio was done, his work remained undone. So, the prior necessity is work, and then of course we will get our Swaraj".74

Rabindranath's patriotism was a part of the philosophy of his life. Again, his own philosophy was enriched with the quality of dynamism and harmony. So, it was quite obvious for Rabindranath that he could not tolerate anything stagnant and rigid.75

74. R. R. - XXIV, Rabindranather Rashtriya mat, 1929, pp. 443-44.
Section V : Rabindranath's Plight to Internationalism

Rabindranath's plight to international politics has often been discussed by scholars. It is true that Tagore as a humanist, could not remain immune from the international strife of the century. It can be put in a different way also, that is when Tagore received a cold rebuff at home and could not make his place properly in Indian politics, he turned to international affairs. So, let us find out the proper position of Rabindranath in international politics by analysing his different writings. First, let us see what some of the scholars have opined regarding this aspect of Rabindranath's thought.

"In his intensest moments the poet grieved over the idea of nationalism, which according to him, gnewed at the root of all understanding among the various countries and governments of the world. However much he deplored his own country's backwardness in politics, especially when the entire world was growing up in an atmosphere of watchfulness and self-sufficiency in order to overcome the unforeseen militant forces at work, there was an insistant drive in him towards the abolition of all the creeds and slogans of artificial patriotism in this country. He frequently harped on the one theme of humanity as a whole. His abhorence of acts of violence in the name of patriotism was unbridled and he showered some of his sharpest missiles on those who advocated it as the best stimulus towards the emergence of a country from the
bondage of years. To Rabindranath, humanity was rich and many-
sided. Therefore, he felt hurt when for material gains the
personality of man got mutilated in the Western world. But at
times, he is said to have justified war and induced men to
fight and conquer".76

One of Rabindranath's early writings, 'Europe Pravasir
Patra' (1879) gives us the idea that Rabindranath's acquaintance
with the modern age has accompanied with the thoughts of the
Victorian period. He was quite impressed by the eloquence of
Gladstone's speeches and he already developed quite respectful
ideas about Bright. He began to understand the difference of
attitude between the Conservatives and the Liberals and he quite
appreciated the reasonable attitude of the Liberals. But at the
same time he realised the grievances of the Irish members in
England's House of Commons. "In England's House of Commons the
Irish members are much in a pitiable condition. As soon as they
begin their speeches, they are so much ridiculed by the public,
that they soon lose their temper. This adds to the fun of the
people. In their resentment, they are now taking the revenge.
They oppose practically to all the proposals that are raised
in the House and try to embarass the House for a long time by
their lengthy speeches".77

That Rabindranath was aware of the dark sides of the
modern era were visible in his writing 'Prachya O Pratichya',

76. K. Chandrasekharan, World Peace and Rabindranath Tagore
(1951), pp. 2-5.
77. R. R. I, Europe Pravasir Patra - 4th Patra, 1879,
pp. 551-52.
(1891), where he has expressed his opinion about the European society, family and the place of women in society. He regarded capitalism as purely an European product and that he was perturbed about the problems of the capitalistic society, can be found in his writings like 'Stri Majur' (1891), 'Kamrer Umedar' (1891), 'Catholic Socialism' (1891) and 'Socialism' (1892). In his essay, 'Catholic Socialism', the poet has not been able to give any concrete picture of Socialism, but he is quite critical about the European social system. By the end of the 19th century, we can at least detect certain redeeming facades in Rabindranath's thought — his bitter feeling against barbarous imperialism of Europe and the materialistic interest working behind the purpose; secondly, the need for establishing equal status quo in the East and the want of human values in the modern era and the urge to establish the creed of self-reliance at home.

