

## CHAPTER THIRD :

### TAGORE'S IDEAS ON NATIONALISM

CHAPTER - III

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Tagore was more interested in egalitarian humanism than in nationalism, therefore, he vehemently criticised western civilization for promoting the cause of nationalism. He was of the view that the glorification of power and profit in western civilization gave birth to colonialism and imperialism. Hence he criticised the concept of nationalism in his book on ' Nationalism ' in order to show that human civilisation was more important than nation-state.

The book on Nationalism is divided in three chapters -  
1) Nationalism in the West. (2) Nationalism in Japan and  
3) Nationalism in India. Tagore sought to critically analyse the concept of nationalism through western, Japanese and Indian context.

Nation and Nationalism :

Tagore was of the opinion that nationalism was basically a psychological concept that promoted collective self-interest of a particular society. Hence, he defined nation as " Political and economic union of a people, in which whole population is organised for mechanical purpose ".<sup>1</sup> The



mechanical purpose of nation, according to Tagore was lust for power, profit and dominance over others.<sup>2</sup> He held a view that nation was an artificial creation which was forged by professional men to subserve their interests.

Tagore was of the opinion that nation was different than society as the latter was spontaneous self-expression of man as a social being. It was a natural means of adjusting human relationships so that men could develop ideals of life in co-operation with one another. The society was an end in itself but nation was a means to attain power and profit. He wrote, " the nations were the organizations of power and promoted the consciousness of self-preservation of men. With the growth of science and technology, men had accumulated enormous amount of wealth and the power of organisation had expanded rapidly. This had encouraged and facilitated the transformation of peoples into nations in modern times." <sup>3</sup>

According to Tagore, the source of enormous power of the modern nations was the blind force of mob psychology.<sup>4</sup> He held that national leaders insidiously sought to foster in popular mind some sort of universal panic, race pride and hatred of others. Newspapers, educational institutions and even the church played a dubious role in this. Hence, as member of the crowd, the individual lost his reasoning capacity and moral sense, as crowd mind was essentially

primitive and its forces were elemental. Hence the nation had become the most powerful anaesthetic that man had invented. He held that nationalism stood for the expression of collective self-interest of the people.<sup>5</sup> The identity of man as a social being was lost and he became an instrument in the hands of nation. The nation had created mechanical unity and suppressed the moral faculty of the mind of an individual. It sought to weld individuals into an uniform mass according to its own formula. It gave encouragement to narrow minded ideology and promoted the cause of imperialism and colonialism. He held that nationalism was the product of western nation-state that rose a hundred years ago and completely changed the life of the European people.

After carefully defining his concept of nationalism, Tagore sought to discuss nationalism in west, nationalism in Japan and nationalism in India. He vehemently criticised nationalism in the west because he held a view that western civilization gave birth to it and it was western civilization that was encouraging it. He distinguished the spirit of the west from nation of the west and it was the nation of the west that was suppressing the most of the countries and it was not allowing them to be benefitted from the spirit of the west.

A) NATIONALISM IN THE WEST :

Following were the main characteristics of nationalism in west according to Tagore :

1) Commerce and Politics were the predominant factors of western nationalism :

Tagore was of the opinion that the western nations had acquired enormous amount of success in the fields of commerce and politics. It had brought material affluence in the lives of the people. But it suppressed the morality of mankind. The achievements of men were measured according to their market value. Market ideology prevailed in all spheres of European social life. Commercial and Political aspects dominated social life, creating the conflicts of interests and competition in the different groups of society. The market forces forced man to run after wealth and power and he had developed insatiable desire to acquire power and wealth. In this process, man had lost his moral purpose and he became a phantom<sup>6</sup> that carried out the policy decisions of the vast apparatus of wealth producing machine.

2) Nations were the vast wealth producing machine :

The mechanical purpose of this politico-economic organization, whose other name was the nation, was to acquire more wealth and power to fulfil its selfish ends. The nations

of the west had consolidated and expanded their political and economic power to undermine the growth and development of other societies of no nations. He mentioned that the material prosperity of a nation created fear and jealousy in the minds of the neighbouring nations. The competition for acquiring more wealth and power had become the main feature of western nationalism. With the emergence of nation, greed, selfishness and competition had created serious conflict among the European states, as they lost their moral bonds with the society.

Consequently, the social relationships among the people were also changed. According to Tagore human society was built up due co-operation among the people. This co-operative instincts of man, as a social being, was also changed and it was replaced by a sense of competition. To quote Tagore's own words, " And thus there where co-operation was natural has intruded competition. The very psychology of men and women about their mutual relations was changing and becoming the psychology of the primitive fighting elements, rather than of humanity seeking its completeness through the union based upon mutual self-surrender. " <sup>7</sup>

The idea of nationalism had emerged to root out all social relationships. Social co-operation had transformed itself into social conflict, " like gaseous particles forced into a narrow space,<sup>8</sup> " it would lead the society on the verge of total destruction.

