



Transnationalist Spirituality of Rabindranath Tagore

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Abstract:

Focusing on a selection of Rabindranath Tagore's essays, lectures, and a few of his creative works, this essay draws attention to the spiritual orientation of Tagore's transnationalism. In his vast and multifaceted writings, Tagore offers an alternative vision of transnational union of humanity, different from and often resistant to nationalist distributions of human relationship. Through close readings of Tagore's works, this essay complicates Orientalist notions of the East-West polarities. While strongly opposing Western imperialist ideology, Tagore was always frank about his trust in and indebtedness to the liberal humanist values of the West. On the other hand, despite upholding Indian or Eastern spirituality, he was critically aware of the social and political crises of the contemporary East. A large volume of his works betrays his scepticism about any political solution to national and international problems. What he promotes is a spiritual concord of the best in Western and Eastern cultures, connecting the liberal humanist conscience of the West with the harmonizing, all-inclusive spiritual wisdom of the East. Neither completely secular nor thoroughly religious in an institutional sense, the transnationalist spirituality of Tagore bridges the gap between the secular humanism of Western modernity and the mystic-religious spirituality of Eastern antiquity, offering nuanced perspectives on both.

Keywords: Transnationalism, spirituality, universal humanism, nationalism, cosmopolitanism, culture, political, East, West.

‘The most memorable fact of human history’, according to Rabindranath Tagore, ‘is that of a path-opening, not for the clearing of a passage for machines or machine guns, but for helping the realization by races of their affinity of minds, their mutual obligation of a common humanity’.¹ This notion of ‘common humanity’ or universal humanism is informed by the profoundly spiritual nature of Tagore’s vision of life and world. Tagore’s spiritually idealist stance against nationalism made him unpopular both at home and abroad. On his lecture tours in Japan and the USA during the globally historic moments of 1916 and 1917, he chose ‘Nationalism’ as his topic. In Japan, his valorisation of the traditional Japan against the Western-influenced ‘modern’ Japan received a generally unsympathetic response—a condition that would exacerbate during his later visits in 1924 and 1929.² On Tagore’s Chinese tour in 1924, public sentiment was divided as to his supposed antimodern Oriental antiquarianism.³ Although in America he was initially well received, he was shocked by American journalist and New Humanist Paul Elmer More’s condemnation of him in the *Nation* on 30 November 1916. More preferred to the spiritually optimistic Tagore ‘philosophers who at least have the advantage of being virile’ given the need of the time ‘when the devil is unchained’.⁴ At the same time, Tagore’s lectures on the evils of political nationalism also caused mistrust among the non-Bengali Indians living in the USA, so much so that there was even a failed attempt to murder him in his hotel room on the West Coast.⁵ The spiritual universalism of Tagore remains to this day a matter of both admiration and condemnation in India and Bangladesh as well as among the Bengali-speaking community all over the world.

It is imperative to state at the outset that the term ‘spirituality’ is used in this essay to mean a way of looking at life and reality that prioritizes man’s spirit, soul, or moral sensibility, and his inner subjective consciousness over materialist, commercial, political, and exclusively corporeal values. As we will see, in Tagore’s usage, the word ‘spiritual’ does not have any other-worldly or supernatural implication, but is concerned with man’s existence in this world. The transcendence it underpins pertains to transcending the overly materialistic or self-centred existence of one’s life in order to realize one’s deeper connectivity with every living being. Whether in his early works such as *Sādhanā* (1913) or in his late works such as *The Religion of Man* (1931), Tagore adheres to this liberal notion of spirituality.

¹ *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, ed. by Sisir Kumar Das, 3 vols (New Delhi: Sahitya Academi, 1994–96), III (1996), 711.

² Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p. 203.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

As Michael Collins notes, the *Upanishadic* influence on him notwithstanding, Tagore's spiritual views should not be seen as 'merely derivative', but as particularly distinct from the 'orthodox *Upanishadic Advaita Vedānta*' which attributes only an illusory status to the phenomenal world.⁶ It is, therefore, significant that, in *The Religion of Man*, Tagore calls the object of life's ordeals 'transcendental Man', suggesting that he is not after any transcendental Being, outside the reach of human existence in this life.⁷ This paper will scrutinize Tagore's views of the East–West relationship and his promulgation of a syncretic internationalism or universalism, both of which, it will be argued, are deeply informed by his spiritual preoccupations. If his position about the former is complex and apparently contradictory, his commitment to the latter, too, is not a simple and straightforward one. 'The true universalism', as he writes in 'Notes and Comments' (1924), is one that does not demolish 'the walls of one's own house' but offers 'hospitality to one's guests and neighbours'.⁸ Tagore's universalism thus respects cultural difference and diversity, which are natural and, for that matter, fluid. What he is wary of is the idea of nation, which he views as a politically motivated construction of the West.

In 'Nationalism in the West' (one of his US lectures given in 1916 and 1917), Tagore provides his interpretation of the concepts of 'nation' and 'society'. The term 'nation', for him, implies a sense of 'the political and economic union of people [...] organized for a mechanical purpose'. 'Society', on the contrary, 'is a spontaneous self-expression of man', 'a natural regulation of human relationships'.⁹ Writing about Tagore's notion of *svadeś* (one's own country), Partha Chatterjee explains the importance in Tagore's discourse of terms and concepts like '*svadeśsamāḥ*' (society of one's own country) and 'the collective power of self-making or *ātmaśakti*'.¹⁰ The term *ātmaśakti* also implies an inner spiritual power and is loosely analogous to Ralph Waldo Emerson's concept of 'self-reliance'.¹¹ Therefore, despite renouncing the Western notion of statist nationalism, Tagore believed in socially and culturally unique self-identities of people of different parts of the world. However, rather than suggesting any rigidity or mutual exclusivity, this recognition of sociocultural unity of different groups of people in the world is only the first step, according to Tagore, towards a spiritually charged universal-humanist unity, forged by intercultural exchange, sharing, and reciprocity.

⁶ *Empire, Nationalism and the Postcolonial World: Rabindranath Tagore's Writings on History, Politics and Society* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 40.

