In Chapter-II, we saw how the vision of a glorious ancient civilisation of India was conjured up in the pages of *Vanga Darsan* and sought to be established by the historical method without any attempt at rigorous historical research. In the *Vanga Darsan* articles, the evidence furnished to prove the existence of such a civilisation was rather general and referred to no single historical epoch. Also the *Vanga Darsan* approach was universalistic in the sense that the highest glories of the Indian civilisation discussed by the *Vanga Darsan* writers emphasised no special feature of that civilisation which could set it apart from the historical civilisation of the West. We shall see how this approach was modified by Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore. In this chapter we intend to describe the Indological thoughts of Bankim Chandra, Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore.

But first of all it will be in order to discuss the Indological work of Bankim Chandra. His post-*Vanga Darsan* excursus into Indology was aimed at discovering a specific historical epoch in ancient India, thereby giving the *Vanga Darsan* vision a definite historical shape and illuminating an unwritten chapter of Indian history with the torchlight of genuine historical research.

The epoch selected by Bankim Chandra for his historical research was the epoch supervening between the Vedic age and the age of Buddha. To this day this has remained perhaps the darkest epoch of Indian history and Bankim Chandra's is perhaps the only serious work that helps us to gain some positive information regarding the nature of the civilisation.
obtaining in India during that epoch. It would be important to study how Bankim sought to answer two related questions:

1) What was the nature of the religion prevalent in India during the epoch?

2) What were the characteristics of the secular civilisation prevalent in India during that epoch?

It is only necessary to add that Bankim Chandra's answer to these questions was inspired by the desire to set off the New Hindu ideas against an epoch of true history so as to render the New Hindu vision something more than a vision—in other words, something that could serve as a gospel of future action by furnishing inspiration from a glorious series of past actions.

(a) The Age of the Mahabharata

It would be relevant here to examine the authenticity of the sources on which Bankim's answer were based. The result of the researches he embodied in his famous work "Krishnacharita" can be considered on two levels: (1) the actions of certain mythical heroes as described in the Mahabharata; (2) the civilisation of a certain epoch as narrated in the same work. On the first level, Bankim claimed that the Kauravas, the Pandavas, and above all Shri Krishna were historical characters. On the second, he asserted (or rather implied) that the Mahabharata in point of its main story was a pre-Buddhistic work, and could be used as a source of historical information if carefully handled.1 Bankim Chandra's claim as regards the first level can hardly be sustained in the absence of.

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1. 'Krishnacharita': Chapter I, Sec II: Bankim Rachanavali: Sahitya Samasad p 412
archaeological evidence regarding the historicity of the mythical heroes. His sources (apart from tradition) were literary - the Vedic literature, the Mahabharata and the Puranas. These works unanimously treat the Mahabharata story as historical. The Puranas and the Mahabharata even assign a date for the main event of the Mahabharata story - namely, the Kurukshetra war - which Bankim Chandra calculated to be 1430 B.C. (Circa). The unanimity of all these works regarding this date is indeed a striking discovery; but even so, Bankim Chandra's claim has to be viewed against the general untrustworthiness of purely literary sources as dependable authorities regarding India's past. It however, remains a bold hypothesis, which, for all we know, may yet be proved to be true, if archaeological evidence turns up in its favour. After the discovery of Troy, and coming nearer home - after the discovery of the Indus Valley Civilisation, it can hardly be reckoned a wild hope to believe that Bankim Chandra's hypothesis regarding the historicity of the Pandavas and Krishna may yet come true.

Coming to the second assertion of Bankim Chandra we are on a surer ground. Bankim Chandra took his stand against the bulk of European Indologists who had decided that the existing text of the Mahabharata was a later work, the original Mahabharata, as mentioned in the Vedic literature, being irretrievably lost. Bankim Chandra examined the arguments advanced in favour of this assertion and pointed out how unsound they were. A number of the Mahabharata heroes were mentioned in the Satapatha Brahmana (Dhritarashtra, Parikshit, Jamshed, Arjun), the epic itself was mentioned in Asvalayana and Sankhyana Grihya - Sutras. Krishna's name occurred again and again in the Rgveda Samhita.

1. 'Krishnacharita': Chapter I, Sec. V: Bankim Rachanavalis Sahitya Samsad p 416.
Krishna Debakiputra was mentioned in the Chhandogyu Upanishad. Kanshituki Brahmana omitted the epithet Devakiputra, but, like Chhandogyu, mentioned Krishna's name in connection with one Ghora Angirasa. All these were parts of the Vedic literature, most of them definitely pre-Buddhistic. Coming to post-Vedic literature, Bankim Chandra showed that the aphorisms of Panini not only mentioned the Mahabharata, and most of the Mahabharata heroes, but actually referred to Arjuna and Basudeva (a name of Krishna) as deities receiving worship. The Buddhist literature in its earliest phase as given in the Sutra Pitaka itself mentioned Krishna as Mara, thereby indicating that the Krishna cult was the most formidable adversary Buddhism had to reckon with.

