CHAPTER TWO

SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF
RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND WOLE SOYINKA
Literature has always existed beyond the confines of one particular country which has been authenticated with the emergence of comparative studies of literature. In the light of Max Mueller’s assertion, “All higher knowledge is gained by comparison and rests on comparison” (Introduction to the Science of Religion, 12), the re-invention of Comparative Literature recently to address “ideological issues emanating from the inequality of power relations across cultures and society” (E.V. Ramakrishnan, 3), forms the basis of the present study. Recognizing the immense potential of diverse national literatures of the world, the present chapter focuses on socio-political milieu of India and Nigeria during the times of Rabindranath Tagore’s and Wole Soyinka’s and how it shaped and affected their literary sensibilities.

Mathew Arnold’s assertion, “Every critic should try and possess one great literature at least besides his own and more the unlike his own, the better” (Comparative Literature, 22) highlights the vast canvas of comparative studies. In a lecture at Oxford, in 1857, Arnold said:

Everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration. No single event, no single literature is adequately comprehended except in relation to other events, to other literatures.

(Comparative Literature, 1)

These words of Mathew Arnold pioneered the comparative criticism in England. Arnold’s emphasis on the significance of comparative approach to literary works has been carried further since nineteenth century as the scope of comparative literature encompasses the totality of human experience into its embrace by vanishing narrow national and international boundaries. The universality of human relationships which emerges out of this study makes it highly relevant. Rabindranath Tagore’s most popular epithet Vishvasahita for comparative literature not only highlights his universal outlook but also provides an unparalleled objective of comparative literature. Emphasizing universalism, Tagore said:
From narrow provincialism we must free ourselves, we must strive to see the works of each author as a whole that whole as a part of man’s universal creativity, and that universal spirit in its manifestation through world literature.

*(Comparative Literature in India, 2)*

Das Gupta remarkably brings out Tagore’s mystical and spiritual sensibilities when he says:

Tagore feels that what one needs to find out from World Literature is the timeless form in which humankind wishes to represent itself through all its diversity, the way in which it tries to express its joy and stamp it on eternity. One has to enter World Literature to see how it pleases man to represent himself - as a suffering being, as a seeker after happiness or as an ascetic...Literature therefore is not just an artifice but a world that is being constantly shaped. Its substance belongs to no individual.

*(Interdisciplinary Alternatives, 131)*

Ostensibly, the interdisciplinary and the patterns of connection in literature across both time and space makes comparative literature a tool for studying worldwide cultural institutions- artistic, aesthetic, literary, linguistic and social. Commenting on affinities and divergences of comparative literature, Adnan M. Wazzan aptly remarks:

Comparative Literature aims at investing parallelism and contemporaneousness between international literatures as seen in various literary forms and literary schools in terms of affinities and divergences.
It also traces the aspects of the effect and impact of literature exercised on one or several literatures’ or the influence of one writer on one or a group of authors.

*(Essays in Comparative Literature, 25)*

Gayatri Spivak refers to comparative literature by the name of “a new comparative literature” in response to the “rising tides of multiculturalism and cultural studies” (Indranath Choudhari, 110). Broadening the scope of comparative literature she remarks:

Comparative literature should be world embracing at the beginning ...continue to believe that the politics of the production of knowledge in area studies (and also anthropology and the other “human sciences”) can be touched by a new Comparative Literature, whose hallmark remains a care for language and idiom.

*(Death of a Discipline, 4-5)*

In *Death of a Discipline*, Spivak asserts her progressive shift from the ‘global’ to the ‘planetary’ that opens up the new vision of ‘alterity’. She lays emphasis on ‘planetary’ which is best imagined from “the precapitalist cultures of the planet” (101) as she avers:

If we imagine ourselves planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us. It is not our dialectal negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away. And thus to think of it is already to transgress, for in spite of our forays into what we
metaphorize, differently, as outer and inner space, what is above and beyond our own reach is not continuous with us as it is not, indeed, specifically discontinuous. We must persistently educate ourselves into this peculiar mindset.

(Death of a Discipline, 73)

Indranath Choudhari, a renowned Indian scholar sees the relevance and significance of comparative perspective in literary studies as very vast and progressive. He asserts, “CL should include the open-ended possibility of studying all literatures, with linguistic rigour and historical savvy. More than that the effort was to find out a universal oneness in the study of literatures of the world” (Studies in Comparative Literature, 111). The extended scope of comparative literature liberates us from “cultural prison and helps us to develop a bigger perspective where more than judgement understanding through dialogue has become the axiom of comparative literary studies” (Indranath Choudhuri, 144). In the article The New Indian Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies, Anand B. Patil says how comparative perspective acts as a bridge between history and modern knowledge and contributes to one of the objectives of globalization:

Comparative perspective gives good opportunity for evaluating how history can contribute to modern knowledge. Inclusiveness and plurality are the watchwords of globalization. (192)

Taking a cue from above mentioned theorists and scholars of comparative studies, the present comparative study follows the parameters given by Francois Jost wherein he defines comparative literature as an “Organic Weltliterature” which is “an articulated account, historical and critical, of the literary phenomenon considered as a whole” (Introduction to Comparative Literature, 21). In the light of Jost’s assertion, the study does not aim at juxtaposing a vast corpus of works of Tagore and Soyinka but at coordinating and seeing the concatenation of significant literary events, and assigning
Rabindranath Tagore and Wole Soyinka are known as India’s and Nigeria’s national consciences respectively who always gave all through their life, through their paradisiacal writings that envisioned a world of love, equality, honesty, bravery and unity of all mankind. The two have more things in common than the above-mentioned similarities of coincidental nature. Tagore and Soyinka are writers who are deeply rooted in their language and culture. However, they are privileged to enlarge and broaden their canvas with more than just an exposure to the West and Western literature. They are not like the modern breed of Indian and Nigerian writers settled in the West who are just writing the literature of Exile while they don’t know about the ground realities of their respective countries. Though Tagore visited different Western countries and Soyinka spent a good part of his life in US and UK but both had their feet firmly grounded in their native soil. Nothing can better describe their love for their land than Wordsworth’s lines from *The Skylark*: “Type of the wise who soar but never roam; True to the kindered points of heaven and home”. They both are represented as true litterateurs who wanted only positive change and their writing is a plea for that change.

Undoubtedly, both Tagore and Soyinka are humanists-writers par excellence. Both wrote extensively for the amelioration of the suffering humanity. They projected in their works the foibles and weaknesses of the societies of their times into different countries. Both are known as the national heroes and also as the great writers of their countries, India and Nigeria. Yet, it may be understood clearly that there is a magnitude of contrast in their philosophies of life and methods of expression in their writings.

Tagore deeply believed in the philosophy of intuition and expression. To him, the whole creative process appears as a sort of spiritual exercise. He believes that in a work of art, it is the wholeness which delights, not any dominance of one element against the others. The wholeness includes both good and evil: “Good and evil whatever comes, accept reality with easy grace” (*Smaran*, 13). He further illustrates that in an art-experience and in the writing of a poem, a story, a novel or a play, one should transcend
all sense of limit and separateness; he believes that a work of art should appear as a pointer to the higher metaphysical or spiritual reality. Writing about the influence of Tagore on different fields of creative art, philosophy and political thought, Rajanikanta Das makes the following observation:

Dr. Tagore is a great creative genius. His contributions to religious philosophical and political thought, poetry, music, painting, fiction, the drama, the historic art, and essay, form a great treasure to the world’s literature and art.

