

**Tagore's Heaven of Freedom and the Realms Beyond:
Certain Perspectives in Time and Social Life¹**

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[T]rue freedom is not in isolation.²

Let not my love be a burden on you,

My friend,

Know that it pays itself.³

The Freedom of self-expression which we had once learnt
to look upon as Europe's great gift is ruthlessly suppressed.⁴

The perfect freedom is in a perfect harmony of relationship and not in a mere severance of
bondage. Freedom has no content, and therefore no meaning...⁵

Abstract:

This essay attempts to explore Rabindranath Tagore's creative understandings of 'freedom(s)' at the time of India's colonial subjectivity. Tagore was critical of the dichotomous colonial ideology that promoted otherness. Aware of the coloniser's enforcement of cultural superiority upon the subject people/nation, he said 'we do not become cyphers just because the British treat us as such...'⁶ The Indians thus marginalised, needed the freedom of mind to recover the self from the imposed otherness and fears of oppression. Tagore moved beyond the dominant ideology, insisting on 'work' that would remove 'major obstacles to our national freedom,'⁷ emphasising self-reliance/self-sufficiency and education that would emancipate and strengthen the total inner-self of the emerging nation, without ignoring the risks of participating in 'the wider expansion of the life's

¹ A concise version of this paper — 'Rereading Tagore's Heaven of Freedom' — was presented at the international conference 'Samaj and Freedom(s)', 2019. This revised paper considers the comment of the participants and scholars present there, and is dedicated to my respected teacher, Late Swapan Mazumdar whose distinctive understanding of Rabindranath Tagore encouraged me and drew me to Tagore studies.

² Rabindranath Tagore, 'I am He' [1934], in *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Volume 3, ed. by Sisir Kumar Das (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), pp. 211-218 (p.211).

³ Rabindranath Tagore, 'Kalantar' [1933], in *Rabindra Rachanabali*, Volume 13 (Kolkata: West Bengal Govt., 1961), pp. 209-216 (p. 216). Also see, Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Changing Age', in *Towards Universal Man: Rabindranath Tagore*, ed. by Humayun Kabir (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1961), pp. 341-352 (p. 352).

⁴ Tagore, 'Kalantar', p. 216. Also see, Tagore. 'The Changing Age', p. 352.

⁵ Rabindranath Tagore, 'Address at the Parliament of Religions' [1937], in *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Volume 3, ed. by Sisir Kumar Das (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), pp. 704-710 (p. 705).

⁶ Rabindranath Tagore, 'Presidential Address' [1908], *Towards Universal Man: Rabindranath Tagore*, ed. by Humayun Kabir (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1961), pp. 101-128 (p. 117).

⁷Ibid, p. 115.

freedom'.⁸ This inclusive and holistic approach to life and the moral culture that shunned exclusive political interests led Tagore to a passionate analysis of the West. Witnessing the ways the great stream of western civilisation wasted 'its boasted love of freedom', he declared that it historically proved itself 'the greatest menace to Man'.⁹ He was particularly critical of the interplay of freedom and violence—the modern product¹⁰— that manifested in the form of 'nomadic barbarism', cruelty, hatred and revenge across borders.¹¹ As against the colonial onslaught, domination and the humiliation associated with it, Tagore's plea to his countrymen was to overcome the unbridled passion for destruction and political extremism and focus on removing India's blind loyalty to a tradition that tolerates injustices evident in practices of discrimination through the ages.¹² Tagore's emphasis on freedom sans marginalization and violence draws us to Gandhi's perception of Tagore as an opponent of any discrimination and social injustice.¹³ The paper attempts to address the Tagorean discourse on freedom vis-à-vis *samaj* and freedom that the nation-state promotes while remaining engaged with Tagore's thoughts on freedom(s).

Keywords: Rabindranath Tagore, Freedom, *Samaj* (Society), State/Nation-state, Oneness

As the title indicates, the 'Heaven of Freedom' is an unbridled and powerful expression of the creative understanding of freedom/s of *Visva Kavi*¹⁴ Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), his dynamic vision of a just and violence-free India (within the world), when the country was under the colonial regime. The profundity of his anti-colonial thoughts (not anti-British thoughts) on freedom/s, and linked with that of decolonisation of minds, is implicit in the

⁸ Rabindranath Tagore, 'Thoughts from Rabindranath Tagore' [1921], in *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Volume 3, ed. by Sisir Kumar Das (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), pp. 29-82 (p. 71, no. 152).

⁹ Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* [1917], in *Rabindranath Tagore: Nationalism*, introduction by Ramchandra Guha (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2009), p. 6.

¹⁰ Tagore, *Nationalism*, Ibid, p. 35.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 6.

¹² Tagore, *Nationalism*, Ibid, p. 76.

¹³ Tagore's ideal of freedom and Gandhi's response to it—'Tagore [is] a representative of mass mind of India' and 'humanity as a whole'— is largely drawn from Gopalkrishna Gandhi's *A Frank Friendship*. London, N Y and Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2007 and Uma Das Gupta's *Friendships of 'Largeness and Freedom': Andrews, Tagore and Gandhi: An Epistolary Account*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018.

¹⁴ The word *Visva Kavi* means World Poet. In Bengal/ India, Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, an ardent patriot, preacher and educationist, a Vedantist and then, a Roman Catholic theologian, after reading Cardinal Newman, was the first to acknowledge Rabindranath Tagore as a major literary figure of the world, praising him as the poet of tallest stature under the title 'The World Poet of Bengal.' Upadhyaya reviewed Tagore's *Naivedya* (long before the publication of even the Bengali *Gitanjali*) in the journal *Sophia* edited by him as early as 1 September 1900, under the caption 'The World Poet of Bengal' (for further details, see, Krishna Kripalani, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1980), pp. 217-218; Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.63.) The global acceptance of the poet in 1913 as Noble Laureate, however, set the stage for the world poet, *Visva-Kavi*, though often he is seen in a figure of an 'oriental sage'.

words ‘heaven of freedom’.¹⁵ These words are part of his poem ‘Where the mind is without fear’ (no. 35) of his “Song Offerings” meaning *Gitanjali*.¹⁶ The words embody the *Visva Kavi*’s deep thoughts concerning the removal of various types of ‘unfreedoms’¹⁷ operative in his India and his struggle within to see the country awake to *that heaven of freedom* where *knowledge is free* for all, where the horizons of freedom of the mind are not limited by the *fear* of oppression, exceeding the limits of *narrow domestic walls*.

As such, this essay does not attempt to offer a close reading of the poem, for this is not a paper on poetry. Yet one cannot miss the inbuilt discerning qualities of wholeness in the poem. At one level, the poem, as evident, is representative of a creative will that intends to serve the interests of everyone in the society, including those left with little choice in overcoming injustices, little opportunity of exercising the freedom of mind and to wake up from the fear of uniting/reconciling with the expansion of life’s freedom. So, the invocation in the poem can be read as Tagore’s striving for an agency to bring about a just and violence free society across the limits of nation and geography.

At another level, the poem evokes the ‘devotional’¹⁸ nature of his *Gitanjali* poems and *Naibedya*, Tagore’s first volume of Bengali poems devoted ‘(though not exclusively) to spiritual themes’.¹⁹ It is true that this poem (no. 35), particularly, ‘as though supporting a new meditative rigour’²⁰ destabilises an exclusive or fixed notion of spirituality and that of freedom while combining within it the principle of the freedom of oneness that permeates his understanding of the interrelationship between the part and the whole (India within the world *that has not been broken up into fragments*), of social harmony across borders, beyond *narrow domestic walls*, and explodes the myth of freedom that the dominant Nation (N) promotes. The poem, in other words, is suggestive of the need for an individual’s selfless

¹⁵ Henceforth, all words from the poem will be in italics.

