

Easterine also writes on romantic and religious themes. She is a patriot and is passionate about the glorious heritage of her motherland and is very critical about the patriarchal dominance and women's suffering. Ecological inequilibrium in our times is one of the important concerns of Monalisa Changkija (1960–), a stern feminist and ecofeminist. She is the editor of a newspaper Nagaland Page which is published from Dimapur. An eco-chronicler and sentinel of time, in one of her poems, Monalisa says:

Yes, I've seen our rice fields
 turn into factories and hills
 reduced to barren brown
 our rivers have dried
 and our once sparkling fish
 lie dead on sandy banks.
 But I wonder why you remain silent
 When I say we are hungry. (Nongkynrih & Ngangom 2003: 216)

In the preface to the first book of her poems, Monalisa speaks about her feminist concerns:

The first part of this collection, WEAPONS OF WORDS ON PAGES OF PAIN and TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN reflects some of my thoughts on battered and abused women, on domestic violence and on women's ability to rise above the "second class citizenry." Yes, I am empathising with and also crying out at the same time along with women who have suffered and continue to suffer in a discriminate society. (n.p.)

In several of her poems Monalisa raises the basic question about inequality and sexual discrimination in the society and against the atrocity and patriarchy which exploits the weakness and innocence of the fairsex and shatters their "liberty, peace, prosperity and right to live independently at par" (Das 2008:125) with their male counterpart. As such she seeks justice for the eternally oppressed, exploited and dominated women class:

If god made man / In His own image,
 Where shall the / Battered seek justice? (1993:1)

Being ambitious of the victory the women subaltern, their age-old predicament, insecurities and sufferings, she feels that these do not speak of their inadequacies, but Man's violence, dominance and atrocities and his inadequacies. About the pages of pain and the destiny of eternally suffering women she is sympathetic and feels asphyxiated:

Violence-induced miscarriages,
 Black-eyes and bloodied-lips
 Blue bruises and broken ribs
 Within the sanctity of marriages
 And security of homes,
 Are unrecorded indexes
 Of man's "progress and growth"
 On this planet's unwritten
 Pages of pain. (ibidem 7)

Rapid changes in the bio-diversity of Nagaland and places around Northeast India, the suffering of tribes amidst the environmental degradation, degeneration and extinction of rare flora and fauna and the impact of the ecological inequilibrium on the human habitat and living conditions create recurrent provocations in her to protest:

Yes, I've seen our rice fields
 Turn into factories and mills
 Our green hills
 Reduced to barren brown
 Our rivers have dried
 our once sparkling fish
 lie dead on sandy banks.
 It's no more the Pines I can smell
 Nor hear the Tragopan and the Hornbill (2007:29)

Besides the rare flora and fauna, birds like Tragopan and Hornbill which are the symbols of Naga heritage are extinct now and this gives pain to the poet to ponder over the culture and ecology of her motherland. Temsula, Nini, Easterine and Monalisa have aired their mellifluous feelings through their poems. Their works have brought glory to Nagaland by exposing the ethos of the land in English verse. They are still writing and more novelty in their themes, concepts and techniques is expected in their future poetry.

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Tagore's Nationalism: Realization and Reconstruction of the True Indian Identity with Lessons from the Past

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Abstract

Benedict Anderson has argued that Europe and the Americas had provided India with the models of anti-colonial struggle and nation formation, which ultimately cut ways for her achievement of nationhood and freedom. This standpoint has been vehemently contested by Parth Chatterjee and others, who say that Nation formation process had two separate field of activities, one political and the other, spiritual. In the external, political sphere there may be some borrowings of pattern and models, especially in the Congress political programme. But the spiritual field did not allow any foreign direction and domination. Rabindranath Tagore is its classic example. Through his endless poems, songs, stories, articles, lectures, plays, novels and everything he has tried to build up an inner strength for his country. If the self honour and esteem is roused within the soul, he believed, no one could stop India from regaining her political freedom. But this preparation of the soil and soul is a serious issue and it requires extreme courage, love of truth and sacrifice. He examined the history of India, not imitating the process of foreign scholars, but in his own way, taking his cue from her silent yet vibrant culture. He, in one sense, tried to realize and reconstruct the true identity of India, a base upon which the nation was to be built. The present paper intends to examine this venture of Tagore with reference to his various representative works.