⁷ *English Writings*, III, 106.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 493.

⁹ *Nationalism* (London: Macmillan, 1924), p. 9.

¹⁰ qtd. in Poulomi Saha, 'Singing Bengal into a Nation: Tagore the Colonial Cosmopolitan?', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 36.2 (Winter 2013), 1–24 (pp. 7–8).

¹¹ See 'Self-Reliance', in *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 145–69.

Despite the overabundance in his writings of terms such as ‘East’ and ‘West’, and their Bengali equivalents, ‘pūrba’ and ‘paścim’, or ‘prācyā’ (Orient) and ‘paścātyā’ (Occident), one should not ignore the coexistence of the notions of cultural uniqueness and syncretism in Tagore’s thoughts. That is to say, his use of the above terms is less contentious, polemical, and oppositional than that of Edward Said. In *Orientalism* and much of the debates that it inspired, the distinction between the Occident and the Orient appears to be always-already preconditioned by an unequal power relationship. As Said puts it in his Introduction to *Orientalism*, ‘The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony’.¹² While Said’s insight into the way power works through apparently benign forms of literature (in a broad sense) is a great contribution to cultural theory and postcolonial literary criticism in general, it often proves limiting in our search for any extrapolitical understanding of human relationship across cultures, races, and nations. Particularly, in talking about Indian Orientalism, Said brings in wonderful materials but does not develop them in a way that would complicate his almost monolithic obsession with coercive Orientalism. For example, he touches upon Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron’s reconciliatory approach to different religions of East and West, arguing that ‘[f]or the first time, the Orient was revealed to Europe in the materiality of its texts, languages, and civilizations’ and ‘Asia acquired a precise intellectual and historical dimension’.¹³ Said also refers to William Jones’s ‘comparative’ approach to the classical languages of East and West—Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin—and quotes Jones’s ‘unassuming’ proclamation in 1787 ‘to know *India* better than any other European ever knew it’.¹⁴ But, rather than seeing them as signs of a positive, respectful, and personally engaging approach to ‘other’ cultures, Said characteristically emphasizes their complicity with the dominant Western motive-force: ‘[t]o rule and to learn’.¹⁵ Despite acknowledging—albeit obliquely—the value of ‘the fruitful Eastern discoveries’ by the Orientalists like Anquetil-Duperron and Jones, Said conflates these with those works on the Orient that are more directly utilitarian, business-minded, and racially patronizing, and sweepingly concludes that ‘all such widening horizons had Europe firmly in the privileged center’.¹⁶

My intention, of course, is not to disregard the utility or ‘fruitful[ness]’ of these early Orientalists’ ‘Eastern discoveries’ for the imperialist regime, which is obvious from such facts as that Jones’s Asiatic Society grew under the ideological tutelage of the empire via the more direct encouragement of

¹² *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1978), p. 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 76–77.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 78–79.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

Indian Governor General Warren Hastings.¹⁷ We should, nonetheless, facilitate a more open-minded reading of these cross-cultural encounters that sees them not as adumbrating the more aggressive imperialist measures like Thomas B. Macaulay's imperialist language policy of the later 'Anglicist' context, but as representing transcolonial or transnational cultural exchange and cooperation. David Kopf argues that 'Said's monolithic treatment of Orientalism' does not provide sufficient insight into understanding the workings of Orientalism in India.¹⁸ Stressing the importance of taking into consideration the way Orientalism 'was understood by the intelligentsia of other Asian societies, including India', Kopf refers to Debendranath Tagore, Keshub Chandra Sen (both leading Brahmo Samaj members), Dayanand Saraswati (founder scholar of Hindu reformist Arya Samaj), Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, and Mahatma Gandhi. All of these cultural figures of India represent, in some form or other, the Bengal Renaissance, which Kopf rightly sees as a legacy of British Orientalism in India.¹⁹ For our purposes, Kopf's insight is particularly important because it emphasizes Tagore's connection with the Bengal Renaissance, which had an ambivalent relationship with Orientalism or Western scholarship in general—subscribing to, appropriating, and subverting the latter's fundamental premises such as humanism, progress, enlightenment, and secularism.

So far as Tagore himself is concerned, being historically tied to, and conditioned by, the colonial context of British India, he could not have been blind to the evils of an uneven and Eurocentric distribution of economic and cultural capital. But, instead of holding the 'West' or 'Occident' (*pāścātya*) as an apparently incorrigible suspect, Tagore often saw it as a boon for the Eastern countries, particularly India. Moreover, he did not consider cultural influence as a negative phenomenon in itself. Rather, he emphasized and epitomized the reciprocity of artistic and cultural influences between the East and the West, the exchange of what is best and universal in both cultures.

The multifaceted nature of Tagore's vision of universality and cultural specificity is nicely captured in an oft-quoted poem of *Gitanjali*, poem no. 35: 'Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high'.²⁰ Almost at odds with the generally self-absorbed mystical mood of *Gitanjali*, this poem seems well concerned with Tagore's place and time. The opening line (quoted above) seems to reflect the notion of *ātmaśakti* or the inner strength of

¹⁷ Michael J. Franklin, *Orientalist Jones: Sir William Jones, Poet, Lawyer, and Linguist, 1746–1794* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 209.

¹⁸ 'Hermeneutics versus History', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 39.9 (May 1980), 495–506 (p. 496).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 497, 501.

²⁰ *Gitanjali (Song Offerings): A Collection of Prose Translations Made by the Author from the Original Bengali* (London: Macmillan, 1913), pp. 27–28.

one's self. Given the use of the phrase 'my country' in the last line, the poem might very well be read as representative of the nationalist sentiment of the Swadeshi Movement (1905–07), in which Tagore had become actively involved.²¹ (Tagore, however, soon became disillusioned about the scope of the Movement as it triggered communal rivalries and violence.) But the third line of the poem counters this tone of national(ist) attachment by a seemingly transnational, cosmopolitan vision that does away with the statist–nationalist 'walls': 'Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls [...]'.²² Such a claim, too, is problematic, considering the fact that Tagore's attitude towards cosmopolitanism was not unmixed. Using the term 'cosmopolitan' interchangeably with 'international', he writes in 1924: 'The international endeavour of a people must carry the movement of the people's own personality round the great spirit of man. [...] Otherwise, mere cosmopolitanism but drifts on the waves, buffeted by winds from all quarters, in an imbecility of movement which has no progress'.²³ In this powerful observation, we note the juxtaposition of 'people's own personality' and 'the great spirit of man'; in other words, the cultural particularity of a group of people and the spiritual oneness of universal humanity.