3)        " Political Power "- the by-product of western nationalism :

Tagore, was of the view that " Political power was a scientific product made in the political laboratory of the nation, through the dissolution of personal humanity." <sup>9</sup>

Political power was the main weapon in the hands of the nation to curtail humanitarian and moral values of human civilization. The nations of the west exercised dominance over their own society by acquiring enormous amount of political power. But according to Tagore, " Power in all its forms is irrational, it is like a horse that drags the carriage blind — folded." <sup>10</sup> The development of political power of European nations created a dangerous threat to human liberty.

4)        The economic impact of nationalism in the western society:

The western nation-states achieved a rapid pace of economic development. It had satisfied the economic needs of the people. But, according to Tagore, the ends of human life was not merely to accumulate a heap of wealth. The perfection of human life was only possible by doing welfare of his fellow being, along with the over all development of the society. The competition for acquiring more wealth had created bitter economic conflict among the peoples of European society. And hence " an interminable economic war is waged between capital

and labour."<sup>11</sup> It was the natural consequence of developed capitalism which was the key to success of the European nation-states. But, according to Tagore, "greed of wealth and power can never have a limit, and compromise of self-interest can never attain the final spirit of reconciliation. They must go on breeding jealousy and suspicion to the end the end which only comes through sudden catastrophe or a spiritual re-birth."<sup>12</sup> Thus, nationalism encouraged the class-struggle between the capital and labour at the cost of the latter.

- 5) Moral man had turned into a professional man -  
a man of commerce and politics ; due to the impact of  
the idea of nationalism :

Tagore was of the view that due to deep penetration of the idea of nationalism ~~the~~ moral man had turned into a political and commercial man, the man for limited purpose.<sup>13</sup>

The moral degradation of man occurred due to the most pervasive effect of the idea of nationalism. The ideal of moral man was unselfishness but the ideal of professional man created by nation was selfishness.

The nations of the west had attained spectacular success in the specialization of knowledge. But this specialization of knowledge put forth the growth of professional people



it had become a major source for the enhancement of national power. Professional peoples would serve the special purpose of the nation without having any moral obligation towards human civilization. In this context Tagore wrote, " Man in his fulness is not powerful, but perfect. Therefore, to turn him into mere power, you will have to curtail his soul as much as possible. A moral man can not slaughter his fellow being because his sense of morality will stop him in doing such a brutal act. But when man loses his sense of morality he can easily perform such a type of work". <sup>14</sup>

With a strong resentment Tagore wrote, " the nations have flourished upon mutilated humanity. Men were the fairest creations of God. But they had been converted into a war making and money making puppets in the large manufacturing device of the nation. Human society had turned into a puppet show of politicians, soldiers, manufacturers and bureaucrats whose strings were controlled by the nation itself with a wonderful efficiency. " <sup>15</sup>

In spite of the most perverse effect of the idea of nationalism, Tagore held an optimistic view about the future of human civilization. He believed that the tyranny of the nation should come to an end in the near future and man would be free from its iron claws.

6) Western nations were the imperial powers in disguise :

Tagore held that the western nation-states laid more stress, On the spirit of conflict and conquest, hence, they were not ashamed of dominating other states. Nationalism in variably gave birth to colonialism and imperialism. These states exploited their progress to politically dominate nations of East and selected them for worst type of economic exploitation. They did not allow free flow of blessings of western civilization into these countries. He said that these western states were imperial demons having all stomach and no heart.<sup>16</sup> They wanted to devour all vitals of human civilization, Tagore wrote, " It is like the pack of predatory creatures that must have its victims; with all its heart it can not bear to see its hunting grounds converted into cultivated fields." <sup>17</sup> The nations of the west were fighting among themselves for the extension of their victims and their reserve forests. Thus, the struggle for profit and power had become the only aim of western social life. Western societies, Under nation-hood, had acquired massive temporal success at the cost of the wreckage of their own soul in particular and humanity in general.

The nations of the west were following imperialistic expansion policy to the backward countries of Asia, Africa and

Latin America. Belligerent occupation was the main feature of Western nationalism, whose another name was ' jingoism '. Thus, " the nations of the west fixed their fangs deep into the naked flesh of the world of no-nations."<sup>18</sup> Tagore held a view self-love and remorseless pursuit of power and profit forced most of the nations of west to exploit no-nation of East by pursuing the worst type of imperialism. Wars, violence, espionage and hatred had become the essential things for nations and the nation had become the enemy of a nation. Also, the nations exploited no-nations of East by draining their wealth to their country. Hence, he asked nations of Asia to be careful about the economic dragons of the west. Tagore contended that the war mongering policy of the western nations would bring their total destruction. He wrote, " European War is the war of retribution ( . . . . . ). In this war the death throes of the nation have commenced. Suddenly, all its mechanism going mad, it has begun to dance of the Furies, shattering its own limbs, scattering them into the dust. It is the fifth act of the tragedy unreal." <sup>19</sup>