Keywords: Enlightenment, culture, nation, History, Hinduism, casteism, deliverance.

I

The advent and spread of Western education in early 19th century Bengal and thereafter gradually in India, with its sparks and ignition introduced a new era, that of new enlightenment. Acquaintance with the brave new world and its modern thoughts and theories; its doubt, belief, experiences and experimentation, and mostly its devoted preoccupation with the world of matter, its supreme urge to dominate there with new and newer findings in the realm of science and technology- all these together enkindled the true spirit of renaissance and gave birth to an intelligentsia, spirited, cultured and solvent. But the new education could not reach the mass, the poor, the marginalized, and even where it reached, it bore and imprinted the inevitable stamp of colonial domination and diplomacy. It intended only to prepare a group of half

educated, limpid clerks, who neither could, nor would ever challenge the colonial and imperial exploitation. The English education did arouse a sense and desire of national reawaking and independence, but tutored as it had been by foreign rulers, it set out to follow the western models blindly. Benedict Anderson appears to be right here in his insistence on the worth of Western models which India was to follow and imitate. But even though it is true that the models had been there and of course they had been used in explaining the Indian situation, it is also to be kept in mind that initially those who worked on them, had been all English and Western scholars. The Indians were never trusted to choose models for themselves; they had been mere subordinates to follow instructions of their masters. Then when the models got fixed and took roots in the native soil, nothing more was required. It bore fruits like a machine automatized to publish copy of a copy, one after another, in an endless practice. The western writers and scholars themselves imported the models, and set only those designs to the machine which had been most familiar to them and suitable for their purpose. The machine did not know how to think and every care was taken so that it could never master the art of independent thinking. Then the switch was turned on and in an expected way, it started producing copies and echoing his master's voice. It had been controlled so skillfully that it was next to impossible to come out of the allotted design. The shoe cannot walk by itself, its only duty is to obey and protect the foot. And it is never trusted, nor allowed to choose way for itself. The colonial administration considered the colony just like a shoe, caring little for what a Benedict Anderson might require to devise a face saving theory in subsequent years.

Following that Western model even Indian History was written and interpreted, -not by Indian writers, but by western scholars. The Indians had been given only the duty to read and cram those lists of historical records and to pass examinations. It is here that Tagore came forward to register his protest in *Bharatbarsher Itihas*, (Bharatbarsha: 525):

The history of India which we read and remember to pass examinations, is only the story of a stormy night and its bad dreams. It rejects everything else and records only who came from where and fought with whom for how many days, months and years. Father and son, brother and brother, each and everyone targeted the throne and played the mouse-cat game. The Pathans, the Mughals, the Portuguese, French and English all came in due course of time and complicated this chronicle.

But these coloured looking glasses fail to catch the true India. This chronicle projects only those who fought and killed and burnt one another, as if apart from these invaders, there had been no native people.¹

Even in a stormy day, the storm may not be the principal event, despite its great roaring. The daily flow of life that passes from hut to hut, under the thatched roof and behind the mud walls, itself bears the seeds of true history of India and her people. But unfortunately, as Tagore regrets in the same essay (526), the Indians do not have access there:

The son of the Englishman knows from early childhood that his

father and grandfather have fought many battles, captured many countries and made business there. He also strives to shine in the same line and enjoy the same glory of war, wealth, business and statesmanship. We know from our early days that our fathers and forefathers have never captured foreign countries, never gone there for interests of trade and commerce. The chief aim of our history is to furnish this and this information only. We do not know what they had done. So we cannot fix what we should do. The only way left for us, thus, is that of imitation and making copy of others' models. No one needs to be blamed. The education we get from early childhood itself separates us from our country everyday, and thus one day we get completely detached and stand against our own motherland.

Tagore therefore, requests the native historian to make new interpretations of history, to illuminate those dark, vague spots and phases, where under thick cover of dust and neglect, mother India waits patiently for him, with her unknown events, untold stories, unidentified children and unheeded message. He is supposed to pick from these, the right path that even through variety and plurality, leads to the final destination which is the center of Indian civilization and which reveals her innermost principles. India never suppresses difference. Difference adds variety and spice to life. But underneath its external outfit, there runs a thread of unity that binds together all differences and prepares the garland of India. This is, according to Tagore, the true lesson of Indian history.