Faced with the ambivalence inherent in Tagore's vision of transnational or transcultural relationship, critics often take recourse to compound terms. In order to define Tagore's 'counter nationalist national attachment', Poulomi Saha finds the phrase 'locally rooted globalism' useful.²⁴ In a similar attempt to theorize Tagore's and Yeats's ambivalence about both nationalism and cosmopolitan universalism, Louise Blakeney Williams coins the term 'cosmopolitan nationalism'.²⁵ Taking her stance against the 'skeptics about Tagore's nationalism' like Ashis Nandy, Gauri Viswanathan, and Martha Nussbaum, Williams considers Tagore and Yeats as nationalists of a kind that is less typical and 'resembles the "new" cosmopolitanism' that has started to gain critical currency since the last decade of the twentieth century.²⁶ The 'new cosmopolitanism', to sum up her argument, is respectful of national differences, but poses a fundamental challenge to imperialist dichotomization of some form or other.²⁷ Attempting to view Tagore in the light of Kwame Anthony Appiah's notion of 'rooted cosmopolitan', Fakrul Alam qualifies Appiah's observation by pointing out that, unlike 'the con-

²¹ Dutta and Robinson, p. 151.

²² *Gitanjali*, p. 27.

²³ *English Writings*, III, 493.

²⁴ 'Singing Bengal into a Nation', pp. 2–3.

²⁵ 'Overcoming the "Contagion of Mimicry": The Cosmopolitan Nationalism and Modernist History of Rabindranath Tagore and W. B. Yeats', *The American History Review*, 112.1 (February 2007), 69–100 (p. 73).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 70.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 72–73.

temporary cosmopolitan’, Tagore would not ‘celebrate’ statist ‘institutions’.²⁸

Amanda Anderson’s reformulation of ‘cosmopolitanism’ and ‘universalism’ is also helpful to understand Tagore’s cultural–political position in the early decades of the twentieth century. According to Anderson, the twentieth-century version of cosmopolitanism ‘is defined against [...] parochialisms emanating from extreme allegiances to nation, race, and ethnos’.²⁹ She also distinguishes between the ‘exclusionary’ and ‘inclusionary’ cosmopolitanisms. While in the former, ‘all value lies in an abstract or “cosmic” universalism’, in case of the latter, universalism is less vague and ‘finds expression through sympathetic imagination and intercultural exchange’.³⁰ As we will see, Tagore’s vision of the world carefully eschews any extreme national/racial/ethnic allegiances, and relies heavily on the values Anderson defines as symptomatic of the ‘inclusionary cosmopolitanism’. Drawing upon Lalita Pandit’s apt distinction between ‘hegemonic’ and ‘empathic’ universalism, Patrick Colm Hogan maintains that Tagore is against ‘the imposition of one local set of beliefs and customs on everyone else’, but in favour of a nondogmatic universalism ‘that fosters a sense of common humanity’.³¹ Clearly, it is an equivalent of the ‘exclusionary cosmopolitanism’ (as defined by Anderson) that Tagore seems to have in mind when he argues that ‘[n]either the colourless vagueness of cosmopolitanism, nor the fierce self-idolatry of nation-worship is the goal of human history’.³² As an alternative to a vague and apparently all-levelling cosmopolitanism or universalism as well as a jingoistic nationalism, Tagore promotes a transnationalist spirituality that, while recognizing the sociocultural distinctiveness of peoples, values the potentially moral nature as well as the spiritual oneness of all humanity.

Tagore’s View of the West

Tagore was born in the heyday of the ‘modern’ colonial education in India—the first Indian universities having been established in 1857, some four years before his birth—with its stress on ‘a general humanistic education’

²⁸ *Rabindranath Tagore and National Identity Formation in Bangladesh: Essays and Reviews* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy Press, 2012), pp. 45–46.

²⁹ ‘Cosmopolitanism, Universalism, and the Divided Legacies of Modernity’, in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, ed. by Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 265–89 (p. 267).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

³¹ ‘Introduction: Tagore and the Ambivalence of Commitment’, in *Rabindranath Tagore: Universality and Tradition*, ed. by Patrick Colm Hogan and Lalita Pandit (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), pp. 9–23 (p. 11).

³² *Nationalism*, p. 5.

and ‘the teaching of English literature as the formative spiritual influence on a colonized elite’.³³ He, therefore, could not have been unaffected by the liberal-humanist values of Western civilization. Although he would never cease speaking against the negative aspects of the colonial education in India, particularly against the use of English as the medium of imparting that education,³⁴ he always valued the higher humanistic ideals filtered through colonialism or, as he would say, the presence of the British in India. As we will see, his attitude to the West always oscillated between gratitude for its liberal-humanist values and vehement indictment of its chauvinistic nationalism.