(The Golden Book of Tagore, 1)

On the other hand, Soyinka, thus not seem to have believed in any theory of art expression or the concept of intuition expression or divinity as expression as we see in the case of Tagore. Soyinka is a socialist realist. He is a man of the earth. He saw oppression and situation of the oppressed by the political and economic oppressors. He is deeply rooted in the philosophy of Karl Marx’s ideology.

It is desirable that we situate Rabindranath Tagore and Wole Soyinka in their socio-political culture in comparative manner to explore interconnectivities between the two writers of India and Nigeria in the sense of their cultural background and analyze the linkage between their backgrounds and their works. The present comparative study which is both epistemological and political is made in an ideal world and at the same time deconstructs such an idealist ethic in the name of lived reality and its constitutive imbalances. Prior to the comparative endeavour, we have the English subject, the French subject, the German subject, the Indian subject, and so on. Each subject conceives of itself within its own interior plenitude, its own sense of an I-We balance and equilibrium. The challenge for “comparative literature” is the task of deconstructing the apparatus of recognition (Radhakrishnan, 458-460). A literary writer sets his character in motion within an imaginative framework of situation in order to represent the aspirations, attitudes, norms, behavioural patterns and values within the social order he is dealing with. But at the same time, his portrayal is also coloured by his own view-
point which must be taken into account. The most generalized concepts about human nature found in literature prove on close inspection to be related to social and political change. Let us start with social and political changes that happened in India and Nigeria, which affected Tagore’s and Soyinka’s literary sensibilities.

I

2.1. a Socio-Political Scenario of Bengal and its influence on Tagore:

Rabindranath Tagore was one of the greatest creative genius of the Indian mind who had played a vital role in the history of Indian Renaissance in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Commenting on Tagore’s contribution, Dr. Radhakrishnan has rightly said:

He was one of those rare men about whom it may be said... He was one of the few representatives of the universal man to whom the future of the world belongs.

(The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore, xii)

Two historical events marked his works: the freedom struggle and the great World Wars, his entire creativity is permeated with the idea of the national liberation, of the struggle for the spiritual and political liberation from the yoke of colonialism and feudal survivals which in later years gave away before the ‘crisis in Western civilization’ created by the two great World Wars. Thus, Tagore was in search of a new vision of man and a new civilization. The whole of Tagore’s creativity was subordinated to one idea, the idea of the struggle of the oppressed people, and in the first place the people of India, against all form of slavery and in the name of freedom and Independence. Moreover, he championed the cause of woman’s emancipation, protested against social inequalities and injustice, exploitation of man by man, nation by nation. His oeuvre reflects his dream of a much better societal order in a new world.
Tagore was a great humanist and Universalist who endeavoured throughout his life to discover sublimity of man in his simplicity. Personally, he longed to be remembered as a man among all men. In one of his poems he expressed his desire that ‘he wanted to be identified as man of all’. In the same vein, Kh. Kunjo Singh lays emphasis on Tagore’s humanism which stirs the conscience of the world:

He believed in one world and in the eternal vision of man evolving into an All-man, *Vishva-Manava*...Tagore’s philosophy of life is based on his emphasis on the development of the human personality and in his deep set conviction there is no inherent contradiction between the claims of the so-called opposites—the flesh and the spirit, the human and the divine, love of life and love of God, joy in beauty and pursuit of truth, social obligation and individual rights, respect for tradition and the freedom to experiment, love of one’s people and faith in the unity of mankind.

*(Humanism and Nationalism, 144)*

In a very broader sense, Tagore’s humanism is universal. The humanism of Tagore conveys us the belief that feeling anything as human-in the human way is a source of joy. It is the human mind that reveals the meaning and significance of things. He further says:

It is almost a truism to say that the world is what we perceive it to be. We imagine that our mind is a mirror, that it is more or less accurately reflecting what is happening outside us.

*(Personality, 47)*
Tagore’s humanistic outlook is very much influenced and moulded by *Upanishads*. All his philosophical discourses like *Santinikitan*, *Sadhana*, *The Religion of Man*, and *Personality* are deeply influenced by *Upanishads* teachings. Though he was influenced by *Upanishads* but his humanistic approach is mostly his own. In *Upanishad* ‘Brahma’ is described as an attributeless- *nirguna*. At the same time it is also said, ‘everything is Brahma’ but Tagore accepted only the positive side of the *Upanishads* teaching. In the same vein, Tagore avers:

Some modern philosophers of Europe...maintain that the *Brahma* of India is a mere abstraction, a negation of all that is in the world...but this is certainly not in accord with the pervading spirit of the Indian mind. Instead, it is the practice of realising and affirming the presence of the infinite in all things which have been its constant inspiration.

*(Sadhana, 14)*

Thus, we can say that Tagore’s God is not abstract from the world. God is both ‘immanent and transcendent’. As God is present everywhere so, “their object of worship is present everywhere. It is the one truth that makes all realities true” *(Sadhana, 14)*. Tagore was also influenced by Saint Poet Kabir. He was also a humanist. He was against sectarianism, asceticism and blind faith like Tagore. Thus Kabir’s idea of humanity, love and sympathy had profound influences on Tagore which helped him in shaping his aesthetic values and literary sensibilities. A noted Indian critic, Prabhakar Kr. Mukerjee has aptly commented on the *Upanishadic* philosophy of Tagore:

Nothing has influenced him more, both consciously and as an undercurrent of his thought than the *Upanishad*...I maintain that Rabindranath’s entire life is only an evolution and development of his *Upanishadic* education.

*(Rabindranath Tagore, Literary Concepts, 9)*
Tagore was very much impressed by Dr. Radhakrishnan who gained worldwide recognition and reputation in the field of philosophy and religion. Like Tagore, Radhakrishnan also tried for the synthesis of the East and the West and for the re-orientation of the basic Hindu outlook. But the difference lies in the fact that where Radhakrishnan was theoretical, Tagore was practical. His ideals got concrete shape in his Santinikitan. Tagore was not too much interested in metaphysical or ontological discussion rather he believed in the constructive works for the removal of deep rooted social evils. His was the aim to revive ancient Indian religion and culture. His philosophy is not speculative rather it is the philosophy of a suffering man. Dr. Radhakrishnan has rightly remarked that his philosophy is, “a genuine manifestation of the Indian spirit” (*The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, V). In thought and nature, he was native and up to the end of his life he tried his best for the re-construction of social and national life.

Tagore lived in the period when three revolutionary movements in Bengal were germinating. The first was the great socio-religious movement of the Brahmo Samaj, started by Ram-Mohan Roy (1772-1833), rightly regarded as the first leader of modern India, in the early years of the nineteenth century which sought to break through the shackles of established beliefs and rigid social customs of the Indian society of the time. The Brahmo movement accepted universal theism and brotherhood of all men, completely rejected all idols and icons, the infallibility of the Vedas and caste differences; and proclaimed the equality of rights of men and women and of all castes, race and nations of the world. Deeply concerned about the position and treatment of women in Hindu society, especially the monstrous custom of the *Sati*, he was largely responsible for outlawing this inhuman practice through a legislation brought by William Bentinck in 1829. Tagore’s observation on Raja Rammohan Roy highlights Roy’s contribution in bringing new lease of life in society:

Rammohan Roy inaugurated the modern age in India.