¹⁶ The Bangla version of this poem (চিত্ত যেথা ভয় শূন্য) was first published in 1901 in the book of verse-offerings *Naibedya* (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati Publication, 1901), p. 83. The book was dedicated to his father Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, known for his contribution to the growth of culture of social-religious reforms in India.

¹⁷ The idea of socio-economic freedom needed during the colonial times as much as now is taken from Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. xi. This point is discussed in Dipannita Datta, ‘In Search of Fairness of Justice: Contemporising Tagore and “The Home and The World”’, in *Contemporising Tagore and the World*, ed. by Imtiaz Ahmed, Muchkund Dubey and Veena Sikri (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2013), pp. 439-468. In the current article, I focus on Tagore primarily as a *Kavi* (Poet) in an attempt to address his poetic sensibilities as expressed in his words and work on society/*samaj* which are as relevant today as they were in his time.

¹⁸ See, Krishna Kripalani, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1980), p.189.

¹⁹ Sukanta Chaudhuri, ‘Tagore’s Poetry’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Rabindranath Tagore*, ed. by Sukanta Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 49-84 (p. 59).

²⁰ *Ibid.*

striving and conscious sensitivity to connect and realise the collective minds and hearts of the people in the life of the nation (n) beyond *the dreary desert sand of dead habit* into *ever-widening thought and action*, of freedom and unity across borders and boundaries of race, class/caste, community, religion and gender hierarchy. Taken together, the poem can be read as the Poet's undogmatic defence of freedom and his urge to see his country free from subjectivities.

As evident, the poem with its associated meanings (of freedom sans violence and sans geopolitical or ideological borders) can function as an example of what Tagore explains later as a process in the dynamics of 'inter-communication'²¹ that samaj/society (n) engenders because of its loose textures. This essay considers these wide-ranging aesthetic-ethical and spiritual-intercultural ideas of freedom and harmony as a context to examine the Tagorean discourse on freedom/s vis-à-vis *samaj* and freedom that the nation-state promotes. Juxtaposing the complex domination-subordination relationships against the backdrop of colonialism and its binary nationalism, the essay investigates how far should we consider revisiting the meaning and historicity of freedom as conceived by Tagore. It wishes to suggest that when violence, polarity and deception combined with fear continue to influence contemporary ways of life, we can regard Tagore's *heaven of freedom* as something that one can believe in for there is a life beyond 'the narrowness of freedom'.²²

The essay will take help from a few of the Poet's interrelated texts from different periods of his life in an attempt to address the interconnected meaning of *heaven of freedom* and to learn the principles of freedom/s as envisaged by him.

The thematic pattern that follows (through a brief overview of a selection of his work) will attempt to show that Tagore's notion of freedom traverses from one text to another, including what Amiya Dev calls 'Tagore's self-intertextuality', which also allows the readers to access the meaning of '*oneness* as a valid poetic principle'.²³

Tagore, Freedom - an Endless Journey (*Chirojatra*) and the Poet's *Samaj*

We might get a clearer picture of Tagore's thoughts on freedom and the realms beyond from the essay/talk 'Freedom' transcribed by his English friend and a trained agro-economist

²¹ Rabindranath Tagore, 'Freedom' [1924], in *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Volume 4, ed. by Nityapriya Ghosh (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007), pp. 627-628 (p. 628).

²² Tagore, *Nationalism*, Ibid, p. 48.

²³ Amiya Dev, *Rereading Tagore* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2018), pp. 24-25. [emphasis in the original]

from Cornell University, Leonard K Elmhirst.²⁴ The transcript says, ‘When we regard our self as a sole and final end, we separate the self from the greater life of the world. As soon as we admit that the self must establish a harmonious relationship with the all, then, for the first time, we realize what the word freedom means.’²⁵ The Poet believed in the deeper ‘truth of inter-relation [that] goes far beyond the mere facts or the contents of the poem’.²⁶

It is pertinent to mention at least two of his early essays here — ‘Jagater Bandhan’(1885) and ‘Ek Katha Jomi’ (1885)—because both represent the Poet’s insightful assertion of freedom for a just and non-violent society and beyond conformist existence.²⁷ In ‘Jagater Bandhan’, he said, ‘I am not outside the world, and the world is not outside of me’.²⁸ Put differently, the world is inside me, and I am inside the world. By extension, the self/national self/country is within the diverse currents of the World and that World is established within the self (with conscious striving). This two-way process of convergence, or in the Poet’s word, ‘inter-relation’ — of the spiritual-ethical and social-cultural — and its underlying meaning of freedom beyond the narrow confines of self-interest is portrayed in a similar vein and a little differently in ‘Ek Katha Jami’. There the Poet says ‘The world and its universality manifests in every bit of land [*protyek bigha protyek katha tei*],’²⁹ suggesting the right of all — of any caste/class or religion, the high born and the humble, the stranger and the indigenous, to know and live in this world freely; to be at home in the world through self-realisation, knowledge and effort beyond the artificially constructed solidified lines of the self and the other and unite into all that comes within the fold of the ‘hospitality of his love’.³⁰ In other words, his emphasis was on the equal worth of all human beings inhabiting a vastly divided world, the world we (the peoples of the global South) continue to live in. While these essays may be neglected as the Poet’s idiosyncratic expressions or as expressions of romantic delight, speaking of the interaction between the self (the all-encompassing self) and the

²⁴ I have discussed Leonard K Elmhirst’s positive role in uniting cultures in India. Among others, see, Dipannita Datta. ‘Connecting Cultures: Rethinking Rabindranath Tagore’s “Ideals of Education”.’ *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, 24. 3 (2017): pp. 412-423.

²⁵ Rabindranath Tagore, ‘Freedom’ [1924], in *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Volume 4, ed. by Nityapriya Ghosh (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007), p. 627.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ The essays are from *Alochona -Discussions/ Discourses* [1885]. For further references, see notes 28 and 29.

²⁸ Rabindranath Tagore, ‘Jagater Bandhan’ [The Worldly Ties/ The Creative Ties], in *Rabindra Rachanabali, Sulabh Sanksharan*, Volume 15 (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 2000), p. 30.

²⁹ Rabindranath Tagore, ‘Ek Katha Jami’ [A Little Plot of Land], in *Rabindra Rachanabali, Sulabh Sanksharan* (Kolkata: Visva Bharati, 2000), p. 25.

³⁰ While Tagore has discussed these philosophical mediations in several instances, starting with his weekly *Santiniketan* talks in 1909, the words quoted are from ‘I am He’, the third lecture of three delivered in 1933 at Andhra University. See Tagore, ‘I am He,’ in *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Volume 3, p.211.

collective social body, and its concomitant truth— “exchange”— of internal/inner wealth and external events, Sankha Ghosh reminds us that ‘We cannot chart this... by a straight graph.’³¹ His perception of freedom in society calls for an understanding of the creation of an inter-relation between and among ‘all’ that comes in the ‘scheme of creation’ so that ‘the flow of life in us [would] be *one* with the universal life outside’.³²

As the examples show, the Poet’s idea of freedom is a non-dogmatic defence of the ‘truth of oneness’ that can be maintained without collapsing of difference.³³ He believed in a plural way of life and diverse cultures that would bring social inclusion (and he was optimistic that political freedom would follow once the social obstacles were removed). Therefore, removal of (un)freedom and (in)justice, to be specific, the dark areas of tradition gyrating around society, was important for him. As against the antagonistic relationship between the colonizer/ruler/master and the colonized/ruled/slave that divided human beings into us and them and constructed ideological and geopolitical borders, in his essay ‘Swadeshi Samaj’ (1904), for example, he reiterates his emphasis on the idea of freedom and says:

To comprehend unity in diversity, to establish unity amidst diversity — this is India’s innate *dharma* [the way of life]. India does not view difference as hostility, she does not think of the other as enemy.³⁴

The Poet’s welcoming of freedom *that has not been broken up into fragments*, reflects India’s age-long social-cultural heritage interconnected with the underlying meaning of the guest-host relationship (*atithi devo vabo*³⁵) based on the principles of Oneness. This assimilative meaning of freedom is especially important in the context of today’s India and the world for issues of discrimination, unevenness and polarisation continue to affect human lives across borders and boundaries. It carries an analogous expression not only in one specific poem or in essays like, ‘Bharatbarsya Samaj’ (1901) ‘Swadeshi Samaj’ (1904), as we have seen. The deeper meaning of freedom is also spread across the Poet’s vast and inspiring

³¹ Sankha Ghosh. ‘Rabindranath Tagore: From Art to Life’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Rabindranath Tagore*, ed. by Sukanta Chaudhuri. New Delhi, Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. 1-10 [p. 10].

