

Chapter-4

Civil Society and Nationalism: Contemporary Indian Stand Point

The nation and civil society emerged simultaneously in the history of political modernity in Europe. They have originated in the same historical moment: transition from feudalism to capitalism or modern nation-states. Capitalism inaugurated many new social experiences. It is characterized by the dissolution of feudal ties between landlords and tenants. It has put an end to political rule based on personal loyalty. Tenants obey the feudal lord as a person. Nobles obey the King as embodied in the physical person. Capitalism ushered in a new era. The idea of political authority, as vested in the body of a human person, has decisively come to an end. It has been replaced by imperial authority constituted by the legal norms of a political order. Authority is constituted legally, which doesn't concern itself with the character of the person occupying it in actual terms. Thus, Capitalism and modern political revolutions ushered in an era of impersonal rule.

There was an economic and social modernization taking place simultaneously. It is a contentious issue, whether social modernization followed economic modernization, or preceded it? The key to modernization in Europe has been the emergence of an individual free from the obligations of feudal authorities. The individual is viewed as totally autonomous from social collectives of whom he had been a part of. There has emerged a space of private experience as regulated by public power. It is a space that made possible the value of privacy, leisure, self exploration and self realization for individuals. The individual, free from the control of social institutions, has a free space to realize himself in his private activities. The private Individual can live together with other individuals. The coordinating function is performed by groups of individuals, whose relationships are guided by the fact that they are rational. Hence, it is the faculty of reason which makes social life possible between self-serving, and mutually competitive individuals.

At this juncture of modernity, the two ideas- civil society and nationalism- came in to existence. Neither the meaning nor the relationship between the two can be stated in simple terms. Civil society, in its European sense, is a space of private

individuals coming together to pursue their common interests. When they come together to pursue common interests, they became a society. Civil society consists of several groups pursuing a variety of interests. This space is an unconstrained one for free voluntary interaction. The purposes of different groups may be contradictory, but the common space is sustained by the regulatory norm of free interaction. The society sustains itself by crisscrossing its constituent groups. Civil society, as a whole, acts as a check on the governmental excess. It also offers legitimacy to governmental actions by propagating them in society or by generating necessary inputs in to the policy framework. Thus, civil society is an uncoercive space of human associations coming together for interests, faith, ideology etc.

Nationalism performs a different social function. It performs the function of evolving a common identity under conditions of radical individualization. Individuals are knit together under the authority of the feudal lord. The identity of the peasant is inextricably linked to the identity of the master. With the emergence of capitalism, these links based on personal power have been dissolved. There have emerged loose individuals estranged from the collectives that they had been part of. The nation is an identity that brings these loose individuals together and gives them a sense of oneness. It is a sense of oneness realized through the invention of collective myths¹ about their common origins, past glory, the present sense of crisis, and the necessity of collective resolve to overcome the present sense of crisis. These collective myths offer a shared narrative of who one is, where they have come from, where they would go. These collective myths give a common story in the ideological sense of the term nation. At the same time, they cause vast and energetic mobilizations in different fields. It includes a nationalist fashioning of oneself in various fields like literature, art, food, dress, films etc. These nationalist mobilizations, energize the otherwise divided and dissipated community. Thus nationalism causes mobilizations in a variety of fields.

Nationalism bulldozes hierarchies of the traditional kind. It flattens hierarchies within the community. Nationalism, assumes the formal equality of all its members in the eyes of the community. There is a possibility of the exclusion of certain groups from the field of common imagination of the nation; but whoever is considered a part of it, is considered equal in the eyes of the community.

¹ Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 1983.

Nationalism shapes culture and spurs creativity. It fights the dormant state prevailing in various fields. It brings to the fore, individuals of exceptional talent, and makes possible, what is called national genius. It shapes culture, according to national needs. New ideas of ideal women, ideal families etc., are invented.

Nationalism also mobilizes hither to socially excluded groups. Nationalism constantly reinvents itself in every new phase. It addresses new social groups, and tries to include them in its fold. For instance, nationalist consciousness spreads to lower classes, through which they get mobilized and became part of the process of nation making.

The relationship between nation and civil society is not a well discussed theme, even in the west. There are, broadly, two positions on this relationship. Firstly, nationalism is generally viewed as reactionary and conservative in social values and in its social base. Hence the idea of civil society as a voluntary realm of public action stands inimical to the forces of nationalism. Nationalism is often viewed as against democracy and hence against the project of civil society.

Secondly, in some instances, nationalism and civil society work in unison for democratic purposes. Nationalism gives birth to a wide variety of organizations, in various fields, aiming at national renewal. These organizations may be working in the field of art and culture, or in the field of social reform and social service. It gives rise to the vibrancy of the civil society. Thus, civil society and nationalism can work hand in hand with each other. However, during the peaks of nationalism, nationalist organizations mobilize support from different sections of the society. Nationalist mobilizations, in ascendancy, undermine the voice of the rational and secular-civil society organizations. They place themselves politically in opposition to groups committed to issues of rights and other democratic causes. The Nationalist voice sees itself as nurturing and expressing authentic culture. 'Authentic' culture is invented, experienced and propagated. In public life, nationalist mobilizations view themselves as the authentic voice of the nation that they are articulating. Rationalist agendas of civil society organizations are pushed to the corner and dubbed as inauthentic. It violates the value of liberty, which is essential to the growth of civil society. Thus, essentialist constructions of reality by nationalist mobilizations violate the growth of a healthy civil society. However, there could be democratic constructions of the nation,

which offer narratives of diversity, tolerance and mutual-respect. The Nehruvian phase of nationalism in India is one such instance. The relationship between nationalism and civil society depends upon the construction of the narrative of the nation, and whether it constitutively respects diversity, or is inimical to diversity. Such constructions often vary on the basis of material interests heralding the cause of nationalism in the space of political economy. Historically, nationalism and civil society are represented as having, most of the times, opposing social and political tendencies. Nationalism in its ugly phase stands in a relationship of contradiction to the values of civil society. Nationalism has been theorised as mass euphoria. It destroys the values of a democratic, open society. Nationalism violates the values of a civil-society. Nationalism gives spur to the growth of nationalist public organizations, or nationalist civil society, in its positive vein. But nationalism often comes against the values and institutions of civil society.

Nation, Modernity and Civil society:

Within the Marxist theoretical construal, the relationship between nation and civil society has been theorized by ParthaChatterjee². He was attempting a critique of nationalist thought that shares the epistemic framework of post-Enlightenment Europe, which it seeks to repudiate. Nationalism in colonial countries is premised on opposition to western rule. But opposition occurs within a body of knowledge about the East which has the same ‘representational structure’ and shares the same ‘theoretical framework’ as Orientalism. The epistemic framework of modern scientific knowledge of Enlightenment Europe has not been repudiated by nationalist thought. Though Nationalist thought articulates opposition to colonial rule, it accepted the framework of European knowledge. It did not operate with an alternative framework of knowledge or the framework of indigenous knowledge. “.... An inherent contradictoriness in nationalist thinking because it reasons within a framework of knowledge whose representational structure corresponds to the very structure of power that nationalist thought seeks to repudiate. It is this contradictoriness in the domain of thought which creates the possibility of several divergent solutions being proposed for the nationalist problematic.”³The framework

² Chatterjee Partha, “Gandhi and the Critique of Civil society,” in Guha, Ranajit (ed), *Subaltern Studies III: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1984.

³*Ibid*, Page.156.

of knowledge of post-enlightenment Europe, determines the resolution of some of the key issues of nationalism.

Civil society is invoked in a restricted sense. Chatterjee prefers to use civil society to refer to associations that function according to modern principles of rights, free entry and exit, contract, public deliberations etc. This sphere is a modern realm. It continues to express the desire of the elite for modernization in various fields, while political society refers to movements and networks and community initiatives which work for various causes. The issues in political society are not legal in the sense that they are not legally sanctioned for which one can approach law courts. They are claims made from outside the purview of law. For Chatterjee, this sphere is the site of democratic transformation. The issue of modernization is the task of the society, endorsed and led by the elite. The struggles of the subalterns are ideologically pushed aside, and are branded as illegitimate by modernization theories. They also arise from the fringes of development and are imagined as illegitimate and illegal by the propagating mechanisms of modernity.