The second phase of Rabindranath's thought can be traced from the beginning of the 20th century. The article 'Prachya O Paschatya', written in 1901 reflects certain new aspects in Rabindranath's thought. The self-reliance on which Rabindranath was emphasising in this period was a weapon against imperialism, but this attack was based not on any materialistic analysis, rather it was emotional attack. "We all know how the Europeans treat the Asians and the Africans in a cruel manner. They are very often thrown to danger and death without slightest dismay. But the irony of fate is this that these civilized Europeans always assure the world the sanctity in it, it is reflected only 78. Sehanavis, Op. Cit., Gopal Halder ed., pp. 201-5."
in a distorted form. Europe is no longer pretending to glorify the triumph of generosity when selfish interests are so vital. In China and Belgian Congo, the barbarity of the Europeans reached its peak of brutality. The emotional approach of self-reliance stands like this: "We have gradually become self-reliant because we have got faith in our native land and we have got faith in our capabilities. This self-reliance is not the fruit of English supremacy over us. We are in no way to be pitied and to become pessimist. Our effort of reforming the society would become futile if it is not properly channeled for native interests. The policy of appeasement is no way out; so we will have to seek the right path."

From 1901 to 1912 and 1913, Rabindranath was gradually becoming aware of the nature of imperialism and the tragic distortion of nationalism into chauvinism, with the great political and socio-economic changes that were taking place all over the world and he was trying to confront India with this resurgent era. Rabindranath came to believe that in order to bring about a thorough reshuffling in a country, a revolution or intellectual resurrection was needed. He studied the history of the world and was fascinated to find how the revolutions in France, England or in America had changed their political set up completely. He wrote in 1908: "It is difficult to judge the lesson of History in the proper channel. The image of the history of all the countries in the world is always precipitated..."
by a great event like a revolution or an insurrection. The age long grievances of the people take the shape of a revolution in a country. If this revolution is accompanied by an intellectual resurrection, the signs of future possibilities become distinct. The future fate of a country is determined by this intellectual wealth, rather than by a sudden political outburst. But out of the ashes of destruction, construction should have its way. Only revolution and destruction cannot bring any permanent benefit to a country.

The third phase of Rabindranath's international thought can be traced from the year 1914, when the First World War broke out. In the same year the article 'Laraiyer Mool' which was published in Sabujpatra indicated a new beginning in Rabindranath's thought. In order to relate the poet's thought, we should have a brief sketch of the history of the world before us. At this time, the National Movement in India took a definite turn. This was the peak hour of Gandhi's rise to power. But his rise to power was not so smooth and spontaneous affair. The circumstances rather paved his path to power. Let us see what History tells us about his rise.

With Tilak's help, Annie Besant introduced the agitational style into national politics. This style had been foreshadowed by Tilak in Maharashtra in the 1890s and by the Punjab Extremists, and the opponents of Partition in Bengal in the first decade of the 20th century, but it was only in the period

1915-18 that agitation was aroused throughout India over a continuous period of years and was adopted by the major national organization as a standard technique. It was this style, transmitted by Gandhi, which was to characterize much of Congress' political activity during the following 30 years. The Home Rule Agitation imparted a sense of impatience to the National Movement as a whole, and the effect of this was seen in 1920, when Motilal Nehru and others prevailed upon Gandhi to put forward the demand for Swaraj before they would support his non-cooperation campaign.62

The demand for Home Rule and the challenge it offered to British rule were presented not only to Western-educated Indian, but also to massgroups. The Leagues never claimed to have more than 60,000 members between them and so were small compared with what came later under Gandhi.

The demand for Home Rule was simple and forceful, but it had the great disadvantage of being impossible to satisfy in the short run. By initially demanding the maximum, Annie Besant had limited her room for manoeuvre; any attempt to change her strategy in relation to the British exposed her to the change of apostasy by her followers. By fostering agitation to the point where passive resistance was demanded and then repudiating this programme, she and Tilak firmly succeeded in frustrating their followers and in this way provided much of need of steam world was to propel Gandhi's satyagraha campaign.