³² Rabindranath Tagore, *Glimpses of Bengal: The Letters of Sir Rabindranath Tagore 1885–1895*, (London: Macmillan, 1921), p. 168 [Kushtea, now in Bangladesh, 5th October 1895].

³³ Rabindranath Tagore, ‘Realization in Love’ [1913], in *Sadhana, Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Essays* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2004), pp. 145-158 (p. 158).

³⁴ Rabindranath Tagore, ‘Swadeshi Samaj’, in *Atmashaktio Somuha, Rabindra Rachanabali*, Volume 12 (Kolkata: West Bengal Govt., 1961), pp. 683-707 (p. 701).

³⁵ Taittiriya Upanishad, Shikshavalli I.11.2.

oeuvre, including a variety of his poetry, prose fiction, creative nonfiction, letters and songs written earlier and later in his life. In a slightly different vein, he also recognises the possibilities of freedom in the complementary relationship between Bengal/ India and Britain in his essay ‘Bangalir Asa o Nairasya’, gathered with other essays under *Samaj*.³⁶

Was the Poet ignoring the colonised situation of India and delving into his *antaratma* the core of his being? At this point, another question that comes to mind. What was the Poet thinking about the subject nation? Let us consider here some portions from his essay ‘Bharatbarsya Samaj’, for both the essay and the poem **চিত্ত যেথা ভয়শূন্য** / Where the mind is without fear were written around the same time. This poem voices Tagore’s devotion to his ‘god’ and his urge for an awakened spirit of freedom in him and his country. Can we think that the essay was also meant to rekindle the freedom of harmony, interdependence and exchange once prevalent in the magnanimous spirit of Indian society?

Tagore attended to the challenges confronting the freedom in ‘social life’ and said, ‘The active independence of society is greater than all other forms of independence’. He stressed, ‘it is true that in our country society is of the utmost importance...but those conditions/traditions prevalent three thousand years ago would not help us in any way’. Tagore did not ‘turn a blind eye to them and destroy them’. Instead, referring to the forefathers he tried to unfurl creative paths for a near and distant future that can ‘connect this time to those’. He also raised questions about ‘blind emulation’ of Englishness and the ‘blank imitation’ of our ancestors, the lack of ‘compatibility between the inner being and the outer’ and emphatically insisted ‘the transformation of life is development’.³⁷ Here the emphasis is on ‘development’ (*where the tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection/transformation+ development*) that is deeply aware of the local exigencies. Another important point worth remembering is about the ‘conscious’. He says, ‘Our society is also undergoing rapid transformation, but as there is no conscious core in it, it is moving towards a disease’. ‘Today, those rules [of the past] persist but that consciousness does not’. He lays the emphasis on ‘keeping in mind *the well-being of the entire society*’.³⁸ Furthermore,

³⁶ Rabindranath Tagore, ‘Bangalir Asa o Nairasya’ [1878], in *Samaj, Rabindra Rachanabali*, Volume 30 (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati), pp. 97-100. For the English translation, see, Stephen N. Hay, *Asian Idea of East and West* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 21. Also quoted in Swapan Mazumdar, ‘Concept of Crisis’, in *Contemporarising Tagore and the World*, ed. by Imtiaz Ahmed, Muchkund Dubey and Veena Sikri (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2013), pp. 469- 490 (p.473).

³⁷ Rabindranath Tagore, ‘Bharatbarsya Samaj’ [1901], in *Atmashaktio Somuha, Rabindra Rachanabali*, Volume 12, (Kolkata: West Bengal Govt., 1961), pp. 678-683 (p.682).

³⁸ Ibid. Emphasis added.

he says, ‘nation-building requires a mind, a remembrance, but the lack of remembrance is also a necessity – a nation has to forget disunion and dissension and conflict as soon as possible.’³⁹ As for the term nation(al), he said, ‘We may not accept it as national unity – because the words nation and national are not ours, their sense and meaning has been limited by European doctrine.’⁴⁰

In his essay ‘Nation Ki?’ Tagore considered Earnest Renan’s philosophy of the nation and pointed out that ‘We have to admit that there is no word for “nation” in Bengali’ and thus he had ‘no qualms in choosing the word ‘nation’ in its original sense’.⁴¹ Sabyasachi Bhattacharjee reminds us that his use of the term and the thinker is far from uncritical.⁴² Tagore draws upon the connotations of a nation – ‘as a living entity’ and ‘a mind-spirit element’ and observes ‘two elements have built the inner being of this entity. They are one and the same.’ Explaining the sameness in difference he says ‘One of them is located in the past and the other in the present. One of them is the ancient memory of the common man, the other is each other’s consent, the will to live together in harmony’.⁴³ He explains further, ‘the will of the common man, the past togetherness to achieve something great, and the determination to achieve something great once again – this is the earnest root or foundation of the formation of a community’.⁴⁴ However, ‘the field of unity of the Indian society is huge’. As a result, it is difficult to ascertain its real centre’.⁴⁵ So, the Poet says ‘Here, our question is – where do we concentrate? Which ideal of unity should one focus on?’ He knew that the work for political freedom cannot be ignored and for that ‘We cannot ignore political unification – the more the types of unity the better, the more the merrier’. ‘But we should comprehend and understand that in our country *samaj* is of the utmost importance’.⁴⁶ Behind this, there certainly lies a past, but we can find its direct goal in the present. It is nothing other than – a general consent, a conspicuous and clear expression of the wish to bear the burden of life together.⁴⁷ So, we see here, the Poet is not just speaking about the elite in society.

³⁹ Ibid p.679.

⁴⁰ Ibid p.679.

⁴¹ Rabindranath Tagore, Nation Ki? [1901], in *Atmashaktio Somuha, Rabindra Rachanabali*, Volume 12, (Kolkata: West Bengal Govt., 1961), pp. 675-678 (p.675).

⁴² Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, ‘Tagore’s View of History’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Rabindranath Tagore*, ed. by Sukanta Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 268-278.

⁴³ Rabindranath Tagore, Nation Ki? [1901], in *Atmashaktio Somuha, Rabindra Rachanabali*, Volume 12, (Kolkata: West Bengal Govt., 1961), pp. 675-678 (p.677).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Rabindranath Tagore, ‘Bharatbarsya Samaj’, p.680.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Rabindranath Tagore, Nation Ki? p. 678.