7) Tagore on the efficacy of the inter national organization to resolve international problems :

The growing conflict and animosity among different nations of west gave birth to European wars. International peace keeping organizations were established to prevent the

out break of wars in Europe. But Tagore had little faith in such organizations because for him such an arrangement would lead, " pitting machine against machine, nation against nation in an endless built fight of politics." <sup>20</sup> According to Tagore, the real solution of the problem did not lay in the creation of international organization. The argument was that the nations would come to an agreement for their mutual protection, proved futile with the failure of the earlier attempts. Moreover, such an arrangement would place the weak no-nations on the tender hooks of the strong nations. <sup>21</sup> Tagore caustically pointed out that the nations of the west were seeking peace, not by curbing their greed, nor by giving up their exclusive advantages which they unjustly acquired, but by concentrating their forces for mutual security.

Tagore advised the weak countries of no-nations that they should rely on themselves for their own survival, because the powerful nations of the west would not help them for the protection of their sovereignty and integrity. He made an appeal to the weak countries of no-nations in the following terms :

" Do not submit yourself to carry the burden of insult upon your head,  
Kicked by terror,  
and did not a trench with false hood and cunning to build a shelter for your dishonoured manhood, offer not the weak as sacrifice to the strong to save yourself. " <sup>22</sup>

B) NATIONALISM IN JAPAN :

After discussing demerits and evil effects of western nationalism, Tagore discussed nationalism in Japan. He was proud of Japan's advances because Japan was the first Asian country to defeat the western nation-state i.e. Russia. Also, he was dazzled by the advances made by Japan in a short period of time. He was of the view that Japan was both old and new at the same time because it " has come out of the immemorial East like a lotus blossoming in easy grace, while keeping its firm hold upon the profound depth from which it has sprung ".<sup>23</sup> According to Tagore, Japan took the concept of nationalism from the west but she kept intact the spirit of the East. She took the progressive side of the nation of the west but did not sacrifice her humanity at the altar of the cult of the nation. He wrote, " Japan has imported her food from the west, but not her vital nature. Japan can not altogether lose and merge herself in the scientific paraphernalia she has acquired from the west and be turned into a mere borrowed machine. She has her own soul, which must assert itself over all her requirements. " Tagore argued that if Japan only duplicated western nationalism no good would be done to her in particular and humanity in general. In any eventuality Japan too had to answer those questions presented by nationalism, but

not answered by the west. Nationalism could serve humanity when if maintained harmony between the conflicting elements. Explaining this, he pointed out, " For there are grave questions that the western civilization has presented before the world but not completely answered. The conflict between the individual and the state, labour and capital, the man and woman, the conflict between the greed of material gain and the spiritual life of man, the organized selfishness of nations and the higher ideals of humanity, the conflict between all the ugly complexities inseparable from giant organization of commerce and state and the natural instincts of man crying for simplicity and beauty and fullness of leisure, all these have to be brought to a harmony in a manner not yet dreamt of " <sup>25</sup>

Japan, he expected, would change some aspects of modern civilization infusing blood in the mechanical life of the west. She should not only acquire power and success but should wed the Eastern spirit with western nationalism by harmonising the conflicting elements in the pursuit of living growth, for truth and beauty. Japan should not take up the carnivorous and cannibalistic tendencies of the west in the name of development just only to suppress the higher ideas of man. He held that the nationalism of the west was based on political civilization and garbed in the dress of national patriotism could never be permanent. But the civilization whose basis was society and the spiritual ideal of man was eternal.

Japan, a representative of the East, must not deviate from her ancient ideals. She must not imitate the west but must prove her worth and existence by producing living work.

Tagore considered moral law as the greatest discovery of man by which he discovered the truth that " man becomes all the truer the more he realises himself in others."<sup>26</sup> Therefore, nations which cultivated sedulously moral blindness as the cult of patriotism would end their existence in a sudden violent death. If, Japan imitated the west she had to meet the death. He wished that Japan would have the advantages of the modern western civilization particularly it's scientific development but should not give up her ideals, " because our hopes were based on the land of rising sun that East could infuse sap of fuller humanity into the ( . . . . ) heart of modern civilization." <sup>27</sup>

#### C) NATIONALISM IN INDIA :

After examining the prospects of positive nationalism in Japan, Tagore turned to India - the land of his birth. We had seen in our last chapter that Tagore was a great admirer of Indian civilization and he did not want India in particular and East in general to follow the pale imitation of west. India primarily did not think about politics as social life was more important for her. In history, the Europeans followed the policy

of political and commercial aggressiveness. But in India, she had faced the problem of internal complications - that was the problem of the racial unity. India should be conscious of this as " Each nation must be conscious of her mission, and we in India must realise that we cut a poor figure when we are trying to be political simply because we have not yet been finally able to accomplish what was set before us by our providence."<sup>28</sup> Being not inclined towards politics, Tagore discussed Indian social problems. According to him, the following were the major social problems confronted by the Indian society.