In order to reach that final unity, India has always refrained from the race of political power. Domination and control, expansion and encroachment which produce political command and glory, had never drew any interest for her, because political glory and state power stand upon the force of contradiction. Tagore realized early that

...the noose of opposition within the political nature of European consolidation can protect it against the external enemy but cannot offer it any internal harmony. Hence it keeps alive the point of contradiction between individuals, between the king and his subject, the wealthy and the penniless. It is not that they assemble together and carry forward or maintain their society by individual share of work, executed with a profound inspiration to support one another. It is only that they differ and oppose one another from the beginning to the end, every one alert and careful that the other is not gaining strength and getting ahead even for one inch. (ibid: 527)

The equilibrium achieved in this artificial way, by members of a society, each neutralizing the other, cannot control, - so Tagore contends, the balance and poise required for long term prosperity and sustainable development. The government in its desperate attempt to maintain status quo, passes rules and regulations, one after another, but in vain. Seeds of contradiction take roots in the soil and burst from within. The society splits in revolts and endless fragmentation.

India, as Tagore continues to explain, has taken the other way. She has tried to mitigate and overcome contradiction from within. She has never

attempted to erase difference where it lies in substance and truth. For real difference can never be overcome by external force and pressure, it needs to be allocated to its proper place, it requires a proper and justified classification and allotment of authority within its circle. Only then its keen edges lose sharpness. India intended and followed this model for centuries, her call of unity and cultural superstructure stand upon this base.

India followed this particular way not playfully or accidentally, but from a system approach derived out of hard earned experience. She has always strove to rearrange and unify diverse elements of her civilization; she never flung anybody aside, she neither rejected nor expelled the outsider marking him as harmful for her unity and a miss-match. She acknowledged all and accepted all who came to her and traded on her path of harmony and sacrifice, belittling all forces of contradiction.

Europe protects her purity by closing her door to the outsider. She does not hesitate to follow the prejudice of racial and cultural untouchability that divides man on the pretext of skin-colour. She is scared of diversity, because she lacks in her internal discipline and harmonizing power. She apprehends her own cultural plurality and intends to cast all dissimilarities into one single pattern by force. But India subdues force and overcomes all contradictions through her deep-seated faith in harmonious co-operation and co-existence. She gains by sacrifice. She teaches man not to run after matter and material profit, for there is a greater bargain, that is, the awakening of the mind and spirit. Resources to be found there are endless. Bliss and joy of that world is unlimited.

'This awakening of the spirit' India calls religion. Religion, as Tagore explains, is one and indivisible. There cannot be anything like the life of the hand, the life of the leg, or of abdomen, -for life resides everywhere in the body. Likewise India has never segmented religion into pieces like the religion of faith, religion of behaviour, religion of Sunday, religion of other six days, religion of Church or that of home etc. The religion of India is the religion of her entire society, the feet and head are not separate there, but it stands and functions like a great tree, each of its foliage offering fruits, shade and shelter to the universal man. The unity felt within is to be established among many. To discover it through endless search for knowledge, to establish it through endless sequence of works, to feel it through the profound philosophy of love and to spread it through all activities of life- this is what India is after, making way through all opposition and contradiction. So Tagore says, "the moment this fundamental effort and mission of Indian civilization we shall realize, the gap between our present and past will also be craved" (ibid:529). His chief contribution to nationalism is to make his countrymen aware of and believe in this unsegmented and uninterrupted flow of History, which preserves the keynote of Indian civilization and reveals the secrets of its struggle towards that goal.