According to Tagore, considering the colonial context and the attending coercive forces unleashed by the Raj and the presence of the hugeness of diversity in India, the need of the time was to light the devotion of freedom, and that can be sustained by delving into the life force of the ‘inner being’ of the nation/*samaj*. For, according to him ‘to be sad, to be happy and to hope — all in togetherness — it is these that are real’.⁴⁸ He said, ‘Our love will be strengthened by the extent to which we have agreed to sacrifice and the extent to which we have endured suffering.’⁴⁹ Moreover, in his view, to ‘understand the greatness and value of these emotions - in spite of the diversity of races and languages [are] much more valuable than the allocation of charges and frontiers.’⁵⁰ These aspects of freedom that underscore the need for love and the value of emotions and social justice in the life of the nation lead us to what Martha Nussbaum refers to as ‘why love matters for justice’.⁵¹

As we see, Tagore allows a discursive flow in the two essays mentioned above and while extrapolating ‘the present and the past’ he tried to offer ways of uniting and connecting ‘the hugeness of diversity’⁵² in an attempt to ‘remove unfreedoms’ and ‘clear injustices’ to the extent he could across the fragments of *narrow domestic walls*. He said, ‘Whatever name you may lend to this force of unification, it does not matter, we should be more concerned about unifying humans and nothing else’.⁵³ It is clear that his idea of freedom in unification is not what colonialism/imperialism and the ideology of aggressive and narrow nationalism capitalize on. He underlined, ‘The binding together of everyone from the lowest strata of society to the highest *in a union of well-being*, this is the subject of the biggest of all endeavours that we must put in’.⁵⁴ This example and the ones discussed above then gives us insight into Tagore’s idea of freedom that speaks of working together for ‘a level of perfection that must be a gain for all’.⁵⁵ He insisted on ‘work’ that would remove ‘major obstacles to our national freedom,’⁵⁶ on self-reliance/self-sufficiency and education that would emancipate and strengthen the total inner-self (*atmashakti*) of the emerging nation. Here, of course, we must bear in mind that he was writing not as a historian or a philosopher, though history and philosophy are important components of his idea of togetherness, which

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 677.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Massachusetts and England: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), see, especially pp. 47-105).

⁵² Rabindranath Tagore, ‘Bharatbarsya Samaj’, p. 680.

⁵³ Ibid. p. 679.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 683.

⁵⁵ Rabindranath Tagore, ‘East and West’ [1908], in *Towards Universal Man: Rabindranath Tagore*, ed. by Humayun Kabir (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1961), pp. 129-140 (p. 131).

⁵⁶ Rabindranath Tagore, ‘Presidential Address’, p. 115.

also underscores the ‘idea of literature as communication as well as expression’.⁵⁷ According to Bashabi Fraser, he is simply ‘the Poet’,⁵⁸ and his literature seeks to ensure human relationships across time and space with bonds of service.

With an awareness of India’s historical vision of *milan* and *sāmanjasya*,⁵⁹ of unity and harmony, ‘to perceive one in the many profoundly and unambiguously’,⁶⁰ it was difficult for the Poet to eschew the colonial situation that divided human relationship into us and them. He could never subscribe to the colonial enterprise that emphasises divide and rule, the inhumane consequences of which were manifest in Lord Curzon’s partition of Bengal. Tagore’s voice of protest against violence, human waste, the Hindu-Muslim divide and the nationalist excess that followed the Bengal partition are well known and we need not repeat those here. His 1916 novel *Ghare Baire* (*Home and the World* - 1919) is a representation of the ensuing cycle of violence, uncertainty and the tragic circumstances of his country. What is worth noting here is, ‘*Ghare Baire* posits Nikhilesh against Sandip’s *svadeshi*, no less a patriot but not carried away by the passion of the moment, a personification as it were of Tagore’s *atmashakti*’.⁶¹

Tagore knew colonialism was not about the ‘English culture at its best’.⁶² He said, ‘The West has come into our homes and we cannot turn it out like an unwelcome guest’.⁶³ That was against the cultural ethos of India. The Poet considered the eternal, universal, and contingent aspects of his country. But, what was the option before the Indians? In Tagore’s view, ‘We must awaken their humanity by our own—that is the only way’ to freedom.⁶⁴ Therefore, he could not agree to the kind of regressive nationalism that was shaping his country’s psyche. He calls it ‘a terrible fetter,’ ‘spiralling in the narrowness of our selfish motives’, and insists we must ‘prepare ourselves to participate in a transaction of relationships’.⁶⁵ Later on, he was also drawn into questions surrounding inter-civilisational

⁵⁷ Sisir Kumar Das, ‘Introduction’ to *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Writings on Literature and Language*, eds. Sukanta Chaudhuri and Sankha Ghosh (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 1-21 (p. 12).

⁵⁸ Bashabi Fraser, *Rabindranath Tagore* (Critical Lives) (London: Reaktion Books, 2019), ‘Introduction’, p.7.

⁵⁹ Rabindranath Tagore, ‘Bharat Itihas Carca’ [1901], *Rabindra Rachanabali*, Volume 13 (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1961) pp. 450-453 (p. 450).

⁶⁰ Rabindranath Tagore, ‘Bharatbarser Itihas’, in *Swadesho Samaj*, *Rabindra Rachanabali*, Volume 12, (Kolkata: West Bengal Govt., 1961), pp. 1027-1034 (p.1029).

⁶¹ Amiya Dev, *Rereading Tagore* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2018), p. 52.]

⁶² Tagore, ‘East and West’, p. 137.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ See, among others, Rabindranath Tagore, ‘Shakti’/Inner Strength, ‘Samaje Mukti’/ Freedom in Society and ‘Jagate Mukti’/ Freedom in this World [1908-1909] in *Santiniketan*, *Rabindra Rachanabali*, Volume 12, (Kolkata: West Bengal Govt., 1961), pp. 175-177 & 173-175.

negotiation and with an emphasis on India's *samajic* (societal) culture he said, 'it is the reconciliation of opposites which is of its essence'.⁶⁶

What he stood for was 'a history beyond history' - beyond the history of colonial archives, and that the former can be sustained through creative humanity that affective bonds ensure, as the Poet explained in one of his last works 'Sahitye Aitihāsikata'.⁶⁷ Speaking of Tagore's literature in relation to society, his commitment to the life of the nation, his efforts in removing all obstructive elements that lead to stagnation of the society and his 'faith in the unity of man', Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, observes insightfully, 'Rabindranath... perceived relationships hitherto unnoticed and gave humanity his vision of one world'.⁶⁸ Simultaneously, he 'gave the people pride and dignity' which were almost lacking in our country during the colonial times.⁶⁹ Vinod Joshi, a contemporary Gujarati/Indian poet and literary critic, states, Tagore's work, including *Gitanjali* was 'an inspiration for many writers, even for the emerging writers during the early thirties influenced by Gandhiji'.⁷⁰ Mahadev Desai, a scholar and personal secretary to Mahatma Gandhi 'was the first person to translate Tagore's work into Gujarati. His version of *Chitrangada* was published in 1915'.⁷¹ It might not be out of place to mention here that emphasising on the 'outstanding reach of Tagore's poetry', Vojislav Djurić, an important comparatist and Serbian literary critic, quotes poem 35 of *Gitanjali* (1910) translated as *Song Offerings* (1912) and writes, 'One of Tagore's poems is considered the greatest and the most beautiful...poems in the world. In it, he built heavens worthy of the entire country, of the entire mankind'.⁷² Djurić observations find their

⁶⁶ Rabindranath Tagore, *A Vision of India's History* [1923]. Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1988, p.38.

⁶⁷ Rabindranath Tagore, 'Sahitye Aitihāsikata', in *SahityerSwarup, Rabindra Rachanabali*, Volume 14, (Kolkata: West Bengal Govt., 1961), pp. 536-538. For a recent discussion, see Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, 'Tagore's View of History' in *The Cambridge Companion to Rabindranath Tagore*, ed. by Sukanta Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 268-278 (p. 276).