For Chatterjee, the nation is an imagined community of strangers, connected through a collective imagination instituted through print and visual circulation of ideas and images. Partha Chatterjee analyses the constitution of imagination of the national community, or the structure of nationalist discourse. For him, there is a split in consciousness between the world of elite and subalterns. The Elite attempted weaving public discourses for all the members of the national community that the nationalist world could not include on an equal basis. The Elite imagined making modernist culture and incorporated different segments into the nationalist-modernist culture. But, the nationalist world so imagined constituted subalterns and their culture as in need of transformation. The relationship between elite and subalterns is one of pedagogy in the sense that nationalist culture ought to be taught to subalterns. They should be taught to be modernists. He reserved the term civil society to refer to institutions and activities aimed at modernist transformations and political society to refer to public activities that do not fit into modernist presuppositions. Civil society and nation are working in tandem to produce elitist-modernist culture while political society is a conceptual tool to understand non-modern/subaltern activities. Political society carries a normative weight in relation to civil society. Political society is the site of democracy while civil society positions

itself against democracy, and is for modernization. Thus, for Chatterjee, in post-colonial democracies, the nation and civil-society act in tandem for modernization. However, they stand for the hegemonic elite committed to cultural, political and economic modernization.

Nation, Modernity and Civil-society in Tagore's Thinking:

This is an exercise to interpret Tagore's thinking. It aims to creatively interpret Tagore's ideas to understand how he weaved his thoughts in relation to the nation, which is a simultaneous critique of the nation and modernity. Civil society, as a term, did not exist during Tagore's time. One can interpret Tagore's ideas to draw resources to construct ideas of civil society. There is a good deal of literature available in interpreting Tagore's ideas. Tagore's thought is interpreted to bring out the implications of his critique of the nation. His critique of the nation is premised on his critique of modernity of the west.

Interpreting Tagore:

Tagore is known for his humanism, pluralism and internationalism. These are the terms he has been frequently described with. The specific connotations of these are not subjected to scrutiny. A classical liberal modernizer would describe him as a quintessential humanist, pluralist and internationalist. This has been the predominant interpretation, even during nationalist movement. Marxists have vehemently criticized him

“He wanted man to emerge in his best and fullest stature. He also wanted society and, on its behalf, the state to create the necessary conditions for this to happen. Yet he would not tell us how an old, detestable order could fade out of existence without there being the inevitability of class war in divided society. His faith in the essential unity of mankind blocked his vision about the historic battle of the nationalism of the East against the imperialism of the west”.⁴

⁴Chakrabarti, Radharaman, “Tagore : Politics and Beyond” in Pantham, Thomas, Deutsche, Kenneth.I, *Political Thought in Modern India*; New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1986, P.91.

Marxist scheme produces different questions. It chides Tagore for not addressing the question of class struggle in the sense of class struggle within the society, and the struggle between imperialism and colonial societies. It also criticized him for not offering a theory of transformation of fading social order.

Subaltern studies did not pay attention to the thought of Tagore as its chief purpose has been to recover the agency of the subaltern within history. It did not think in terms of the possibilities offered by the thinking and practice of national-leaders.

Post-colonial theory, at its best, tried hard to offer a positive theoretical account of Tagore.

Chatterjee sees a resemblance between human rights movements and some strands of thinking within Tagore's thought. Human rights movements, 'abjures politics, but valorizes the individual act of conscience'⁵. His (Tagore's) aesthetically grounded critique of the nation certainly resonates with many of the recent invocations of universal humanity.⁶ He argues that a strain of thought of Tagore finds contemporary resonances in all those movements invoking the idea of universal humanity. These movements do not speak in terms of representative institutions; political parties etc and, abjure politics. His criticism of Tagore is over determined by his framework of appraisal.

There has also been a recent revival of interest in Tagore which brings him into the intelligibility of contemporary liberal and critical-modernist frames. Bindu Puri draws a philosophical parallel between Tagore and Kant on individual freedom, as primarily freedom to reason. Some disagree with this, while speaking of cosmopolitanism, "the universal reach of reason is quite consistent with the values of tradition and inheritance"⁷. Saranindranath Tagore derides the value of abstract universal reason, and emphasizes on reason rooted in tradition. Thus, he reads Tagore to reinterpret him as a cosmopolitan rooted in tradition. Thus, interpretations of Tagore vary from liberal to critical modern in appropriating his concerns. However, this work draws from a variety of interpretations and remains close to critical-

⁵ Chatterjee Partha, "Tagore's Non-Nation" in Chatterjee, Partha, *Lineages of Political Society: Studies in PostColonial Democracy*, Delhi, Permanent Black, 2011.

⁶ *Ibid* p.126

⁷ Tagore, Saranindranath, "Tagore's Conception of Cosmopolitanism: A Reconstruction," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 77, No.4, Fall. 2008, p.1075.

modernist interpretations. There is a commonality in terms of critical modernist concerns, but, each articulation in this mode varies.

Idea of Nation as a Mechanical Union in Tagore:

Tagore had seen European expansionism or colonialism, and the consequent two World Wars, destruction, and the violence it brought, during his own time. He travelled all over the world, particularly Japan, Europe and America. By that time, he had formed his views on the form of life called 'Nation'. He contrasts the life of nation with the life of Civilization. Nation is an invention of eighteenth century Europe, which had spread to different parts of the world. In his view

“A Nation in the sense of the political and economic union of a people is that aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for a mechanical purpose.”⁸

In the beginning there was no nation. It was society only. Society “is a spontaneous self expression of man as a social being. It is a natural regulation of human relationship”.⁹ Society was a spontaneous human cooperation. Only with the arrival of the nation, it took a negative turn.

“... With the help of science and the perfecting of organization this (nation) power begins to grow and brings in harvests of wealth.... For then it goads all its neighboring societies with greed of material prosperity, and consequent mutual jealousy, and by the fear of each other's growth into powerfulness”¹⁰.

Tagore's style of writing is unique. He does not use language in realist terms. He expresses his ideas in terms of metaphors, having been a poet and artist. Metaphors do not bear a direct relation to reality. They illuminate ideas with a theatrical quality. Secondly, he speaks of nations as if they are individual nations with specific human attributes. For him, Nations are not abstract entities. He uses human attributes to describe their relation to other nations. For instance, greed for material prosperity, mutual jealousy and fear are characteristic features of living humans, which he attributes to nations. The significance of this use of language lies in its

⁸ Tagore Rabindranath, *Nationalism*, Delhi, Penguin Books India, 2009. with an introduction by Guha Ramachandra, page.37.

⁹*Ibid* p.37

¹⁰*Ibid*.

ability to retain moral judgment as implicit in language. The language does not merely become instrumental in describing reality, but retains a moral slant.

As mentioned above, society as a spontaneous expression is viewed as a contrast to the life of the nation. The motives of behavior of nations are described as greed, jealousy, fear etc. In course of time, as the nation occupies more space, and as it becomes the ruling force, it tries hard in extinguishing higher human ideals. The society of higher human ideals, Tagore claims, has existed for centuries.

In Japan, talking about higher human ideals than mere profit or benefit, he advises Eastern societies “you must apply your eastern mind, your spiritual strengths, your love of simplicity, and your recognitions of social obligation, in order to cut out a new path for this great unwieldy car of progress.”¹¹ Here higher human ideals are spiritual strength, love of simplicity, recognition of social obligation etc. Thus, the nation is described as inspiring greed, jealousy fear etc, while civilization is committed to higher human ideals.

He also goes on to describe why the nation is a mechanical union of people.

“It is owing to this that war has been declared between man and woman, because the natural thread is sapping which holds them together in harmony, because man is driven to professionalism, producing wealth for himself and others, continually turning the wheel of power for his own sake or for the sake of universal officialdom, leaving woman alone to wither and to die or to fight her own battle unaided”.¹² Thus, natural ties connecting man and woman are transformed into mechanical relations of business or profit. The ideal and natural relationship has been replaced by competition. Thus, Nation destroys naturalness and brings into existence conflict, arising out of a pursuit of power. Similarly, in the realm of economy, the natural union between labour and capital, has been replaced by conflict and competition. Thus, a nation is a mechanical union between different elements while civilization represents the harmonious relation between them.

The nation as a government and as a form of life is not unique to and Britain and Europe.

¹¹*Ibid* p. 37-38.