Both in his Bengali essay ‘Pūrba o Paścim’ (East and West), published in 1908/09, and in his English piece ‘East and West’ (1922), Tagore maintains that India will be benefited by the progressive liberalism of the English. (Tagore mostly uses the word ‘*inrej*’ in Bengali, which literally means the English, not the British.) In the Bengali essay, he argues that, in order to build the Great India (‘*mahābhāratbarsha*’), the Indian must be united with the Englishman. He believes that the English have come to rouse India from her contented sleep in the ancient tradition of her forefathers and to welcome her to the wider world.³⁵ This chimes in with his contention in ‘Nationalism in India’ that it is ‘providential that the West has come to India’.³⁶ In ‘East and West’, although he is less optimistic about the British rule in India, he expresses his conviction that, ‘if the great light of culture be extinct in Europe, our horizon in the East will mourn in darkness’. Because, he goes on, ‘in the present age, Western humanity has received its mission to be the teacher of the world; [...] her science, through the mastery of laws of nature, is to liberate human souls from the dark dungeon of matter’.³⁷ In ‘The Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech’ (1921), he praises the ‘Humanity of the West’ and says that ‘the present age belongs to the Western man with his superabundance of energy’.³⁸ In the above excerpts, one notes Tagore’s adulatory use of Enlightenment images and vocabulary: ‘culture’, ‘darkness’, ‘mission’, ‘science’, and ‘humanity’. However, rather than merely endorsing a Eurocentric cultural chauvinism, Tagore’s use of the words like ‘mission’, ‘culture’, and ‘humanity’ seems, in a careful reading, to be subtly ambiguous. Ironically turning the very concepts of En-

³³ Partha Chatterjee, ‘The Disciplines in Colonial Bengal’, in *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*, ed. by Chatterjee (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp. 1–27 (pp. 10–11).

³⁴ See, for example, *The Centre of Indian Culture* (1919), in *English Writings*, II (1996), 467–92 (pp. 474–75).

³⁵ *Rabīndra Racanābali*. 31 vols (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1957–), XII (1960), 263–64.

³⁶ *Nationalism*, p. 109.

³⁷ *Creative Unity* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2002), p. 103.

³⁸ *The Essential Tagore*, ed. by Fakrul Alam and Radha Chakravarty (London: Belknap of Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 185

lightenment against Europe, Tagore often reminds Europe of its deviation from these ideals.

In *Nationalism*, Tagore notices the contradiction between the liberal humanist (social) values of the West and its political hatred of humanity: 'with all its vaunted love of humanity [the West] has proved itself the greatest menace to Man'.³⁹ In 'East and West', all his faith in 'Western humanity' does not preclude Tagore from condemning 'the dominant collective idea in the Western countries', by which he almost obviously means imperialist nationalism:

[T]he Western mind, after centuries of contact with the East, has not evolved the enthusiasm of a chivalrous ideal which can bring this age to its fulfilment. It is everywhere raising thorny hedges of exclusion and offering human sacrifices to national self-seeking. It has intensified the mutual feelings of envy among Western races themselves, as they fight over their spoils and display a carnivorous pride in their snarling rows of teeth.⁴⁰

Tagore here emphasizes the connection between the nationalist politics of the West and its capitalist greed or violently consumerist values. Hence his morally subversive choice of diction: 'thorny hedges of exclusion', 'envy among Western races', 'carnivorous pride', and 'snarling rows of teeth'. 'Realization in Love', an essay in his earlier collection *Sādhanā* (1913), contains the polemical statement: 'Civilization can never sustain itself upon cannibalism of any form'.⁴¹ This resituating of 'cannibalism' at the core of European civilization is one of the best examples of Tagore's radical realignment of the coercive terminologies of Western imperialism. What is more, appropriating and revising the Enlightenment or Western-humanist notions of civilization and progress, he considers the contemporary Western aggressiveness to be 'far worse than the [...] nomadic barbarism' of ancient history. For all its 'boasted love of freedom', the West is responsible for producing the worst type of 'slavery [...] whose chains are unbreakable, either because they are unseen, or because they assume the names and appearance of freedom'.⁴² Here, by talking about the 'unseen' or latent forms of 'slavery', Tagore foreshadows the late twentieth-century neocolonialist phenomena.

Such awareness of the deep-rooted repercussions of Western nationalist ideologies notwithstanding, Tagore stands apart from any reactionary counternationalist and anti-Orientalist politics because of his faith in universal humanity. That is why, in *Nationalism*, soon after the above-quoted criticism of what in its vagueness might seem to be a generalized European civilization, he qualifies it by directing his condemnation to the 'political civilization' of Europe, which is 'based upon exclusiveness' and 'is carnivorous

³⁹ *Nationalism*, p. 56.

⁴⁰ *Creative Unity*, pp. 109–10.

⁴¹ *Sādhanā: The Realisation of Life* (London: Macmillan, 1913), p. 112.

⁴² *Nationalism*, p. 56.

rous and cannibalistic in its tendencies'. He adds that '[t]his political civilization is scientific, not human'.⁴³ By 'scientific', he seems to mean what is merely technical and mechanical. We have already seen his redemptive view of Western science. His ambivalence between such an optimistic view of science and a highly reductive one is also reflected in his observation that 'science is not man's nature. [...] By knowing the laws of the material universe you do not change your deeper humanity'.⁴⁴ This 'deeper humanity' is the spiritual nature of man, involving his emotional and moral values. In 'East and West', he similarly maintains that 'the dominant collective idea in the Western countries is not creative' but is rather 'wholly wanting in spiritual power to blend and harmonize; it lacks the sense of the great personality of man'.⁴⁵ As we will see, against such materialistic-scientific values and exclusively competitive political ideology of the West, he ascribes to the East the historical role of spiritual unity, assimilation, and harmony of the human races.

Another essay that nicely represents the dialectical relationship between East and West, Asia and Europe is 'The Religion of the Forest' (1922). Tagore there dwells upon two distinctive ways in which men relate to the world ('the universe'): 'either by conquest or by union'. The 'principle of dualism' and the 'principle of unity' are seen, via what seems to be a geographical or environmental essentialism, to be the instinctive characteristics of 'the Northmen of Europe' and the men of 'Northern India' respectively. For the former, the geographical closeness of the Sea represented man's encounter with a hostile and cruel nature: 'the challenge of untamed nature to the indomitable human soul'. Although 'man did not flinch' but 'fought and won', such an antagonistic relationship with nature left its mark in the mould of the personality of the people of northern Europe, to whom 'truth' takes on the 'aspect of dualism, the perpetual conflict of good and evil, which has no reconciliation, which can only end in victory or defeat'.⁴⁶ Tagore specifically focuses on northern Europe and northern India in this essay seemingly as a prelude to contrasting William Shakespeare with Kalidasa, a north Indian Sanskrit poet and playwright. But a similar dichotomy of dualism versus unity or conflict versus harmony is evoked in many other essays and lectures to be attributed to a largely generalized East-West polarization.