⁶⁸ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. *Rabindranath Tagore: A Centenary Volume*. (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2010), pp. xvii-xii (p. xvii).

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. xix.

⁷⁰ Vinod Joshi, 'Rabindranath Tagore and Gujarati Literature', in *Nameless Recognition: Rabindranath Tagore and Other Indian Literatures*, ed. by Swapan Chakravorty (Kolkata: The National Library, 2011), pp. 71-74 (pp. 71-72).

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 71.

⁷² Vojislav Đurić. 'Lyric poetry of Rabindranath Tagore', 'Aesthetic and Literary Concepts of Rabindranath Tagore', (Beograd: Feniks Libris, 2007, *Savremenik* 1955, Belgrade). Translated by Ana Milovanović & Milica Marković.

resonance in the word *sahitya* that comes from *sahit* [together/togetherness],⁷³ and what Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta puts it as ‘being-in relation’.⁷⁴

In Bengal/India, the poet’s thoughts on freedom sans boundaries were also translated into practical works, creating grounds of communication across socio-economic groups through his Santiniketan-Sriniketan educational projects (the word project/s, of course, is not used here purely in the management sense)⁷⁵ and in the opening of his Visva-Bharati that embodies what it is called living beyond the boundary. Visva (the world) started residing in Bharat (India) and vice versa.⁷⁶ That is exactly what Visva-Bharati’s motto is: *Yatra visvam bhavatye kanidam* (Where the world makes a home in a single nest). Visva-Bharati becomes the place where the home and the world meet. His unconventional approach to freedom/s in his creative endeavours, helped the poet to expand his horizon of interactions. At the same time, it is through his words and work on creative freedom/s vis-à-vis *samaj* (based on the holistic and undogmatic concept of *atmashakti*), a new field of local-global⁷⁷ communications opened up for his country; India became a place of learning in world cultures in the modern age when the country was caught in the complexities of colonialism and emerging nationalism. He did play ‘an important role in the life of the nation’.

Freedom, *Samaj* and the Poet’s Alternatives

One fine example of agency and creativity which offer a discursive scope to an understanding of Tagore’s idea of freedom is his 1910 novel, *Gora*. To put it very briefly, the eponymous hero and the adopted son of Anandamayi, Gora unsettles the idea of a Bharatbarsha/India. Transfixed in an idealised notion of purity and thereby the alienation and its attending rhetoric of the normative tradition of the idolatry of nation and the changing faces of alienation and separatism of colonial modernity and nation-states, Gora projects a possible non-sectarian identity of India. He moves beyond, in his words, the ‘fear of losing

⁷³ Rabindranath Tagore, ‘Bengali national literature’ [1895], in *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Writings on Literature and Language*, ed. by Sisir Kumar Das & Sukanta Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 179–193 (p. 179).

⁷⁴ Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta, ‘Rabindranath Tagore and Literary Communication across Borders’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Rabindranath Tagore*, ed. by Sukanta Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 202–221 (p. 202).

⁷⁵ For a fuller account of the evolving nature of Santiniketan (abode of peace) and Sriniketan (abode of grace), having their creative and pragmatic basis in expressions of freedom, see, Uma Das Gupta, *Santiniketan and Sriniketan* (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 2009)

⁷⁶ Dipannita Datta, ‘Connecting Cultures: Rethinking Rabindranath Tagore’s “Ideals of Education”.’ *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, 24. 3 (2017): pp. 412–423.

⁷⁷ Here the local includes national/regional and the global is about international/transnational/ supranational.

my purity’,⁷⁸ beyond losing an ‘unblemished image of Bharatbarsha’, and beyond ‘keeping my devotion safe within that impenetrable fortress’.

Gora in his discursive journey also awakens to ‘his freedom’; realising (the co-relation of the *within* and *without*) his relation of the individual self to the universe, Gora says that he gains the ‘right to true service’ against any ritualistic bonds. ‘The real field of action now lies before me — for promoting the welfare of those hundred crore people in the world outside’.⁷⁹ Proclaiming his newfound insights into Bharatbarsha, he says:

Today I have become what I earlier strove to become... Today I have become an Indian — Bharatbarshia. In me, there is no hostility towards any community, Hindu, Muslim or Christian. Today I belong to every community of Bharatbarsha.⁸⁰

Gora rejects ‘both ultra-nationalist politics and colonial co-optation’.⁸¹ He struggles with the agencies, both the spiritual/inner/private and the material/outer/public, eventually bringing to light that the alien and the native are not directly opposed to each other no matter where one is born.⁸² Forging national as well as world consciousness of the present (today I have become) in contrast to his troubling past experiences, Gora participates in the struggle for India’s freedom, in his ‘futural anticipation of a universality’.⁸³ Gora’s reinterpretation of home-grown/traditional culture suggests a new search for the freedom of inter-relationship between the ethical and the religio-cultural treasures of the past (without glorifying or deifying it anymore) and the possibilities of a new open-ended future. Speaking against fanaticisms that kill individual affective ties with the land and people, Gora seeks entry and simultaneously enters into the all-encompassing self that remains open to any community or any individual, offering an alternative discourse on modernity beyond aggressive and narrow nationalism. He is not ‘un-modern’ in this sense but ‘the modernity that breeds alienation is not his’.⁸⁴ His love of the people-nation, however, is yet to be achieved. Gora says to his

⁷⁸ All quotations from Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gora* are from the translation of *Gora* by Radha Chakravarty (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2009), pp. 505-507.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 505.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 506.

⁸¹ Supriya Chaudhuri, ‘Imagined Worlds: The Prose Fiction of Rabindranath Tagore’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Rabindranath Tagore*, ed. by Sukanta Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 142-144 (p. 143).

⁸² For further studies on *Gora*, see Chaudhuri, ‘Imagined Worlds’; also see Dev, *Rereading Tagore*.

⁸³ Judith Butler, ‘Universality in Culture’, in *For Love of Country?*, ed. by Joshua Cohen (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), pp. 45-52 (p. 49).

would-be preceptor, Pareshbabu, ‘for this freedom...make me your disciple’⁸⁵. Although this journey can be read as Gora’s self-critical idealism, his awakening to freedom triggers a message of transformation, underscoring the need to acquire freedom and move beyond political exclusivity into an understanding of human identity as one.

Reflecting on the above examples it is perhaps fair to assume that for the Poet the presence of universality contained within his ideal of freedom of humanity often crossed his mind in different moments of his life. Tagore did not fail to advance the idea of ‘establishing oneness among the various’, to ‘call the other/stranger our own’.⁸⁶ This expression of collective unity circumscribes the Poet’s oeuvre of literature and art, of religion and social ethics. Recognising the role of the ‘one’ in many spheres of life, the Poet said when India was at the threshold of global modernity -

We need to know that every race is a part of The Universal Man (*Visvamanab*). Every race in this world establishes itself by accounting for what it is creating to gift and help mankind. The moment a race loses the vitality of creation/innovation, it just exists as a burden, like a paralytic part of a body... Indeed, there is no glory in mere existence.⁸⁷

The Poet cherished an anti-hegemonic spirit of *samajic*/social culture and he wished to extend this to his countrymen for the struggle for freedom. This spirit of freedom to a large extent explains the Poet’s idea of India. He said: ‘The objective of Indian History is not to set up Hindu or some other dominance’.⁸⁸

That India establishes unity amidst diversity...cannot mean in any way that she runs steamroller and renders all diversity plain and levelled...India knows that to *accept others as one’s own* is self-fulfilment. That this rendering the *diverse as one*, that accepting the other as our own is not erasing the distinctions; but is, on the contrary, demarcating clearly the *rights of each* – do we have to shout this aloud in our country, too?⁸⁹

He wished his India would ‘secure a special kind of fulfilment for humanity’,⁹⁰ and that would be achieved if she does not fall ‘in the grip of a violent revulsion’ of competition of

⁸⁴ Amiya Dev, *Rereading Tagore* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2018), p. 78.