The Khilafat movement also helped to provide Gandhi with widespread support, but this support was even more 'patchy', than that obtained as a result of the Home Rule movement, and the Khilafat Movement had less in the way of pre-existing Khilafat Movement's importance to Gandhi, at this time should not, in fact be overstressed it was to become more important in the following year — but it has usually suffered from the opposite tendency, of being too summarily treated in relation to the Rowlatt Campaign. It was not insignificant that in the course of the Rowlatt Satyagraha, Swami Shraddhananda was called to the Jama Masjid in Delhi to address the congregation or that like Gandhi and Mrs. Naidu were called in to the Sonepur Mosque in Bombay, Byomkesh Chakravarty to the Nakhoda Mosque in Calcutta and other Hindus to mosques in the Punjab and in Sind. (Swami Shraddhanand, Inside Congress — Bombay Phoenix - 1946, pp. 68-70; Bombay Police 1919, Paras 555(a)(S); Home Poll Dep. July 1919-2046, p. 9). The Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919 was the first occasion on which Gandhi led an all India campaign. A group of armed revolutionaries were at this time, experimenting with the idea of "our enemy's enemy is our friend", and on that basis they were trying to develop contacts with Germany and Japan. The heroic attempt of Jatindranath Mukherjee and his four associates to collect German arms from the ship called 'Meverick' in 1915.

in Orissa, leading to their death at the hands of the English
on the Buri Balam banks, or the zealous endeavour of Rashbehari
Bose to establish contacts with Japan, the Komagata Maru
firing etc. prove that these armed revolutionaries were doing
some concrete work in India. And in the Western countries,
while there was that clamour triumph and lust, a group of
intellectuals like Bertrand Russell or E.D. Morel or Romain
Rolland were either imprisoned or banished for preaching their
gospels of peace. A number of socialists like Lenin or Rose
Luxemburg suggested that the only solution of these complexities
would be a total revolution. Amidst this turmoil and tension,
a Bengali poet pointed out that the moot reason of this
international crises lay in the European social system. At the
same time, he could not support the idleness of India in
contrast to the dynamic spirit of the West. So, he invited the
spirit of dynamism in his poems of 'Balaka' (1916) like
'Sankhya' or 'Sabujer Abhijan' and he also wrote logical
essays like 'Bibechana O Abibechana' in this period. The poet's
struggle was for a spiritual rebirth. But he was very much
aware of the mission of this spiritual rebirth. "Neither the
colourless vagueness of cosmopolitanism, nor the fierce self-
'idolatry of nation worship, is the goal of human history."85

Unfortunately, the poet was too optimistic. He believed
in his heart that at least at the end of the conflagration, the
nations would take a turn towards spiritual rebirth. "The
world is today craving for peace after the blood and tears of

the First World War. But peace cannot prevail in such a world where the unending greed of the stronger power always triumphs over the weaker power. Unfortunately, the weaker powers possess all the alluring things with them, so they always become the victims of the stronger powers. Anatole France has written about Chinese War... 'Having in this fashion covered themselves with military glory, the five powers signed one of the innumerable treaties by which they generate the integrity of the very China, whose provinces they divide among themselves'.

The poet was somewhat disillusioned by the nature of international politics in the 1920s. Particularly, the imperialistic designs of an Asiatic country like Japan over China and Russia gave him a rude shock. If we peep into the pages of history, we will find that it was in this period, that a series of Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars were fought over the overlordship of Korea and Manchuria. His visit to Italy also did not give him a pleasant experience. In 1928, through his 'Yatri' was reflected the nature of the crude and aimless social pattern of Fascim introduced by Mussolini.