¹²*Ibid* p. 38

“This Government by the nation’s neither British nor anything else; it is an applied science and therefore more or less similar in its principles where ever it is used”¹³.

“It (Nation) is the aspect of a whole people as an organized power. This organization incessantly keeps up the insistence of the population on becoming strong and efficient. But this strenuous effort offer strength and efficiency, drains man’s energy from his higher nature where he is self-sacrificing and creative. For thereby man’s power of sacrifice is diverted from his ultimate object, which is moral to the maintenance of this organization, which is mechanical”.¹⁴

The organization of life, as the nation demands, is that people should grow efficient and powerful. Becoming efficient and powerful is contrary to the truth of human nature, as he perceived it. The truth of human nature lies in simplicity, love, self-sacrifice etc. because it is only a simple life which makes human creativity and humanity possible. He explores into one key dimension of human creativity. A child, who makes small objects of mud with his own hands, enjoys more than a child gifted with expensive dolls and good gifts. Expensive gadgets make him feel more elated, which is a bloat in his emotions. But a child who plays with mud and makes objects out of it, develops inner depth, harmony and calmness in his interior. This inner depth allows him to develop a harmonious relationship with the other. The more intimate and deep the connection between the self and the nature, the more creative one is. This is how Tagore sees true human nature. The more powerful and efficient one grows; he becomes distant from nature and thereby becomes mechanical. The union of people organized for mechanical purposes violates human creativity. It leads to the development of conflict with others and within oneself. Because, in Tagore’s language, it violates the true nature of the human self. Human self springs joy in loving and caring relation with the others. Human activities performed with specific interest in mind, or for instrumental reasons, deform the self. The inner texture of the self is distorted, which causes violence within one self. Violence within oneself leads to conflict with others. It leads to conflict with others in the immediate vicinity and with the groups, and with other Nations. The self organization of groups, as nations and as communities, also involves considerable distortion in the texture of the self

¹³*Ibid* p. 43

¹⁴*Ibid* p. 73

where one sees one self in the group as powerful. The self organization of a group necessarily invents its enemy and survives in sustaining that enmity. Thus, Nation's demands to make its people powerful and efficient, violates the true nature of the human self and destroys the noble ideals of man. The man excels in sacrifice and love. The best capacities of man are realized in sacrifice and love. But, those capacities are being used for mechanical purposes of securing profit or other instrumental activities. These capacities should be serving creative purposes or service.

Tagore brings out the color of experience of the nation and civilization in vivid contrast.

“Before the Nation come to rule over us we had other governments which were foreign, and these like all governments, had some element of machine in them. But the difference between them and the government by the nation is 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 finds its expressions and it harmonies with the music of life. But the power loom is relentlessly lifeless and accurate and monotonous in its production”¹⁵.

For him civilization is compared to weaving with the hand loom, the products of hand loom contains the ‘magic of man's living fingers’ and it ‘harmonizes with the music of life’.

“And these shoes are the government by the Nation. It is tight. It regulates our steps with a closed up system within which our feet have only the slightest liberty to make their own adjustments”.¹⁶

“When the humanity of India was not under the government of organization the elasticity of change was great enough to encourage men of power and spirit to feel that they had their destinies’ in their own hands. The hope of the unexpected was never absent and freer play of imagination on the part of both the governor and governed had its effect in the making of history”.¹⁷

¹⁵*Ibid* p. 43-44.

¹⁶*Ibid* p. 48.

¹⁷*Ibid*

Tagore makes a further distinction between the government of the Nation, and the idea of India as a civilization. A government of the nation totally controls social, economic and cultural aspects of human- life. It controls the motivation behind every activity. Civilization is reshaped into the nation. Multifarious activities of the civilization, with non-instrumental motives are straight jacketed into a single motive of pursuit of greed in the life of a nation. Each activity is reoriented towards the purpose or benefit it brings. It is controlled through over the organization in the form of science, laws and bureaucracy. Science makes possible enormous control of human life. Science offers knowledge of human life. This knowledge, in its objective form, is in turn attempted to shape human relations. The motive of knowledge production is not totally unbiased. Knowledge has the motive of controlling the society according to the *telos* that it imagined. Hence, science controls and reshapes human relations in instrumental terms. Thus, science is an instrument of the Nation-state. Laws attempt to make objective codes to regulate social and political behavior. The objective of the laws is equally intended to reshape social and political relations. The laws in different spheres function to realize the objectives of the nation-state. Bureaucracy is involved in explicit control of society through administrative procedures. This becomes more important when bureaucracy is committed to the goals of the Nation-State. Thus, the Nation-state aims at total control and restructuring of society.

The government during pre-Nation times is significantly open. The 'elasticity' of change was great. Men of imagination had their destiny in their own hands. There was significant room for imagination in administration, particularly in terms of transforming the codes of administration which could be changed whenever it was necessary. The purposes of such changes were also not pre-determined, while such mechanisms, which, in their very constitution are open, ended in pre Nation times. Thus, there had been a difference in the governments of Nations and the governments before that.

The Spirit of the West and the Nation of the West:

One could read Tagore's critique of Nation as an overall critique of forms of life in the west, as a whole. However, Tagore did not make the divide sharp at the edges. He lays enormous emphasis on the necessity of acknowledging the

contribution of the spirit of West to the East. He denounces only that dimension of the West, which has the Spirit of the West. There has been a contrast within the west between the nation and civilization. This contrast is not contrast in time; it is also contrast in terms of the quality of life.

“Europe is supremely good in her beneficence where her face is turned to all humanity; and Europe is supremely evil in her maleficent aspect where her face is turned only upon her own interest, using all her power of greatness for ends which are against the infinite and eternal in man.”¹⁸

There are appreciable aspects in the west, particularly Europe. Similarly, there are aspects to be denounced. The nation dimension of Europe has to be denounced, while the spirit of the west should be appreciated.

“In Europe, we have seen noble minds who have ever stood up for the rights of man irrespective of color and creed; who have braved calumny and insult from their own people in fighting for humanity’s cause and raising their voices against the mad orgies of militarism, against the rage for brutal retaliation or rapacity that sometimes take possession of a whole people”.¹⁹

Thus, Europe gave birth to the greatest spirit of self-sacrifice, for the sake of justice, right and virtue. Europe reached great heights in literature, surpassed many obstacles in science as knowing and in social service. That greatness is possible only if its motive power lies in spiritual strength.

However, India has not been offered the best of Europe according to Tagore. India has been given minimally by Europe.

“.....and reducing our education to the minimum required for conducting a foreign government, this nation (Europe) pacifies its conscience by calling us names.”

Thus, the Nation of Europe has been offering a minimum of what it could, in spite of the fact that the spirit of Europe could offer immense to India. Nation of Europe has been giving out minimally to India, only to the extent that is necessary for

¹⁸*Ibid* p. 14-15.

¹⁹*Ibid* p.13

the farmer to survive and sustain its administration, thus, Tagore offers a trenchant critique of western Europe of its Nation form, while appreciating the spirit of Europe.

Nation and Modernity:

Nation is an outgrowth of modernity. It means developments in the economy, and society is responsible for the growth of an entity called Nation. In economy, the practice of production for personal consumption has been replaced by production for profit. In culture, modernity stands for being slave to desire. It is not about true freedom. It is about superficial freedom to buy and sell. Modernity is not understood in the sense of freedom of thought and opinion. In political terms, it is a conquest and war.

“The political civilization which has sprung from the soil of Europe, and is overrunning the whole world, like some prolific weed, is based upon excursiveness.”²⁰

“It feeds upon the resources of the other people and tries to swallow their whole future.”²¹

The political, in modern times, is organized around an entity called Nation. The nation is based on exclusiveness. In the West, it is limited to a group of people who are culturally homogenous. It did not encourage the assimilation of culturally diverse people. Instead, it eliminated aliens, in some instances. Internally, it demands cohesion, which in turn, erases difference. Tagore explores into resonances of nationalism in its external dimension, in relation to foreign countries. He brings out the psycho-cultural²² dimensions of political phenomenon like nationalism in relation to other nations. In other words, the logic of power in international relations develops certain ramifications in terms of permanently fixing the idea of strong and weak nations. The strong nations do not want weak nations to grow stronger by thwart (ing) all symptoms of greatness outside its own boundaries”²³

²⁰*Ibid* p.8

²¹*Ibid*

²² Tagore describes nations as if they are human persons. He describes each nation as having qualities. He draws similarities between human persons and nations. He talks of them as if they are possessed of feelings of fear, humiliation etc. This brings out complexities of international relations in the ordinary language of interpersonal behavior.