⁸⁵ Tagore, *Gora*, Chakravarty (trans.), p. 507.

⁸⁶ Tagore, ‘Swadeshi Samaj’, pp. 700-701.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 700.

⁸⁸ Rabindranath Tagore, ‘East and West’ [1908], in *Towards Universal Man: Rabindranath Tagore*, ed. by Humayun Kabir (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1961), pp. 129-140 (p. 131).

⁸⁹ Tagore, ‘Swadeshi Samaj’, p.706. Emphasis added.

⁹⁰ Rabindranath Tagore, ‘East and West’ p. 131.

British vs. India.⁹¹ The political right to freedom ‘must be earned’ by proving the inner strength of the country: ‘Sacrifice and service, not hard words and violent action, are true tests of strength’.⁹² Also, moving beyond all social obstacles/weaknesses, for example, between the higher castes and the ones below in the social hierarchy, which have been hurting India’s development, should be taken up as the task of immediate concern.⁹³ Witnessing the moribund state of the Indian society and the unfreedom and otherness of subjugation under the colonial regime, he insisted on working towards freedom: the ‘work which will give us vitality and remove from our national character the factors which make us poor and weak, divided and subject’.⁹⁴ Much before that, in his negotiations with colonial modernity, he said insistently at the turn of the century,

Our very own task is to impart the knowledge of education, health, food, riches; herein lies our well-being; we should not look at it as a business opportunity and not to accept anything more than good deeds and well-being in exchange.⁹⁵

Later on, he would also stress the need to work towards freedom from superstition and discrimination across time and space: ‘we need to liberate ourselves from [the imprisoned world] the fetters of the self and all those passions that tend to be exclusive’.⁹⁶

Many of Tagore’s creative work exemplifies that his recourse/route to freedom/s is not a fixed universal category. According to him, there is a need to realise the humanity in the freedom of harmony and the fundamental ‘unity...of our relation to the ever-unfolding universe’.⁹⁷ That universe includes the spaces ‘where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking stones’ (*Gitanjali* no. 11).⁹⁸ Equally, he was disheartened to see the dehumanising colonial situation and the fearful effect of the colonial rule — the ugliness of separatist politics that caused alienation between the countrymen — ‘uneducated’ and ‘educated’ Indians, the ordinary village folks and the city-bred English-educated Indian middle-class. He wrote how those who knew the English language were ‘clearly marked off from those who did not’ and underlined that ‘the educated man could hold his uneducated

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 136.

⁹² Ibid, p. 139.

⁹³ Ibid, p. 139.

⁹⁴ Tagore, ‘Presidential Address’, p. 115.

⁹⁵ Tagore, ‘Bharatbarsya Samaj’, p.683.

⁹⁶ Tagore, ‘Freedom’, p. 628.

⁹⁷ Rabindranath Tagore, *Glimpses of Bengal: The Letters of Sir Rabindranath Tagore 1885–1895* [1913], (London: Macmillan, 1921), p. 168 [Kushtia, now in Bangladesh, 5th October 1895].

⁹⁸ Also quoted in, Vojislav Đurić, ‘Aesthetic and Literary Concepts of Rabindranath Tagore’.

brother in heartfelt contempt, but could find no easy way to share his learning with him'.⁹⁹ Tagore felt one is not fully entitled to anything one cannot give away. He believed in 'togetherness'. But the situation was complex. There were issues of superiority and inferiority of cultures; there were also issues of civilising mission that served the interest of the colonial authority resulting in an outright subordination of the colonised and the excess of indigenisation that nationalist sentiments popularised.

As against the issues of the divisiveness of power that converted people and their social institutions into machines, and fear, humiliation and suffering that got associated with power politics, Tagore's abiding alternatives were focused on restoring the agency of the village collective and the 'wellbeing' of *samaj*/society as a whole, offering new possibilities of freedom for a fuller social life and overcoming the 'wretchedness'¹⁰⁰ of the country, and this planetary earth. This spirit of freedom is all the more important in the context of today's human affairs across borders for not only India but the entire world continues to be ruled by conflicts of race, class and gender, and especially because the basic rights for self-determination and self-development are still in jeopardy.

The Poet believed 'Anything that is profoundly abounding in humanity will never get outdated' or old. In it lies perpetual freshness/modernity.'¹⁰¹ With deep humane concerns, he held 'howsoever novel and profitable the slave trade may be, it is very old/ancient'.¹⁰² So, he stood strong supporting the ideal of *samaj*, about which he noted in his essays/lectures/talks, and engaged his education efforts with an ever-new creative task to prove India's capacity to harness her latent powers, or, to create *atmashakti*, providing a workable and sustainable basis for 'the descendants of India's historical unfortunates'¹⁰³ and that served as alternatives to colonialism and its binary nationalism. It is obvious that he was not spared of 'scorns and threats from both sides- left and right, so-called westernisers and traditionalists'.¹⁰⁴ 'At least twice he incurred his compatriots' displeasure, once by writing *Gare-Bahire*...that did not approve of nationalist excesses, and again by *Char Adhyay* where he saw the futility of

⁹⁹ Rabindranath Tagore, 'Bengali National Literature', p. 185.

¹⁰⁰ Tagore, 'Swadeshi Samaj', p. 706.

¹⁰¹ Rabindranath Tagore, 'Adhunikata' [1925] in *Bharati* Vol. 49, p. 300.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalisation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 318. Also quoted in Dipannita Datta. 'Connecting Cultures', p. 417.

¹⁰⁴ Uma Das Gupta, 'Rabindranath Tagore and Modernity', in *Tagore and Modernity*, ed. by Krishna Sen and Tapati Gupta (Kolkata: Das Gupta & Co., 2006, 2009), p. 1 – 11 (p. 1).

svadeshi terrors and its human waste.¹⁰⁵ He was especially ‘bitterly criticised by the then extremists’,¹⁰⁶ excepting those who took issues with his words and work and were later touched by his writings, his philosophy and his ideals.

Nation, Samaj and Freedom(s)

As far as the national question related to freedom is concerned Swapan Mazumdar observes, ‘Political freedom was not unimportant to [Rabindranath], but freedom of mind was of much greater import’.¹⁰⁷ He quotes from Tagore’s 1905 essay ‘Saphalatar Sadupay’ – ‘Hopeless laments won’t do. We shall have to strive for what we ourselves can do’.¹⁰⁸ These first two crisp sentences of the essay underline that to overcome the fear and external compulsions of the colonial situation, the first step for Tagore was to take responsibility for nurturing and creating the capacity for governing the self/*samaj*/nation rather than depending solely on helps from the state (in Tagore’s term nation-state) that ‘superimpose’ order from outside and above.¹⁰⁹ Aware of the colonial reason that subjugates the ruled through state-centric administration, which is abstracted from Indian *samaj*, and the pessimistic attitude of the privileged countrymen to voluntarily bestow all onus of the *samaj* to the dominant order/law, he said painfully, ‘We have understood very well today that self-protection is not just hiding oneself at a distance and sitting there. The real manner of self-protection is to uplift our inner strength down to the ground or core.’ Simply ‘lamenting will not yield any results.’ On the other hand, ‘Imbibing the English in every aspect and trying to survive incognito is also nothing but deceiving oneself.’¹¹⁰ Tagore felt that if the educated gentry put their ‘heart’ in clearing the many-layered deficiencies and dysfunctionalities in the villages, if they establish ‘solidarity between the Hindus and the Muslims’, ‘staying away from any form of useless politics’, if they address ‘the remedy of the lack of schools, roads and passageways, water bodies, etc. in the district, then in a very short time, they would be able to turn the country into a truly dynamic entity.’¹¹¹ The essential requirement of the time, according to him, was to ignite the light of the local communities/village societies. So, he

¹⁰⁵ Amiya Dev, *Rereading Tagore*, p. 28. [emphasis in the original]

¹⁰⁶ Swapan Mazumdar, ‘The East-west Colloquy’ in *Rabindranath Tagore and Challenges of Today*, ed. By Bhudeb Chaudhuri & K.G. Subramanyan (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1998), pp. 294 – 306 (p. 299).