These are formidable arguments, and on the strength of these arguments alone, Bankim was entitled to claim that the existing text of the Mahabharata contained its original text including "the Pandava story and the story of Krishna." in their bare outlines. But Bankim Chandra did not stop here. He considered Lassen's hypothesis regarding the original text of the Mahabharata and showed how that hypothesis did not contradict his own. Lassen (and some other European scholars) had noticed the early Vedic mention of the term 'Kuru-Panchala' and had come to the conclusion that the original text must have narrated a war between Kurus and Panchalas, but as the existing text narrated a war between Kauravas and Pandavas, the original text must have been lost. Bankim pointed out that the war mentioned in the existing text was essentially a war between the Kurus and Panchalas since the bulk of the Pandava army consisted of Panchalas and Srinjayas (a clan related to the Panchalas). Not only that, the Pandava general was a Panchala hero, namely, Dhristadyumna,
Dhristadyumna, the Panchala Prince. Also the Mahabharata was full of references to the conflict between Kurus and Panchalas. Bankim pointed to the fact of Bhisma's and Drona's joining the side of the unprincipled Duryadhana, and suggested that this was explicable only on the hypothesis that the Mahabharata was a Kuru-Panchala war, since, to these highminded heroes, Pandavas were dearer than the unprincipled Duryodhana. Bankim concluded that the Krishna-Pandava story in its essentials was what constituted the original Mahabharata.

It need only be added that when a work is mentioned again and again in the pre-Buddhist literature, when the names of most of its permanent heroes happen to occur in the Vedic literature; when its existing text becomes as a 'fleshless skeleton' without the Pandava story and the Kurukshetra war - the European Indologist's repudiation of even this story as having formed the core of the original text appears plainly fantastic. Bankim's findings, on the basis of this story alone, therefore, seems to be a most dependable source of information regarding the post-Vedic and the pre-Buddhistic civilisation of India. To Bankim's interpretation of this civilisation we turn now.

(b) The Dawn of Hindu Civilisation

The character of the civilisation portrayed in the earliest portion of the Mahabharata is definitely pre-Buddhistic. This comes out most clearly if we examine the nature of the religion prevalent in that epoch. The Vedic religion is pre-dominant; Yagnas or sacrifices are mentioned

1. *Krishnacharitra; Chapter I, Sec. XI: Bankim Rachanavali: Sahitya Sansad p 429.
again and again; Vedic deities are paramount. Tribal concepts of justice and fairness are prevalent. Thus Arjuna is bent upon killing his elder brother Yudhistira for the sake of a pledge he had undertaken to kill anyone who should speak ill of his bow Gandeba. But new ideas on religion are set afloat by the mythical Krishna (whom Bankim took for a historical hero). Krishna combats the traditional ideas and pleads for a rational basis of religion and morality without violence to the tradition. He says to Arjuna:

"There are certain definite characteristics by which one can discriminate between religion and irreligion. In certain cases where the religious issue is extremely complicated, we have to fall back upon Reason to decide the issue."1

This is not all. Krishna says quite clearly that the traditional Vedic religion is incomplete:

"Many people say that the Vedic Revelation is the basis of religion. I do not condemn that belief but not all truths are stated in the Vedas."2

What then is the non-Vedic basis of religion by which Arjuna's tribal notion of truth (which instigates him to kill Yudhisthira for its sake) is to be replaced? Krishna says:

"Religion is religion because it holds all creation. Therefore, that alone is religion which conduces to the well-being of all creation."3

1. *Krishnacharitra*: Chapter VI, Sec.VI. The original verse (not quoted by Bankim) is: Tatra te laksanoddeshah Kaścid evam bhavisyati Duskaram paramajnanaja tarkanuvavyasyati.

2. *Ibid*; 'Srute dharma iti hyeke vadanti vahavo jaṇaḥ Tat ten pratyanuyāmi na ca sarvaḥ vidhiyate.
   - Both these verses occur in the Chapter Karmavādha, Mahābhārata, Gita Press.

3. *Krishnacharitra*: Chapter VI, Sec.VI.
This is revealing. It shows clearly that in the age of the Mahabhaga a new foundation of religion was being laid by the mythical Krishna with emphasis on reason and the 'well-being of all creation' as surer guides to the truths of religion. The relation of this new religion to the Vedic religion is shown in clearer light by Krishna's re-interpretation of the doctrine of action (Karma).