Race Problem : Tagore was of the opinion that Indian society had to deal with racial problem from the early periods of her history. Ethnologically different races had come in close contact in this country. India was the meeting ground of divergent races, religion and languages. Indian society accommodated all the foreign races in her own fold. The earlier invaders like the Greeks, the Sakas and the Huns were merged into her social system. The eventual outcome of the process of accommodation to all the foreign races, was the emergence of racial problem<sup>29</sup> in Indian society. Hence, the major task of Indian society was to bring about racial unity, as the solution of race problem. A number of great saints like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya and a host of others dedicated



their lives to bring about social unity in Indian society. They preached the message of devotion to one God to all races of India. According to Tagore, the history of Indian social development was the continuous process of social adjustment to bring about racial harmony among the different races of Indian society.

India was the country of no- Nations :

The west propagated the idea that India was a land of many races and that no common ground for unity was possible among the divergent races. Tagore argued that a true unity was like a round globe. When it rolled on it carried with its burden easily, but diversity was a many cornered thing which had to be dragged and pushed with all force.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, this diversity was not the creation of her own. She had to accept it as a fact from the beginning of her history. Comparing the Indian problems with the west, he said that the west simplified the problem by almost exterminating the original population in the colonies & of the races European origin. Social integration was worked out by destroying the aboriginals and by establishing the dominance of the European races. Again the process of extermination to the aliens also helped the European people to maintain the racial purity of their own societies. According to Tagore the uniformity of the races helped for the emergence of the nations in the west.

India, on the other hand, tolerated different races from the very beginning of her history. Her caste system was the outcome of this spirit of toleration. India all through her history tried experiments in evolving a social unity within which all the different races of people could be held together, while fully enjoying the freedom of maintaining their own differences. This had produced something like a united states of a social federation, whose common name was Hinduism.<sup>31</sup> It requires to be precise here that Tagore, by the term 'Hindu' did not indicate people professing particular religion but the people of India as a whole.<sup>32</sup>

India was the country of divergent races and hence India was the country of no-nations. She never tried to establish a nation in the western sense of the term. "Neither the colourless vagueness of cosmopolitanism, nor the fierce self-idolatry of nation-worship, was the goal of human history. And India was trying to accomplish her task through social regulation of differences, on the one hand, and the spiritual recognition of unity on the other".<sup>33</sup> Thus, the goal of Indian society was to establish social and spiritual unity of man and not to bring about political unity forged into a nation of Western society.

Role of Caste for the maintenance of Social Order :

Indian social unity was maintained on the basis of her caste system. As stated earlier, the caste system in India was the outcome of the spirit of toleration. Being influenced by this spirit of toleration divergent races of people got united in Indian social system. In spite of differences in religion, caste, creed and culture, they created a harmonious blending of social unity. Hence, he was of the opinion that the social conflict did not emerge due to the most pervasive effect of the caste system. Tagore also pointed out that the caste system thwarted the spontaneous development of Indian society. The evil effects of the caste system, was considered as the chief hurdle in the way of her social progress. He wrote, " what Indian society failed to realise was that in human beings differences are not like the physical barriers of mountains fixed for ever- they are fluid with lifes flow, they are changing their courses and their shapes and volume."<sup>34</sup>

The caste regulations of Indian society rejected the dynamics of social change - as the law of nature. The degeneration of Indian society occurred due to immovable caste distinctions. In fact, all the principles whether social, economics or political were subject to change with the change of time and need. In order to avoid social conflict and to maintain social harmony, Indian society was divided into a

number of castes. But the caste distinctions of Indian society, according to Tagore, brought about "negative benefit of peace and order, not of the positive opportunity of expansion and movement."<sup>35</sup>

Regarding the social effect of caste system, Tagore wrote, " Indian society treated life in all truth where it is manifold, but insulted it where it is ever moving. Therefore life departed from her social system and in its place she is worshipping with all ceremony the magnificent cage of countless compartments that she has manufactured".<sup>36</sup> For a long period of time, Indian society remained stagnant and monotonous due to the orthodox canons of the society. The upward mobility of the lower caste was prohibited by the rigid caste regulations of the society.