²³*Ibid* p.8

The logic of power unsettles other kinds of possible imaginations of interstate relation in the times of the Nation, or alternatively in the times of Modernity. The logic of power makes all other considerations irrelevant.

“The political civilization is scientific, not human. It is powerful because it concentrates all its forces upon one purpose, like a millionaire acquiring money at the cost of his soul. It betrays its trust, it weaves its meshes of lies without shame, it enshrines gigantic idol of greed in its temples, taking great pride in the costly ceremonials of its worship, calling this patriotism”²⁴

Thus, political modernity in its organization as a nation sustains itself through lies, greed and the violation of trust. He is uncovering the hollowness of organization of the Nation-State. Its organization is scientific and mechanical, and as a consequence, generates great amounts of power which is morally blind. Thus, he speaks of one kind of modernity which has been realized in the West in an institutional form. He articulates a critique of this modernity in new terms. He criticizes modernity for violating the truth of life. According to Tagore, Truth lies in simplicity, social obligation towards others, love and self sacrifice, which can be expressed in one term, social cooperation. This is the truth because human nature flourishes itself in such values than to the contrary. Modernity creates illusions, individual as well as collective in nature. These illusions are collective euphoria created and made possible by the scientific organization of society.

Nation as modernity could violate basic truth of human existence, because it is impersonally organized. Impersonal organization of society is possible because of abstract knowledge. Abstract knowledge sets standards according to which societies ought to be transformed. Nationalism emerges in a society where person to person relations are severed. Nationalism is an abstract idea connecting humans to each other, impersonally. This connection is possible only due to certain myths/ideas shared among its members. These myths violate truth as one knows personally.

Science, Modernity and Society

Within the enlightenment tradition, the science as exact knowledge of human societies, introduced a new dimension to knowledge and society. Knowledge is

²⁴*Ibid* p.9

abstracted from concrete social relations. The function of knowledge creation has been assigned to specialists in a society. The knowledge so produced has been used by scientists and policy makers to alleviate the suffering of the people and to reform the practices of the society. Thus, the Enlightenment tradition posited a link between knowledge, and freedom or liberation.

Tagore sees this link differently. It is a crucial issue that determined his understanding of the very conceptions of the purpose of various realms of human activity. For him, science does not mean mere analytical knowledge, but should be working in tune with nature's ideal, harmony within oneself, and harmony with others. Analytical knowledge violates the harmony of creation. The fundamental violence of the separation of the heart and mind is crucial to the very existence of modern abstract knowledge. Unless the mind is disconnected from the heart, modern knowledge is not possible. This is the product of the age of science.

“Our life and our heart are one with us but our mind can be detached from the personal man and then only can it freely move in the world of thoughts.”²⁵

The separation of the heart from the mind makes production of knowledge ‘ascetic’. Asceticism is not in the sense of overcoming desires. Asceticism that does not know desires, has no link with the heart. The mind that does not know desires is absurdly aggressive with no meaning of moral kind. It goes to the root of the things to find law, unconnected to heart.²⁶

“The grammarian walks straight through all poetry and goes to the root of words without obstruction, because he is seeking not reality but law when he finds the law he is able to teach people how to master words. This is power – the power which fulfills some special usefulness, some particular need of man”²⁷

Tagore points to the power of abstract knowledge, and the power it generates. For him, Reality is harmony, and science violates that harmony. It is similar to how a grammarian breaks the harmony in poetry to find out a law, but not truth. In breaking harmony, science gives unique power to control things, or the power which fulfills some need or use.

²⁵*Ibid* p.55

²⁶*Ibid*

²⁷*Ibid*

It is possible that power helps in attending to a particular need. When the need is satisfied it makes him free from the constraints of physical nature. But the problem with science in this sense is that it deals with a portion of reality, but not the whole of reality.

“The moral man remains behind because it has to deal with the whole reality, not merely with the law of things, which is impersonal and therefore abstract”²⁸

The modernity of the West suffers from disharmony. The material aspect of the west has been flourishing, while its spiritual aspect has remained dwarf. Tagore’s ideal is to achieve harmony between the various dimensions of human life. Modernity, in its scientific dimension, violates this harmony.

“Man in his fullness is not powerful but perfect. Therefore, to turn him into mere power you have to curtail his soul as much as possible.”²⁹

“Take away man from his natural surroundings, from the fullness of his communal life, with all its living associations of beauty and love and social obligations and you will be able to turn him into so many fragments of a machine for the production of wealth on a gigantic scale”³⁰

Invoking science/intellect, leads to division between heart and mind within oneself, the division between heart and mind to oneself and division within reality by inventing principles according to which it functions. The principles are extracted from the reality, by which a mechanical power is secured. This mechanical power grows very quickly because it is mechanical and if doesn’t have to concern itself with the whole. It merely concerns itself with a specific portion. This violates harmony or proportion between different parts of reality, by which one aspect grows very quickly and other parts became paralyzed. The quick growth in one aspect that is in political aspect and the consequent mechanical coming together is the emergence of the nation. Thus science, modernity and nation are interconnected.

However, Tagore is neither anti-modernist nor anti-science. He criticizes vicious nexus between knowledge, power and commerce. This nexus inhibited the

²⁸*Ibid* p. 55-56

²⁹*Ibid* p.56

³⁰*Ibid* p.57

growth of human ideals. Human ideals have been subverted for the sake of power and commerce. He deplored the nexus between human greed and knowledge. Greed and knowledge should not go together. The function of knowledge should be to bring the criticality of human ideals to human institutions perpetuating greed and power. Thus, human ideals should not be servicing greed and power.

There are hints to say that Tagore had alternative views on modernity and science.

“Those who have modern spirit need not modernize”³¹

“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”³²

Modernism does not mean newness in mere appearance. Modernism in commerce and politics for him are distorted affects of being modern. True modernism means freedom of mind and independence of thought and action. It is freedom in thought and action and its opposite is the slavery of taste. The idea of freedom for him is different from the liberal version of freedom and it is also different from what nation-state calls political freedom. Political freedom is limited while freedom of mind is beyond political freedom

Similarly, Tagore argues against the dominant idea of science because it makes knowledge, a servant of profit. A scientific attitude has been emphasized in colonial and post-colonial public culture. It is reduced to a set of beliefs. Over a period of time, scientific attitude has come to be known as at odds with popular beliefs. Science tried imposing itself on popular beliefs. Science is thought to be in opposition to people. As Tagore mentioned above, Science has been reduced to superstition. It is being invoked as an aid to all impossible purposes. Tagore held alternative conception of modernity and science. He articulated a view of modernity as freedom of mind and science as dialogically placed in relation to people’s beliefs while dominant versions of modernity and science serves the nation. Alternative

³¹*Ibid* p.19

³²*Ibid*.

versions are imagined by him to think of life outside the framework of the nation. A good society ought to be made outside the framework of nation-state beyond the dominant notion of modernity alternative to it can be called dialogical modernity.

The political vs the Social.

Tagore's vision puts emphasis on social in opposition to the political. The sphere of the political covers that region of life called nation. The social is the organization of life without being concerned with the pursuit of power. The question of the social is important to him because he wanted to explore the implications of social being mobilized by the political.

He offers an expansion of the social and states its objectives.

“one is to regulate our passions and appetites for the harmonious development of man, and the other is to help him cultivate disinterested love for his fellow creatures. Therefore society is the expression of those moral and spiritual aspirations of man which belong to his higher nature”³³

The social is the realm which involves disinterested love for his fellow beings. It is a realm expressive of ideals. It is a realm uncontaminated by power. It is a realm of human action in which the motive for it is disinterest, but not with satisfaction of certain interests in mind say the interest for domination.

“Our food is creative it builds our body; but not so wine, which stimulates. Our social ideals create the human world, but when our mind is diverted from them to greed of power then in that of intoxication we live in a world of abnormality where our strength is not health and our liberty is not freedom. Therefore political freedom does not give us freedom when our mind is not free.”³⁴

He refers to the political world as abnormality where strength is not health and liberty is not freedom. It is precisely because the mind is not free, that it succumbs to greed and power. The social world is constituted and sustained by human ideal of love, special obligations, self-sacrifice etc. The political world is constituted by power

³³ Ibid p.80.