Traditionally the doctrine of Karma inculcated the so-called "Kamya Karmas" or Vedic sacrifices aimed at the attainment of heavenly pleasures after death. But Krishna puts the whole emphasis on actions aiming at the "well-being of all creation." This is made clear in his speech to Sanjaya. Sanjaya is trying to construct a specious argument in favour of Duryodhana's usurpation of the Pandava Kingdom. He is trying to put off the warlike Pandavas by an appeal to pacific sentiments inculcated by traditional religion. He is pleading for inaction as action in this case would mean war. Krishna says:

"According to some, it is action alone that leads to salvation; according to others, Vedic learning alone does so. But (I say) : Just as no one can know the taste of food without actually partaking of it, no Brahmana can possibly attain salvation by means of Vedic learning alone without engaging himself in action. Those actions are therefore to be performed which lead to results in this very life in the manner of a man's quenching his thirst by partaking of water."

Thus activism aimed at the "well-being of creation" was the essence of the new religion that was being formulated during the age of the Mahabhagata. Also the air was thick with Vedantic ideas, Krishna himself taking a leading part in the propagation of the doctrine of an "all-pervading God" who was to be realised, not by
taking to a monastic life but by trying to change the direction of desire from worldly pleasures to things of the soul in other words by selfless action (Nishkam Karma). This was of course the doctrine of Impersonal Pantheism (Nirguna Brahman) preached in the Upanishads. But side by side with this Impersonal Pantheism the doctrine of Personal Pantheism (Sagun Brahman) was being developed with Krishna himself beginning to be worshipped by certain of his admirers as the world-soul made of flesh. Bankim himself has left the question open whether the cult of Krishna as described in the existing text of the Mahabharata formed part of the original text. But it is clear that the idea of a God-like man being worshipped as an Incarnation was already in the air. In other words the doctrine of Bhakti was taking shape.

Coming to the secular civilisation as portrayed in the Mahabharata we are again face to face with a tribal society in the process of reconstruction by means of newer and loftier ideas. The casteless Vedic society has given place to the caste-ridden society of the later ages but caste in the Mahabharata epoch is by no means rigid. Intercaste marriage is prevalent. There is no restriction on the intermingling of castes on the social plane — interdining as amongst men of different castes is the rule rather than the exception.

1. Krishnacharitra: Chapter-VI: Bankim quotes in full the religious discourse Kangita addressed to Yudhisthira dissuading the latter from renouncing the world, and shows the simplicity of the religious ideas discussed in the discourse with the ideas of the Gita.
2. Cf. Bankim’s discussion in Krishnacharitra, Chapter-IV: Section IX.
3. Krishnacharitra, Chapter-V. Footnote of Section VI.
As regards social customs tribalism is by no means extinct. Marriage amongst Kshtriyas usually takes place by abduction of the bride. But the romantic custom of Swayambara where the bride chooses her own groom is also mentioned again and again. For Kshatiiyas it is actually considered the best custom.

Women are by no means subservient to menfolk. Thus Draupadi, the common wife of the Pandavas breathes pride and loftiness in every word she utters. Bankim quotes with approval her words: "It is no less a sin to withhold death from a man who deserves it than to murder one who does not."

In politics, the main activity is war. The Kshatriyas are extremely war-like. Even Brahmans excel in the art of war. But already Brahmans participating in war are under severe social censure. The Kshatıya ideal is death in the battlefield. But even in peace as well as in exile the Kshatriya creed is lofty and generous. In the words of Krishna: "Heroic people suffer the greatest tribulation or enjoy the loftiest happiness. It is only sensual people who are satisfied with the middle station which is the source of all unhappiness. Real happiness consists in conquest or in exile."

These words of Krishna set the tone for a new drama of ideas, directed by Krishna again, which aim at the establishment of a