Significantly foreshadowing the postcolonial critique of *The Tempest* as well as going beyond it by his conflation of Ariel and Caliban, Tagore argues that, 'through Prospero's treatment of Ariel and Caliban we realise man's struggle with Nature and his longing to sever connections with her'. He dwells at length on man's control and subjugation of nature. Analysing

⁴³ Ibid., p. 60.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 54.

⁴⁵ *Creative Unity*, p. 103.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 45–47.

Macbeth, *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *The Winter's Tale*, Tagore attempts to show 'the gulf between Nature and human nature' in Shakespeare, which, he considers, is caused by 'the tradition of his race and time'. Not disregarding Shakespeare's depiction of the beauty of nature in his works, Tagore notes there a failure 'to recognise [...] the truth of the interpenetration of human life with the cosmic life of the world'. The same is also true of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Despite its beautiful descriptions of the heavenly garden, Tagore discerns in the text a lack of 'kinship' between man and animals. The latter 'were created for man's enjoyment; man was their lord and master', as suggested by the impenetrability of the 'seclusion of the bower' of Adam and Eve in Paradise.⁴⁷ What Tagore wants to stress here is clearly the materialist anthropocentrism of the West, which he connects with its imperialist ethnocentrism.

It is against such exclusive Western sense of 'superiority of man' that Tagore places ancient Indian syncretism, which does not deny man's superiority but rather sees it reflected in 'the comprehensiveness of sympathy, not in the aloofness of absolute distinction'.⁴⁸ Tagore thus envisions an aesthetic of spiritually comprehensive harmony and union which, he seems to claim, is essentially Eastern. Although he notes a trace of this in the English Romantic poets and mentions Wordsworth and Shelley in particular, he sees the Romantic phenomenon as symptomatic of the 'great mental change in Europe', caused by its interest in Indian philosophy.⁴⁹ On this note, let us move on to consider Tagore's vision of the East.

The East, where the sun rises

As with his view of the West, Tagore's view of the East is also a site of ambivalence and contradiction, which is all too natural given his complex cultural-historical background. There are moments in his works when he believes, like his Japanese friend, Okakura Kakuzo, that 'Asia is one'.⁵⁰ At other moments, Japan's rise as a materialist and imperial power shatters his idealism about the singleness of the Orient. Although India remains at the centre of Tagore's notion of the East, the constant shift between ancient and contemporary India in his writings poses an intellectual challenge for us in trying to place his preference. However, for the sake of clarity, it is possible to note two dominant modes in his thoughts on India. On the one hand, he idealizes ancient India as a land of harmony, peace, and unity, and also sees in its spiritually syncretic model the ideal future of the human world. On the other, he dwells upon the problems of contemporary

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 62–64.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 64.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 63.

⁵⁰ Dutta and Robinson, p. 247.

India, most alarming of which is its loss of a sense of its own greatness. For reviving its self-respect or *ātmaśakti*, Tagore stressed the importance of reforming India's social institutions, particularly religious and educational ones.

In 'Nationalism in Japan', delivered originally as lectures in Japan in 1916, Tagore writes that 'in Asia great kingdoms were founded, philosophy, science, arts and literatures flourished, and all the great religions of the world had their cradles. [...] For centuries we did hold torches of civilization in the East when the West slumbered in darkness'.⁵¹ As is obvious from his self-conscious tone and diction here, Tagore is responding to Eurocentric notions of the East. Although he does not mention any particular writer of the West, the notions he seems to be revising or writing back to remind us of G. W. F. Hegel's chauvinistic contention in *The Philosophy of History* (1837) that '[t]he History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning' or '[the East] is the childhood of History'.⁵² Hegel contests that, in its obsession with the One supreme power, India or the Orient ignores the individual existence and lacks '*subjective* freedom'. What is more troubling is his notion that 'outside the One Power [...] there is only revolting caprice, which [...] roves at will without purpose or result'.⁵³ Tagore, too, maintains that, after its initial glory, there 'fell the darkness of night upon all the lands of the East. The current of time seemed to stop at once, and Asia ceased to take any new food, feeding upon its own past, which is really feeding upon itself'.⁵⁴ While more of this type of self-criticism on behalf of the East will be seen in his reflection on India's contemporary social decadence, it suffices for now to say that Tagore did not believe this state of stagnancy to be an essential or natural condition of the East. Moreover, far from seeing the West as the end of history, he strongly believed in the potentiality of the spiritual East for saving humanity from the degeneracy of the materialist ideologies of international politics dominated by the West.

For taking up the new historical role as preserver of humanity, the East, of course, has to synchronise the old and the new, the ancient and the modern. That is why Tagore ostensibly praises 'Japan, the child of the Ancient East', for accepting 'all the gifts of the modern age' and for 'com[ing] in contact with the living time'. By combining in herself 'old and new', the 'immemorial East' and the modern West, Japan 'has given heart to the rest of Asia'.⁵⁵ Such optimism, however, cannot have been unmixed. Two years before coming to Japan, Tagore expressed his grim apprehen-

⁵¹ *Nationalism*, p. 50.

⁵² *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree (London: George Bell and Sons, 1894), pp. 109, 111.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 111–12.

⁵⁴ *Nationalism*, p. 50.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 52–53.

sion, in the context of Japan's rise as a military power in 1915, that 'Japan has her eyes on India. She is hungry—she is munching Korea, she has fastened her teeth upon China and it will be an evil day for India when Japan will have her opportunity'.⁵⁶ We note again Tagore's use of food metaphors to suggest the carnivorous consumerism that Japan imported from the West in the name of modernization. The whole lecture on 'Nationalism in Japan' oscillates between his optimism and apprehension so far as Japan's tilt towards modernity was concerned. Seemingly keeping Japan's aggression towards its neighbouring countries in mind, he wants to remind Japan of 'those days when the whole of Eastern Asia from Burma to Japan was united with India in the closest tie of friendship, the only natural tie which can exist between nations'.⁵⁷ Here he tries to forge a pan-Asiatic or an ideal Eastern identity. Many years later in 1937, he would similarly think of a China-India spiritual coalition, distinctly nonpolitical, and founded upon the 'intercourse of culture and friendship' that dates back 'eighteen hundred years'.⁵⁸ In the same year, he would also inaugurate the Department of Chinese Studies at Visva-Bharati University.