Among many other meanings, Renaissance, in one sense means, the freedom of thought from established patterns, customs and conventions. Renaissance came to India, first to Bengal, through enlightenment due to the advent of Western Education. Rabindranath is usually considered a

product of this renaissance waves. And here pointedly, the first mistake occurs (Sen: 150).² Tagore definitely took his cue from his age, but he did not stop there, he utilized and exercised the freedom of thought and delved history to reach its inner truth. At the same time, as Sen shows (35) he explained the rationale of this search, the need of exploring the past:

When the present appears dry and grain less, and famines disturb too much, we take recourse to the past, which like mother earth, offers refuge in its mother's lap. When the sun shines pitiless and the rains do not come, we can collect life giving sap from the deep, dark entrails of Past, through our roots.³

Like a true artist of renaissance, Tagore loves this past, because it receives the collective achievement of Indian civilization, it restores her forgotten honour and glory in the memory and thus it stimulates the new age to recreate upon the resources of heritage. Unlike the other nationalists, between time and space he prefers and picks up time in order to overcome narrow nationalism. Once again Sen quotes him at large (35):

We live in time and space. But our love is mostly for our space, our country, our territory. We fight desperately for one acre of land but cares little for our right upon the far extended time!...if we lose the past, then it is an unrecompensable loss....A moment's pleasure cannot satisfy the need of Man. If our life is nothing but a collection of some scattered and unrelated water images, then it is indeed a poor life. But on the contrary, if our life maintains the essential link between the birth peak and sea mouth of final submission, passing in an uninterrupted flow through diverse vales, plains and deltas, and thereby connecting the past, present and future of that temporal journey, then it is next to impossible to suspend her dynamism. Then she will not obey the frowns of stones....I am not a parasite. I stand upon my past that spreads roots deeper under the earth. I have certain holy points and places in my past. Exhausted and fatigued under the heavy chains of sinful present, I make pilgrimage there and seek refuge in the melodious plot of beechen green and shadows numberless. The melody of the past keeps on ringing. To miss its call is to lose your address, path and identity.

The necessity of keeping this connection with the past, he explains in various ways with examples from individual, social and national perspectives:

Nothing lasts for ever but passes away. Still a few signs and tokens, left behind, speak of the past days and revive old memories. Who is so heartless to destroy even these!...Is there anybody in this world who has not preserved carefully a torn letter of very old days or a ring of a dear one!....That little letter is the shrine and image of my past. It has no worldly value, still it is invaluable because my past is buried deep and preserved in it.⁴

Taking cue from this, he then moves forward to justify the need of established social customs and rituals. These are, in his view, neither good, nor harmful; their only fault is that they are no longer useful; there is no need to follow them in the present age. But to reject and refuse these also leads one to reject and refuse the great heritage established and preserved among them. Appealing to emotion and nostalgia, Tagore, as Sen shows (37), writes in his own inimitable way:

If the last memento of your dead mother is valueless to you,
simply because it has no longer any value in the market, then
your wisdom is deceived. You are not at all a son.

Similarly, as he claims, those meaningless social customs and conventions are important for us because they bear the history of our forefathers. The grey, old and fragrant past they carry, even in its suspended motion, disregards the eruptions, the sick-hurry and divided aims of the disjointed present, and directs man towards the bygone age. The march of civilization halts before it, looks back, listens carefully the whisper of relics, and thus regains insight, refines strategy and resumes journey. In Tagore's opinion, only this insightful journey, rich and refined with lessons from past, can lead India to her successful rebirth as a nation. This alone can establish freedom in her spiritual domain and make her confident of her worth. He spends his life to locate its source and resource, scattered in myth, in art, in sculpture, architecture, folk lore and literature. He thus revives and shapes the image of his spiritual India, which foreign rule and exploitation attempted to darken, damage and destroy.

II

First Tagore refers to the eloquent silence, lying resplendent in the walls of Indian temples. It reminds him of the basic lessons of India's message to mankind. In the essay *Mandir* he writes:

When I first saw the Bhubaneswar temple in Odissa, the experience was like that of reading a new book. It seemed that those stones stored within themselves speech, unexpressed and silenced for centuries. Their message affected the heart more. The sages in old Vedic age composed lines in rhyme. This temple also seemed to be muttering lines and incantations in the rhyme of stones, which appeared like the last, few, torn leaves of an ancient epic....

My mind tutored from early childhood in Western education, was trained to divide heaven and earth and to maintain the holy distance between them, lest it opens up new vistas of sinfulness. But man here comes upon the very shrine of God....