1. Krishnacharitra: Chapter-VI. Section V.
2. Krishnacharitra: Chapter-V. Section VI.
"Kingdom of righteousness" (Dharmarajya) by enlarging and broadening the prevalent Kshatriya ideal. Yudhisthira is a righteous king. But his notions of righteousness are traditional. He thinks it part of his royal duty to accept the challenge of Sakuni in a gamble in which he stakes his Kingdom, his brothers and even his wife. When he is finally exiled for thirteen years along with his brothers and wife he lives out the term with unflinching determination, but he is at a loss how to recover the lost kingdom. Most of his friends advise war. War, in fact, is the traditional mode of resolving political disputes. But Yudhisthira recoils at the idea of war amongst blood-relations. His traditional notion of righteousness makes him fall between two stools. On the one hand are the war-hungry Kshatriyas of the Pandava camp; on the other his fear of the sin of killing his own kindred. Krishna points out the way to found the kingdom of righteousness. He chides Yudhisthira for his chicken-hearted irresolution unbecoming of a Kshatriya and emphasises the immorality involved in not striving to recover his usurped kingdom. He says that the annulment of usurpation is a moral duty. It is as imperative as the duty of avoiding war in resolving political disputes. These two — and not traditional Kshatriya ideal of war nor the traditional fear of sin in spilling the blood of Kinsmen — are the basic moral principles involved in the matter. But how should one reconcile these ideals when they become contradictory? Krishna's suggestion is to strive to the uttermost for peace by fixing the Pandava claiming to only a half of the lost kingdom. He offers to act as a go-between between Pandavas and Kauravas for negotiating a reconciliation.

1. Krishnacharitra; Chapter-V. Section II
on such terms. He himself would not participate in the war and asks Arjuna to choose between his single unarmed self and a big regiment of skilful soldiers. When Arjuna selects for his unarmed assistance he hands over the regiment to Duryodhana. He travels the whole way to the Kaurava capital and does his best to prevent bloodshed. He fails but not before clearly enunciating his doctrine of "righteous politics" to all concerned. After the holocaust he guides Yudhistira to found a kingdom of righteousness by learning the art of statesmanship from the oldest and the wisest of the Kauravas.

The idea of "righteous statesmanship" attributed to Krishna, runs like a silver thread through the original version of the Mahabharata as conceived by Bankim. According to Bankim, Krishna's direction of the ethics of the Kurukshetra war as also his guidance in making Yudhisthira's kingdom a kingdom of righteousness is only the final act of a long life devoted to the cause of righteous statesmanship. Bankim has illustrated this with the Jārasandha episode. Jārasandha was the most powerful monarch of the Mahabharata epoch. He was an unrighteous ruler forcibly holding as many as eighty-six kings whom he intended to immolate before the God Siva by adding another fourteen to the number. Krishna advised Yudhisthira to subdue him, and, to prevent unnecessary bloodshed, took Bhima and Arjuna with him to the capital of Jārasandha and challenged the latter to engage in fight with one amongst the three. According to Kshatriya custom Jārasandha had to accept the challenge. He fought with Bhima and was killed by the latter. Krishna got all the eighty-six kings released and desisted from usurping Jārasandha's kingdom. Thus at one stroke he relieved the world of a scourge with the minimum of
bleeds and furthered the cause of 'righteous statesmanship' by making friends of as many as eighty-six monarchs.¹

This summary in bare outlines, of the pre-Buddhist and post-Vedic civilisation of India could be reckoned a valuable contribution to Indian history. European Indologists have all along doubted the authority of the Mahabharata as a historical work. We have admitted the validity of this doubt as regards the historicity of the characters portrayed in the epic. But just as the Rigveda Samhita is treated as a most valuable source book of Indian history, so the main story of the Mahabharata, denuded of all its miraculous trappings can form a significant source of historical information regarding the epoch supervening between two ages of the Vedas and that of Buddha. Bankim was a pioneer in this direction with hardly any successor but that does not detract from the merit of his great work.

But Bankim's interest in the Mahabharata epoch was not merely antiquarian. Nor was it actuated by the desire to locate the shimmering Bangadarshan vision of a glorious Indian past at a definite historical epoch and thereby to give the vision a definite shape and form. No doubt this second was a most powerful motive behind his work. But this motive was indissolubly linked with his desire to justify his rationalist exposition of Hinduism (as given in Dharmatattwa) by a historical precedent. Krishna's approach to Vedic revelation which Bankim discussed in such detail was identical with his own. His interpretation of the

¹ Krishnacharitra: Chapter-IV, Sections VI-VIII.
activism preached in the Gita was vindicated by Krishna's discourse to Sanjaya. Above all the concept of Dharmarajya* (kingdom of righteousness) was one which was intended to supplement that activism with a political programme. In the event, this concept was to play the most momentous role in the Nationalist Movement of the succeeding decades. Mahatma Gandhi modified the concept into that of Ramrajya which in English must be rendered by the same phrase "Kingdom of righteousness."¹ The Mahatma of course demurred the concept of its associations with war, but it must be remembered that in Bankim's work it was, the non-violence of Krishna, and the latter's emphasis on it to the uttermost limit, which was sought to be established against the popular notion of a war-hungry Krishna. Bankim's emphasis on Kshatriya ideal was perhaps one that the Mahatma would not accept, but it was echoed by Vivekananda with his cult of the 'rajaguna' and taken up enthusiastically by the Bangali youth during the Swadeshi struggle.

