

Introduction

Though the title of this study respects chronological order and therefore, places Rabindranath Tagore (1861 – 1941) before W. B. Yeats (1865 – 1939), in discussion, that order has not been maintained. It is with Yeats and his contribution to the formation of the spiritual domain of nationalism that the analysis begins and thereafter comes Tagore. The introduction, as a prologue to the main argument, attempts an explanation behind that strategy.

In the formation of nation and nationalism the fundamental task has been recognized to be unifying men of diverse caste, creed, class and culture under one common umbrella. Three things have been identified to play instrumental role in this: a) awareness of the course of history, b) awareness of the course of culture and c) awareness of the course of common daily life, meaningful in its thousands of unnamed deeds. History does not merely provide the records of wars and battles; it reveals between its lines the gradual crystallization of resistance on the part of the native people against colonial and imperial exploitation. Then the cultural enterprise, which involves issues like language, literature and religion, and revives into the collective memory the rich heritage of the past, and thereby consolidates a greater number of people. But the task does not end there. For meanwhile, into the rising nation itself, there may develop hierarchy and further division between the privileged class and the down-trodden, the aristocrats and the working multitude. Without resolving that tussle, the nation formation process cannot successfully move forward. For, the rising nation cannot ignore the common people, the working multitude, who personify the nation or *make* the

nation, in the true sense of the term. On the other hand, this raw workforce should not be left rusting unburnished, swelling and swallowing everything like uncontrolled flood water; it requires leadership, it needs to be channelized properly, so that ultimately it can reach the ocean. The analysis of history, the unification of different cultures, the amalgamation of various class interests – all are then interlinked and all move up, step by step, as if in a systematic order, in the final emergence of a nation or its nationalism. Their order of operation may alter, or some new factors may intrude and influence the course of action in different countries/colonies, but no nationalist discourse can ignore or avoid any of these three vital elements.

In Ireland the History of colonization and its resistance began early, much earlier than in India. After Brian Boru's death in 1014, amid chaos and quarrels of various rulers, when political assistance was sought by Dermot MacMurrough, the king of Leinster, from Henry II of England, it led to the Norman Conquest under Henry's lieutenant, the Earl of Pembroke. His expedition was backed by the Pope's blessing, as it was supposed to carry religion to a 'barbarous people'. But it was proved almost impossible for foreign rulers to rule and tame these 'barbarous people' for next few centuries, even though the country was divided into counties for administrative purposes, English law was introduced and serious attempts were made to reduce the feudal liberties of the native Irish.

A brief threat to English control of Ireland, made by Edward Bruce, brother of King Robert I of Scotland, ended when Bruce was killed in a battle near Dundalk (1318). English control was reasserted and strengthened by the creation of three new Anglo-Irish earldoms, those of Kildare, Desmond and Ormonde. But the increased power of the Anglo-Irish, arousing out of the shrewd, colonialist policy of Protestant plantation, brought about an inevitable reaction also. During the remainder of the 14th century, there was a remarkable revival of Irish political power, which was duly matched with a flowering of Irish language,

law and civilization. The Gaels recovered a large part of Ulster, the Midlands, Connaught and Leinster, while the Anglo-Irish started to become increasingly Irish by marrying Irish women and often adopting Gaelic customs and culture. This showed that native resistance had already started to counter colonial penetration of Britain which was soon to emerge in the form of the Empire. This counter force of resistance, in due course of time, concentrated on nation building and emerged as nationalist movement in Ireland.

Along with political penetration England strove for cultural control over Ireland as well. The Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity, enforcing the Anglican Church settlement, were passed in Ireland in 1560. The towns and Irish countryside were shamelessly exploited by the new administrators and planters as a continuation of the colonialist policy, and even though authoritative suppression partially succeeded under Queen Elizabeth I to reduce the country to certain obedience, the cost was a serious one, as the loyalty of the Irish was perennially strained over the religious issue of intolerance.

Owing to mass protest and agitation, James I restored the Earls of Tyrconnell and Tyrone in Ulster in 1603, but irritated with English arrogance and conspiracy, with more than a hundred of chiefs, they left Ireland for good. This flight of the Earls irreparably weakened Gaelic Ireland and its native aristocracy, leaving only the language and literature to carry forward its past glory and indigenous resources to posterity. “The plantations continued”, as Malins and Purkis categorically show, with renewed strength; ‘undertakers’ annexing 500,000 acres, including the lands of the Earls which were the best. “The town of Derry was presented to the City of London and London Companies (absentees) received grants for business in the county. Many Scottish and English landowners thereafter, settled in the north” (30).