³⁴ Ibid p.80.

and for the sake of the pursuit of power. The goods pursued in the political world are illusory. The pursuit of goods in political power does not constitute health. It is merely a sedative. The health of a society lies in its social sphere or social self-organisation based on its ideals only.

He argues even in the western countries majority of the people do not know to what goal they are directed towards. “This becomes possible only because people do not acknowledge moral and spiritual freedom as their object.”³⁵

The unfreedom in social life cannot ensure freedom in political life. Nationalism is not a solution to social ills. Social ills ought to be cured before one talks of political freedom, which should emphasize the value of freedom in social life.

“... Whatever weakness we cherish in our society will become the source of danger in politics.... The narrowness of sympathy which makes it possible for us to impose upon a considerable portion of humanity the galling yoke of inferiority will assert itself in our politics in creating the tyranny of injustice.”³⁶

The weaknesses in social life will show itself in politics as unfreedom. Social conservatism cannot create a free society in the political sphere. Nationalists during the freedom movement in India, spoke of ideals, and thought the social system as perfect. “They are taking the very immobility of social structures as the sign of their perfection.”³⁷ Thus, nationalists delude themselves that the social sphere is perfect and they need to pursue political freedom in the sphere of polity. On the contrary, Tagore asserts that freedom in the political sphere is absurd as long as social system is rigid and unfree.

He criticized both moderates and extremists within the congress. Moderates “wanted scrap of things, but they had no constructive ideal. Therefore I was lacking in enthusiasm for their methods.”³⁸ Moderates restricted themselves to constitutional demands. They didn’t have the aim of social regeneration. They were not involved in social reconstruction. “What India most needed was constructive work coming from within oneself”. He wasn’t very comfortable with the idea of sharing political power

³⁵ *Ibid* p. 81

³⁶ *Ibid* p. 82

³⁷ *Ibid* p. 75

³⁸ *Ibid*

with the British as he wasn't sure about the new realm of human affairs called political. He was arguing for social reconstruction in its own terms.

He could not readily agree with extremists either. "Extremists, who advocated independence of action, and discarded the begging method,. This is the easiest method of relieving one's mind from his responsibility towards his country. Their ideals were based on western history."³⁹ He views extremist methods of public actions as relieving one's mind from the responsibility towards his country. In other words advocating violent public action towards the British was in a way relieving one's responsibility towards one's country and co- members of the community. Their attempt was to create an exclusive community based on religion. Extremists attempted to draw the attention of the colonial state with such a support. Thus, extremists' objective was to create Indian nationhood on the basis of which to capture state power. Finally, they are operating within the paradigm of the nation and the state without focusing on societal self-organization.

By reading Tagore, one can discern the distinction that he makes between the political and the social. This distinction is very crucial to his political critique of the idea of nation. The nation is equated with the political sphere. In this sphere, abstract power is created which divides the social world. People's struggle for power is uncoupled from purposes of social life. Tagore advocates reform of social life. Unless social life is cured from ills, those ills would afflict political life. Nationalists operated within the framework of the nation and did not consider working for social reconstruction.

Critique of Nationalist movement in India

Tagore stands among very few in his criticism of the nationalist movement during its heydays. This came out vividly in his exchange of letters with Gandhi. Though they had shared commonality regarding the goals of the country, their fundamental philosophical and practical differences over the ethical implications of a mass public movement for freedom remained. In the course of their active exchanges during 1915-1945, the deep disagreements came out. This engagement led to clarification of his ideas on ethical implications of protest as a part of a larger critique

³⁹*Ibid.*

of the nation which laid the basis of his alternative understanding of the purpose of social self-organization as away from nationalist politics. It also spells out his idea of freedom as distinct from western ideas. The major premise underlying his critique of nationalism is its tendency to create hostility towards others against whom the national identity defines itself. The idea of freedom for him lies in freedom of mind. The mind should be able to freely choose its actions in the outer world, which can only create free country. If the mind succumbs to fear, greed or lazy imitateness, it cannot create free world. This ability to create one's own country is key to Swaraj according to Tagore. There is a world of difference between Gandhi's Swaraj and Tagore's conception of Swaraj.

Tagore's critique of nationalist movement helps one to uncover the psychology of nationalist movement and its basis in delusion of mind. This helps one to see more clearly his version of possibilities for creating alternatives to nationalist civil society.

Tagore⁴⁰ criticized the non - cooperation movement. Non-cooperation movement and nationalist movement as a whole created an atmosphere of hatred towards the British. He is not against the idea of freedom from the British rule. He could not be merely contented with political freedom. For him, true freedom lies in moral and spiritual freedom or freedom of the mind. He thought that the activities of the freedom movement spring from empty mind and give rise to empty mind. Freedom movement does not give rise to fullness of mind. Fullness of mind should be the objective of social self-organisation. He criticized the non - cooperation movement for its hostility towards British as a whole. He was uncovering the spiritual basis of such hatred towards entire community and its possible consequences.

Nationalist movement led by Gandhi is distinct in the sense that it is not the movement of the powerful, wealthy or muscled. The west had belief in the material power. The nation-state in the west is built around the ideal of material power, or being strong economically, politically and culturally. Its basic framework is oriented towards building national power. But the basis of the nationalist movement in India is based on moral power, the power of the destitute and the weak.

⁴⁰Bhattacharjee Sabyasachi, *The Mahatma and the Poet: Letters and Debates*, National Book Trust, India, 2005, p.55-62

“Mahatma Gandhi, frail in body, devoid of all material resources, should call up the immense power of the meek, that has been lying waiting in the heart of the destitute and insulated humanity of Indi. The destiny of India, has chosen for its ally, Narayan, and not the Narayan Sena- the power of soul and not that of muscle”⁴¹

It says the struggle of India’s freedom movement is not a fight for becoming a strong national power. Its fight is to show that the pursuit of power is a limited venture while the distinct path of India lies in showing the possibility of alternative ideal. This ideal has the capacity to liberate the world from the clutches of national power.

“We are to emancipate Man from the meshes that he himself has woven round him, - these organizations of National Egoism.... If we can defy the strong, the armed, the wealthy, revealing to the world power of the immortal spirit, the whole castle of the Giant flesh will vanish in the void”⁴².

The alternative ideal is the spiritual ideal. The spiritual ideal is not at all about being strong and powerful either nationally or individually. The spiritual ideal is about immortal spirit, truth. The power of standing for the truth as a moral ideal could be offered to the world from India. Tagore summed up the nationalist movement as different from the nation-state of the west. The nationalist movement in India as an ideal would send a message to the world in terms of essential significance of liberating man from the organization of National Egoism. Thus, it can convey to the world the dangers of a nation as a form of life.

Tagore has been critical of Non-cooperation movement and digs deep into it to lay open its implicit basis. Talking to a group of student on boycott of classes in Shantiniketan during non-cooperation movement, he says “the reason of my refusing to advise those students to leave their schools was because the anarchy of mere emptiness never tempts me, even when it is restored to as a temporary measure I am frightened of an abstraction which is ready to ignore living reality. These students were no more phantoms; to me their life was a great fact to them and to All.”⁴³

⁴¹*Ibid* p.55

⁴²*Ibid*.

⁴³*Ibid* p.58

Tagore did not allow his students to boycott classes and participate in the non-cooperation movement. In his refusal to do so, he refers to a particular way of seeing. Nationalism ignores living reality, the life of students by imposing an abstract aim or the purported need of an abstraction, the nation. The nation demands a sacrifice of the life of the students. They see themselves in the image nation created for them. He talks of anarchy of mere emptiness of nationalist movement. Nationalist activities and protests are product of emptiness, in contrast to the creative activity of a free mind. Nation as an abstraction even as an oppositional movement is produced out of an empty mind devoid of any moral meaning in contrast to creative activity.

Tagore writes, he could not find harmony for himself within nationalist movement.