He was born at a time when our country, having lost its links with the inmost truths of its being, struggled under a crushing load of unreason, in abject slavery to circumstance. In social usage, in politics, in the
realm of religion and art, we had entered the zone of uncreative habit, of decadent tradition, and ceased to exercise our humanity. In this dark gloom of India’s degeneration Rammohan rose up, a luminous star in the firmament of India’s history, with prophetic purity of vision, and unconquerable heroism of soul.

(English Writings, 667)

Raja Rammohan Roy was very rationalistic in his approach. To him, some basic reforms in Hinduism were the need of the hour, and thus he founded, in 1829, a religious society called the Brahma Sabha-later known as the Brahma Samaj. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, a great scholar and reformer, proved to be a worthy successor of Roy. Besides the Sati, there were other issues concerning women which sorely needed keen attention like widow remarriage, female education and the prevalence of child marriage and polygamy. Under Vidyasagar’s inspirational supervision, the first Hindu Widow Remarriage Act passed in 1856. It is for these and other valuable services that Raja Roy and Vidyasagar are called as the makers of modern India.

The next national movement, which emerged in the country after Brahmo Samaj was the Arya Samaj movement founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati. Like Brahmo movement, it was also a socio-political movement working within the frame work of Hinduism. They fought against untouchability and the rigidities of the hereditary caste system. The Ramakrishna mission, started in Bengal in 1897 under the leadership of Swami Vivekananda, was another reformist movement of great importance. The social vision of Swami helped him to understand almost all the major problems of Indian society. It was his firm belief that the root cause of the backwardness of the Indian masses was their ignorance. He considered education the only remedy for improving the condition of the people. According to him, any sound scheme of national education for India could ill-afford to ignore the masses and women of India. He rightly remarks:

Ignorance is the mother of all the evils and all the misery we see. Let men and women have light, let
them be pure and spiritually strong and educated,
then alone will misery cease in the world, not before.

(Quotes of Swami Vivekananda, 21)

These reforms were very important, as the social injustice and societal ills were deep-rooted. It was this political and social backdrop that Rabindranath Tagore opened his eyes and enlightened the world through his powerful writings. Tagore was a powerful public speaker and greatest actor of his time in India. Tagore had started writing social and political articles at an early age not only on Indian but international affairs. In Indian politics, he took a very wide view and considered it as an integral part of social activities and progress. His collection of essays like *The Religion of Man* and *Sadhana* (originally a series of lectures at Harvard) are thoughtful and provocative additions to the huge religious and philosophical literature of India. *Sadhana* and *The Religion of Man* contain the *Upanisadic* ideals.

The God of *Gitanjali* is the *Upanisadic* God who has a sword in one hand and garland in the other where power and punishment are united in love. His entire life is the development and evaluation of *Upanisadic* ideals. One infinite God is *Satyam Sivam Advaitam*. One must have eyes to see and heart to feel. Thus Tagore wanted to give a new colour to the ancient Indian wisdom. According to Tagore, there is only one religion and that is religion of man. This religion of man is the religion of service. Service to man is the service to God. Religion, in true sense, is that force which “inspires in us the spirit of renunciation which is the spirit of humanity” (Tagore, 322). The essays in *Towards Universal Man* and *Nationalism in India* show him as a social and political theorist.

Tagore was always attacking social injustice of his own country and pointing out that true freedom cannot be won without removing such injustice. He provoked that vigorous attempts should be made to awaken the consciousness of the Indian masses by spreading education and to create self-reliance by initiating welfare work by own efforts. Nehru in his tribute to Tagore brings out the greatness of this son of India:
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’.

(The Golden Book of Tagore, 183)

The greatness of Tagore lies in the fact that he was able to feel the pulse of the nation and embodied national aspiration as Nehru pointed out:

The rising middle classes were politically inclined and were not so much in search of a religion, but they wanted some cultural roots and cling on to, something that gave them assurance of their own worth, something that would reduce the sense of frustration and humiliation that foreign conquest and rules had produced. In every country with a growing nationalism there is this search apart from religion, this tendency to go to the past.

(Discovery of India, 36)

The objective conditions of India at that time reflected two historical concrete forms of suppression and exploitation in the life of Indian people- colonial oppression and feudalism. Continuous rule of a foreign government, the lack of free relations with the progressive forces of the world, religious and communal superstitions, all these were reflected in the social life of the country. One of the most glaring examples of social injustice of this period is cruelty towards women. The new methods of imperialistic exploitation were conducive to the development of capitalism amidst colonial and feudal oppression was extremely slow.
By the 18th century, much of India was brought under English subjugation. The history of Bengal became integrated with that of the whole country. Calcutta, being the headquarter of British power, became the first modern Indian metropolis. Most of the modern institutions of government like pattern of civil services, judiciary, local self-government and administration were originated in Bengal and later on, were extended to all over the country. Some social reforms of the modern system of education are also said to have been initiated in Bengal. The young Bengal, as they were known, fearlessly criticised the acts of ‘oppression and extortion carried out by the local government’ and tried to inculcate a sense of national dignity and self-respect among the Indians. By no means a mean achievement, it steadily laid the foundation of nationalist awakening in latter part of the 19th century.

With the escalation of capitalism in Bengal national awakening and conscious striving for a struggle against colonial oppression started rising. During this period, when feudal remnants were still deeply entrenched and colonial exploitation persisting, there could not be any question of overcoming bourgeois relations. For an all-round development of the country, the fast development of bourgeois relations was needed. In comparison to liberals, the democratic section of the intelligentsia more systematically struggled against feudal backwardness and was determined in their insistence on the development of bourgeois relationships. Soviet Indologist L.R. Gordon-Polonskaya points out:

On the whole the Indian intelligentsia maintained an enlightened approach to most important problems of their time...their activities were conducive to awakening the national consciousness, the intelligentsia undermined the very basis of the colonial regime and feudalism, prepared premises for conscious and organised struggle for national freedom and social progress.

(Ideological Problem of Modern India, 150)
The development of social processes in India and Nigeria at the end of the century underlines the fact that democratic enlightenment in these two countries had its own specificities. But on the whole it played a most positive role in the freedom movements of the countries wherein writers and intellectuals played a pivotal role. Both in India and Nigeria, the democratic enlighteners were opposed to liberals and reactionary movements.

Continuing the tradition of Indian enlighteners, Tagore in the nineties insisted on a feeling of national pride. It was clear to him that as long as the masses were ignorant and passive, the struggle against the British could not succeed. The national-freedom movement in the nineties was going through the initial stage of its development. In such circumstance, Tagore realised that preparing the nation for the coming struggle was the main duty. For fulfilling this aim, he felt that Indians should train themselves to be strong-willed and develop a feeling of national pride. His writings of nineties highlight his firm belief in ancient Hindu culture where he advocated:

If we can love the truth, work according to our belief. Instead of bringing up our sons in an atmosphere of thousand lies, like healthy parasites, we teach them to see the truth, so that they could be simple, strong and can stand up with confidence, if we can educate ourselves in a humble and liberal spirit and gladly welcome knowledge and greatness from all quarters and develop our knowledge in the field of music, culture, literature, history, science, etc.-travelling in different countries of the world-observing relentlessly different phenomena and by thinking attentively in an unbiased manner can achieve an all round development of our personality, then what is called as dogmatic Hinduism can still exist or not I cannot say, but then we can to a great extent merge ourselves with the lively, active, powerful ancient Hindu culture.