In 1641, there was a rising of Catholics in Ulster. Many of the colonists were murdered and some others fled away from the country. Cromwell considered himself as one

appointed by God to punish the rebels and to root out the Catholics. His efforts reached success easily as famine, plague and war contributed a lot to reduce the total Irish population to nearly half a million. The Restoration of Monarchy in 1660 once again reconfirmed the authority of the Protestant Anglican Ascendancy, this time with a Protestant State Church. And most significant of the events in this period was the second Act of Settlement (1662) which enabled Protestant loyalists to recover their estates. However, the hopes of the Catholics really rose high on the accession in 1685 of James II, a Catholic. Under James's instruction in the Parliament, the Acts of Settlement and Explanation were repealed and provision was made to restore expropriated Catholics. But three years later, after James had differed with the Tory party and the Church, he was expelled and Ireland became a battleground. The Protestants of Derry closed the gates of the town on the Catholic armies of James and withstood a siege for 105 days. A patriot parliament was summoned by James to Dublin which proved to be the last Irish legislative assembly until 1922, in which the Catholic faith was represented. The battle of Boyne on July 1st, 1689, decided the fate of the Jacobites as the English army under William defeated them. A second resistance, defeated in the Battle of Aughrim (1691) put an end to all Catholic hopes for a solution to their grievances. The Protestant position was once again secured by acts of the English parliament declaring the acts of James's parliament in Ireland illegal and also by restricting Catholics from being a member of future Irish representations in the Parliament. The land forfeited by James was once again put to sell and finally this reduced Catholic landownership to a miserable state. "By 1703," as *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. VI, informs, "it was less than 10 percent. On this foundation was established the Protestant Ascendancy" (1012).

W.B. Yeats was a Protestant. Since Protestant plantation in Ireland during the fourteenth and fifteenth Century, the Catholic majority of the country had been relegated to the marginalized position of the ruled. They at intervals went for protest and insurrection no

doubt, but the Protestant Ascendancy, with the strong support of England, their true home, easily subdued those sporadic efforts.

But at the end of eighteenth Century – the most glorious era of Protestant rule, that superior and advantageous position suffered a jolt. The 1800 Act of Union merged Ireland with England, to form the United Kingdom. The Protestants thus, were no longer able to enjoy their authoritative ruling position upon the Catholic mass. They grew angry upon England and initiated nationalist struggles to avail political separation with the hope that it would enable them to regain, at some point of time in future, their old command of the past. In order to make this nationalist struggle strong, vehement, unified and massive they invited the native Catholics to take part and sang of the ‘Unity of Culture’.

Thus Douglas Hyde in his famous 1892 address, entitled ‘*The Necessity of De-Anglicizing Ireland,*’ which was delivered before the Irish National Literary Society in Dublin on 25th November, stressed:

I shall endeavour to show that this failure of the Irish people in recent times has been largely brought about by the race diverging during this century from the right path, and ceasing to be Irish without becoming English. I shall attempt to show that with the bulk of the people this change took place quite recently, much more recently than most people imagine, and is, in fact, still going on. I should also like to call attention to the illogical position of men who drop their own language to speak English, of men who translate their euphonious Irish names into English monosyllables, of men who read English books, and know nothing about Gaelic literature, nevertheless protesting as a matter of sentiment that they hate the country which at every hand's turn they rush to imitate. (1)

Hyde raised a very pertinent question of the movement:

It has always been very curious to me how Irish sentiment sticks in this half-way house – how it continues to apparently hate the English, and at the same time to imitate them; how it continues to clamour for recognition as a distinct nationality, and at the same time throws away with both hands what would make it so. . . . you ask, why should we wish to make Ireland more Celtic than it is – why should we de-Anglicize it at all?

I answer because the Irish race is at present in a most anomalous position, imitating England and yet apparently hating it. How can it produce anything good in literature, art, or institutions as long as it is actuated by motives so contradictory? (1 – 2)

But the Catholics were not easily convinced. They knew and believed that “imitating England and yet apparently hating it” after all, was a Protestant disease in Ireland. Yeats increased their suspicion, as unlike Hyde, he continued to write in English and not in Gaelic. Yeats hated materialism and believed that unless Ireland recovers first its glorious past, its myth, magic, mystery, folk and fairy, it cannot regain itself and cannot express its identity as a nation. He feared that English materialism will turn Ireland’s rose garden of rich culture into a ‘cabbage garden’ and therefore, wanted to revive its spiritual heritage and fragrant tradition that was both mysterious and beautiful on one hand and on the other could provide a common platform of shared culture. Hence he raised the question:

Have not all races had their first unity from a mythology that marries them to rock and hill? We had in Ireland imaginative stories, which the educated classes framed, rediscovering for the work’s sake what I have called ‘the applied arts of literature’, the association of literature, that is, with music, speech and dance, and at last, it might

. . . so deepen the political passion of the nation that artists and poet, craftsmen and day labourer would accept a common design. (*Autobiographies*, 194)

Hence during the early part of his career he had been busy in glorifying the Celtic past of Ireland and its glorious mythology.

His enemies however, found it a clever evasion from that part of Irish history, where the unity was brutally damaged by the Protestant exploitation and torture upon the Catholics. They considered Yeats's glorification of the Celtic past not only as irrelevant in the context of the present crisis but a strategic policy to pressurize England to give them back their privileged position where they would again rule Ireland at the cost of the Catholics. That was really detrimental to the Catholic interest. So Yeats's Protestant origin was continually under attack, his artistic enterprise was constantly put under intolerant doubt and suspicion. Yeats, in reaction grew angry and wrote and produced plays where the Protestant role was significantly highlighted. The conflict increased, the tussle continued in full swing.