It signaled a wider meaning in my heart. I caught the language of stones and realized that, God does not maintain distance. He lives within us and this very real and tangible world of dust and dirt is His only abode, permanent residence...the expression of God within man, His arrival and appearance in our realization amid this dull, daily routine, these had been the root words of new Hinduism....The temple of Bhubaneswar followed the same way and...coroneted man in godliness. (Sen:152)

Then Rabindranath concentrates on the literary resources of India's past and restores their dazzling glory to the public eye. His enthusiasm for the classical epics was a sort of worship. He tried to probe deeper into the inner spirit of the Ramayana and said:

The Ramayana of Valmiki should not be treated as mere poetry, but the Ramayana of India. Only then India by the Ramayana and the Ramayana by India will be realized....I read the Ramayana and the Mahabharata from this angle. In its simple Anustup metre [a kind of Sanskrit metrical pattern] the heart of India vibrates for ages. (Sen:152)

On the story of Ramayana, he composed plays like *Kal Mrigaya*, and *Valmiki Pratibha*, and poems like *Ahalya Prati* (to Ahalya), *Patita* (The fallen woman), *Vasha o Chhanda* (Language and rhyme) etc. Similarly from the Mahabharata, he took story line for his immortal poems like *Kach O Devjani*, *Gandharir Abedan* (*Gandhari's Appeal*), *Karna Kunti Samvad* (The Meeting between Karna and Kunti) and composed a verse play, *Chitrangada*. Each of these cannot be discussed here but one or two instances can project the basic ideas Tagore intended to restore through them:

In *Karna Kunti Samvad*, on the eve of the great battle Kunti introduces herself to Karna as his mother who disowned him at the time of birth, and entreats him in every possible way to transfer his love and allegiance to the Pandavas, with the promise that he would be made king after victory. True to the tradition of honour of a Kshatriya warrior, Karna firmly rejects her offer, and adds, how could she have offered him a kingdom now when at the time of birth she denied him the love of a mother? His manliness and honour refuse to be persuaded and he prays that he may not betray the truth of a hero for the allurements of fame and kingdom. (Poddar:54-55)

The same idealism is expressed in *Gandhari's Appeal*, where even when her son Duryodhan begs of her blessings for victory in the forthcoming war, mother Gandhari cannot utter those words but says, 'Truth must win at the end'. In a like manner the king Somak in the poem *Narakbas* (In Hell) maintains his word of honour and agrees to offer his infant son to the sacrificial fire at the instigation of his priest, Ritwik, who executes the deed. This deed in popular belief, as Poddar explains (55),

...is a deed of the boldest virtue, which has earned for him a distinguishable place in heaven. On his way to heaven after death, he finds his priest, Ritwik, expiating for his sin in the purgatorial fire of hell. The truth dawns upon Somak that he is as good or bad a sinner as his priest and deserves identical punishment. He realizes that while demonstrating his loyalty to the spurious ideal of a warrior, he has alienated himself from his own humanity and also from the paternal loyalty to his son. He refuses to take the chariot to heaven, and decides to share life with Ritwik in atonement.

After the epics, Tagore takes up the Buddhist era. He composes some of his unforgettable poems on the spirit of mercy, pity, peace and love, propagated by Lord Buddha and his disciples. *Malini*, *Natir Puja*, *Chandalika*, *Shrestha Viksha* (The Best Alms) etc. bear statements of his homage to that great idealism practiced in India and followed in various other parts of the world. Reference here may be drawn from the poem *Abhisar* (the journey to meet the beloved):

Upagupta, the disciple of Buddha,
lay asleep on the dust by the city wall of Mathura.
Lamps were all out, doors were all shut,
and stars were all hidden by the murky sky of August.
Whose feet were those tinkling with anklets,
touching his breast of a sudden?
He woke up startled,
and the light from a woman's lamp struck his forgiving eyes.

It was the dancing girl, starred with jewels, clouded with a
pale-blue mantle, drunk with the wine of here youth.
She lowered her lamp and saw the young face,
austerely beautiful.

'Forgive me young ascetic,' said the woman;
'graciously come to my house.

The dusty earth is not a fit bed for you.' (Das:171)

But the Sanyasi only smiled and did not comply with her request. He assured her, however, that when time will come, he definitely will go to her.