(Collection of Tagore’s Works, 483)
While Tagore insisted on imparting the feeling of national pride in Indians, he never went to extremes like idealising the East. In 1898, he wrote, “so for us, on the one hand our patriotism, and on the other hand, freedom from bondage, both are absolutely necessary for our liberation. Imitation of the West is fruitless for us and dogmatic Hinduism is deadly for us” (Collection of Tagore’s Works, 558). Tagore was opposed to this religious dogmatism and conservatism, which idealised feudal institutions of Middle Ages. He was ready to adopt the best achievements of Western civilization. In this context in his famous essay “Social Divisions” written in the nineties he opines:

All that mocks and despises Western civilization may be called dogmatic Hinduism but not Hindu civilization. Similarly that which completely rejects Eastern civilization may be called European chauvinism but not Western civilization.

(Collection of Tagore’s Works, 489)

Tagore’s writings particularly a selection of his dramatic world as analysed in this thesis reflect his vision as well as the influence of social milieu on his writings. One of his earliest plays The King and the Queen (1923; from original Bengali play, Raja O Rani published in 1889) shows the great dramatists’ concern for disciplining the destructive forces of ego-centric love to affect a spiritual poise. Rather simplistic is the view that “the conflict in this play is between love and duty, between a vain and infatuated man, and a proud and humane woman” (Kripalani, 127). In this play, the king, Vikram, neglects his royal duties in his passionate attachment to his queen who always tells him that duty is the prime virtue. According to Juan Mascaro, “Love is undeniable, but we know that love is joy, Not indeed a transient pleasure, but an eternal joy of the soul” (31).

As a true follower of Raja Rammohan Roy, Tagore carried on a vigorous crusade against the practice of worshiping images. His terrible denunciation of it in Rajarshi (1889) and Sacrifice (1917; from original Bengali play, Visarjan published in 1889) has not, however, shaken the faith of his countrymen in the efficacy of offering prayers and
homage to images. The number of Baroari puja (public worship) of Durga, Kali and Saraswati is increasing tremendously every year not only in West Bengal but also in other states of India.

Tagore’s plays stir our spirit, refine our life and give profound satisfaction to our mind. Hindu tradition influenced Tagore very much mainly through Upanishads. At many places he influenced by the Upanishads in support of his opinion. Tagore grew up in an atmosphere pulsating with the truths of the Upanishads. He himself wrote in preface to Sadhana, “The writer has been brought up in a family where texts of the Upanishads are used in daily worship” (Tagore, vii). Though he was influenced by Upanishads, his humanism is mostly his own. Tagore was also influenced by Gautama Buddha much more than any other philosopher. In his preface to The Realization of Life, Tagore writes:

To me the verses of the Upanishads and the teachings of the Buddha have ever been things of the spirit, and therefore endowed with boundless vital growth and I have used them, both in my own life and in my preaching, as being instinct with individual meaning for me, as for others, and awaiting for their confirmation my own special testimony, which must have its value because of its individuality.  

The play Muktadhara suggests the period of colonial India, foreshadowing the subsequent nationalism, freedom struggle and the tension between religion and science. In Muktadhara (1922), Tagore has captured the broad trends of social, economic, political, emotional and spiritual aspects of Indian life. Like the great serious thinkers, Tagore encountered a world where the thousand fashions of one reality had several blemishes set on it, such as, social, political, economic, moral and metaphysical evils.
Tagore composed *Red Oleanders* in 1923 and titled it *Jakshatown*. Very soon Tagore changed it and renamed the play *Nandini*. In 1924 the play *Red Oleanders* was published. This play is the most mobilizing instrument for counter attack on postcolonial society, the by-product of the modern materialistic system. The First World War played the role of the catalytic agent and accelerated the transformation by bringing to the forefront the crisis in human history, politics, economy, society and civilization. Culture and civilization themselves were threatened in which the expected peak had turned to be a catastrophe of decline. In a number of plays, Tagore’s reflections relating to the structure of society in a highly complex pattern of life became prominent.

To counter the crisis of civilization, to revive and liberate man from his ever-increasing greed, Tagore came down to meet men from every stratum of society. Tagore’s *Red Oleanders* (1924) has in it the total picture of the crisis in civilization of the contemporary world and the dilemma of modern man in terms of the place of action of this drama, Yaksha Town and its inhabitants naturally, the Yakshas. Just as the modern man is in the grip of an acquisitive society, so are the inhabitants of this town. Their dilemma and prospects have a nightmarish quality about them; its meaning and implication extend beyond a particular or individual to assume universal dimensions and significance. The controlling vision of *Red Oleanders* is a comprehensive view of twentieth century civilization, rugged individualism and its philosophy to shape and sharpen i.e. moulding individuals to suit the existing system of Yaksha Town.

As a representative of the democratic trend, Tagore took up a stand against liberal bourgeois statesmen trying to defend their class interest and accepted only those forms of political agitation, by which they could avoid mass participation in the struggle. Cowardliness was a basic feature of the liberals. Tagore, from the position of democratic enlightenment could formulate the real character of imperialistic and colonial oppression. He knew that one of the main reasons of prosperity of Western countries was imperialistic and capitalist exploitation. In the series of articles under the heading “Motherland” Tagore wrote:
When we call America a rich country, we forget about the thousands of poor people in that country. When we call Europe a free world, we fail to notice a vast population subjected to exploitation. These only a small section at the top live in luxury only they enjoy freedom, only they are free from oppression.

(Brahaman-Swadesh, 65-66)

At the end of the 19th century, socio-political conditions in Bengal and Nigeria were far from similar. The problems before Tagore and Soyinka naturally are different. But both approached the problems before them from the stand point of democratic enlightenment. They believed in progress and prosperity of humanity and are opposed to autocratic and colonial oppression. They succeed in avoiding the influence of the liberals and had no illusion about a special, patriarchal development of their respective countries and did not deny the natural historical process of development. In spite of different stages of socio-political development of the two countries during this period, we find that both the writers are critical of bourgeois society. They could foresee the coming of social transformation, but did not know how it would take place.

2.1. b Socio-political Scenario of Nigeria and its influence on Wole Soyinka:

One of the important country of African continent, Nigeria before the imposition of British rule at the turn of the century did not exist as a nation. Instead there were in the geographical location now called Nigeria many nations or ethnic groups, about three hundred that had organized themselves within their own polities. Some were highly centralized structures- Yoruba, Edo, Hausa, Jukun- while others were also equally highly decentralized- Ijo, Uhobo, Igbo, Tiv and so on. The Yoruba of South-Western Nigeria belonged to the first category of highly centralized states. Its government centred on a hereditary ruler, often the descendant of the first inhabitants or settlers in that area. Traditions of origin now claim that these rulers derive from a common ancestor, Oduduwa from Ife-Ife from where his sons went out to find their own kingdoms.
Modern Nigeria’s political history is etched on the trajectory of chaos, anarchy and successive military coups since it obtained independence from Britain in 1960. The modern political state of Nigeria has its origin in the British colonization of the region during the late nineteenth to twentieth centuries; it emerged from the combination of two neighbouring British protectorates: the Southern Nigeria Protectorate and the Northern Nigeria Protectorate. During the colonial period, the Britishers set up administrative and legal structures whilst retaining traditional chiefdoms.