“I have been trying all these days to find a melody, straining my ear, but the idea of non-corporation with its mighty volume of sound does not sing to me, it’s congregated menace of negative shouts.”⁴⁴

He could not find (harmony) and found discordance with the negative shouts of the movement. Nationalist movement, he found, to be oppositional and develop an attitude of hatred towards the British. Tagore could not accept it because he found it to be violative of spirit of universal humanity. On the basis of negativism, nothing good could be built. “.....has often said to me that passion for rejection is a stronger power in the beginning, than the acceptance of an ideal. Though I knew it to be fact I cannot take it as a truth. We must choose our allies once for all.”⁴⁵

Most of the modern public movements operate according to the logic of opposition to an established power. The logic of opposition transforms the nature of one self. If one gets used to life of opposition and hatred, he suddenly cannot participate in positive terms. Tagore draws from the contrast between Buddhism and Upanishadic ideal of renunciation or final happiness to illustrate the futility of oppositional imagination.

⁴⁴*Ibid* p.56

⁴⁵*Ibid* p.56-57

“He (Buddha) emphasized the fact of dukkha (misery) which had to be avoided and Bramha-Vidya emphasized the fact of Ananda, Joy which had to be attained”⁴⁶.

“In the former it was the purification of the life’s joy, in the latter, it(Buddhism) was the eradication of act.”⁴⁷

Tagore draws parallels between acceptance of an ideal and negation and Vedic ideal and Buddhist ideal. If an activity is based on acceptance of an ideal, it leads to purification of life’s joy. If an activity is based on the rejection of an ideal, it leads to eradication of joy. Some say that rejection of evil is necessary to the establishment of good. But Tagore’s point is that whatever is based on rejection, it cannot suddenly be oriented towards acceptance. Non-cooperation is based on rejection, and it leads to eradication of joy or political asceticism. Tagore argues for social organization based on acceptance of an ideal: the law of cooperation.

Interior of Nationalist Activist :

Tagore criticized nationalist activism by locating the critique squarely in the mental orientation of the activists. Nationalist activism is premised on a rejection of the colonial power. The ethic of opposition gives rise to anger at the core of the being. Hence it leads to eradication of joy that springs from the creation which is political asceticism. Political asceticism is an inadequate basis for nationalist activism. It destroys the very psychic perceptions of everyday life and imposes abstract notions of a social machine in mind which pumps them to mechanical action. One can experience social reality as moulded by our scientific ideas of society. It overlooks every day humanist considerations. Alternatively, joy should be the basis of any human activity. The sacrifices of Nationalist activists do not have any aim or goal.

“It has at its back a fierce joy of annihilation which at best is asceticism and at its worst is that orgy of fright fullness in which the human nature, losing faith in the basis reality of normal life, finds a disinterested delight in an unmeaning devastation as has been shown in the late war and on other occasions.”

⁴⁶*Ibid* p.57

⁴⁷*Ibid*

The metaphors used above can be made sense only in the context of his understanding of freedom and the human mind. Nation is an abstraction which creates distorted realities. The mind that participates in abstractions loses sight of everyday realities. The aim of the mind is greed and power. The true nature of mind is to engage in uncoercive associations with the environment⁴⁸. Here, comes the ‘disinterested delight in devastation’ which took the form of a world war. Asceticism means negation of the world. Nationalist activist is not involved in creation as the sensuous engagement with the world. The lack of it, is violence created in the world. Political activism was leading to unmeaningful destruction or ‘non-education’.⁴⁹ He did not believe in activities that would lead to destruction.

This has been best illustrated in the personality of Sandip, one of the characters in the Novel, *Home and the world*.⁵⁰ His personality in the narrative is contrasted with the landlord, idealistic, and kind Nikhil. Sandip is a Nationalist. He is rhetorical, opportunistic and self serving. Sandip is political in the sense that he would sacrifice honesty for the sake of political goals. He belongs to a generation of activist-nationalists who were ‘opportunistic’. In the process of constructing a political narrative of nationhood, Sandip brings selfish landlords in to the fold of Nationalism. Thus, Sandip represents a new breed of politicians who is selfish, aggressive, unabashed and tough minded. Nikhil is generous, soft, idealistic and honest. Bimla, wife of Nikhil and the land lady develops an ‘attraction’ for Sandip, the aggressive and unabashed. This is the moment a new Nation is formed and its moral economy is effectively told by Tagore. In Bimla’s words “it is felt as though a God had declared him, before all the men and women present there, to be one of the immortals. Every word of his speech, from beginning to the end, seemed to carry the gust of storm. His boldness knew no limits at one point. I noticed that Sandipbabu’s eyes, bright as Orion in the sky, settled on my face. I was past caring. At that moment I was no longer the daughter in law of this aristocratic household. I was the sole representative of all the women in Bengal and he was its Hero.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Here Tagore could be compared to Frankfurt school theories in their analysis of unfreedom of modern mind and superficial nature of liberal freedoms.

⁴⁹ *Ibid* p. 57

⁵⁰ Tagore Rabindranath. *Home and the World* in *Classic Rabindranath Tagore*, Penguin Books India. 2011.

⁵¹ *Ibid* p.681

This is a literary description of the emergence of nation in Bengal rich with emotional texture. Bimlais always quite at unease with aristocratic etiquette and was born in a lower-middle class family. She finds herself attracted to aggressive and masculine Sandip than idealistic and mild mannered Nikhil. The Union between passion and aggression is the moment of arrival of the Nation. This is the moral economy of a nation which Tagore detests. She no longer thinks of herself as a member of an aristocratic family, but as a common woman of Bengal and it was Sandip. Thus the hero of the Nation, aggressive and masculine was born and Bimla says, “it was flames in my heart that lit this fires”⁵². Tagore elaborated a critique of Sandip with the character of Nikhil, who is generous, mild mannered and caring. Tagore seems to be standing for Nikhil, in his literary descriptions, thereby criticizing the emerging form of nationalist culture.

Alternatives to Nation

Nation is an abstraction of ideas, and identity. It is an abstraction in the sense that science produced abstract ideas taken out of society conceived as the pursuit of higher ideals. These abstract ideas aim to reshape society in their image. It means that reshaped society is a nation. The aim of the Nation is to be powerful and efficient. These ideas emerged from the abstract study of society through laws. Tagore’s alternative to the nation is a country. Nation is an imposition of the ideas of the powerful and efficient, on society. “The idea that our country is ours, merely because we have been born in it, can only be held by those who are fastened, in a parasitic existence, upon the outside world. But the true nature of man is his inner nature, with its inherent powers. Therefore, that only can be a man’s true country, which he can help to create by his wisdom and will, his love and his actions”⁵³

Nation imposes uniform ideas across cultures. It is a nation that attempts to make its people in a particular mould. In contrast to this, the country stands for variety of activities that man performs out of his wisdom and will, his love and his actions. “For act of creation it is the realization of truth”.⁵⁴

⁵²*Ibid*

⁵³Bhattacharjee Sabyasachi, P. 71

⁵⁴*Ibid*.

Truth cannot be realized in the form of the nation. Nation is an imposition of abstract ideas and a sustained activity of imitation by the masses of such abstractions. The activities of the national movement are an imposition. They are not product of spontaneous creative acts of individuals expressing their inner nature.

This can be done when we are engaged in building (country) up with our service, our ideas and our activities. Even if a foreign government undertakes a public utility activity, it benefits but people lose the sense of our own Thus, the creation of our own country by the spontaneous loving activity of the individuals is an alternative to the nation as a form of human organization. Neither the Bureaucratically organized nation-state nor the large organizations like nationalist movements constitute an ideal form of human organization. For him, spontaneous human activities pursued in the spirit of cooperation and love constitute the substance of the country, the alternative form of human organization.

The Nationalist movement has developed a distorted vision of its goals or aims. It aimed at the quick achievement of the goal, freedom of the country. The motive forces in the minds of individuals are greed, fear and benefit. These motives kill the instinct for truly free country. One acting out of fear, or greed or benefit cannot be truly focused on the goal. His aim would be to achieve the objective somehow. Tagore reflects on instrumental rationality intrinsic to modern politics and its spiritual basis. Instrumental rationality as a form of reason distorts one`s vision and makes one to pursue inauthentic visions.