¹⁰⁷ Swapan Mazumdar, ‘The Other Face of Modernity’, p. 24.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Tagore, ‘Swadeshi Samaj’, pp. 700 - 701.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 688.

urged that the upper crust of the society, the *bhadrolok* and the landlords rise to the occasion, recognise and carry out their social duties and obligations responsibly and collectively.

It is not that Tagore was particularly tuned to the disparities between village life and city life from an early age. Around 1890, when he was asked by his father, Debendranath Tagore, to take charge of running the family estates in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) and Orissa (in India), Rabindranath came in close proximity to the variety of local life in his *zamindari* in the countryside. It is only expected that the freedom of living in the abundance of nature drew the Poet to the centre of his inner-self and that he would have preferred to live in solitude. His joyful experiences, in this connection, in the vast expanse of land, water, sky are noted in his *Chinnapatra* (translated as *Glimpses of Bengal*) and *Chinnapatrabali*. These creative and lived experiences, at times transient and on occasion transcendental, however, did not stop him from realising that one must participate in the harsher realities of life beyond self-interest to the quotidian.

As Fakrul Alam observes ‘For the first time...he undertook managerial duties on a scale that immersed him in work with ordinary men and women and also involved him directly in economic and public affairs.’¹¹² On many occasions, he would refer back to the aesthetic-ethical experiences in the countryside and his keen observations are underlined in his words, ‘Slowly but surely I began to understand the sorrow and the poverty of the villagers and I grew restless to do something about it.’ The restlessness took him to the core of the nature of the problems surrounding the plight of the people/nation. He moved beyond self-interest and said: ‘I did not think helping from outside would help. I began to try and open their minds towards self-reliance’.¹¹³ He realised that the freedom of relationship between the self/home/country and the world cannot be enlivened in isolation from the village community/collective or the indigenous people who form the larger part of the *samaj* and yet relegated to the backwaters of social neglect.

In the comprehensive and transformative nature of Tagore’s work, we have seen till now that Tagore did not fail to advance the idea of ‘establishing oneness among the various’, to ‘call the other/stranger our own’.¹¹⁴ Again, in his essay ‘Freedom’, for example, Tagore delves into the idea of the ‘truth’ that implies ‘a unity expressed through many and varied

¹¹² Fakrul Alam & Radha Chakravarty, eds. *The Essential Tagore*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), ‘Introduction’, p. 7.

¹¹³ Uma Das Gupta, *Rabindranath Tagore: My Life in My Words*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books Ltd, 2010), p. 99.

¹¹⁴ Tagore, ‘Swadeshi Samaj’, pp.700-701.

manifestations, a unity which, when we are able to realize it gives us freedom'.¹¹⁵ Read in the context of the current political climate symptomized by global dissatisfaction with human ties (not exclusive of intercultural ties) which leads Isaiah Berlin to assert, 'The first requirement for freedom [...] is to be able to speak in one's own voice',¹¹⁶ it demonstrates the poet-thinker's deep knowledge of the country with which he identified himself intellectually and spiritually.

Tagore inherited the non-dogmatic intellectual-spiritual tradition of universal ties from his father Maharshi Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905).¹¹⁷ Though the Maharshi was conservative in certain ways, he was the master-mind in revitalizing India's social-religious reformation movement in the modern age by reorganising the Brahmo-Samaj (reformist-society) founded by Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) in 1828.¹¹⁸ Rabindranath called Rammohun *Bharat Pathik* – the pathfinder of India, and he says, '[Rammohun] remains modern forever'.¹¹⁹ Moreover, his involvement with the *samajic* (social-cultural) aspects of the country, along with his family members, did not allow Tagore to submit to 'moral slavery' or to narrow nationalism that leads to 'moral degeneracy and intellectual blindness'.¹²⁰ He understood the futility of mimicking the savage greed of the modern nation-state (N). Neither was he willing to sit in consolation in the bondage of immemorial tradition, which was not devoid of dogma. He saw how the social-cultural aspects of *milan* and *sāmanjasya*¹²¹—the unity and harmony—that Indian *samaj* (n) once embodied was ceasing to be creative, taking tragic shapes in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century with the birth of the Nation.

Without submitting to the limits of the self and the other, without overlooking the differences, including the social-cultural norms of different communities at different geographical locations (regional and national, and over time international), the Poet worked towards curbing unfreedom and injustices as far as possible by initiating the urgency of the

¹¹⁵ Tagore, 'Freedom', p. 627.

¹¹⁶ Isaiah Berlin, 'Rabindranath Tagore and the Consciousness of Nationality', in *The Sense of Reality: Studies in Ideas and their History*, ed. by Henry Hardy (England: Chhatto & Windus Ltd 1996), pp. 249 – 266 (p. 262).

¹¹⁷ Sivanath Sastri, 'The Personal Reminiscences of Maharshi Devendranath Tagore-I & II', *The Modern Review*, 9, no. 1 (1911): 74-82 & 160-165.

¹¹⁸ Both Maharshi Debendranath Tagore and Rammohun Roy are known for their contribution to the growth of culture of social-religious reforms in India.

¹¹⁹ Rabindranath Tagore, 'Bharat Pathik Rammohun Roy', in *Charitro Puja* (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1908), pp. 61 – 79 (p. 72).

¹²⁰ Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Nation' in *Creative Unity, Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Essays* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2010), pp. 63-71 (p. 68).

¹²¹ Rabindranath Tagore, 'Bharat Itihas Carca' [1901], in *Rabindra Rachanabali*, Volume 13 (Kolkata West Bengal Govt., 1961), pp. 450-453 (pp. 450-451).

freedom of right to education in Bengal/India, for example. Speaking of his educational work Swapan Majumdar observes, ‘It would inevitably be an alternative education for the poor yet without any trace of poverty in thought’. He goes on to say that his alternative education would exceed the limits of the colonial policy of ‘creating a class of subalterns in the coloniser’s employment hierarchy’.¹²² Additionally, he notes, at Santiniketan, Tagore moved ‘from a mode of education modelled after the Upanishadic Brahmoism to a secular, self-reliant and at the same time artistic and comprehensive education’¹²³ that would have resonance across the country and beyond. Amidst internal fractures and differences as mentioned above, the Poet’s ‘not for profit’ educational projects and programs that embodied his ideal *samaj* took a shape outside the metropolitan administrative centre of Calcutta (now Kolkata); the projects were located in a peripheral location at Santiniketan, Bolpur in around 1901, once begun by his father Maharshi.