Nigeria achieved Independence in 1960, but plunged into Civil War several years later. It has since alternated between democratically-elected civilian governments and military dictatorships, with its 2011 presidential elections being viewed as the first to be conducted reasonably freely and fairly. Nigeria is often referred to as the “Giant of Africa”, due to its large population and economy. With approximately 174 million inhabitants, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the seventh most populous country in the world. Nigeria regained democracy in 1990 when it elected Olusegun Obasanjo, the former Military Head of State, as the new President of Nigeria. This ended almost 33 years of Military rule (from 1966 until 1999), excluding the short-lived second republic (between 1979 and 1983) by military dictators who seized power in coups d’etat and counter-coups during the Nigerian military juntas of 1966-1979 and 1983-1998.

Nigeria is represented almost exclusively as a state in crisis. Recurrent military coups, ethnic and religious sectionalism, a Civil War, a series of bloody riots and local unrest (of which the Niger delta situation is the best known example), economic turmoil and the re-imposition of the Islamic criminal code in many northern states have all been used to paint a picture of chaos and collapse. The trouble with Nigeria is also understood to illustrate the trouble with Africa. With 25 percent of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria appears as representative of Africa.

Wole Soyinka is often called Nigeria’s National conscience and Africa’s most compelling literary force who deals with the core issues of human liberty, equality and justice in contemporary society brutalized by violence and corruption. Many historical
events marked his works: the Civil War, Machel’s Declaration of war on Rhodesia and dictators like Amin and Bokassa. He took an active role in Nigeria’s political history and its struggle for independence from Great Britain. In 1965, he seized the Western Nigeria broadcasting service studio and broadcast a demand for the cancellation of the western Nigeria regional elections. In 1967 during the Nigerian Civil War, he was arrested by the federal government of General Yakubu Gowon and put in solitary confinement for two years.

Deeply committed to social justice and the arts, Soyinka has been a thorn in the side of many Nigerian dictators- his outspoken activism landing him in jail and eventually forcing him into exile. Though he was refused basic materials, such as books, pens, and paper for continuing his creative work during much of his imprisonment, he did manage to write a significant body of poems and notes criticizing the Nigerian government. Despite his imprisonment, in September 1967, his play The Lion and the Jewel was produced in Accra, and in November The Trials of Brother Jero were produced. The years 1975-1984 were for Soyinka a period of increased political activity. During that time he was among the authorities at the University of Ife; among other duties, he was responsible for the security of public roads.

A biographical overview of Soyinka reflects his deep rooted faith in Yoruba culture and his instinctive, rebellious nature prompting him to fight for the amelioration of man. The Yoruba is one among the three ethnic groups in Nigeria, the other two being The Hausa Fulani and The Ibo. The Yoruba constitute the dominant group in the old Western region of Nigeria whereas the Hausa is the main group in the Northern part and Ibo occupy the Eastern region of Nigeria. The co-existence of the contradictory worlds of Yoruba religion and Christianity left an indelible impression upon the sensitive and inquisitive mind of Soyinka from an early age. Soyinka was the son of Ayo and Eniola, who were Christian converts. His father was the headmaster of the local missionary school which the young boy attended. Thus from his childhood he was exposed to the English language and to Christian ideas.
Soyinka occupies a unique position among the ‘triad’ of Nigerian ‘lions’-Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and J.P Clark. Unlike the other two who have excelled in particular literary genres-Achebe in fiction and Clark in drama and poetry respectively-Soyinka has demonstrated a consummate mastery over almost every literary genre providing his amazing versatility. Among Nigerian novelists, Achebe was unquestionably one of the outstanding and best-known writers to have emerged from colonial and independent Nigeria. He was a social critic and political activist of an egalitarian bent like Soyinka. It is not as if he stood aloof from the mainstream of ‘protest’ and cut out a path for himself. He was very much in it-he protested against the imposition of an alien religion on the traditional way of life, against colonial rule and, after the independence of his country, against corruption in Government and society. Chinua Achebe was one of the great intellectual and ethical figures of Nigeria. An African work of art that fails to address issues of socio-political or historical significance is considered to be outside the scope of African aesthetics. Achebe reiterates this view:

> Literature whether handed down by word of mouth or in print, gives us a second handle on reality, enabling us to encounter in the safe manageable dimensions of make-believe the very same threats to integrity that may assail the psyche in real life; and at the same time providing through the self-discovery which it imparts a veritable weapon for coping with the threats whether they are found within problematic and incoherent selves, or in the world around us.

*(Hopes and Impediments, 117)*

J.P Clark, Nigerian acclaimed poet and dramatist, was actively, involved in the dynamics of the Nigerian Civil War and was also a prophet to his society. Soyinka’s poetry is always full of thrilling elements and stimulating intellectual exercise. But there is something sublime, soothing and uplifting about the unobtrusive profundity of J.P Clark’s poetry. They remind us the lyrical quality and the enchanting poetic cadences of Indian dynamic writer Rabindranath Tagore, who was the first non-European to win the
Nobel Prize for literature in 1913 like Wole Soyinka, who is the First African writer to win the Nobel Prize for literature in 1986. Wole Soyinka was awarded with the 2014 International Humanist Award.

Nigerian intellectuals like Achebe, Soyinka, Clark and other have made great personal sacrifices for their activism. Their lives and their works reveal the same mission, the same fierce desire to fight against tyranny and oppression. Because of Nigeria’s unique history of slavery, colonization and post-independence oppression, protest has been an integral part of writing not only in Nigeria but in India also. Agreeably, the role of the intellectual/writer is to intrepidly protest the repressive policies of regimes and bring about a change for the better future. Be it Indian intellectuals/writers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Aurobindo Ghosh, Rabindranath Tagore and Nigerian intellectuals/writers like Wole Soyinka, Achebe, and Clark. These intellectuals/writers took an active role in India’s and Nigeria’s political history and its struggle for independence from Great Britain. Writers worldwide have stressed that the most fundamental role of the writer lies in his attempt or ability to foreground and interrogate the topical issues emanating in their immediate society. Wole Soyinka, at a UN conference (1971) in Dar es Salem stated:

The writer is the visionary of his people he recognises the past and present not for the purpose of enshrinement but for the logical creative glimpse and statement of the ideal future he anticipates and he warns...the writer cannot help but envisage and seek to protect the future which is the declared aim of contemporary struggle.

Soyinka’s literary acumen was enhanced by his encounter with some of the most inspiring teachers at the Leeds University. His encounter with G. Wilson Knight, the great Shakespearean Scholar, has left an indelible mark on his works, as it was through him that Soyinka first became interested in theorizing the link between ritual and tragedy, which is central to his dramaturgy.
In 1962 Soyinka was appointed a lecturer in English at the University of Ife. This was the period of general social and political unrest in Western Nigeria and Soyinka contributed regularly in the controversies through the press. As the political turmoil escalated in Western Nigeria with renewed intensity in 1965, Soyinka produced a satirical revue *Before the Blackout* which was a blistering attack on the corrupt and opportunist politicians. In the same year, he wrote two major plays, *Kongi’s Harvest* and *The Road* and his first novel *The Interpreters*. In the background of the Harvest ritual, Soyinka depicted a conflict between a modern dictator and a traditional ruler in *Kongi’s Harvest*, thereby, highlighting the lust for power of the modern rulers. Amidst the selfishness of rulers, the great dramatist projected a young dynamic and revolutionary hero, Daodu as the messiah and the only saviour who could lead the country.