Thus all through his career, Yeats is seen to be engaged in a double battle, one against materialism, largely a British import in Ireland, and the other against Catholic prejudice, with which he never could come to a compromise and grew increasingly impatient. The first did not allow him to be a nationalist in the true sense, but diverted him to anti-materialism, whereby he found the supernatural and occult studies more interesting and important than building resistance against colonial and imperial exploitation of Ireland. The second made him only partially nationalist, valued earnestly by the members of his literary circle no doubt, but considered an enemy by the Catholics and irrelevant by a large section of the Protestants as well. Thus Yeatsian nationalism, even though it explored some untrodden ways, ultimately failed to bind together a fragmented nation. Hence Seamus Deane wrote in his appreciation:

O'Connell and Parnell had mobilized Irish political energies into national movements. Yeats mobilized Irish cultural energies in a similar way, enhancing the distinction between Irish and English culture and providing the leadership to make this institutionally effective. The elite company which he envisaged, would govern a community rather than represent a public. Therefore his aristocratic views needed reinforcement from the belief in the possibility of such a community in Ireland and, of course, the peasantry were there to supply it. The astonishingly swift decline of the Irish language in the years after the Famine and the increasing prominence of shopkeepers, publicans and innkeepers in the land league and Home Rule movements were clear indications that Yeats's view of the peasantry was outmoded by the 1870s. . . .

The period between 1880 and 1940 made a fetish of continuity in part because the generation before had witnessed the final rupturing of the Gaelic civilization. The glamorization of the Celt and of the Ascendency was an attempt to reconcile on the level of myth what could not be reconciled at the level of politics. It was, in effect, an Arnoldian 'healing measure', which failed. It offered the Irish the opportunity to be unique but refused them the right to be independent on the grounds that independence would lead to a loss of their uniqueness. Yeats's unhappiness with the new Irish state stemmed from this. In refusing to accept an Ascendency led cultural nationalism of Yeats's sort, with its aristocratic claims, post Treaty Ireland effectively put an end to the Revival, a fact for which many of its writers and artists have not forgiven it. The great myths had gone. The best of the poets after Yeats quickly learned that the local and the ordinary defined the horizon for literature as it did for politics. With the emergence of Patrick Kavanagh, the new state found its characteristic, if adversary,

voice. The day of the literary peasant and of the aristocratic hero was over. (*Celtic Revivals*, 33, 37)

From this unresolved clash of aims and objectives between the Protestants and the Catholics, there arises a third issue which influences Yeats's literature and makes him both romantic and pro-aristocratic. By the beginning of the twentieth Century it gradually became distinct that England was suffering from severe overstretch of its Empire. The humiliation of the Anglo-Boer war exposed the vulnerability. Added to this, was the threat and competition of emerging nation states like Japan, Italy and Germany, which began to claim their share of colonial plunder in Asia and Africa. Taking full advantage of the imperial retreat and softening of its tight administrative grip, oppositional movements of resistance and self-affirmation were beginning to blossom around the same time in Britain's colonial territories. In Australia, White Federation was achieved in 1901. In India, during 1905 – 08, Bengal saw the fiery waves of anti-partition Swadeshi movement. In 1912, South African Native National Congress, later the ANC, was formed. In Ireland there was a massive armed rebellion in the Easter of 1916. Thus, as Boehmer rightly observes in *Colonial and Post Colonial Literature*:

Across the Empire, during the first half of the twentieth century, colonized elites, articulate though embattled, began to organize cultural revivals, or raised their voices in protest at imperial power. White colonial nationalisms, too, were growing more confident and assertive. (95)

Yeats definitely came to know some of these incidents. In the last decade of the previous century, he had been actively engaged with Maud Gonne in anti-British political campaign in Ireland, and only in 1902, established the Irish National Theatre, writing and producing a play like *Cathleen ni Howlihan*, that called for militant rebellion against the colonizing power. But severely pressed and criticized as he had been by the rising Catholic

middle class, which continually attacked his Protestant origin and ambivalent attitude, Yeats could not participate literally, in the anti-imperial campaign of the contemporary world, rather his growing love of aristocracy and Nietzsche at one point of time in the thirties, stretched him so far away that he was called by many, a fascist. But in the phase between 1890 and 1920 which is the covered area of this study, to counter back his cornered position, after 1907, Yeats concentrated more on highlighting and even re-creating the glorious history of the Protestants in Ireland. The Ireland he tried so desperately to revive in his writings during this period was not only mystic, mythic or romantic but it relied chiefly on three characteristics, which he saw as class identities. These were: a) Aristocracy, b) Heroism, c) Love of art and culture. Hence in poem after poems, he described the high, aristocratic life of the Big Houses in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth Century Ireland. In play after plays, he recorded the heroic passion of great Irish heroes who inherited, so to speak, not only the strength and indomitable energy of Finn, Oisín or Cúchulainn, but who had the high taste and culture of ancient Ireland, who loved the folk and fairy and appreciated poetry and art in general and yet, knew the art of tragic resignation and self denial and accepted fate in smiling faces.