However, returning to 'Nationalism in Japan', Tagore cautions Japan against the fatal contagion of the 'political civilization' of Europe, arguing that the civilizations of Greece and Rome have become 'extinct', whereas 'the civilization, whose basis is society and the spiritual ideal of man, is still a living thing in China and in India'.⁵⁹ Here he clearly connects the social and the spiritual, pitting them against the political and the materialist. Japan should not be dazzled by the lustre of materialist modernization into ignoring her 'inherited ideals', because, modernity, as Tagore defines it, is 'freedom of mind, not slavery of taste'. Therefore, the East should welcome 'the true modern spirit' of the time from the West without taking recourse to mimicry of its culturally specific external details.⁶⁰ The 'true modern spirit' of the West, like its liberal-humanist values, seems to be essentially compatible with the spiritual values of the East, and is not to be confused with the 'false' or superficial modernity.

We have already seen how, in 'The Religion of the Forest', Tagore offers a critique of the self-centred, isolationist, or anthropocentric ideologies of the West encapsulated in Shakespeare's plays. On the contrary, Kalidasa's plays uphold 'the true Indian view', according to which, human 'consciousness of the world [...] is perfect when [it] realises all things as spiritually one with it'.⁶¹ Diverging from Hegel's argument (quoted above) that Indian philosophy ignores the world in its obsession with the One, Tagore's analy-

⁵⁶ qtd. in Dutta and Robinson, p. 200.

⁵⁷ *Nationalism*, p. 58.

⁵⁸ *English Writings*, III, p. 711.

⁵⁹ *Nationalism*, p. 61.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 75.

⁶¹ *Creative Unity*, p. 49.

sis of ‘the Indian view’ ascribes to individual human consciousness the spiritual agency of a deep empathy for all living beings. Similarly, in his Bengali essay, ‘Śakuntalā’, the forest-hermitage in *Śakuntalā* is seen as an antithesis of the island in *The Tempest*.⁶² Tagore also characteristically blurs the nature–civilization distinction in his analysis of the play. As Amit Chaudhuri argues, although Tagore’s use of nature in these instances involves anti-imperialist politics, it does not fit in the frame of typical post-colonial writings:

If Tagore were to fit in with our stock idea of the post-colonial writer, he would have enlisted the wildness of nature, of the indigenous landscape, as a trope of resistance against European civilisation and the Enlightenment. Instead, for Tagore, nature is *the* site of civilisation, refinement, and of certain ideals of the secular enlightenment, such as the ideal of living in harmony with the world. [...] Tagore, audaciously, not so much critiques the Western Enlightenment and humanism, and the idea of ‘civilisation’ itself, but snatches them away from their expected location and gives to them another source and lineage in India and its antiquity.⁶³

We have already observed Tagore’s use of Western humanist concepts to criticize Western imperialist praxes. Chaudhuri here aptly points out Tagore’s appropriation of, rather than resistance to, Western humanism and Enlightenment ideas on behalf of India. However, I do not read Tagore’s use of nature in the essay ‘Śakuntalā’ or elsewhere as suggestive of any ‘secular enlightenment’ model. Rather, to my mind, the model of enlightenment he proffers as an alternative to the (scientific–materialist) Western one is profoundly spiritual. He wants to revive the spiritual civilization of the East, which, once revived and renewed, will be her contribution in the transcultural exchange. Tagore’s transnationalist spirituality, of course, is not absolutely Eastern or Indian, but is rather a constructive mix of Western liberal humanism and Eastern spirituality. Such conflation also saves him from promoting an alternative ethnocentric world-vision with the East or India at its centre.

In his glorification of ancient India, Tagore did not ignore the alarming social degeneracy his contemporary India had fallen into. Even for India’s misery at the hands of the colonial West, Tagore held her partially responsible. Towards the end of the Bengali essay, ‘Pūrba o Paścim’ (East and West), he puts the blame for the cruelty and cowardice of the British in India on the Indians’ lack of self-confidence and a sense of India’s greatness. The Indians have partly attracted the baser qualities of the British

⁶² ‘Shakuntala’, trans. by Sukanta Chaudhuri, in *Selected Writings on Literature and Language*, ed. by Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 237–51 (p. 237).

⁶³ ‘Two Giant Brothers: Tagore’s Revisionist Orient’, in *Clearing a Space: Reflections on India, Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 122–39 (p. 134).

colonizers by not standing in front of them as equals.⁶⁴ Although such statements might be taken to represent Tagore's elitist or pro-Western mentality, a comprehensive understanding of Tagore's works allows one to find a different meaning in these lines. He always wanted to cling to the essential goodness of man, Eastern or Western, the colonizer or the colonized. That is why, in the same Bengali essay, he sees the 'Englishness of the English' as benevolent and humane, rather than materialist, capitalist, or colonialist—qualities, which are 'against the best nature of the English' (translation mine).⁶⁵ Reading such statements as symptomatic of Tagore's protoimperialist sympathy ignores the fact that he struggled hard to keep up his faith in a spiritually benevolent nature of man across racial and territorial divides. It is to this greater nature of man, and not to any temporary deviations from that, that he refers in the above observations.