“It was then really necessary for our countryman to be made conscious of the distinction, that the Englishman`s presence is an external accident mere Maya. But the presence of our country is an internal fact which is also an eternal truth Maya looms with an exaggerated importance, only when we fix our attention exclusively upon it, by reason of some infatuation –be it of love or hate.”⁵⁵

Tagore point to a nationalist self exaggeratedly fixed on a foreign enemy. This focus within one`s vision lead to illusion of one self. On the other hand, it is creative to have the centre of one`s vision within one self or within the surrounding but not on an imagined fictitious enemy. Nationalist movement, in Tagore`s view, could not help

⁵⁵ I bid p.70.

realizing the true nature of the Individual. It is much like state when it comes to the realization of individual creativity. He criticized the rhythm of nationalist movement and how it affects the quality of individual life. In fact, he comes to the contrary conclusion that nationalist movement violates the creative freedom of the individual.

Tagore writes in literary metaphors. When the anger⁵⁶ has clear object, it is expressed in restrained language. When the anger was not focused it grows suddenly and dissipates without serving any purpose. The latter illustration is about nationalist movement. The anger expressed in it has no clear focus. Secondly, nationalist movement was in a hurry to attain its goals very quickly without spending enough energy and without being patient enough. Thus the nationalist movement was negatively obsessed with the British. Thus, it was not self-reliant in the sense that it was not focused on itself, but on an imagined enemy with whom it was obsessed with.

“our unfortunate minds keep revolving round and round the British Government, now to the left, now to the right. Our affirmations and denials alike are concerned with foreigners.”⁵⁷

As an alternative to this, he proposes a societal self organization as an ideal untouched by the politics of the state as well as a national movement. He did not consider political revolution as a possible emancipatory route. ‘Since there are no politics, political revolution is like a shortcut to nothing.’⁵⁸ Thus, politics alone cannot resolve the problems of the country.

“The creation can only be fruit of that Yoga, which gives outward form to the inner faculties. Mere political or economical Yoga is not enough; for that all human powers must unite”⁵⁹

The creation of the country involves a union of all the faculties to be achieved by the union of hearts. Creation of the country does not take place through deliberation or a process of collective reasoning. People must directly participate in it. “Then only shall we know the real value of self-determination,.....not by reasoning nor by listening to lectures, but by direct experience. If even the people of one village

⁵⁶*Ibid*, p. 72

⁵⁷*Ibid*, p. 72-73

⁵⁸*Ibid*, p. 74

⁵⁹*Ibid*, p.74

of India, by the exercise of their own powers, make their village their very own then and there will begin the work of realizing our country as our very own,"⁶⁰

Thus, the creation of our own country involves not imitation of either the state institutions or national movement. It involves spontaneous expression of the inherent powers of individual activities in the outer world. It also involves direct experience in participating in the common affairs of the community.

Stateness and National Movement in India:

It is to argue, following Tagore, National movement in India exhibits state like features. The nation comes into being out of capacity for abstract thinking, as opposed to concrete thinking rooted in one's own life world context. An abstract thought as a discursive field is possible when impersonal knowledge is sought through discovery of scientific laws. An abstract thought creates impersonal visions across cultures through language and symbols. Abstract thought makes man a machine or tool for beneficent purposes like profit or power. In contrast to conception of man as a personal man rooted in specific cultural context, Man as a machine is rooted out of his traditional context. Nation involves mechanical man in its narrative to produce a powerful or efficient Nation. Thus, Nation is created out of mechanical and rootless man and the alternative ideal with which he contrasts the mechanical man is the personal man. Personal may be contrasted with impersonal. Personal man's entire being is defined only in orientation with human and non human environment. His self is rooted and gains meaning only in relation to other concrete humans and the environment.

Morality arises from the situatedness and rootedness of self in the environment. Morality arises from as one is related to the other and to the environment. Morality is intimately related to the ideas of the transcendent. The personal man is one who retains control because he can influence the environment through his creative actions. It means he can express his inner world in to the outer world through creation. Creation is the activity of a truly free man. Anything that violates the personal man's ability to create anew is a violation of freedom. National movement violates his ability to create anew in many ways.

⁶⁰*Ibid*, p.120.

Tagore extensively criticized Gandhi's program of weaving chakra as it violates his key notion that each person is unique in his temperament. He is suited to do a specific kind of action by his temperament. It violates this idea and imposes it as compulsory through a subtle program of mind intoxication.

"To one and all he simply says: "spin and weave, spin and weave". In this the call, "let all speakers after truth come from all sides"? Is this the call of the new age creation".⁶¹

Tagore argues that a country can be created by the true union of all the forces from all sides. Chakra is one program only; it cannot be the vehicle of Swaraj in its full scale. Swaraj should allow the flourishing of all forces from all sides and their true union. Weaving Chakra as a program should have occupied a small space, but it is occupying an entire space.

Tagore is opposed to the national call by Gandhi and congress to weave Chakra.

"Pressure of persuasion brought upon the crowd psychology is unhealthy for it. Some strong and wide spread intoxication of belief among a vast number of men can suddenly produce a convenient uniformity of purpose immense and powerful".⁶²

The pressure of public opinion can often create enormous power and uniformity of purpose. Public opinion induces people to have false beliefs. People cling to such false beliefs when the possibility of their realization is high. The possibility of immediate realization of false beliefs in no time leads to eclipse of judgment⁶³. The human mind is highly flexible; it could be twisted into whatever the direction that one would like. But, if the objective is not realized, it gets demoralized. Thus, Tagore points out that under the pressure realization of once expectations, one would lose the capacity for judgment. Similarly, in case of Charka, people have been persuaded to believe that doing so would bring them nearer to Swaraj. This made them to believe in its possibility. This is how mass propaganda leads one's mind towards believing in shortcuts to reach the objectives.

⁶¹*Ibid* p.80

⁶²*Ibid* p.101-102

⁶³*Ibid* p. 102

Swaraj should be realized in various fields simultaneously. Merely, in the economic or political field would not be sufficient to realize the multi-faceted, multi-sector ideal Swaraj. Nationalist-movement emphasized on one agenda: turning the wheel, “can it be then expected that, in the shrine of Swaraj the Charka goddess will attract to herself alone the offerings of every devotee?”⁶⁴ Swaraj can be attained only with a multifaceted focus on all the fields, not in one field alone like political or exclusive focus on turning the wheel. It should take place in all the fields simultaneously.

Swaraj cannot be attained by external imposition, but only by the internal realization from within human hearts. “It becomes necessary to restate afresh the old truth that the foundation of swaraj cannot be based on any external conformity, but only on the internal union of hearts”⁶⁵. Swaraj can be realized by force. It cannot even be realized by external imposition. If one merely imitates an idea or program, means that he is not free in his mind. It is not the product of his own creation. It is an offspring of somebody else’s imagination. Following it is a form of slavery because it is not a creation of one’s own. Swaraj cannot be imagined to be an imposition of this sort. Swaraj should be a true expression of one’s inherent powers. Through the creation of new products which makes one’s life joyful. This is contrast to mechanical imitation of rules assigned by a huge human organization like state or nation. In the form of life called state, the role of the each person is performed mechanically. It is characterized by mechanical repetition. Same thing happens even in the nationalist movement. Gandhi gave a call for weaving Charkha. All of them mechanically start weaving *khaddar*. It leads to boredom and blind limitation. National movement exhibits state like characteristics in its practice. Hence, *Swaraj* cannot be attained through blindly imitating programs at a national level. It can be attained only through joyful and creative activity which brings hearts together.

Thus, the Nationalist movement repeats statist imitative as a form of legitimacy among the people. It has been produced out of mass propoganda and political canvassing. The psychology of it is motivated by the expectation of the possibility of immediate realization of the goal. All these dimensions of mass

⁶⁴*Ibid* p. 105

⁶⁵*Ibid* p. 106

movement violate the human being as a creative person rooted in the immediate environment or surroundings.

Memory, Identity and Nation:

Tagore can be interpreted to argue that he preferred small scale face to face communities rather than large scale communities of impersonal kind. Nation is a community of the second kind. Tagore prefers alternative, small, face to face communities whose common life shared imagination of the collective is rooted in memories of the inter personal kind.