It should only be added that Bankim, in Krishna Charitra, discovered what may truly be called the Dawn of Hindu Civilisation. Its main features were, in the first place, the religion of the Vedanta and the Gita, in the activist sense of Vivekananda, since Krishna, the supreme activist, was its exponent. In the second place, this Vedantism was merged with the incipient Bhakti Movement, in the sense that Krishna

¹. We have already referred to Mahatma's acquaintance with Krishnacharitra in a Gujrati translation.
was already being worshipped. In the third place, this civilisation in its secular aspect, was characterised by a loose and intermarrying caste system in which Brahmanas like Drona could take up war as their profession; but the Brahmanical ideal was already being emphasized as pacific and non-violent pursuit of religion and scholarship. The Kshatriya ideal was proclaimed in all its glory and violence, but already Krishna was shaping it in the direction of a "Kingdom of righteousness." The glory of Indian womanhood was being vindicated in such women as Draupadi, whose lofty spirit shone forth in all its splendour and eclipsed all the male heroes in the court of Dhritarashtra, when her husbands stared helpless at her molestation owing to a superstitious adherence to the traditional religion which could not prevent them from gambling away their wife and yet disabled them from coming to her rescue by a foolish adherence to the laws of gamble.1

(c) Canons of Civilisation

Neither Swami Vivekananda nor Rabindranath Tagore was an Indologist. But they supplemented Bankim's findings by two important additions. Vivekananda defined the place of monasticism in Hindu civilisation and society, and Rabindranath revived the ideal of the forest. In Bankim's historical research into the dawn of Hindu civilisation the question of the monastic ideal was touched upon in passing, but its place in the civilisation of Ancient India was not.

1. Bankim's essays on 'Draupadi': Vividha Prabandha: Part I.
determined. Actually the Mahabharata epoch does not seem to have been conspicuous in upholding the monastic ideal. Tapovans or forest settlements containing marrying as well as celibate Brahmans are mentioned in the Mahabharata, but the pre-Buddhist Mahabharata does not seem to contain any reference to monks and monasteries. The Upanishads, of course, extol the Sannyasin ideal as the highest, but even the Upanishads do not mention monasteries, but describe the Yatins or Sannyasins taking up the pursuit of personal illumination (Moksha) individually rather than as members of a monastic organisation. To see how Vivekananda settled this question, it would be necessary first to examine his special approach to the civilisation of India.

Vivekananda was not an Indologist, but he was the first among Indians to start a comparative study of civilisations by emphasizing the distinctive feature of the civilisation of India. We say, "distinctive" because all other Indian thinkers before Vivekananda, who had taken note of the East-West conflict in contemporary India, had taken pains to emphasize the universal elements of the civilisation of ancient India. Thus Bankim was as much a universalist as Rammohan was. It is true that Rammohan's universalism had taken little (if any), notice of the secular civilisation of ancient India. But in his exposition of Vedantic monotheism, the impulse was supplied by his desire to look for a common basis of the three great religions - Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. Bankim had rejected monotheism, in favour of Personal Pantheism but he too had emphasized Bhakti as the common basis of these three world religions.¹

¹ Dharmatattwa: Chapter XI.
We saw in Chapter-II that Bankim’s universalism had extended to the sphere of secular civilisation. This same impulse had actuated him to glorify the Kshatriya ideal — a Kshatriya ideal by all counts — described in the Mahabharata with the modifications proposed by Krishna. This was, of course, the ideal of contemporary Europe, though according to Bankim, the European ideal lacked the modifications proposed by Krishna, who according to Bankim, was the ideal man amongst Hindus. Bankim admitted that this Kshatriya ideal, with the modifications supplied by Krishna was the ancient Hindu ideal, not to be found in contemporary Hinduism, just as the Christian ideal was the ideal of ancient Christians not to be found in contemporary Europe. The point, however, was that Bankim wanted the ancient Hindu ideal to be revived by contemporary India, which, in his opinion, was in a state of decline. In a brilliant passage of 'Krishna Charitra' he discussed how India's decline was due to the loss of the ancient ideal which, in his opinion, was a complete ideal. To him this ideal was superior to the monastic ideal of the Buddhists and the Christians. He pleaded for the revival of the ancient ideal in language that was as noble as the ideal was glorious.