The institution of caste also played an important role in the economic spheres of the society. The Law of heredity.<sup>37</sup> Prevailed in the spheres of trade and occupation. Occupation of an individual was determined by his birth. Every individual was tied to his caste duties. No change in occupation was allowed by the social regulations. In this way, " India laid all her emphasis upon the law of heredity, ignoring the law of mutation, and thus gradually reduced arts into crafts and genius into skill".<sup>38</sup> Tagore was of the opinion that the

law of heredity was introduced to avoid the conflict of interests among the different occupations in the society. It was a historical fact that the Indian economy remained in a feudal stage for a long time due to lack of competition and occupational mobility within the Indian society. Finally, Tagore was of the opinion that the self-reliant Indian villages produced essential commodities to fulfil the social needs. Its basis was social co-operation-not of competition of the western society.<sup>39</sup>

The goal of Indian society was the realization of the spiritual ideals. :

According to Tagore the ultimate goal of Indian society was the full realisation of spiritual ideals, not of the fulfilment of material needs. In this context he put forward the reference from the upanisads :

तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथाः । मा गुधाः कस्यचित् धनम् ।

( Find enjoyment through renunciation not through greed of possession. )<sup>40</sup> Tagore argued that, " In India, our social instincts imposed restrictions upon our appetites - may be it went to the extreme of repression - but in the west the spirit of economic organization with no moral purpose goads the people into the perpetual pursuit of wealth."<sup>41</sup> With the impact of materialism, the western peoples were spending most of their

vital energy in merely producing things and neglecting the creation of ideals.<sup>42</sup> In this way, Tagore glorified the spiritualism of the East at the cost of the materialism of the west.

Politics was not a matter of concern of Indian Society :

According to Tagore, as India was a country of no-nations and Indian people were less interested in the political affairs of the country; politics was not the matter of concern of Indian society. The goal of Indian society was the realisation of social ideals, not that of political ideals of the western societies. It was the historical fact that, there occurred many political changes in Indian history. But it had a little effect on Indian society. Political upheavals, according to Tagore, " were like the catastrophes of nature whose traces were soon forgotten, when the cataclysm was over".<sup>43</sup>

Indian society, devoid of politics, had her own mode of development from the distant past. Tagore wrote, " Her homes, her fields, her temples of worship, her schools, where her teachers and students lived together in the atmosphere of simplicity and devotion and learning, her village self-government with its simple laws and peaceful administration - all these truly belonged to her. But her thrones were not her concern. " <sup>44</sup> The Moghals and Pathans and other foreign races

invaded India several times. They came, conquered and ruled India, ultimately they lost their identity in Indian soil. They were the foreign races-not that of the nations of modern times. Tagore concluded with the argument that at present Indian society had to deal with the problem of the organized force of the nation, not that of the foreign races of the past. Indian society had confronted with the new challenges from the alien rule. Formerly, the changes in the political rulers did not affect her social system. But now under the rule of a nation, the pace of change was multi-dimensional.

The impact of Western nationalism in India :

Indian society came under the direct contact of Western nationalism due to the advent of British rule in India. Tagore had a deep love and respect for the British race, but so far as the British nation was concerned, it was like a thick mist covering the glory of the British race. He made a distinction between the British as a race and the British as a nation.<sup>45</sup> Regarding the nature of the British government, Tagore wrote, " It is not the question of the British government, but of government by the nation. The government by the nation whether it may be of British, or Dutch, or French or of Portuguese are guided by the same principles. It is an applied science whose principles are same in the universe."<sup>46</sup> Tagore

discussed the social changes occurred during the period of British rule. According to him, the following were the major social changes :

Change in the relationship between the rulers  
and the ruled :

Before the British conquest, there were other foreign governments that ruled over India. Moghals and Pathans came, conquered and ruled over India. They made India their homes and identified themselves wholly with the interests of India and ruled India as Indians. They were known as human races - not as a nation. They got our love and hatred simultaneously. Although, these personal governments were tyrannical in nature, there existed a harmonious relationship between the rulers and the ruled.<sup>47</sup> People could come in close contact with the rulers for the promotion of their interests. Above all, the Muslim rule was a rule by man not by a machine. The scope of social adjustment was great enough because those governments were not governments by the nation. The difference between the former rule and the British rule, according to Tagore, was like the difference between the hand-loom and the power-loom. In the products of the hand-loom the magic of man's living fingers found its expression and its hum harmonized with the music of life. But the power-loom was relentlessly lifeless and accurate and monotonous in its production.<sup>48</sup>



It was during the British rule that the relationship between the rulers and the ruled changed completely. The British rulers in India could not come near the heart of the Indian people nor could they accept India as their own home. They maintained strict exclusiveness from the natives. Not only they differed in dress and customs but also languages and habits. They did not know Indian languages and hence there existed a little scope of personal contact between the rulers and the ruled. Due to lack of personal contact, very often the British rulers hindered the aspirations of the Indian people by following the policy of red-tapism.<sup>49</sup> There existed a little scope of change or internal adjustment in the strict principles of British administration because it was the rule of a nation - a lifeless mechanical organization. Formerly, the Indian rulers served for the protection of interests of Indian people, but the British rulers ruled over the country to serve the interest of the British nation. In this context, Tagore wrote, "Englishmen can never truly understand India, because they are not interested to get acquainted with the Indian literature and philosophy ..... . This attitude of apathy and contempt is natural, where the relationship is abnormal and founded upon national selfishness and pride." 50