This account of heroic, aristocratic Ireland no doubt falls in the general line of revivalist literature that looks for cultural restoration and reformation. And Yeats must be praised for this painstaking task of spiritual recovery and cultural romanticism that aimed to consolidate a fragmented Ireland. That the task was not very easy, he hinted in *The Second Coming*:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood- dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

(*Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*: ed. Augustine Martine 185)

And indeed the apprehension came to be true. His project of nation building faltered and grew increasingly unstable and alien with the passage of time, the chief reason being his own alienation from his root, the common Irish people and their everyday life in Sligo and the West of Ireland. His love of aristocracy, heroism and high culture, his political errands, his duties and responsibilities as a Senator, continually drew Yeats away from the common people of the country, the mass, which provides labour and literally builds the nation. The colonial – imperial forces exploit and suck blood chiefly from this section which, due to ignorance and poverty, becomes the soft target and ultimately succumbs to the pressure. Anti-colonial resistance, in its nationalist phase, therefore, endeavours everywhere to consolidate first this weaker and vulnerable section and hence anti-colonial literature in every country speaks of the emergence of these marginalized common people, who provide the back bone to the nation. The strategic romanticizing of the peasants keeping apart, in Yeats, this is strikingly missing.

What saves Yeats then, is his anti-materialism, though even there, he is more interested to explore the occult, the mythic, the fairy. His criticism of English materialism and colonial – imperial exploitation could never rise in tone and at best, revealed itself fatigued and weary as in the poem *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*, because after all, England was the root and hope of the majority of Protestants in Ireland. Yeats failed and was never allowed, to come out of the shadow of his *original* crisis in Ireland.

While the beginning of the eighteenth century saw Ireland indisputably under the command and grip of the colonial force, operative in this case, by the settler Protestants, in

India, at that time, the colonization process did not begin at all. The last dominant Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb died only in 1707, and decentralization followed thereafter. By 1739 a weakened Mughal Empire was defeated in the Battle of Karnal by the forces of Nader Shah and the glorious Peacock Throne was taken away. Even though as early as in 1612, the English East India Company secured necessary permission from the Mughal emperor Jahangir, to establish a factory or trading post, in the port of Surat, on the Western Coast, and Bombay island, not far from Surat, was gifted to England as dowry in the marriage of Catherine of Braganza to Charles II; it did not appear as a political threat to India until the battle of Plassey in 1757, where Robert Clive defeated the Nabab of Bengal, Sirazdaulla. The victory in the 1764 Battle of Buxar against Mir Kashim, confirmed the Company's power and forced the Mughal Emperor, Shah Alam to appoint it as *diwan*, or revenue collector of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the three major states of the Eastern Province of India. The Company was transformed from a mere trade unit to the de facto ruler. Then with the victories in the Anglo –Mysore wars (1766 – 1799) and the Anglo – Maratha wars (1772 – 1818) it achieved an unquestionable authority in the politics of India and emerged as a formidable colonial force.

The company gradually penetrated into the socio cultural arena of India to strengthen its grip. In 1784, the Asiatic Society had been founded in Calcutta by William Jones, a judge in the newly established Supreme Court of Bengal. Soon, Jones was to advance his famous thesis on the common origin of Indo-European languages. Then in 1800, Lord Wellesley, the then Governor General, founded the College of Fort William. The Hindu College was established in 1817, Calcutta Sanskrit College in 1824 and Bethune college in 1849. Gradually Scottish Presbyterian missionaries arrived and supported the British rulers in their efforts to spread English education. They established many reputed colleges like Scottish Church College (1830), Wilson College (1832), Madras Christian College (1837)

and Elphinstone College (1856). Meanwhile under Lord Bentinck the ugly Custom of Sati was suspended and declared illegal by the Sati Abolition Act (1829). Postal system was introduced in 1837 that gradually extended to have a total of 889 post offices by 1861 which annually delivered almost 43 million letters and over four and a half million newspapers. By 1851 telegraph was introduced on a trial basis from Diamond Harbour to Hooghly in Bengal and in 1854, Railway came into operation in Maharashtra.

These facts do not show any sort of united or unified resistance whatsoever, on the part of the native population against the political and socio-economic or cultural penetration of Colonial England over India, which normally frames the agenda of nationalist discourse. Some frowns were there, and some whispers, but these were disjointed and negligible. Anti colonial struggle and nation building operation in India therefore, is regarded to start only with the Mutiny of 1857 and it took a political turn only with the inception of Indian National Congress in 1885.

In nationalist discourse and facts examination process, therefore, historically speaking, analysis of the Irish situation should precede and not follow that of the Indian context. To do justice to chronology itself, then, the present study begins with Yeats and not with Tagore.