"For us to-day it has become imperative that we understand the complete Hindu ideal as distinct from the incomplete ideal of the Buddhists and the Christians. For, there is a surprising thing involved in this lack of our understanding of our own ancient ideal. In Christian Europe as well as in Hindu India things have taken a turn quite contrary to the original ideal. The ideal Christian was modest, meek, pacific and monkish; — the modern Christian is just the opposite. What is modern Europe but a sprawling camp of armed warriors totally given to earthly pleasures of the senses? The ideal Hindu was a man of infinite activity; — the modern Hindu glories in total inaction. How then to account for this total reversal of ideals? The answer is simple: In both the countries the ancient ideal has vanished from the
minds of their inhabitants. Since the day in which the ancient ideal vanished from the Hindu heart, since the day in which we lowered the ideal of Krishna's character we have been in a continuous state of decline. Everyone imitates the sensual Krishna of Joyadeva Goswami - no one remembers the Krishna of the Mahabharata. But now we are at the dawning of a new epoch in which the national mind must remember, once again, its original ideal. And it is my modest hope that this exposition of Krishna's character will be an aid to that task.1

This was Vivekananda's point of departure. It is clear that Vivekananda was profoundly influenced by this passage of 'Krishna Charitra' for it occurs almost verbatim in his "Prachya O Paschatya". But he was too much of a disciple of Ramkrishna to subscribe to the Kshatriya ideal as the highest ideal of the Hindus. Bankim had studied only an epoch of Indian history, Vivekananda viewed Indian history in its totality and examined the whole field of Indology by a canon of civilisation instead of canons of mere scholarship.

The canon was what Vivekananda called the "aim of national life". "Every nation has a national aim"5 - this was Vivekananda's postulate on the basis of which he undertook to study the civilisations of India, Britain and France. On the strength of this postulate and his application

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1. Krishna Charitra. Chapter-IV. Section VII.
2. "See the fun! Jesus advises, "Invite no enmity. If any one slaps you on a cheek, turn to him the other. Stop working." And our saint says, "work with all enthusiasm, kill your enemies, enjoy the world". But they took the reverse. The Europeans did not care to follow what Jesus said. They are enjoying the world exhibiting their strength (rajogun), activity and enthusiasm. And we are resigning ourselves to fate and thinking of Death. Who follow the advice of the Gita? - The Europeans. And who are following Chriit's advice? - The follower of Krishna." Prachya O Paschatya 'Vivekananda Bani O Rachana' Vol. VI.
3. Ibid.

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of it Vivekananda must be pronounced a pioneer in the field of comparative study of civilisations - a study since undertaken by Oswald Spengler and, in times near our own, by Arnold Toynbee. Without waiting to consider the special results of his study in regard to Britain and France, let us see how Vivekananda applied his canon (or postulate) to the civilisation of India and of the West.

The national aim of the West was Dharma in the sense of the Mimamsaka School of Philosophers. The national aim of India was Moksha or liberation or personal illumination. "Dharma taught one to seek for happiness in this world and the other. It was based on action." Moksha taught one "to go beyond the bondage of nature, beyond the bondage of flesh", beyond happiness. "This path of Moksha was to be found in India alone and no-where else," though, it was Vivekananda's hope that the path would be taken up by other countries too. This was therefore the distinctive feature of Indian civilisation and the aim of India's national life.

But if this was so, should India not devote herself wholly to the "path of liberation" (Mokshamarga) and leave Dharma aside? If

1. Dharma is the subject of inquiry in Mimamsa. Jaimine defines dharma as a command or injunction which impels men to action. Dharma and adharma deal with happiness and pain to be enjoyed of suffered in the life beyond. Actions performed here produce an unseen potency (apurva) in the soul of the agent which yields fruit when obstructions are removed and time becomes ripe for its fructification. The earlier Mimamsaka believed only in dharma (and not in moksa) and their ideal was the attainment of heaven (svarga). But later Mimamsakas believe in moksa and substitute the ideal of heaven by that of liberation (apavarga).
Dharma in the Mimamsaka sense meant "the path of happiness" and if this path did not serve India's national purpose, should it not be left alone to make room for a whole nation of Sannyasins who would devote themselves wholeheartedly to the path of liberation? Quite the contrary, said Vivekananda. This seems to contradict his own postulate, though the contradiction was not real, for he wanted a balance between the two paths. He accepted Bankim's Kshatriya ideal wholeheartedly by tracing the decline of India from the age of Buddha who made the path of liberation the only expression of national life. But he pointed out that the Mahabharata epoch was not an epoch of the Kshatriya ideal alone but of a balance of the Kshatriya ideal with the monastic. With this correction of the one-sided view of Bankim the householder, the monk emphatically took the householder's side, and, in language that sets the reader's blood on fire sang the praise of the Kshatriya.