Tagore had been critical of large scale identities invented in modern times. He has been critical of the Nation. The nation is imagined into existence through a commonly shared ideas, images, myths and beliefs. It is a community of strangers who do not know each other in personal terms. In the process of industrialization, individual are rooted out of their traditional life contexts. They have lost their identity rooted in the traditional social world. They can no larger imagine themselves as part of a traditional order. At the same time, in the modern social world, they do not have an imagination connecting each other. To meet such a vacuum in imagination, Nation is invented. The nation is imagined on the basis of collective shared ideas, images, myths and stories. These are propagated and internalized through mass media, particularly print media in early 20th Century.⁶⁶

Tagore criticized such communities in his own language. Nation destroyed and bulldozed identities based on face to face interaction. It attempted creation of large scale identities: common identities of people who had never known each other in person. They develop a sense of 'we-ness' which gives cohesion and strength to the sense of who they are. It happens through common imagination cultivated assiduously. It has two ethical problems at the centre of the constitution of such large scale national identities.

According to Tagore large and impersonal identities come in to existence and sustain themselves by a false imagination of the collective self. For him collective self created

⁶⁶Anderson Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin of Nationalism*, London, Verso,1983.

is a mechanical union. It is mechanical because the union is not based on the true union of hearts. It is coming together of people arising out of false thrill of the people. The mind is excited in the act of union because such a union meets some false needs like crave for power and greed. These needs excite the mind, but they are false because they do not make possible realization of joy which is the intrinsic purpose of the mind. This joy cannot be attained in the mechanical union. It can be attained only in creative union. Thus, collective identity is forged to address the false, or an unfree mind.

In practical realm, such collective identities are forged in opposition to significant others. For instance, national identity is conceived and sustained in opposition to the British. Similarly, membership with in the Nation as an imagined community has been theoretically granted to all the communities constitutive of it, yet the status of different communities is not equal within the Nation. The nation is constituted out of the culture of hegemonic community and the other communities are imagined to be subordinate to the culture of hegemonic community. Thus, the Nation is constituted in opposition to significant others and internally it is hegemonic towards smaller communities. Thus the imagination of the Nationalist self is significantly determined by the posited enmity to others. Hence the other is at the centre of the self, thereby making the life of the self anxious. Thus, nationalist imagination is posited in violent opposition towards others. Tagore is concerned with extinguishing the anxiety at the centre of the self, thereby articulating the free self.

This violent opposition between the self and the other destroys the spirit of humanity. Treating others with the respect that human deserves. Nationalist treats others as communities belonging to caste, religion or Nation etc. It begins a spiral of violence without any end. The end state assumed is total extermination or the subordination of minority communities or the spiral of violence in the empirical sense continues unabated while the psychological violence of nation in invisible forms continues. That is, treating humans as the means to some abstract ends.

Tagore develops his ideas in contrast to this stream of thinking. His ideas can be interpreted to conceive alternative basis for morality and civility. Central to the alternative conception of civility is a new notion of civility. It is different from the bourgeois conception of civility. Bourgeoisie conception of civility assumes

interpersonal relationships for mutual benefit. It consists of fairness in exchange of goods and services. The right manners should be followed in the process of business transaction. The underside of it is that it is a life corroding pursuit for the sake of benefit.

Tagore thinks of a different conception of civility. It assumes interpersonal relations pursued for non instrumental reasons. The relationships are worthy in themselves, but not because of any benefit that it accompanies. The bases of relationship are memories of inter-personally shared experiences. The myths of nation and the consequent excitement it creates are the product of an unstable mind while memories of interpersonal sharing bring in true joy of the mind. It purifies greed, power, etc., and strengthens bonds. It creates a strong human connection which brings an end to greed and benefit.

In the novel “Home and world”⁶⁷, Nikhil remembers various relationships in his life. Most of the relationships are instrumental in nature, burdened with social pressures. But the early childhood friendships that he shared with his cousins are most the human, and are unburdened by social expectation. He fondly remembers collecting fruits and flowers with them. These relationships are the most human and act as sources of personal creativity. Tagore also fondly remembers a connection between one`s sentiments and one`s environment.

“The love of this river, (Ganga) which has become one with the love of the best in man, has given rise to this town Banaras as an expression of reverence”⁶⁸

Thus, personal memories of people and environment bring joy to the mind which is the source of creativity and humanity. This is the basis for alternative forms of community that he visualizes. This is in contrast to the bourgeoisie civility or ‘incivility’ of large scale modern identities.

Thus, the new conception of civility is rooted in inter personal sharing. It constitutes the key for alternative imagination of an ideal community. One objection that could be raised: Is it advocating a return to pre- bourgeoisie forms of social life? He is denying the path of progress premised on rationalization of society as a sign of

⁶⁷ Tagore R. *Home and the World*.

⁶⁸ Tagore R. *Creative Unity and other Essays*, New Delhi, Asia Publishing House, 1962. P.117

modernity. He is advocating an alternative path to modernity that emphasizes two key ideas: Human freedom lies in being creative and critique of abstract reason and implicitly thinking in terms of contextualist reason located in vernacular traditions.

Critique of abstract reason:

Tagore has been interpreted to understand that he is the champion of abstract and transcendental reason on the line of Kant. It means that he advocated Universalist conception of reason, implying that what is reasonable in specific circumstances is reasonable across cultures.

Contrary views are also available. Reason is specific to cultural tradition that one belongs. Reason is culture bound⁶⁹. Tagore criticized all the practices that violate expression of human creativity including caste system. But his criticism of existing social institutions is not based on reason of an abstract kind. Abstract reason totally dismisses traditional social institutions as superstitious and absolute. It does not look at the spirit in which social institutions have evolved over a period of time. He offers a critique of social institutions wherever they have become rigid and wherever they thwart the growth of creativity. He is not an advocate of unreason. He does not talk of reason unbound by cultural tradition. One should firmly root oneself in one's own cultural tradition or vernacular tradition and grew to be cosmopolitan in terms of respecting humans from another culture. The culture of tolerance does not come from invoking the abstract notion of reason, but firmly being rooted in one's vernacular tradition. Vernacular traditions form the soil for the growth and vitality of one person. One educated in English cannot access the fertility of the vernacular soil. Thus, he criticizes modern form of life and places his hope on the vitality of the vernacular tradition in strengthening the ideal of society based on reason and tolerance. It is apt to quote Tagore here, "I have come to feel that the mind, which has been matured in the atmosphere of a profound knowledge of its own country and of the perfect

⁶⁹ Tagore Saranindranath, "Tagore's Conception of Cosmopolitanism: A Reconstruction," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 77, No. 4, Fall.2008.

thoughts that have been produced in that land, is ready to accept and assimilate the cultures that come from other countries”⁷⁰.

Ideas for Civil-Society:

This chapter tried interpreting Tagore to understand the central issues of his thought in the context of the nationalist movement in India. It offers a unique vantage point to critically look at happenings in 20th century India and to draw from them to contribute to contemporary theoretical efforts.

1. Tagore argues for recovery of form of life that lies outside the sphere of the Nation. The uniqueness of such a life, is the pursuit of ideals beyond being instrumentalist in nature. The nation is a mechanical union of people coming together in the pursuit of instrumentalist ends.
2. Political modernity took the form of the Nation. A nation is not about self-expression of the people. Its aim is the pursuit of power and it is expressed in the form of National power. Even if the nation is couched in terms of self-expression, it is an inauthentic self-expression. The true self expression is possible only in the life outside the nation. The locus of civil society is to be found outside the Nation, but not within.
3. The scientization of the culture of society and politics produces instrumentalisation of social goals and objectives. It treats humans as machines. Life has relevance only in so far as it promotes certain objectives. There is a kind of complicity between knowledge, powers and commerce. Civil society should be conceived outside the hegemonic ideas of rationalization of public life and the role of science in it. A scientific attitude in society should not be an imposition, but be seen as emerging out of dialogical process.
4. The culture of political activism of nationalism that Tagore detests. He views the life of a Nationalist activist is oriented towards opportunism and meaninglessness. It is unprincipled. He is a slave to illusions that nationalism systematically propagates. It is uncreative, frozen and lacks spontaneity. Civil society ought to be premised on freedom which is synonymous with spontaneity and creativity.

⁷⁰*Ibid.* P.1076 as quoted in Saranindranath Tagore originally from Sisir Kumar Das (Ed), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, vol.3, New Delhi, Sahitya Akedemi, 1996.

5. Tagore does not postulate an idea of abstract reason which erases tradition and memory. Tagore articulates his views in terms of contextualist reason in which reason is produced out of vernacular traditions, but not by dispensing it. For Tagore, this conception of idea of tradition is humanistic and truly values toleration.