Rabindranath Tagore was born in 1861, four years after the mutiny. He stands distinctly apart from Yeats in this that he did not inherit a well developed resistance against colonial rule in the country, his formative years saw the inception and gradual crystallization of resistance also. By virtue of his poems, stories, novels, plays and songs Tagore sharpened resistance and won the heart of his countrymen. In his case the problem was that he could not get the support of the political elite class, which tried to maintain a warm relationship with the British rulers for narrow class interest. On the other hand, Tagore, a Zamindar, came down to stand by the common people, became the natural public leader during the fiery years

of anti-partition movement (1905-1908), established Santiniketan Ashram Vidyalaya and Visva-Bharati University, took initiative in rural reconstruction programme and wrote the song '*Janaganamanaadhinayaka Jaya he*' which tried to unify the fragmented nation and was accepted by all as the national anthem of India. For a brief period before 1905, a whispering charge of Hindu advocacy was raised against him, but the way he stood for Hindu-Muslim communal unity during Swadeshi movement and thereafter in numerous essays, articles and especially in the novels, *Gora* and *The Home and the World*, revealed his true standpoint and all doubts got evaporated.

There was another threat. What would be his attitude to the British and to Europe in general? His country and countrymen, many of them eminent leaders and politicians, considered England an enemy country which should be hated and rejected outright. But in spite of his hatred of colonial and imperial enterprise of England and Europe in general, Tagore never forgot their contribution to human civilization:

The East has instinctively felt, even through her aversion, that she has a great deal to learn from Europe, not merely about the materials of power, but about its inner source, which is of the mind and of the moral nature of man. Europe has been teaching us the higher obligation of public good above those of the family and the clan, and the sacredness of law, which makes society independent of individual caprice, secures for it continuity of progress, and guarantees justice to all men of all positions in life. Above all things Europe has held high before our minds the banner of liberty, through centuries of martyrdom and achievement, – liberty of conscience, liberty of thought and action, liberty in the ideals of art and literature.

(Nationalism, 29)

Hyde in his de-Anglicising project, calls for battle in racial lines:

On racial lines, then, we shall best develop, following the bent of our own natures;
and in order to do this, we must create a strong feeling against West-Britonism. (8)

Yeats remains busy in attacking the Catholic middle class, and mourning for the romantic Ireland, which in his view, is irrecoverably gone and permanently lost:

What need you, being come to sense,
But fumble in a greasy till
And add the halfpence to the pence
And prayer to shivering prayer, until
You have dried the marrow from the bone?
For men were born to pray and save:
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave. (C.P., 86)

But Tagore is far more tolerant and aspirant of amalgamation of civilizations and cultures:

There is always the natural temptation in us of wishing to pay back Europe in her own coin, and return contempt for contempt and evil for evil. But that again would be to imitate Europe in one of her worst features, which comes out in her behavior to people whom she describes as yellow or red, brown or black. And this is a point on which we in the East have to acknowledge our guilt and own that our sin has been as great, if not greater, when we insulted humanity by treating with utter disdain and cruelty men who belonged to a particular creed, colour or caste. It is really because we are afraid of our own weakness, which allows itself to be overcome by the sight of power, that we try to substitute for it another weakness which makes itself blind to the glories of the West. When we truly know that Europe which is great and good, we can

effectively save ourselves from the Europe which is mean and grasping. (*Nationalism* 27-28)

Rabindranath did never have any need to butter the Muslims, nor did he ever crave to gain anything by attacking Hindu orthodoxy and obstinacy. He was a poet of the common man and he was bemused by looking at the endless beauty of the world, scattered in common things. In one of his letters of *Chinna Patra* he wrote:

The more one lives alone on the river or in the open country, the clearer it becomes that nothing is more beautiful or great than to perform the ordinary duties of one's daily life simply and naturally. From the grasses in the field to the stars in the sky, each one is doing just that, and there is such profound peace and surpassing beauty in nature because none of these tries forcibly to transgress its limitations.

Yet what each one does is by no means of little significance. The grass has to put forth all its energy to draw sustenance from the uttermost tips of its rootlets simply to grow where it is as grass; it does not vainly strive to become a banyan tree; and so the earth gains a lovely carpet of green. And indeed, what little of beauty and peace is to be found in the societies of men is owing to the daily performance of small duties, not to big doings and fine talk. (138)

He never asked his countrymen to share the energy of Cuchulain or Bhima and to throw and catch mountains. His simple effort was to arouse men to the vital task of self arousal:

I try to make my countrymen see that man does not have to beg for his rights, he must create them for himself. Man lives by his inner nature and there he is his own master. To depend on gains from outside is to hurt one's true self. The denial of our political rights was indeed less grievous than the shameful burden of our prayers and petitions.

I underlined the fact that we must win over our country, not from some foreigner, but from our own inertia, our indifference.

At this dawn of the world's awakening, if our own national endeavour holds no intimations of a universal message, the poverty of our spirit will be laid piteously bare.