She did not have to wait for long. The spring came to the end of the year. The trees blossomed in all colours, the breeze breathed all the fragrance, the cuckoo cooed in the bower. The Sannyasi reached the cottage, where lay the dancer girl, Vasavadutta, left alone and deserted by all, suffering from the intolerable pain of small pox. She was surprised to see his gracious face and begged for pity. The very timing of his arrival gave her a rebirth to holiness, where desire could never trespass.

The lesson is well imbibed by Pujarini, the worshipping maid, in the poem of the same title. Emperor Ajatshatru passed an order forbidding worship of Lord Buddha in the temples within his land. Since law-breakers will be punished to lose life, nobody dares disobey the ruling. But the maid of the palace, Shrimati, does not have any such fear. She comes out, calls everybody to join and offers her worship to the shrine, alone, unaccompanied. The guards warn and then kill her, but she does not deviate from her decision, her dharma.

Similarly the glorious past of Punjab and Rajasthan, the heroic feats of the Rajput and Sikh Communities, Tagore records and revives in poems like *Bandibir* and *Horikhela* (The Holy). The first poem begins with assurance of the rise of the Sikh:

The Mughals attacked Punjab with a great number of soldiers and force. But the Sikhs did not yield. The day has come when they must show their valour keeping life as the stake. The torches set fire to the sky; the roars defeat the clouds and darkness. The Emperor in Delhi frowns in worry. His order reaches Punjab and blood streams fresh like new rivers. Such a rebel was Banda, who despite his furious struggle got captivated. Interested in increasing the mental agony, the conqueror Kaji ordered Banda to kill his own young boy. The father did not utter a word, but blessed and kissed his young cheeks, then said something in his ears. The son also sang in roaring words and showed his courage. Father killed the son and himself was tortured to death by the men of Kaji. But behind their death survived the belief, 'the Sikhs never fear to die.'

In *Horikhela* the Rajput queen invites the Pathan ruler to participate in the play of Holi. He comes with his soldiers, boiling within with the carnal desire and lust. The dance begins, the spell rises. Suddenly the queen throws down her metal dish of colours at the Pathan and the hundred maid dancers come out of disguise as hundred warriors. All his lustful desires crushed within, the Pathan was killed and conquered just playfully.

Examples may be multiplied. In fact, the volumes *Katha* and *Kahini* (Tales and stories) bear many such pearls of Indian mythology which Tagore endeavoured to revive and connect with the past and present history of the land. His intention is clear. A story is a narrative which everybody enjoys but never trusts. A myth is a story which in spite of its fictional elements, is trusted and believed to be true. But a history is an analytical account that convinces with evidence of its truthfulness. Tagore realized that his countrymen had lost conviction in their past and had been struggling with belief and dis-belief that step by step led them away from truth. He attempted to bring back and restore the conviction and thus to re-furnish the historical accounts in mellowing verse and poetic forms, sweet and stimulating as well.

Simultaneously he responded also to the responsibility of fighting against superstitions and untruth of our religious dogmas like castism and untouchability. This was never the field of a poet, but a social reformer. Tagore employed his poetic muse even in social reformation. Two examples may drive the point home, one is the poem *Brahmana* (The Brahmin), the other *Debatar Grash* (The Toll of God).

In the first one, a young boy enters the hermitage of sage Goutam and expresses his desire to take lessons from him like his young friends. But as a principle Goutam imparts his lessons only to those boys who are Brahmins. So he inquired the boy of his parentage, clan and caste. The boy did not know that and went to his mother to ask:

She clasped him to her bosom, kissed him on his hair,
and asked him of his errand to the master.

'What is the name of my father, dear mother?' asked the boy. 'It is
only fitting for a Brahmin to aspire to the highest wisdom, said
Lord Goutam to me.'

The woman lowered her eyes and spoke in a whisper.

'In my youth I was poor and had many masters.

Thou didst come to thy mother

Jabala's arms, my darling, who had no husband.' (Das:183)

Next day morning, Satyakama appeared before sage Goutam and informed him what he had learnt from his mother. The boys present there laughed ridiculed and scolded the ambition of an outcast to get wisdom. But sage Goutam stood up and embraced the boy and welcomed him as the greatest Brahmin who is born to the clan of Truth.