Moreover, he employs a similar kind of positive essentialism in his construction of the East or India, too. If he is hard on contemporary Indian society, it is because he wants India to realise her essential greatness—her spiritual egalitarianism and openness—lost amidst a rigid and reified social compartmentalization. In two of his major plays, *Acalāyatan* (1912), which means 'obsolete structure', and *Tāser Deś* (1932), which literally translates as 'the country of cards', Tagore exposes the meaningless and degenerative nature of the orthodox Hindu society. The inhuman absurdity of rituals as well as the sheer immobility (*acal* means immobile or fixed) of orthodox practices are subjected to incisive irony, mockery and ridicule in these two plays. Given this grim realization of the 'immobility of our social structures', Tagore criticizes the contemporaneous Indian nationalists' indifference to the need for 'the constructive work of society', born out of their nationalist 'creed' that 'this social system has been perfected for all time to come by our ancestors'.⁶⁶ Such apathetic self-complacency is conducive to the West-infected 'delusion that mere political freedom will make us free'.⁶⁷ Tagore, therefore, did not think that India was ready for 'political freedom' until it addressed its social crises rooted in inequality of different sorts. He feared that '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 tyranny of injustice'.⁶⁸ The glaring relevance of such insightful observations to today's Indian or South Asian context can hardly be overstated. Tagore was painfully aware of the religion- and caste-based discriminations that the socially marginalized communities had been subjected to for long in the then undivided India.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ *Rabindra Racanābali*, XII, pp. 270–71.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

⁶⁶ *Nationalism*, pp. 122, 125.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 122–23.

⁶⁹ Dutta and Robinson, p. 274.

In his novel *Home and the World* (1915), set in the context of the Swadeshi (*svadeśī*) movement of 1905, Tagore addresses some key factors behind Hindu–Muslim rivalry. One of his major concerns, revealed in this novel, seems to be that Indian nationalist movement is not dealing with this crucial internal antagonism sensitively enough.

Syncretic Internationalism of Tagore

Tagore’s view of India remains incomplete without taking into account his idealism about India’s role in the realization of his universal-humanist vision of unity. In his novel *Gora* (1910), Tagore represents this dream as well as the multifarious impediments on the way to its realization, such as the internal, caste-based segregations among the Hindus, the division between the Hindus and the Muslims, the Hindu–Brahmo antagonism, and, of course, the friction between the colonizers and the colonized. Gora, the son of a deceased Irish soldier and raised as a Hindu by Anandomoyi and Krishnadayal, holds on to Hindu orthodoxy, including the caste system and idol worship, as part of his nationalist resistance to the British colonial rule in India as well as to the attempted Westernization of the educated middle- and upper-class Indians. The family of Paresh Babu is the epitome of the Brahmo Samaj. While Paresh Babu represents the philosophical and spiritual wisdom born of his Brahmo faith, his wife and Panu Babu, a family friend and a leading member of the Samaj, are remarkable for their extremist anti-Hindu ideology and their slavish contentment about British rule in India. Tagore’s Brahmo inheritance notwithstanding, the novel betrays his scepticism about the possibility of the Brahmo Samaj’s being the epicentre of the true Indian unity. (It is significant that, by that time, the Brahmo movement had become rife with clashes, conflicts, and schisms, and Tagore’s efforts to unite its different branches as well as to see it as inseparable from Hinduism had resulted in failure and invited severe criticism.)⁷⁰ Nor could he trust Hindu orthodoxy with such a historical role. The novel zooms in, among other things, on Gora’s journey towards self-realization (in more than one sense), which could also be read as the self-realization of *bhāratbarsha* or the Great India. What is more, as Syed Akram Hossain suggests, Gora’s voyage from Hindu nationalism to universal humanism also reflects his author’s similar ideological evolution.⁷¹

Having remained engrossed in the Kolkata-centric Hindu–Brahmo controversy so far, it is during his tour of the rural Bengal that Gora comes face to face with the Hindu–Muslim divide as well as the caste system and its worst offshoot—untouchability. In a Muslim village, Gora and his com-

⁷⁰ Dutta and Robinson, pp. 32, 93–94.

⁷¹ *Rabīndranāther Upanyas: Cetanālok O Śilparūp* (‘Rabindranath Tagore’s Novel: Thought and Craft’) (Dhaka: Ekushey Publications Ltd., 2001), p. 167.

panion, Ramapati, are faced with a dilemma with regard to accepting the hospitality at the house of a low-caste and untouchable Hindu barber, the only Hindu family in the village. What exacerbates the case for Gora and Ramapati is the fact that the wife of the barber has temporarily adopted the son of a Muslim farmer, Faru Sardar. Faru was the leader of the rebellious tenants of the village, and, for standing against the indigo planters' oppression, suffered persecution. Finding Faru's son Tamiz starving for days, the Hindu barber's wife felt compelled to take him home.⁷² When Ramapati, after hearing this story, becomes adamant about refusing the hospitality of this Hindu transgressor and accepting, instead, that of Madhav Chatterjee, the Brahmin rent collector of the indigo factory, Gora chooses to accept the hospitality of the barber.⁷³ He cannot make himself refuse the food of the good-souled barber merely in order to 'preserve his caste'.⁷⁴ Torn between his long-cherished prejudice and his superior moral sense, Gora self-critically questions the 'terrible wrong' of 'making purity an external thing'.⁷⁵ Here Gora takes his first significant move towards the spiritual humanism that finds most eloquent expression in Tagore's 1930 collection of Oxford Hibbert Lectures, *The Religion of Man*. Far from expressing allegiance to any institutionalized religion, Tagore there distinguishes between man's biological and transcendental selves, and maintains that man's 'religion' lies in his spiritual journey from the former towards the latter: 'Man [...] is truly represented in something which exceeds himself. He [...] is not imperfect, but incomplete. He knows that in himself some meaning has yet to be realized'.⁷⁶ This 'meaning' is the spiritual self-realization, namely the realization of the universal humanity in oneself: 'in our life we must touch all men and all times through the manifestation of a truth which is eternal and universal'.⁷⁷ The eternal/universal truth or the spiritual experience he pursued all his life was to be sought for and realized in this life through actions that 'touch all men'.