(Rabindranath Tagore: A Centenary Volume, xvi)

There is no mourning, no fear or despair of any permanent loss, but only faith, belief, confidence and desire to overcome weakness and fear and despair and indifference, to love and accept and welcome and unify all, to ensure a common shared culture of mankind in general. Hence Radhakrishnan wrote in his appreciation:

He perceived relationships hitherto unnoticed and gave humanity his vision of one world. His great gifts of imagination and art were used for fostering faith in the unity of man and forging bonds of kinship with others. . . . Rabindranath did not claim to produce an original philosophy. His aim was not to analyse or speculate about the Indian tradition. He expressed it in his own vivid phrases and homely metaphors and showed its relevance to modern life. A fresh interpretation of religious idealism which has been the central feature of India's life and history is itself a mode of creation. Rabindranath as a dreamer and an artist was an exponent of it.

(Rabindranath Tagore: A Centenary Volume, xvii- xviii)

Rabindranath felt the need of a cultural amalgamation between the East and the West and throughout his life struggled for its accomplishment. In a letter to his friend Rothenstein on July 6, 1917, he wrote:

I am afraid the West has lost its foothold of the inner life and has been hopping with one leg, reveling in the very jerkiness of its difficult movement, because that has the

appearance of power. Unfortunately the East has gone to the other extreme, and instead of using the inner life as the source of all harmonious movements, has used it as a retreat for its practice of hibernation. But I who have the amphibious duality of nature in me, whose food is in the West and breathe air in the East, do not find a place where I can build my nest. I suppose I shall have to be a migratory bird and cross and recross the sea, owing two nests, one on each shore. (Lago 136)

And Rabindranath was a humanist too, who called forth the rise of man in self power, self confidence and self dignity, and wrote a book, *The Religion of Man*. Poetry and philosophy did not keep him aloof of world politics but in fact, sharpened his feelings and widened his sympathy for the suppressed men of the world, for whom he continually sang and wrote and lectured. When even Gandhiji and other national leaders did not agree to make large protest of the Jalianwalabag massacre in 1919, he fought the battle single handed and renounced his title of knighthood in protest.

Tagore respected Gandhiji very much and wrote:

Then at crucial moment, Mahatma Gandhi came and stood at the door of India's destitute millions, clad as one of themselves, speaking to them in their own language. It was a real happening, not a tale on the printed page. That is why he has been so aptly named Mahatma, Great Soul. Who else has so unreservedly accepted the vast masses of the Indian people as his own flesh and blood? At the touch of truth the pent up forces of the spirit are set free. As soon as love stood at India's door, it flew open. All inward niggardliness was gone. Truth awakened truth.

This indeed, is the birth of freedom, nothing less. . . . It has little to do with the alien occupation of India. This love is pure affirmation.

(*Rabindranath Tagore: A Centenary Volume*, xiv)

But what he said about Gandhiji applies to Tagore himself. Much before the arrival of Mahatma in the political arena of Indian freedom struggle, Tagore prepared the way for his arrival in his writings. His plays, short stories, poems and songs move to that direction, his *Gitanjali* itself testifies this.

Gandhiji did not like European modernism, a point where Tagore's opinions differed. But that could not make Tagore a blind supporter of European advancement. Where Europe expressed its shameless greed and hunger to devour other civilizations, where European colonial and imperial venture exploited man ruthlessly and left him to suffer amid darkness, despair and distress, Tagore protested and criticized that ugly, demonic activity. In his book *Nationalism*, he first defines the popular idea of a 'nation' and then exposes the shameful functions and operations Europe performs under its overwhelming influence:

A nation, in the sense of the political and economic union of a people, is that aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for a mechanical purpose. . . . It is merely the side of power, not of human ideals. And in the early days it had its separate place in society, restricted to the professionals. But when with the help of science and the perfecting of organization this power begins to grow and brings in harvests of wealth, then it crosses its boundaries with amazing rapidity. For then it goads all its neighbouring societies with greed of material prosperity, and consequent mutual jealousy, and by the fear of each other's growth into powerfulness. The time comes when it can stop no longer, for the competition grows keener, organization grows vaster, and selfishness attains supremacy. Trading upon the greed and fear of man, it occupies more and more space in society, and at last becomes its ruling force . . .