Finally, Tagore condemned the British rule in India because it was the rule of a nation. Although he condemned the impersonal rule of a nation, he had a great respect for the British as human beings. To him, the British as a race and the British as a ruler was completely opposite in nature. He distinguished the two by characterising them as ' great Englishman ' and ' small Englishman ' respectively. He considered the great Englishman as a friend of the whole human race, who loved justice and freedom and had a great respect for humanity. On the contrary the small Englishman who represented the British rule in India, ruled as a nation Tagore wrote, " we have felt the greatness of this people as we felt the sun ; but as for the Nation, it is for us a thick mist of a stifling nature covering the sun itself." <sup>51</sup>

#### Paradox of the spirit of the west and the

#### Nation of the West :

According to Tagore, under the rule of a nation Indian people faced the paradoxical problem of absorption of the contradictory forces - spirit of the west and the nation of the west. <sup>52</sup> He was of the opinion that the spirit of the west marched under the banner of freedom, on the other hand, the nation of the west spread its unbreakable chains of organization based on power and dominance.

Tagore had distinguished between the spirit of western civilization and the cult of the western nation. The spirit of western civilization had come upon Indian society like the light of enlightenment. Indian social unification and regeneration occurred due to the blessings of the western civilization. On the contrary, the western nation prevented the free flow of the light of western civilization to whom it had selected for the purpose of exploitation. In this context Tagore wrote, "the benefit of the western civilization is doled out to us in a miserly measure by the nation, which tries to regulate the degree of nutrition as near the zero-point of vitality as possible. The portion of education allotted to us is so raggedly insufficient that it ought to outrage the sense of decency of a western humanity".<sup>53</sup> Thus, it was the policy of the western nation to exploit more and in return to give very little, just what was minimum for subsistence.

#### Establishment of new pattern of Law and Order :

Tagore held that, it was during the British period that the rule of law was established in the country. The protection of law was not only a boon but also a valuable lesson to the Indian people. It taught the discipline that was necessary for the progress as well as to maintain the

stability of a civilization. Indian people realised the the universal standard of justice to which all men irrespective of caste and creed had their equal claim.

Again, the application of the uniform pattern of law established order in this vast land inhabited by peoples of different races and customs. It was possible for the peoples to come in close contact with one another and cultivate a communion of aspirations.<sup>54</sup>

The system of law established by the Britishers also invited the criticism of Tagore. Law and order was established for the maintenance of peace in the country. But, according to Tagore,. The peace achieved was negative in character because it did not provide greater scope of freedom for the development of the common masses. He compared the British legal system with the steam roller - formidable in its weight and power, but it did not help the soil to become fertile.<sup>55</sup> Tagore was of the opinion that mere maintenance of peace by an administrative machinery was unproductive. It lacked creative ideals. Human faculties did not get opportunity to be expressed under such a lifeless administration. Peace achieved was artificial in nature. To create such peace humanity was humiliated, talents were stunted and harmony between men was destroyed. Men were treated as mere objects instead of living creatures. Hence, Tagore wrote, " when after its enormous toil

it comes to offer us its boom of peace. We can but murmur under our breath that 'Peace is good,' but not more so than life, which is God's own great boon. ( . . . . . ) The government by the nation retains tight control over us, it regulates our steps with a closed-up system, within which our feet have only the slightest liberty to make their own adjustments.<sup>56</sup>

Social effects of the British administration  
in India :

Tagore criticised the British rule in India as niggardly, loathsome and cruel. It was largely due to the spirit of conflict and conquest embedded in the idea of western nationalism. He was of the opinion that a very little scope was provided for education. Not only in the field of education but also in economic and industrial spheres. Very little assistance was given to the Indians for development. On the contrary, Indians were blamed to be backward and unfit for self-government and unable to display originality in their intellectual attainments. The rulers considered the Indians as inferior because they lacked the qualities which the Japanese possessed.

Regarding the tight administrative apparatus of the British government, Tagore wrote, "every single individual in the country of the no-nation is completely under the grip of

a whole nation. There is no flexibility in the rule of this monster organization and no-body can be relieved from the tight vigilance of this vast administrative machine."<sup>57</sup> According to him, the liberty of the individual was crushed down under the dead weight of this mechanical organization. It was not only applicable to the subject races, but also applicable to those people who attained nation-hood. Because the people under the rule of a nation lived in the poisonous and suspicious atmosphere. They were not free at all and were treated as an instrument to serve the purpose of the nation.

Tagore held the British administration responsible for the socio-economic backwardness of Indian people. He argued that indigenous industries were collapsed due to failure in competition with the monster commercial organizations of the west.<sup>58</sup> The adverse policy of the British government in India, arrested the speed of socio-economic development of the country. India remained an agricultural colony of the British nation.