Gora, of course, is yet to realize the full implication of this universal unity. For all his sympathy for the poor and the lowly, he is kept from feeling a sense of true equality by 'an unseen gulf of separation'.⁷⁸ It is only at the end of the novel, when Gora's birth-secret is revealed to him, that he feels himself free and exclaims with a terrible joy: 'Today I am really an Indian! In me there is no longer any opposition between Hindu, Mussulman, and Christian. To-day every caste in India is my caste'.⁷⁹ In his own self, Gora also unifies Europe and India. Despite the fact that Gora has

⁷² *Gora* (London: Macmillan, 1924), pp. 133–34.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 135–36.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁷⁶ *English Writings*, III, p. 106.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁷⁸ *Gora*, p. 406.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 406.

been subjected to authorial irony throughout the novel, and that Tagore in this novel splits himself into different characters (for example, Binoy, Paresh Babu, Anondomoyi, and Gora), Gora's above syncretic epiphany about a pluralist India seems to be Tagore's, too.

In a poem, written in the same year as *Gora*, a similar vision of India or the Great India finds eloquent expression. The poem, 'Pilgrimage to India' reads much like the ending of *Gora*:

Aryan and non-Aryan come,
Hindu and Musulman:
Come, O Christian; and today
Come, O you Englishman.
Come, brahman, with a heart made pure
Hold hands with one and all:
Come, you outcaste: let your load
Of insult from you fall.⁸⁰

In another important stanza of the poem, the list is enlarged further to include, apart from those mentioned above, 'Chinese, Dravidian, | Scythian, Hun, Mughal, Pathan'.⁸¹ The refrain that threads through the poem and concludes it reads: 'On India's ocean-shore of great humanity'.⁸² It is to this India of 'great humanity' that Tagore invites all the diverse races of human beings. Significantly he uses the image of 'ocean-shore', symbolizing India's openness to the world. The intricately rhymed, incantatory verses of the original Bengali version of the poem accentuate the tone of all-inclusive harmony.

The fact that Tagore, in the above poem, includes the 'Englishmen' among the races to 'merge and be merged' in India is particularly significant in the colonial context (lines 22–24).⁸³ It is intriguing that, rather than asking the Englishmen to 'quit India', he should be asking them to 'come' and join the throng. In a letter to William Rothenstein, dated 20 April 1927, Tagore eloquently defends himself against E. P. Thompson's suggestion (in his biography of Tagore) about his (Tagore's) anti-English feelings: 'Of course, I have my grievances against the British Government in India, but I have a genuine respect for the English character which has so often been expressed in my writings' (letter 218).⁸⁴ In the same vein, 'Pilgrimage to India' welcomes the humanist, not the colonial or the political, West. As he writes in *The Religion of Man*, '[w]hen the streams of ideals that flow from

⁸⁰ 'Pilgrimage to India', trans. by Sukanta Chaudhuri, in *Selected Poems*, ed. by Chaudhuri and Sankha Ghosh (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 200–02 (p. 202, lines 64–71).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 200 (lines 17–18).

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 200–02 (line 76).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁸⁴ *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*, ed. by Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 349.

the East and from the West mingle their murmur in some profound harmony of meaning it delights my soul'.⁸⁵ Clearly, it is the transnational harmony of an extrapolitical nature that he is proclaiming here, inspired by the belief that 'the best in the world have their fundamental agreement'.⁸⁶

Tagore's transnational-humanist vision was also reflected in the educational institution he founded in Santiniketan, India, which he significantly named 'Visva-Bharati', meaning wisdom of the world or universal knowledge. In Tagore's vision, 'Visva-Bharati acknowledges India's obligation to offer to others the hospitality of her best culture and India's right to accept from others their best'.⁸⁷ The founding of the university testifies to Tagore's serious commitment to a meaningful and respectful union of the East and the West. Such union, needless to say, is Tagore's alternative to a merely politically motivated coming together of nations. The latter, however, continued to frustrate his hope till the end of his life. In *Crisis in Civilization* (1941), he reveals his scepticism about European civilization and his fearful apprehension of the 'stark misery' the British would 'leave behind' in India. Nevertheless, he is reluctant to commit 'the grievous sin of losing faith in Man' and 'look[s] forward to the opening of a new chapter in [Man's] history' to be dawned, probably, in 'the East where the sun rises'. The dawning he looks up to is the dawning of spiritual humanity, when the 'unvanquished Man' (cf. the 'transcendental Man' of *The Religion of Man*) will reclaim 'his lost human heritage'.⁸⁸

To sum up, Tagore's views of East and West are not rigid but fluid, and, for that very reason, rife with contradictions. Despite always identifying himself with India or the East in the hemispheric polarization, which he found impossible to completely transcend, he was not blind to the problems of his country or the East in general. Although he strongly opposed Western imperialist politics and often wrote back to Western misconceptions about the Orient, he distinguished, if not always very neatly, the humanist West from the imperialist West, and never completely denied his admiration for the former. Tagore's criticism of the West was corrective and sympathetic, not racially subversive. 'I speak bitterly of Western civilization', he writes in *Nationalism*, '[only] when I am conscious that it is betraying its trust and thwarting its own purpose'.⁸⁹ Given his belief in the spiritual essence of man, he took care not to harbour any 'distrust of the individuals of [any] nation'.⁹⁰ His transnationalism thus relies heavily on the spiritual nature or the superior moral sense of human beings. This sense of morality, inherent in his transnational world-vision, coheres with the mystical spirituality of

⁸⁵ *English Writings*, III, 119.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁸⁷ qtd. in Dutta and Robinson, p. 220.

⁸⁸ *Essential Tagore*, pp. 215–16.

⁸⁹ *Nationalism*, pp. 109–10.

⁹⁰ *Creative Unity*, p. 110.

the vast majority of his works, connecting the public and the private, the political and the poetic, and the national and the transnational in his oeuvre. Tagore ends *The Religion of Man* with the following excerpt from the *Upanishads* in his own translation: 'He who is one, and who dispenses the inherent needs of all peoples and all times [...] may he unite us with the bond of truth, of common fellowship, of righteousness'.⁹¹ This threefold unity needs to be taken into consideration in order to understand Tagore's transnationalist spirituality.

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⁹¹ *English Writings*, III, 189.

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