When this organization of politics and commerce, whose other name is the Nation, becomes all powerful at the cost of the harmony of the higher social life, then it is an

evil day for humanity. When a father becomes a gambler and his obligations to the family take the secondary place in his mind, then he is no longer a man, but an automaton led by the power of greed. Then he can do things which, in his normal state of mind, he would be ashamed to do. It is the same thing with society. When it allows itself to be turned into a perfect organization of power, then there are few crimes it is unable to perpetrate, because success is the object and justification of a machine, while goodness only is the end and purpose of man. When this engine of organization begins to attain a vast size, and those who are mechanics are made into parts of the machine, then the personal man is eliminated to a phantom, everything becomes a revolution of policy carried out by the human parts of the machines, with no twinge of pity or moral responsibility. It may happen that even through this apparatus the moral nature of man tries to assert itself, but the whole series of ropes and pulleys creak and cry, the forces of the human heart becomes entangled among the forces of the human automaton. . . . (37, 40)

Two things come out of this, first, that Tagore was perfectly aware of the political situation which grasped the contemporary world and unlike Yeats he criticized its black design outright. In plain, unambiguous words he condemned the imperial greed of West that strove to interfere, control and possess every particle of production and everything in the colonies that had a material value. In *Nationalism* again and again he analyses this suicidal tendency, this dangerous self debasement that in order to gain a little, digs chasms for final self annihilation:

Thus man, with his mental and material power far outgrowing his moral strength, is like an exaggerated giraffe whose head has suddenly shot up miles away from the rest of him, making normal communication difficult to establish. This greedy head, with its huge dental organization, has been munching all the topmost foliage of the world,

but the nourishment is too late in reaching his digestive organs, and his heart is suffering from want of blood. Of this present disharmony in man's nature the West seems to have been blissfully unconscious. The enormity of its material success has diverted all its attention towards self congratulation on its bulk. The optimism of its logic goes on basing the calculation of its good fortune upon the indefinite prolongation of its railway lines towards eternity. It is superficial enough to think that all tomorrows are merely today's, with the repeated additions of twenty-four hours. It has no fear of the chasm, which is opening wider every day, between man's ever growing storehouses and the emptiness of his hungry humanity. (56)

The second point lies in the first itself, in Tagore's concern for 'tomorrows', in his care for the 'hungry humanity', which he absorbed from his reading of the *Upanishadas*. Tagore found the roots of Indian philosophy, religion and culture in the essence of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishadas*, which he sincerely cultivated, assimilated and often expressed, for example in the article *Dharmer Saral Adarsha* (Simple Ideals of Religion):

Once our India (Bharatvarsha) did possess a simple religious ideal. In the *Upanishadas* we get acquainted with it. Therein the revelation of Brahma (God) is full, unbroken, it is not encumbered by the web of our conceptualizations. . . .

The *Upanishad* has shown this world (jagat, samsar) full of diversity as absorbed in the endless truth of Brahman, in the endless knowledge of Brahman. The *Upanishad* did not conceptualise a special world (lok), it did not erect special temples, it did not install special forms (murti) at some special place, – by only perceiving Him everywhere in a perfect way, it totally removed every manner of complexity, every conceptualized unstableness. Where else is there such a great ideal of pure religious simplicity?

Let us not, by thoughtlessly pronouncing that this Brahman of the Upanishad is inaccessible to us, keep the immortal words of the seers banished from our dealings. Since the sky is not available to our grasp like a piece of stone, we cannot call the sky inaccessible. In fact for this very reason, it is easy to enter. What can be conceived, what can be touched, is exactly what prevents us. The insignificant walls we build with our own hands are difficult to scale, but the endless sky is not difficult to scale. Over a wall we can jump, but there is no purpose in jumping over the sky. The light of the morning sun cannot be gathered together like a fistful of gold, but must we say for this reason that the light of the sun is difficult to obtain? And is it necessary that anyone purchases and brings us the morning rays that fill the sky? The idea that the morning light is to be bought at a certain price is impossible to entertain – that light is not extremely costly, it is without a price.

The Brahman of the Upanishad is like that. He is everywhere inside and outside. He is the most inner one, He is most far away. By His truth we are true, by His joy we have been revealed. *(Rachanabali, vol.7, 462. Also qtd. in Bijlert 53 – 54)*

Victor A. Van Bijlert, in his essay “*Tagore’s Vision of the Indian nation: 1900 – 1917*” makes the following comments on this passage:

Tagore wishes his readers to immerse themselves in the inspiration of the ancient Upanishadic sages. Thus the contemporary readers will perhaps find the way back to the spiritual glory of the ancient seers. Because of the simplicity and universality of this Upanishadic message, all Indians, irrespective of caste or *varna*, should be able to internalize it. Thus the Upanishadic ideal could be transformed into an egalitarian ideal of Indian nationality. (54)

But this can be taken away from the particular context of Indian nationalism and extended to a broader perspective. The impossibility of the purchase of morning light or jumping over the sky is not restricted to India and her people only, this has relevance for the universal man and it wants to establish the limitation of the material world and its endless calculation of profit and loss. Tagore rejects the political, material way of nationalism and wants to rebuild and reform India, socially and culturally:

The ideals that strive to take form in social institutions have two objects. One is to regulate our passions and appetites for the harmonious development of man, and the other is to help him to cultivate disinterested love for his fellow creatures. Therefore society is the expression of those moral and spiritual aspirations of man that belong to his higher nature. (*Nationalism*, 72)

It is this concern for the higher nature of man that instigated Tagore to plunge in thousands types of social development programmes. It is for this that he, a Zamindar, went to meet and solve the daily distress of the common men and women and tried his best to extend education and a sense of self respect and a desire for self emancipation. He wrote in the essay “*The History and Ideals of Sriniketan*”, published in *The Modern Review*, (November 1941) :