Thus Vivekananda preached a balance between the ideal of the Kshatriya and the ideal of the Sannyasin. But was it a true balance when the Sannyasin ideal was asserted to be the "aim of national life" and the householder was asked to uphold the Kshatriya ideal to the uttermost

1. "The decline of the country became imminent when in the Buddhist empire every temple had a following of one lakh of monks."  
   'Prachya O Paschatya'

2. "Once there was a balance between religion and salvation (Moksha) in India. Then the Kshatriyas like Pandavas, Kauravas, Bhima and Karna lived together with saints like Vyas, Shuka and Janaka."  
   'Prachya O Paschvatya'

3. Ibid; Prachya O Paschystya
but not as something that could be included within that lofty designation namely, "the aim of national life." We know that Vivekananda's hesitancy was resolved by Mahatma Gandhi who emphasized the Sannyasin ideal as the alpha and omega of India's civilisation and modified Bankim's Kshatriya conception of the 'Kingdom of righteousness' into one that was thoroughly monastic. But meanwhile Rakindranath Tagore was striking a middle path by effecting a marriage between the monk and the householder.

The word marriage in this connection is strictly appropriate, for Tagore interpreted the marriage between Siva, the Sannyasin, with Parvati, the householder (which formed the theme of Kalidas's great poem Kumarsambhavam) as symbolising the true course of India's civilisation. That marriage had led to the birth of the hero Kartikeya. Tagore indicated that the true Kshatriya was born by uniting the spirit of monasticism with the daily avocations of a householder's life.¹

But how did this allegory symbolise the true course of India's civilisation? Vivekananda would, of course, have laughed the idea of a marrying monk to scorn; but Tagore, with true insight, was drawing attention to another distinctive feature of Indian history, which had not been taken note of by any of his illustrious predecessors. Like

¹. Creative Unity, p. 53, Macmillan, 1971. Creative Unity was first published in 1922, but the essay "Religion of the Forest" from which we have quoted was a free translation of an earlier essay "Tapovan" first published in B.S. 1316, 1909-10, A.D.
Vivekananda, he was examining the field of Indology by a canon of
civilisation and like Vivekananda he was emphasizing a distinctive
feature of Indian history, but the feature discovered by the poet
was enlivened by a historical insight as true as that of the monk.

Tagore pointed out that the distinctive feature of India's
civilisation was a traffic of ideas and ideals between the forest
and the city, between the forest-dwelling Rishis and the householders
of the city. "It was the forest that cradled the civilisations of
the two great epochs of ancient India - the Vedic and the Buddhistic.
Not only the Vedic Rishis, but Buddha also, gave out his teachings
in so many mango-groves and bamboo-forests. His spacious teaching
could not be propagated within the narrow confines of palaces -
it needed all the breadth of the wide-ranging forests." 1

How did these forests give a distinctive expression to the
civilisation of India? According to Tagore the forests gave that
civilisation its distinctive ethical tone. The men who inhabited
these forests were not confined within the hard walls of a prison
built of wood, brick and iron. The place where they dwelt connected
them with the far-flung stream of life that flowed around them.
These forests gave them shade, gave them flowers and fruits, supplied
them with fire-wood and Kusa grass. The forest played a vital role in
their lives - their work no less than their leisure was intimately

affected by it. This was how they felt is their own lives a unity with a broader and larger life around them. All that they received from nature - light, air and food - all these were instinctively felt by them to have their origin in a well-spring of bliss that was infinite and full of consciousness rather than in earth, trees and vacant space. This is why India's distinctive contribution to civilisation was a consciousness of unity - the unity of the individual self with the whole universe in a fellowship that was at once the fellowship of the soul, of the heart and of the mind.¹

This was of course a restatement of the Vedantic teaching of love for all creation preached so eloquently by Bankim and Vivekananda. But Tagore's restatement is original in the very proper sense that neither Bankim nor Vivekananda had noted the sylvan setting in which the teaching had its birth. That the relation between the two, - the teaching and the setting - was a fact of true history and no mere figment of Tagore's poetic imagination was proved by him with a wealth of detail which left little room for skepticism. He pointed to the well-known fact that the places of pilgrimage in India were those "where nature was revealed in some special glory." He mentioned the custom in India according to which even kings and emperors took pride in tracing their ancestry to some forest-dwelling Rishi of venerable name. He pointed out that in all the great works in Sanskrit literature down to the age of Hindu decline the forest played a part that was of the greatest

¹. Tagore: Tapovan: Siksha pp 79-80
literary and spiritual significance. Thus in Valmiki as in Kalidasa, in Bhababhuti as in Banabhatta the forest was the leaven that went to the making of the characters of the heroes and heroines of their works; it was the background that set off their passions and by insensibly working its own influences rescued those passions from the utter nakedness displayed in some of Shakespeare's plays; it was the paradise that revealed the unutterable gloom of unmerited desertion by spreading an atmosphere of peace and holiness.