For a long time Rabindranath did not have any clear cut idea about the pattern of revolution in Russia and its social system. He wrote in 1918: "We know very little of the history of the present revolution in Russia, and with the scanty materials in our hands we cannot be certain if she, in her tribulations, is giving expression to man's indomitable soul."

against prosperity built upon moral nihilism. All that we can say is that the time to judge has not yet come especially as Real Politik is in such a sorry plight itself. No doubt if modern Russia did try to adjust herself to the orthodox tradition of Nation Worship, she would be in a more comfortable situation today, but this tremendousness of her struggle and hopefulness of her tangles do not, in themselves prove that she has gone astray. It is not unlikely that, as a nation, she will fail; but if she fails with the flag of true ideals in her hands, then her failure will fade, like the morning star, only to usher in the sunrise of the newage.  

From the 1930s, there opened a new arena before Rabindranath. Though the poet had much inhibitions, but Socialism in the beginning, that is during the 'Chinna pattr' era, the poet all along had a strong desire to witness the socialistic pattern of society and to gain some experiences. "At last I landed up in Russia and I was totally suprised to observe the Russian mentality. The Russians have been able to set up a completely different social status very unlike the other nations of the world. For a very long time, a class of people are always being exploited in the society. They are deprived of all facilities of human living. Very often, I thought of them, but I could not find out any solution of this inequality. I thought probably there was no way out and these down-trodden people should try their best to acquire their due rights. But it never occured.

87. Modern Review, At the Cross Roads, July, 1918, pp. 3-4.
to me that no social status can be based on mercy. England is
being fed by Indian money and it is expected that India would
give enough supply for England's nourishment eternally. In
return England can show her mercy by giving India scanty
education and culture. But 100 years have passed, we have neither
got education nor health nor wealth. But Russia has taken up the
programme of doing away with inequality. Education is the keynote
of progress and Russia is spreading that education among ignorant
mass. The education is not only quantitative, but qualitative in
nature. This education is filtered among men with the idea that
no one would remain idle or unemployed in future. Education is
given to people of Bylo-Russia, Central Asia also. Here the
opera shows are mostly attended by the artists and peasants. No
one is feeling humiliated, everyone has the same status. What
we wanted to do in Sriniketan, is being done in Russia in a large
scale. If our workers could come and observe everything here,
it would have been really worthwhile. My American friend Harry
Timbers is holding discussions here about health - it is really
so useful a discussion. I always compare my poor India with
Russia. Where does my poor India stand? She cuts a very sorry
image by the side of Russia."

Rabindranath also saw how political motives were
fulfilled by different nations in the name of religion. "History
tells us that whenever a country had gone through a revolutionary
change, it was always accompanied by religious dissention. In

France, Soviet Russia, Spain and Mexico, we have seen the same instances. The Young Turks did not uproot their religion, but tried to reform it. The fact is, once the Prophets of all religions tried to unite men in the name of God, with the passage of time, a group of men would distort religion for the fulfilment of their selfish interests. Men have been exploited and even killed in the name of religion. The countries, which have been able to come out of their religious spell, have really started a successful march towards posterity.  

In his articles of 'Parasye' in 1932 (R.R.-XXII), he expressed his regretful realization that the Asiatic countries had also lost their faith in religion. In the same year, in his poem 'Manavputra', he ridiculed the European attitude. "Many hundred years have passed since Christ has died. He was born to liberate mankind from age-long suffering. He wanted to bring an end to the severe dissection in the society. Today the world is witnessing the same kind of dissection probably in a more crude form. But the greatest tragedy is every cruel act is done in the name of Christ. A fresh arrangement to kill Christ is being made in the modern science laboratory. Christ's soul is agonised to see this gross injustice in the world. The rebirth of Christ is needed at this hour of crisis". Again, he directed his finger towards Japan who was carrying on barbarous onslaughts in Asia. "It is an irony of fate that the Japanese, in order to have their victory in the consequent wars against China and other European powers, paid their  

religious tribute to Lord Buddha. It is surprising to watch the audacity of the Japanese, who had approached the Buddha temple in order to bring about a blood bath in the world.\footnote{R. R. - XXIV, Navajatak - Buddhabhakti, 1938, pp. 11-12.}