I endeavoured all the time I was in the country to get to know it down to the smallest detail. The needs of my work took me on long distance from village to village, from Shelidah to Patisar, by rivers large and small, and across *beels* and in this way I saw all sides of village life. I was filled with eagerness to understand the villagers’ daily routine and the varied pageant of their lives. . . . Gradually the sorrow and poverty of the villagers became clear to me, and I began to grow restless to do something about it. (133)

It is necessary to remember that Yeats also went to rural Ireland and moved from one village to other, accompanied by Lady Gregory or Douglas Hyde, to pick up old sagas, stories and myths to quicken a Celtic revival. But while in Yeats the mission is to renew and romanticize over the resources of ancient folk culture, to draw materials for occult and spiritual experiments, in Tagore, it is completely different. Tagore is preoccupied, not with words only, but with works, works for them who belong to the bottom of the society, who are the lowly and the lost. In a letter to Lady Abala Bose in 1908, he wrote:

At present I am preoccupied with the problems of our village society. I have made up my mind to provide an example of rural reconstruction work in our zamindari. A few boys from East Bengal have volunteered for the purpose. They live in the villages in the midst of the people and are trying to organize the villagers, so that they may make provisions for their own education and sanitation, for the settlement of disputes etc. The workers have initiated such public works as the repair of roads and paths, excavation of tanks, cutting of drains and clearing of jungles. A deep despair now pervades rural life all over the country, so much so that high-sounding phrases like home rule, autonomy etc. appear to me almost ridiculous and I feel ashamed even to utter them. (*Prabasi*, 466)

Innumerable lines from innumerable texts may be quoted in support of Tagore's love for the country and concern for the national struggle but what he said in a speech delivered on the seventh anniversary of Sriniketan in 1928, shows his real intention and project of nationalism in a brief way:

If we could free even one village from the shackles of helplessness and ignorance, an ideal for whole India would be established. . . . Let a few villages be rebuilt in this way, and I shall say they are my India. That is the way to discover the true India.

(“City and Village” in *Towards Universal Man*, 322)

Tagore intended to see all the races of mankind, all cultures and civilizations unified on the shore of India. Thus it was not difficult for him to cross the physical territory of India and to speak of and appreciate the universal Man:

I have believed that the truth of man is in the Greater Man who is linked in the hearts of the great masses. In the name of this Greater Man, I have dedicated my life-work, and have gathered the fruits of renunciations beyond the bounds of the literary efforts that have been my passion since childhood. . . . I have come into earth's great pilgrimage where, in the heart of the history of all countries, of all races and of all times – the supreme Man-God resides.

(Rabindranath Tagore: A Centenary Volume, 69)

It is this supreme Man-God whom Tagore offers his songs and works, the achievements of his life. It is Him he offers his final salutation, as Richard Church depicts in his essay on Tagore, "The Universal Man":

In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet.

Like a rain cloud of July hung low with its burden of unshed showers let all my mind bend down at thy door in one salutation to thee.

Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into a single current and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to thee.

Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee.

(Rabindranath Tagore: A Centenary Volume, 132)

If Yeats's anti-materialist and romantic – revivalist approach lays the foundation stone in the unveiling of the history and mystery of man and one of his early civilizations and cultures, Tagore's exposure of the mechanics of nationalism and hopeful expectation of the liberation of man, his endless toil and struggle to awaken suffering humanity, and his final

salutation of the Greater Man or Man – God, then naturally becomes the legitimate sequel and conclusive target of that enterprise. The present study therefore, disobeys the obligations of the mechanical, chronological analysis and begins discussion with Yeats to concentrate on Tagore, thereafter.

The time frame of this project, covering three decades between 1890 and 1920, also requires an explanation. It is true that a study on the contribution of Yeats and Tagore to the development of the spiritual domain of Nationalism cannot be and should not be confined to any such artificially made time frame. References always flood in from beyond the margins, and they cannot be ignored. Still, it is important to note that the three decades taken here, mark the formative years of the spiritual domain of nationalism, both in Ireland and in India. Before 1890, both Yeats and Tagore had been in the preparatory stage and thereafter, when they participated in the nationalist struggle of their countries, they gradually mastered the art and became representative figures, during this period. After 1922, Ireland achieved self rule, Yeats became a senator and the voice and its context got changed. In the case of Tagore, the spirit continued but definitely with a change, brought in by the impact of the First World War and also by the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian Politics. Any one, reading the poems of *Balaka* after *Gitanjali*, *Gitimalya*, *Gitali* phase notices the change.

Along with it, this is also true that drawing the time frame up to 1940 or even 1950, could not solve all problems. A scope of further study in areas like this is always alive and can never get exhausted. A discussion like the present one, can proceed to further analysis only with an acknowledgement of this truth. Translations from Tagore's Bengali writings and other Bengali works of criticism on him, unless otherwise mentioned, have been made by the author of the present thesis himself.

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