The Chandal girl in the dramatic play *Chandalika* also shares this broad view and points to the hundreds of Brahmins who are in fact worse than the Chandals in their daily conduct, and thus pollute the Brahmin households. Tagore's point is clear. He does not believe in orthodox caste system and wants that his countrymen also come out of this dark, blind convention. Man, if he is true to his work and idealism, can achieve greatness and greatness never makes any distinction between the high and the low, the rich and the poor. –This is Tagore's message to his country, aspiring to take the shape of a nation.

The nation should equally reject superstitions. The meaningless, unknown conventions grow into customs and interfere with the meaning

and truth of life itself. This is also a lesson, earned by the Brahmin, Maitra Mahasay, in the poem *Debatar Grash*:

The young widow Mokshoda appeals to the Brahmin to take her, along with others as a pilgrim to the holy point where the river Ganga meets the sea. Her little boy was supposed to stay with his aunt during her absence. But when the boat was about to start, the mother discovered her son Rakhal as a determined co-passenger. No amount of pleading and scolding could dishearten or persuade the little boy from the fatal adventure. The mother got angry and uttered that she would throw him in the water of the sea. This also could have no effect in the boy, though the mother was scared to receive the foul echo. Finally the Brahmin took pity on the poor boy and to everybody's relief included him in the party.

On the way home, a storm rose. The river was furious, its waves were about to swallow the boat at any moment. The pilgrims cried in fear and started throwing their things in the river as donation to appease the enraged God. The Brahmin declared his verdict: Mokshoda must throw the boy into the water, as she promised at the start of the pilgrimage.

The mother denied and said she never really meant that. But all others pounded over the poor woman, snatched away Rakhal from her lap and threw him overboard into the river.

The last cry of the drowning little boy was piercing the sky and it finally pierced the ears of the Brahmin. His conscience now revolted and to atone his sin he jumped into the river to reclaim the boy back to life.

This poem had a much more effective design as to free people from baseless superstitions. The Brahmin here is shown not only to commit a mistake and misjudge the true reason of the storm, but he finally comes forward to rectify his guilt and jumps into the river to save the boy. In a similar way the people of India also should come out of their stupor and blind faith in baseless conventions. They should jump into the whirlpool and find out the boy, a symbol of lost happiness and harmony. The poem also exemplifies that national awakening should not wait endlessly for the arrival of its leader, even a poet can give it necessary direction and shape, if he is not an idle man, preoccupied with his private dream and illusion only, if he can write poems on anything and everything to inspire man to wake up and overcome submission to untruth.

True it is that Rabindranath evoked the past glory and excavated the corridors of History, Literature and Culture to find out new resources that could renovate, reform and regenerate the national feeling, but it is not true that he found all glory and nothing wrong there. Rabindranath is never preoccupied with past, he learns from past and present equally; he confronts the challenges of his time with a modern outlook, with logic, reason, acquired knowledge of science and technology and other amenities. But in that combat he never ignores the lessons of history and he never deviates from the path of truth.

Tagore's ideas about Shivaji and his Maratha Empire become pertinent in this context. In the poem *Shivaji Utsav* (1904), written as an introduction to the book *Shivaji's Initiation* by Shakharam Ganesh Deushkar, Tagore

described Shivaji's efforts as struggle for truth. The same conviction he expressed later also, in 1908; this time, more elaborately:

Questions arise here on the issue of communalism, as Shivaji's religious activities originate from the basic cults of Hinduism and they endorse his political mission and strategies too. If this is true, then how can Shivaji be accepted as an ideal ruler in the modern age?