#### Two trends of Indian Nationalism :

Tagore was of the opinion that India was the country of no-nation and Indian people lacked national sentiment in the past. And it was largely due to the influence of western political ideals that the intelligentsia of the country tried to evolve a sense of nationalism in the country.

Tagore argued that the educated Indians were trying to absorb some lessons from the political history of the western countries and hereby they tried to develop ' a political destiny of Indian people'.<sup>59</sup> According to him, it would not be conducive for Indian social development, because the Indian society had no political precedence. The course of Indian history was different from that of Europe. Tagore wrote, " Infact, we are trying to dam up the true course of our own historical stream and only borrow power from the sources of other peoples history." <sup>60</sup>

According to Tagore the idea of nationalism and the rise of nation-states were the root cause of the major evils of the present day world. " Nationalism is a great menace " said Tagore, and " it is the particular thing which for years have been at the bottom of India's troubles ".<sup>61</sup> Moreover, " the basis of nationalims is wanting in India."<sup>62</sup> In support of his argument Tagore put forward the cause of growth of western nationalism. According to him nationalims emerged in Europe due to common birth right, racial unity, uniformity of language, religion and culture. On the contrary, there was no common birth right in Indian society. There existed a strong sense of physical repulsion among the different castes and hence, race amalgamation was not possible in India. It was for this reason, nationalism had no roots in Indian social history.

But after the introduction of British rule two schools - Liberal and extremist emerged and Tagore was critical of both the liberal and extremist methods of political action. According to him, the liberals wanted to bring about a few reforms in the existing British Indian administration by pursuing the policy of agitation and appeal. But Tagore was not satisfied with begging policy of the liberals. He thought that the liberal nationalists had no constructive ideals and no real programme. It was his conviction that what the country needed most was constructive work coming from within herself and that nothing substantial could be achieved by prayers and petitions.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, Tagore also refuted the direct action method of the extremists who strove for political independence from the British rule. According to him, the leaders of this new school of thought borrowed their political ideology from the western history. The extremists criticised the begging policy of the liberals and adopted the policy of direct action towards the goal of political freedom. According to Tagore these people wanted to engraft western political ideas in such a society where irrational authority of customs and traditions prevailed. Without the modernization of the traditional social structure, they wanted to build a political miracle of freedom based upon the quick stand of social slavery.<sup>64</sup> The extremist politicians completely overlooked Indian social problems and the need of social reform. They were more interested in political gains.



Tagore was of the opinion that the inherent social weakness was the causal factor for the subjugation of Indian people in the hands of the foreigners. He was of the view that Indian society should be modernized by casting off social evils so that she might cope with the challenge of foreign domination.

According to him, Indian nationalism was not primarily a political cause but a movement for social freedom when nationalism in India was concerned solely with political activity, he made an attempt to shift his attention back to the society. He believed that political freedom was not real freedom when the individual was not free from the social evils. Thus he laid more emphasis on social reforms for the realisation of real freedom.

#### Tagore's idea of social freedom :

Tagore was of the opinion that the society was the expression of the spiritual and moral aspirations of man. It had two objectives one was to regulate the passions and appetites for the harmonious development of man and the other was to cultivate disinterested love for the fellow being.<sup>65</sup> Only the realisation of social ideals could bring the real freedom of man. According to him, political freedom was not the real freedom because it made man more powerful.

In this connection Tagore wrote, " Political freedom does not give us freedom when our mind is not free. An automobile does not create freedom of movement, because it is a mere machine. When I myself am free I can use the automobile for the purpose of my freedom. ( . . . . . ) In the present day those people who have got their political freedom are not necessarily free, they are merely powerful."<sup>66</sup> In the so-called free countries the majority of the people were not free, they were merely the slaves of a number of organizations that promoted the goal of making power and money to dominate the foreign races. Thus, the people were used as an instrument to serve the national goals. But, to Tagore - " man's truth is moral truth and his emancipation is in the spiritual life, not in material affluence." <sup>67</sup>

Tagore felt the need of the modernization of traditional social institutions for the realisation of real freedom of Indian people. He wrote, " Our idolatry of dead forms in social institutions will create in our politics prison-houses with immovable walls. ( . . . . . ) Our social restrictions are so tyrannical that make men cowards. But unfortunately, the educated people of India become insensitive of her social needs. They are less interested in social reform and take more interest in political field." <sup>68</sup>

Tagore put forward a national approach of social freedom to remove inherent weakness of Indian society. He called upon his countrymen to arouse inner powers of constructive work. People should give up beggar's mentality and should be ready to suffer in the cause of truth. He also pointed out that the blind persuance of the authority of customs and traditions created a want of self-respect in the minds of Indian people. The most pervasive element of caste-system hindered the development of individual personality.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, he advised the Indian people to arouse inner consciousness and a sense of reason to justify the validity of prevalent social customs and ideals.