The political events deeply influenced the social vision of Soyinka. The post-war plays depict a drastic change in his attitude towards man and society after the harrowing experience of war. The atrocities committed during the military regime dehumanized man and the subsequent plays of Soyinka depict only the debased and evil self of man. The protagonists figuring in the later plays of Soyinka stand in complete contrast to the earlier plays and embody the dehumanizing effects of war.

Soyinka as a man and as a political activist like Tagore in his Brahma concept, had his roots in Yoruba culture. Traditional Yoruba life is dominated by religion. The Yoruba believe in a pantheon of gods and there are four hundred-one gods in their pantheon. The supreme deity is Olodumare, who is far removed from mortals. According to one popular version of Yoruba myth about creation, it was Orisa-nla (Obatala) who created mortals out of common clay after which Oludumare breathed life into them. The Yoruba supreme deity, Oludumare roughly corresponds to the concept of Brahman of Indian religion.

The principal deities in Yoruba religion are Obatala, god of whiteness; Ogun, god of iron; Shango, god of lighting, Yemaja, Oshun and Oya, goddesses of the rivers Ogun, Oshun and Niger; Shopana or Obaluaiye, god of smallpox; Ifa, god of divination; and Eshu, trickster who serves as god’s messenger. Below the deities, in Yoruba belief, are
numerous spirits of the ancestors and of things. Some of the gods in fact are ancestors who have been elevated into deities. Trees, peculiar land formation, rivers etc. all according to Yoruba belief are imbued with a spirit and hence are sacred.

The ancestors are worshipped through egungun, which is a festival of dead among the Yoruba. The egungun is a masked figure, who is commissioned to recreate a departed man. He imitates his voice and his gait and simulates his gestures. The resultant dramatic interlude is both serious and comic. The egungun dancer on one level is simply an actor assuming a role and on the other level he identifies so closely with the spirit and actually speaks with a new voice, when he leaves the world of drama and make-believe and enters a realm of spirit. In this state of possession, the egungun can become a medium through whom the dead person will speak to the living members of the family. His play The Strong Breed (1963) is centred on the tradition of egungun, a Yoruba festival tradition in Nigeria in which a scapegoat of the village carries out the evil of the community and is exiled from the civilization.

Yoruba culture is rich in ceremonies ranging from simple ceremonies of worship through the family ceremonies associated with birth, death, marriage to the annual rituals and ceremonies relating to king (Oba). Moreover, there are festivals associated with farming too, as it is the most important occupation of Yoruba. Certain trees and crops have taken up a prominent place in Yoruba culture and assume a symbolic stature. Yam, Kola and Palm wine are some of the important products. A failure of crops symbolizes destruction and the very negation of life; while a successful harvest represents the positive forces of life. The principal external features of the festivals are drumming, singing, dancing, feasting and sacrifice. The story of Kongi’s Harvest revolves around the harvest ritual which appears as a bone of contention between the rulers.

Soyinka’s deep immersion in traditional Yoruba mythology provides a rich cultural depth to his writings. His special fascination with Ogun, the Yoruba god of war and iron, who embodies both the constructive and destructive principle, has numerous implications. Soyinka is drawn particularly by the ambivalent role of Ogun. As god of war, Ogun embodies the destructive principle. In addition to his function as the god of
iron and metallurgy, patron of hunting and guardian of road, he is also the creative essence. He is an enigmatic symbol representing both destructive and creative impulses in man and nature.

The paradoxical virtues epitomized by Ogun are reflected in Soyinkan hero also. In the interpretation of Ogun myth, Soyinka emphasizes that Ogun is the first darer and explorer. He alone, out of the band of disappointed and suffering gods, was ‘combative’. Soyinka describes Ogun as “The first actor-for he led the others—-, first suffering deity, first creative energy, the first challenger and the conqueror of transition” (Myth, 145). Soyinka not only refers about Ogun as a Yoruba god, but gives him universal character. In Myth, Literature and the African World, Soyinka lays emphasis on the universality of Ogun:

Ogun for his part, is best understood in Hellenic values as totality of Dionysian, Apollonian and Prometheus virtues. Nor is this all. Transcending, even today, the distorted myths of the terrorist reputation, traditional poetry records him as ‘protector of orphans’, ‘roof over the homeless’, ‘terrible guardian of the sacred oath’, Ogun stands in fact for a transcendental, humane but rigidly restorative place. (141)

Soyinka’s creative genius lies in modelling his heroes and anti-heroes on the Ogun ‘essence’. The Ogun heroes and anti-heroes dramatically render to us Soyinka’s complete world view and convey his ideal for a new political and social order in Nigeria. Ogun, therefore, is the principle deity who stands for the revolutionary artist. As Bernth Lindors avers:

Soyinka’s own artistic and cultural activities have sought to realize the variety of ideals encompassed by this “essence”. His prolific and sustained
creativity, the diversity and range of his literary output, the ferocity of his opposition to tyranny and injustice, his penchant for mysticism and the esoteric arts, the robustness, vitality and lyrical power of much of his writings, all these collectively approximate convincingly to the array of significations which Soyinka has assigned to the Ogun “essence”.

(The Literary Criterion, 55)

The paradox of creation and destruction constitutes the thematic motive of Soyinka’s writings. One dominant, recurrent theme is that of the paradoxical union of conflicting, basic drives and impulses, in the individual as well as in culture and society. What seems to interest Soyinka is that there is both a creator and destroyer in all of us. Soyinkan heroes embody this creative and destructive principle as they try to destroy the life-stifling aspect of tradition.

The strong political overtones in the works especially dramatic works of Soyinka depict the writer’s deep concern for his nation. His political involvement is related to his insistence on his integrity as a human being. He once remarked: “I have one abiding religion-human liberty”. The weapons used by the writer to fight for “human liberty” are his literary works, especially the dramatic works. His fervent desire for an egalitarian and democratic society conveys his modern and emancipated outlook. His strong distaste for the native hegemonistic oligarchic set-up shows his progressive vision. This great writer has always been impelled to write by a special sense of responsibility. Soyinka always believed in drawing the attention of his countrymen to the harsh realities of contemporary times.

Even at a historic occasion like Independence, Soyinka produced a play A Dance of the Forests (1963), a magnum opus, to puncture a nostalgic idealizing of the past. This play was written especially for the Nigerian Independence celebrations (October 1960) - a juncture when the countrymen were rejoicing in the richness of their tradition.
after passing through the dark phase of colonization. The play was triggered by his apprehensions about the leaders who were on the verge of taking over the reins of the country. In this play, Soyinka has juxtaposed the past and the present lives of the three principal personages—Demoke, a carver; Adenebi, a councillor and Rola, a harlot. Through the actions and motives of these principal characters, Soyinka once again cautions against taking tradition at its face value and forbids to be swayed away by the illusion of a glorious tradition, thereby, conveying that the vices in human nature have existed since generations. As Gerald Moore comments, Demoke from Soyinka’s *A Dance of the Forests* is “the only occasion in Soyinka’s work when his Ogunian hero is distinctly portrayed as an artist” (*)Twelve African Writers*, 219). The character of Demoke reflects a healthy fusion of tradition and modernism in *A Dance of the Forests*. His creative and artistic endeavour of carving a totem shows his affinity with the African tradition whereas the daring act on his part in the “Dance of the Half-Child” where he asserts his will by deciding to return the Half-Child to its mother depicts his progressive and modern vision.