This indeed was the most substantial point made by Tagore—this insight into the nature of Indian civilisation with the help of the light supplied by the role of the forest ideal in India's ancient literature. This role was something very different from that played by the forest in the literature of Europe. Tagore mentioned three plays of Shakespeare. In "As you Like It", as in "The Tempest" and "A Midsummer Night's Dream", "we are face to face with a spectacle in which man is out to lord it over nature and not to allow his passions to be mellowed by the fellowship with nature." Even in "Paradise Lost", which was supposed to indicate humanity in an ideal fellowship with nature in the garden of Eden, there was hardly any trace of this fellowship. "Bird, beast, insect or worm //Durst enter none, such their awe of man"—this was how Milton described the relationship of man with nature. Tagore compared this with Kalidasa's treatment of

1. Ibid. p. 89.
2. Ibid. pp. 91-92. Creative Unity, pp. 61-
nature in 'Kumar Sambharam' and 'Shakuntala', and, in unforgettable language pointed out the special role of the forest ideal in the literature of India.

Let us now examine the implications of Tagore's discovery and its place in the New Hindu Movement. To take the second point first, Tagore would probably not agree with the view that the emphasis on the forest ideal had anything to do with the New Hindu Movement. According to his own statement, his predilections for the forest ideal originated from his father's construction of the hermitage at Santiniketan as a place for meditation. But as against this fact we have to consider Tagore's treatment of the Vedantic teaching of love for all creation as the ethical expression of his forest ideal. The unity with nature and all creation was, of course, the essence of Vedantic Pantheism as explained by Vivekananda. It was certainly no part of the Brahmo creed with its emphasis on Monotheism. It is true that like all true Brahmos, Tagore repudiated the monastic ideal preached by Vivekananda. But the forest ideal was not accepted by any section of the Brahmo Samaj even in the form of hermitages intended to give the best type of religious education from the Brahmo viewpoint. The operative part of Tagore's emphasis on the forest ideal as a most important factor in the civilisation of India was the proposal to construct such hermitages in the form of educational centres, but Tagore took care to repudiate any creed that was specifically brahmo in the religious teaching of such centres. It is however unnecessary to labour the point whether the forest ideal was Brahmo or New Hindu
in origin. The New Hindu Movement was not a centralised movement led by a single leader and guided by a rigid system of ideas. The rationalist approach to Hinduism, the ethical teaching of the Gita and the Vedantas, the activism associated with that teaching, the search for personal illumination through mystical experiences, the doctrine of Hindu universalism—all these certainly defined a new movement; but just as Vivekananda, without being a disciple of Bankim, could justly be said to have been adding, with far greater vigour and far more sureness of purpose, to the impulse put forth by his predecessor, Tagore, in like manner, and without being a disciple of either, was adding to their search for material ideals by a study of the national civilisation. In this broad and comprehensive sense, Tagore was as much a New Hindu as Bankim and Vivekananda before him.¹

The implications of the forest ideal preached as a distinctive feature of the civilisation of India were profound and far-reaching. Though Tagore took care to emphasize that the forest ideal was not monastic, and though, in his view, the true Kshatriya was born of a marriage between the monk and the house-holder—the whole emphasis of "the religion of the forest" (as he later named the ideal) was necessarily in the direction of monasticism, or at any rate, pacifism.

¹ Tagore's Tapovan as also the books through which he interpreted the civilisation of India to the West, were published many years after Vivekananda's death.
Tagore never preached the doctrine of absolute pacifism which was Mahatma Gandhi's version of Hindu ethics. The Mahatma took up the idea of forest hermitage but associated it with total pacifism.¹ Tagore himself had written that forest hermitages were abodes of peace,² and indicated that the idea of unity through pacifism was India's special message to the world. Bankim's emphasis on the Kshatriya ideal in search of a 'kingdom of righteousness', Vivekananda's modified version of the same and Tagore's forest ideal - viewed as an ideal of education and as a valuable factor in civilisation - all these ideas floated side by side, nerving the rising Bengali youth to new heights of imagination and new modes of expression in religion and in secular civilisation. These we shall describe in the Chapters that follow.

1. It is doubtful whether the Mahatma was indebted to Tagore for the idea. He had staged forest hermitages in South Africa much before his actual acquaintance with Tagore or his writings.

2. 'Tapovana Santa rasāspada'.