He prescribed a broad programme of social reform such as the advancement of learning to fight against illiteracy, eradication of poverty through economic development etc, for the modernization of Indian society. The establishment of the visva-Bharati, - a world university at Santiniketan was the application of Tagore's thought in action. He believed that political freedom without social reforms would lead people to social slavery.<sup>70</sup>

#### East and West are complementary :

Tagore had criticised the cult of nationalism of the West, but he welcomed the spirit of the West. According to him, East and West were complementary to each other because of

their different outlooks towards life which had given different aspects of truth.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, he called upon his countrymen to imbibe virtues of western civilization for the overall development of Indian society. Regarding the mission of the West, he argued, " It is the historical fact that the west has come to India. She must fulfil her mission to the East, by teaching the ignorant and helping the weak, not of using power to serve her selfish needs. ( . . . . . ) She must not make her materialism to be the final thing, but must realise that she is doing a service in freeing the spiritual being from the tyranny of matter." <sup>72</sup>

As far as Tagore's concept of the spirit of the West is concerned, it indicated a sense of rational inquiry about the validity of established norms of the society. It helped the free-development of creative faculties of mind and thereby promoted individual thought and conscience. Tagore was of the opinion that the Western people got spectacular success in science and technology. In fact, they had received the mission to be the teacher of the world, that her science, through the mastery of laws of nature liberated human souls from the dark dungeon of matter.<sup>73</sup> The new innovations of modern science were urgently needed by the Eastern people to fight against poverty, disease and natural calamities. On the other hand, the spiritual ideas of the East were also required by the western people to give them a moral balance.

Tagore correctly appreciated the sublimity of the western civilization. But he was not a blind supporter of westernization, nor he was the blind opponent of it. He followed the middle path. Radical modernization ( wholesale borrowing of Western culture ), according to him, was like the savage chiefs .... put on European clothes and decorate themselves with cheap European beads. On the other hand, traditionalism or the romantic over-attachment to the past, seemed to him, the tethering of India to the past like a sacrificed goat. <sup>74</sup>

He favoured the synthesis of East and West and did not approve of false sense of modernism. While clarifying his idea of modernism he wrote, " those who have the true modern spirit need not modernize, just as those who are truly brave are not braggarts. Modernism, is not in the dress of the Europeans, or in the hideous structures, where their children are interned when they take their lessons, or in the square houses with flat, straight wall-surfaces, pierced with parallel lines of windows, where these people are caged in their lifetime, certainly modernism is not in their ladies, ' bonnets ' carrying on them loads of incongruities. These are not modern, but merely European. True modernism is freedom of mind not slavery of taste. It is independence of thought and action, not tutelage under European school masters. It is science, but not its wrong application in life- a mere

imitation of our science - teachers who reduce it into a superstition, absurdly invoking its aid for all impossible purposes."<sup>75</sup> Thus according to Tagore, true modernism was a psychological factor that invoked a change in outlook of individual towards life and society as a whole, not of the mere imitation of European culture.

Thus Tagore favoured synthesis of the Eastern and Western civilisations to further the cause of human progress as they were not antithetical but complementary.

#### Tagore on Internationalism :

Tagore conducted that with the emergence of the idea of nationalism man had become the greatest menace to man. The greatest need of the hour, according to him, was that the high walls of national distinction should be pulled down and man should be emancipated from the meshes of the organization of National Egoism.<sup>76</sup> The selfish isolation in which the peoples were wallowing was bound to bring disaster on them.<sup>77</sup> For the preservation of human civilization and for the abolition of the sufferings of man it was necessary that not only individuals but social units also should learn the lesson of sacrifice of their selfish interests for the common good of humanity. The relationship among the people should be established on the basis of love, friendship and mutual co-operation.

Tagore, as an internationalist held a view that peace and prosperity of the world was only possible through international co-operation among the different races of people. He said, " those people who are gifted with moral power of love and vision of spiritual unity will assume the leadership of the world and the people who are constantly developing their instinct of fight and intolerance of aliens would be eliminated." <sup>78</sup>

The optimism of Tagore about the future of world community was best explained in the following words when he wrote, " man will have to exert all his power of love and clarity of vision to bring the spiritual unity of the whole world of men and not merely the factional groups of nationality. The call has come to every individual in the present age to prepare himself and his surroundings for this dawn of a new era, when man shall discover his soul in the spiritual unity of all human beings." <sup>79</sup> It indicated the deep insight and the clarity of vision of Tagore about the future of human civilization. Tagore's idea of internationalism could be materialized when man could overcome the narrow-barriers of national sentiment and committed to the idea of internationalism. Tagore ended his discussion on the following note, " we can still cherish the hope that, when power becomes ashamed to occupy its throne

and is ready to make way for love, when the morning comes for cleansing the blood-stained steps of the nation along the highroad of humanity, we shall be called upon to bring our own vessel of sacred water - the water of worship - to sweeten the history of man into purity, and with its sprinkling make the trampled dust of the centuries blessed with fruitfulness. " 80

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# CHAPTER - III

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