It was in the 1930s that Rabindranath could no longer remain pensive in his world of paintings and poems. His mind became restive at the sight of the repeated barbarities all over the world. He expressed his violent distrust against European imperialism in the pages of 'Kalantar', in his poem 'Africa' in 'Patraput' in 1936. The Spanish Civil War started at the same time under General Franco. The Statesman published one of Tagore's speeches on 3rd March, 1937: "In this hour of the supreme trial and suffering of the Spanish people, I appeal to the conscience of humanity. Help the peoples' Front in Spain, help the Government of the people, cry in a million voices, halt to reaction, come in your millions to the aid of democracy, to the success of civilization and culture!" He sent his message to the Individual Liberty Conference in London: "When rivalry for colonial exploitation becomes still more acute, the British citizens will find it necessary to arm their government at home with extraordinary powers to defend their possessions abroad. Then they will suddenly wake up to find that they have forfeited their own liberty and drifted into fascist grip.\footnote{Amrita Bazar Patrika, October 17, 1937.}

In 1938, after the violation of the Munich Pact, when
Hitler grabbed Czechoslovakia, Rabindranath wrote to Professor Lazani: "It is a tragic revelation that the destiny of all these principles of humanity for which the people of the West turned martyrs for three centuries, rests in the hands of cowardly guardians who are selling it to save their own skins. It turns me cynical to see the democratic peoples betraying their kind, when the others stand by each other".\textsuperscript{3}

In the same year was published the two letters to Japanese poet Noguchi, where he vehemently attacked the barbarous attitude of Japan in China. When Noguchi appealed to Rabindranath, to ask China to disarm herself, Rabindranath wrote openly:...... "how can you expect me to appeal to Chiang-Ki-Shekh to give up resisting until the aggressors have first given up their aggression?"\textsuperscript{4}

The poet was becoming more and more cynical about the attitudes of the nations at the fag end of his life. He came to realize that his life long effort to preach the gospel of peace and fraternity have resulted in vain. In one of his poems of 'Senjuti', we hear the voice of a tired messenger of peace.

"The whole world is today full of the cries of those men who can be turned as brutes. We can visualise everything, understand everything, but still we cannot achieve much except smiling knowingly. Before I depart, I will not tell the world that human history cannot be composed based on primitive activities of a group of individuals. This untrue drama must come to an

\textsuperscript{3} Hindustan Standard, November 10, 1938.
It was before the Second World War that he wrote his poem "Naqinira Charidike Pheliche Bisakta Niswas", (5th December, 1937)\(^{104}\) — he is comparing the lust of the imperialistic powers with the poisonous breathing of snakes. This political awareness, this international outlook was, of course, not the fruit of an escapist attitude towards politics. It is true, that sometimes both at home and in foreign lands, his messages of peace either proved fruitless or gave cause to irritation to the terrorists or the revolutionaries who naturally chose the path of violence. The grievances of many people were that Rabindranath could not suggest any concrete path in the days of distress. But we must not forget the fact that Rabindranath was essentially a poet and a humanist. He felt for the distressed mankind, but he could not give the leadership to a nation, which men like Gandhi, Hitler or Lenin could do in their respective ways. Though deeply involved in politics, Rabindranath always stood as an isolated figure in the political field. But the poet all along aspired for a better future and his message was to brush aside all worries and obstacles and to become self-reliant in order to overcome the crisis of civilization. In one of his famous songs, he says that it will be a great humiliation for us, if we cannot overcome shyness; we must not hesitate in our days of determination. We must overcome fear and come forward to protect the weak people and punish the wrong-doers and we should never regard ourselves as meek. Religion is always on our side, so we can plunge in all difficult tasks without any inhibition.\(^{105}\) This was the message of idealism, but not of escapism or more frustration and conservatism.

\(^{105}\) Gitavitan, Op. Cit., p. 248, "Sankocher hivbhalata nijera apaman; Sankater kalpanate hovo na mriyaman".