*The Swamp Dwellers* (1963) and *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963) were written by Soyinka in 1959 during his stay at the University of Leeds and can be considered as his ‘early plays’. These two plays opened up vistas for the dramatist in London and also established his reputation in Nigeria. Both the plays are set in typical African villages, which are on the threshold of change and thus displaying antithetical clash of ideas between the old and the new. *The Swamp Dwellers* shows the lure of the new generation towards the modern city life in Nigeria. It is a typical Yoruba tragedy, which depicts a confrontation between the central protagonist, Igwezu and the inimical forces represented by superstitious practices. The hero stands for the rational but frustrated youth of Nigeria, who dares to question the authenticity of life-stifling rituals and practices.

Another Soyinkan play, *The Lion and the Jewel* presents a clash between an octogenarian chief of the village and a young teacher. It is an amusing play where Soyinka has presented a young man who adheres to all the vulgarity and superficiality of the Western world and thus appears as a caricature of a modern human being. The play *The Road* (1965) is an eloquent comment on the Nigerian society of mid-sixties,
where a dog-eat-dog principle rules supreme. The central protagonist in *The Road* is named as Professor who typifies Soyinkan anti-hero, who is an ‘evil genius’. The story revolves around his unfathomable quest for the meaning of death. He delights in watching the road accidents and blood oozing out of the victims and is reminiscent of blood thirsty military rulers.

In *The Road* Soyinkan has employed the traditional dramatic devices like the myth of Ogun and the ritual of *egungun* to depict the evil aspect of man who has degenerated to the extent of using god for his selfish motives. *Kongi’s Harvest* (1967) is set in an imaginary African state, Isma during the celebrations for the Harvest festival. The ruler of Isma is Kongi, who is an ambitious autocrat. He is assisted by an ubiquitous Organising Secretary and is advised by two organizations which work for him—Reformed Aweri Fraternity and Carpenter’s Brigade. Kongi, therefore, represents the modern despotic ruler of Africa. His most powerful opponent in the state is the traditional king Oba Danlola, who has the supreme authority of accepting the Yam at the Harvest festival. Another play *Death and the King’s Horseman* (1975) is based on a real incident that took place in Nigeria. This play revolves around the ritual suicide of the king’s horseman. According to Yoruba tradition, the death of a chief must be followed by the ritual suicide of the king’s horseman.

II

2.2 The Mind and Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore and Wole Soyinka:

Art not merely reproduces life but also shapes it. Thus people are seen modelling their lives upon the patterns of fictional heroes and heroines. The ideology of a writer can be studied not only in his pure literary writing but also in his pronouncements on questions of political and social importance and also his active participation in the burning issues of his time. Analysed from this point, Tagore and Soyinkan are more similar than different writers. Their conflicting class and contrasting upbringing are no hindrance to their very much broad outlook. Their philosophy will now be discussed briefly under the following heads which will make their stances clearer.
2.2. a Tradition and Modernity:

Both the writers have the similar views on tradition and modernity. They loved the traditional culture of their countries. This love was not the result of uncritical patriotism or romantic nostalgia. It was based on sound knowledge and deep understanding of those elements in the Indian and Nigerian heritage which have perennial worth. Tagore wrote a beautiful essay on his interpretation of Indian history entitled Bharata-varshe Ithihaser Dhara (The Stream of Indian History) in 1912. In this essay, he tried to explain the two guiding principles- unity underlying diversity, and continuity in the midst of change- which have shaped India’s destiny through the ages. Both the writers were fully aware of the strong points in the Indian and Nigerian tradition: a spirit of assimilation; a tolerance for alternative paths leading to a common goal; the ability to see the one behind the many and serenity behind agitation; and the conviction that there is a point at which all the basic values- Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Love, Freedom, Tranquillity-somehow converge.

The instances mentioned here point to the freshness and modernity of Tagore’s outlook. He was a fearless critic of social practices and of religious beliefs that had no other sanction than that of continuity over a period of centuries. His nonconformism was more radical and consistent than that of many other leaders of his time. His denunciation of the caste system was total and unconditional. He did not dilute his criticism by offering philosophical justification for the origins of caste and untouchability. For example, Tagore’s play Chandalika is a literary representation of the controversial subject of untouchability and caste. Tagore’s heroine, Prakriti spurns the myth of caste and origin telling her mother that “...self-humiliation is a sin, worse than self murder” (Tagore, 2). Prakriti criticizes the die-hard traditions in society and proclaims that “a religion that insults a false religion” (Tagore, 8). In the same vein, Sutapa Chaudhury asserts:

In Tagore’s hands Prakriti becomes a woman living on fringes of human society-a marginalised figure of Hindu society discriminated against for her social
background in a caste-segregated world view. By addressing the theme of untouchability through this dance drama Tagore was making an extremely bold socio-political statement against the discrimination of untouchables that in a way supported Mahatma Gandhi’s pro-Harijan campaign in the late 1930s India.

(Rupkatha Journal, 553)

Tagore’s aim behind this play must have been to scrutinize the uneven and biased structure of contemporary Indian society, culture and religion; the four-fold structure of classes in Hinduism. He culls the account of Chandalika from Buddhist scriptures and renders it a fictional form to expose the evils of Indian caste-system, untouchability and racism. He presents Chandalika as form of ‘Shakti’, a symbol of power, who fights the rigorous social and religious system. She becomes a spokeswoman of Tagore’s ideal of Humanitarianism and universalism.

The play, *The Swamp Dwellers* written by Soyinka at the infancy of his literary career highlights the highly innovative and constructive approach of the writer. *The Swamp Dwellers* preaches reason and logic to voice against the life-stifling rituals, propagated by priests like Kadiye. The playwright is dead against the blind faith and dogmatism which has enveloped the Nigerian society since ages. His *alazonic* hero, Igwezu, who is an ideal amalgamation of tradition and modernism, therefore, takes the uphill task of shattering the edifice of superstition.

Tagore rejected the simplistic formulation of ‘Western materialism verses Indian spiritualism’. He welcomed science as ‘Europe’s greatest gift to mankind’, and dissociated himself from those Indians who looked upon Western civilization, in its entirety, as immortal and superficial. Tagore was deeply inspired by the epochal theory of Creative Evolution of living beings propounded by the French Scientist and thinker Henri Bergson. The French intellectual said: “We change without ceasing and the state itself is nothing but change”. In this context, Tagore went through *The Origin of Species*
By Means of Natural Selection by Charles Darwin. Being curious about the theory of human evolution, Tagore delved deeper into anthropological texts to follow the advent of the Modern or Cro-Magnon man, from his primitive and Palaeolithic lineage of Peking men or Neanderthals.

The negative side of the tradition they inherited made them sad and sometimes angry. They expressed both their sorrow and their displeasure in no uncertain terms. The ascetic world-denying streak that has led India and Nigeria into the morass of inaction; the tendency to lose oneself in abstract speculation about the essence of reality without focussing attention on the human condition; the ease with which the Indian mind and Nigerian mind can find high-sounding justifications for customs and practices that are manifestly indefensibly; the refusal to strive for greater efficiency and comfort on the ground that ‘contentment is the higher virtue’- all these weaknesses needed to be brought into the clear light of candid criticism.