But Tagore refutes this line of argument on the ground that 'the Maratha religious reformation movement influenced a large number of people at a time. Shivaji was born out of that movement....Hence he succeeded to absorb the force of the country and the country succeeded to smile under his power.'⁵

Rabindranath never accepts Shivaji as the leader of a gang of robbers. Shivaji, according to him related himself with the religious cravings of the countrymen who had been tired of the Mughal anarchy and wanted desperately to change it. It is this holy mission that united the fragmented Maratha clans into a regiment which finally sacrificed itself in order to establish a discipline and happiness amid chaos and misrule. This view is supported even by historians like Vincent Smith (432-33):

Shivaji possessed and practiced certain special virtues which nobody would have expected to find in a man occupying his position in his time and surroundings. It is a curious fact that the fullest account of those special virtues is to be found in the pages of the Muhammadan historian, Khafi Khan, who ordinarily writes of Shivaji as the 'reprobater', 'a sharp son of the devil', 'a father of fraud' and so forth. An author who habitually applies such terms of abuse to his subject cannot be suspected of undue partiality towards him. Nevertheless Kafi Khan honours himself as well as Shivaji by the following passage:

"...He made it a rule that wherever his followers went plundering, they should do no harm to the mosque, the Book of god, or the women of any one. Whenever a copy of Kuran came to his hands, he treated it with respect, and gave it to some of his Musalman followers."⁶

But if Shivaji's efforts were not confined to a narrow vision, if he really attempted to reconstruct the History of India in a new mode, why it is so that this great arrangement could not last long and collapsed into failure, soon after his death? Tagore has his answer for this too:

What was pure in Shivaji's mind, got polluted for narrow individual interests in his descendants. His high ideals could not penetrate the heart of his people. Hence his mission could never be realized in the efforts undertaken. Somewhere it lacked truth and thus it grew formidable for the countrymen as *Bargi* invasion.

This view of the fall of the Maratha power due to its submission to greed, separation, evil and untruth, -has been supported by many leading Indian historians, notable among them, Sir Jadunath Sarker, who elaborates the point in his book on Shivaji (68):

Why did Shivaji fail to create an enduring state?...An obvious cause was nodoubt, the shortness of his reign, barely ten years, after the final rupture with the Mughals in 1670. But this does not furnish the true explanation of his failure. It is doubtful if with a very much longer time at his disposal he could have averted the ruin which

befell the Maratha state under the Peshways, for the same moral canker was at work among the people in the 17th century as in the 18th. The first danger of the newly Hindu Kingdom, established by him in the Deccan lay in the fact that the national glory and prosperity resulting from the victories of Shivaji and Baji Rao, created a reaction in favour of Hindu Orthodoxy; it accentuated the caste distinction which ran counter to the homogeneity and simplicity of the poor and politically depressed early Maratha society. Thus his political success sapped the main foundation of that success.

In the security, power and wealth engendered by their independence, the Maratha's of the 18th century forget the past record of Muslim persecution;... the social grades turned against each other,... we have unmistakable traces of it as early as the reign of Shivaji. Caste grows by fission. It is antagonistic to national union. In proportion as Shivaji's ideal of a Hindu Swaraj was based on orthodoxy, it contained within itself the seed of its own death.

This instinctive detestation of greed, separation, anarchy and untruth, led Tagore to learn from History and widen the spiritual domain where his countrymen could stand free and boast of a rich heritage that still could provide solutions to the crises of civilization. This truthful and glorious India that he revives and recreates in an untiring enterprise, is the sacred bed where nationalism germinates and takes root. He celebrates this revival and reawakening in the hundred sonnets of *Naivedya* (The Offerings) and finds emancipation of his country not in closed door sacrifice, but in invocation of strength and power, confidence and self-esteem amid thousand of traps and temptations:

Deliverance is not for me in renunciation.

I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight.

Thou ever pourest for me the fresh draught of thy wine of various colours and fragrance,

filling this earthen vessel to the brim.

My world will light its hundred different lamps with thy flame and place them before the altar of thy temple.

No I will never shut the doors of my senses.

The delight of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight.

Yes all my illusion will burn into illumination of joy,

and all my desires ripen into fruits of love. (Das: 68)

It is also here that Tagore's nationalism embraces all and finds for all a place in the lap of mother India. He calls everybody to unite there:

Awake my mind, gently awake in this holy land of pilgrimage

On the shore of this vast sea of humanity, that is India.

Here I stand with arms outstretched

to hail man, divine in his own image

and sing to his glory in notes glad and free...

No one knows whence and at whose call

came pouring endless inundations of men

rushing madly along- to lose themselves in the sea:

Aryans and non-Aryans, Dravidians and Chinese, Scythians,

Huns, Pathans and Moghuls

All are mixed, merged and lost in one body.