The real issue is not whether we should be modern or traditional. Both Tagore and Soyinka repeatedly pointed out that the man who is genuinely modern is not the one who turns his back upon tradition, but rather the one who reinterprets it creatively and rationally. They also accepted the fact that tradition can help people go into the future without being uprooted or alienated from the past. The play The Lion and the Jewel illuminates the vision of Soyinka, which is explicit in these words of the bale, who is the mouthpiece of the dramatist himself:

The old must flow into the new, Sidi.
Not blind itself or stand foolishly.

(\textit{The Lion}, 54)

A constructive fusion of traditionalism and modernism is requisite for India and Nigeria to emerge as a Nation of Tagore’s and Soyinka’s dreams. Blind imitation of the glamour of modern world, by forgetting all the traditional values can make the society hollow like husk. At the same time, sticking superstitiously to the tradition can also reduce human being to the status of an early man.
Tagore and Soyinka argued that British colonialism found its justification in the ideology of the nation as the British came to India and Nigeria only to plunder and so prosper their own nation. They were never interested in developing the countries of occupation, as it would contribute little to their national cause to turn their ‘hunting grounds’ into ‘cultivated fields’. Like predators, they thrived by victimising and looting other nations and never felt deterred by love, sympathy, fellowship, or humanity in perpetrating heinous crimes for the sake of their nation.

2.2. b Myths and Rituals:

Northrop Frye rightly believes that “myth is and has always been an integral element of literature”. Roland Barthes argues that myth explores religious experience. Many Indian writers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Bankim Chandra Chaterjee, and Rabindranath Tagore went back to the dominant and presumably reliable tradition of the Vedic past. Soyinka states that myths arise from man’s attempt to externalise and communicate his inner intuitions. Ritual is the external manifestation of the myth.

Myths are accepted truths within a community, which become a part of the collective consciousness of the community. Ogun is one such myth which is part of the Yoruba psyche and Kali is one such myth which is part of the Indian psyche. Ogun is the god of destruction and creation in Yoruba mythology. Like Ogun myth, Tagore depicted the myth of Goddess Kali as the power of destruction of evil in Sacrifice. Redemption of mankind from greater evil requires or necessitates the sacrifice of innocence and virtue. Good and evil coexists. Tagore was very much fond of standard Hindu myths for treatment in his plays and for reinterpreting them in light of contemporary events or situations of his time.

Wole Soyinka’s play The Swamp Dwellers is based on the ‘Serpent myth’. Soyinka is ultra-critical of such traditions which stifle the growth of society. His hero, Igwezu at the end of the play makes it very clear that the Serpent is not a physical reality; it exists only as a notion in the minds of people, who do not dare to verify the
veracity of this legend. Soyinka exhibits his creative genius by making use of rituals to convey a message in his plays. Whichever the ritual may be, the Yoruba writer has the potential of presenting a clash between old and the new, so as to awake his people from a deep slumber.

2.2.c Nationalism:

Nationalism is not a literary movement but it is actually the stance the writer takes in his creations and social milieu of his age. His writings identify the degree of his involvement on the issues of national concern and love towards his country. World Book Encyclopaedia defines ‘nationalism’ as:

A people’s sense of belonging together, as a nation. It also includes such feelings as loyalty to the nation, pride in its culture and history, and – in many cases- a desire for national independence. (49)

Both Tagore and Soyinka believe in universalism. They talk, portray and show their great concern about their respective countries i.e India and Nigeria. Tagore’s nationalism has a boarder spectrum. It goes beyond the regional barriers, although India in general and Bengal in particular has been glorified in his songs. But when it comes to voicing his own views, his concern becomes global and encompasses the whole humanity. He did not remain a national philosopher and poet but he became a beloved member of international society of great men of contemporary history. He was truly an internationalist and not a nationalist in the narrow sense of the term. Recounting the qualities of Tagore’s head and heart, Mr. Edward says that “among Indians, Tagore was exceptional in his generosity of judgement” (Rabindranath Tagore, 261). Whereas on the other hand, Soyinka is Nigeria’s outstanding nationalistic icon. An accomplished writer, Soyinka has effectively used Yoruba culture as the philosophical basis of his writings and thus transformed the patterns of Nigeria’s theatre in English.
Tagore became deeply involved in the national movement when he was about forty, at the beginning of 20th century. On many occasions, he delivered important political addresses, organised processions and penned song after song to arise nationalistic feelings of his countrymen. Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson make a pertinent comment about Tagore’s emphasis upon the beauty and greatness of Bengal:

He emphasised the beauties of Bengal, the revival of her greatness, and the need for inner strength- rather than hatred of the British.

(Rabindranath Tagore, 144-145)

In 1967 during the Nigerian Civil War, Soyinka became more politically an active writer. Soyinka spoke at the 5th Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu Colloquium in Lagos on the theme of “A national movement for change: A new generation speaks”. He addressed:

Let us face it; this nation is on the brink. Those who do understand it, I feel very sorry for them because they will one day wake up and find out that we have fallen as a nation...what we envisaged when we struggled for independence. This is not what we envisaged when we struggled to overthrow military dictatorship and restore the rights and dignity of human beings. But whether we like it or not, it has come upon us.

(Hallmark of Labour Foundation)

Tagore was one of the leading protestors against the partition of Bengal. His songs and poems brimming with patriotic sentiments inspired men to acts of heroism and sacrifice. But as nationalist movement took the shape of violence, Tagore retired from the political field. He indirectly participated in the national movement but the case of Soyinka is different, he is very radical in his approach. Soyinka is actively committed to
social justice and he has been an outspoken, daring public figure deeply engaged in the main political issues of his country and Africa, and he has become a symbol for humane values throughout the continent.

Soyinka has always believed in the unconditional freedom of the individual from all forms of constricting Establishment, be it modern or traditional. It is the charge and function of the individual with artistic sensibility to effect change in the society. In his lecture entitled “Drama and the Revolutionary Ideal”, Soyinka states:

It is the individual, working as a part of a social milieu - and this may be a fluctuating milieu - who raises the consciousness of the community of which he is a part.

Tagore and Soyinka identified their humanism with all the strata of society. An autobiographical, and pithy statement uttered by Soyinka in an interview, is highly illuminating in context of his humanistic outlook:

Participant: You seem to wear three caps: the poet, playwright and novelist. Is there any conflict between the three? And which do you prefer?

Soyinka: Yes, well there were more than three caps. One which you omitted to mention is that first and foremost I wear the cap of a human being. And, therefore, the other three caps are really very minor: you know rain covers, sun shields, and things like that.

(Biodum Jeyifo)
‘The cap of a human being’, which this manifold artist wears, makes him the most celebrated of all African writers. As a human right activist, Soyinka has been a courageous voice for justice, freedom and the end of tyranny. He has risked his life time and again to articulate the moral principles that provide the foundation for human rights, both in his native Nigeria and around the world.

Tagore and Soyinka always showed special concern for common man. Both are great humanists and Universalists. Their positive and humanitarian outlook ennobled them and endeared them to people cutting across all boundaries of race, religion and nationality. They believed in unity of life and advocated a holistic approach to life and social reality. Thus, Tagore and Soyinka always assert that one must protest against hurt and injustice and this is the guiding philosophy which shaped their literary sensibilities.
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