His educational projects were guided by a combined process of adaptation to modern scientific evolutions and knowledge of technological advancements and indigenous ways of coordination of *tapovan* education.¹²⁴ In running the projects and achieving the fullness of education, it must be mentioned that he was helped by great Englishmen like William W. Pearson (1881-1923), Charles Freer Andrews (1871-1940) and the Scotsman, Patrick Geddes (1854-1932). Here, Subha Dasgupta’s observation needs a mention. She writes, ‘His creative endeavours spilled over to the nurturing of an innovative system of education in harmony with natural surroundings and a university that would be the meeting place of teachers, artists, and community workers from all over the world’.¹²⁵ His educational endeavours also created, just and non-violent spaces of freedom for rural reconstruction, which started in the early 1890s. The continued innovative work provided an umbrella for agricultural work and related education and skill development programmes for men and women at Santiniketan and Sriniketan in light of the colonial tensions of the time. Moreover, these works facilitated the negotiation of the frontiers between domination and subordination/misrecognition, and are relevant in post-post-colonial times.

While working towards re-establishing the lost connection between societies and cultures, the Poet helped in configuring India in the modern idiom. Speaking of his contribution to India’s struggle for freedom, Ashis Nandy observes, ‘Tagore participated in

¹²² Mazumdar, ‘The Other Face of Modernity’, p. 28.

¹²³ Ibid, p.27.

¹²⁴ Discussed in Dipannita Datta. ‘Connecting Cultures’, p. 216.

¹²⁵ Chakraborty Dasgupta, ‘Rabindranath Tagore and Literary Communication across Borders’, pp. 202-203.

shaping the modern consciousness in India; his voice counted'.¹²⁶ Two developments in the life of the Poet and the nation can be discerned at this point. Firstly, the freedom of the self and the country had become so intertwined as to be identical. Secondly, the 'realisation of freedom'¹²⁷ within the stream of national consciousness that offers freedom beyond isolation towards a global unity, which he also calls 'the truth of grand unity',¹²⁸ ensured the foundation of international cooperation. According to Isaiah Berlin Tagore's vision of an independent India sans borders created an awareness of 'an equal citizen of the world'.¹²⁹

In Tagore's view, the 'inter-relation'¹³⁰ between different groups of people, the continuation of which have been possible across ages through accommodation of difference, adjustments and reconciliation are intrinsic to the shifting and permanent cultural/civilisational idea of India. He said,

[W]e know from our experience in history that [...] that where men live under the compulsion of fear of their neighbours, they cannot attain their own humanity. Only those who can cultivate a feeling of sympathy with others, of understanding and co-operation [can] achieve that relationship which is a great deal more than the numerical fact of their all being on this earth together.¹³¹

Tagore believed 'Only he knows truth who realizes himself in all beings, and all others in himself'.¹³² This truth lies at the 'basis of all that we call civilization'.¹³³ Therefore, for the Poet, the wall, both within the self/national self and without, needs to be removed first. This truth process involves an ongoing practice of social-cultural communication, which is evident in this essay and many of his writings. As noticed, at least partially, they show possibilities of moving beyond caste lines, communal narrowness and religious prejudices while seeking and opening ways to freedom to link and foster allegiance to human ties across boundaries not merely related by bonds of kinship or race similarity. Just as Gora in the novel by the same name offers a transformative idea of alternative modernity, Nikhilesh in *The Home and the*

¹²⁶ Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism*, p. 4.

¹²⁷ Tagore, 'Freedom', p. 627.

¹²⁸ Tagore, "I am He", pp. 211-218.

¹²⁹ Isaiah Berlin, 'Rabindranath Tagore and the Consciousness of Nationality', in *The Sense of Reality: Studies in Ideas and their History*, ed. by Henry Hardy (England: Chhatto & Windus Ltd 1996), p. 262.

¹³⁰ Tagore, 'Freedom', p. 627.

¹³¹ Ibid, pp. 627-628.

¹³² Ibid., p. 627.

¹³³ Ibid.

World (Ghare Baire) projects a dynamic understanding of modernity and freedom in the Indian context (and by extension, abroad).

At the core of Poet's concerns was indeed the achieving of India's freedom from colonial subjectivity and soar beyond it into 'inter-communication' and practices associated with it, especially the human interests governing society.¹³⁴ Such human-centric concerns revolving around the meaning of freedom and as understood by the Poet within the overarching atmosphere of colonialism and emerging nationalism in India and linked with that the entire issue of mutually exclusive relation between the ruler and the ruled and its monolithic operations necessarily eludes any singular understanding of the same. In fact, these operations are highly complex and variable. Without submitting to the limits of domination-subordination relationships, as discussed through the above examples, Tagore negotiated the frontiers between the two and offered a vision of a self-governing and self-reliant nation, ensuring possible ways of India's continuity as a *samaj*/nation. Without depending too much upon the British administration or by glorifying the past, he offered new possibilities of freedom for a fuller social life. His words and work reflect his profound yearning and aspiration for India's awakening (as in the Poem 35) to a realisation that would generate self-empowerment (*atma shakti*), which would also serve the cause of freedom struggle without suppressing the dark tradition, especially that of constructing the 'fixed barriers of social gradations'.¹³⁵ In this regard, and most importantly, the Poet asserted that the circulation of *knowledge* in all strata of society needs to be free, crossing all barriers (between the countrymen and women) that breed a hierarchical system and make some people, groups or an entire community more equal than others.

He stood against exclusionary measures and although he did not succeed in all endeavours, he unhesitatingly suggested that the first step towards overcoming the fearful situation of colonial subjugation was to strengthen the links between the educated and the masses. All available means were to be adopted to minimize the schism between Indians, 'educated' and the 'uneducated,'¹³⁶ for he knew, 'We cannot get a proper hold on anything' unless the Indians put in the effort to make learning 'stand firm' and 'build it up from bottom to top'.¹³⁷ On a similar note, he underscored the need for co-existence, and without

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 628.

¹³⁵ Tagore, *Nationalism*, p. 79.

¹³⁶ Tagore, 'Bengali National Literature', p. 185.

¹³⁷ Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Vicissitudes of Education' [1892], in *Towards Universal Man: Rabindranath Tagore*, ed. by Humayun Kabir (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1961), pp. 39 – 48 (p. 40).

overlooking the consequences of colonial subjugation he put his faith in the common masses and said: 'We never realize that we are no one unless we can identify with the general mass in our heart of hearts'. He stressed, '[w]e are erecting an insurmountable difference/barrier with the common people. We have always kept them outside the purview of all our discussions'.¹³⁸ Such divisiveness serves as a weakness and a viable source of domination of the coloniser over the colonised, proving their cultural superiority. A further difficulty stems from the fact that it is on such weaknesses imperialism builds its political power.

Those of us in India who come under the delusion that mere political freedom will make us free have accepted their lessons from the West as the gospel truth and lost their faith in humanity. We must remember whatever weakness we cherish in our society will become the source of danger in politics. The same inertia which leads us to our idolatry of dead forms in social institutions will create in our politics prison houses with immovable walls. 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 a tyranny of injustice.¹³⁹

So, by the Poet's submission, the 'otherness' had to be resolved progressively by the countrymen collectively to gain political freedom from colonial subjugation. Freedom would be achieved once the changes emerge from the core of the society/*samaj*/nation. This striving towards freedom sans violence and social divisions would help in self-reliance and in overcoming the fear of reconciling/uniting with the wider expansion of 'life's freedom'.¹⁴⁰ He had reasons to offer this alternative, for

The idea of India is against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one's own people from others...which inevitably leads to ceaseless conflicts. Therefore, my one prayer is: let India stand for the *cooperation* of all peoples of the world. The spirit of rejection finds its support in the consciousness of separateness, the spirit of acceptance in the consciousness of unity.¹⁴¹

The passages above project Tagore's growing sense of freedom during India's pre-independence days, and it hardly requires a mention that he was particularly apprehensive of what he had put as the dehumanising effect of 'the soul-stifling discipline' and 'the savage

¹³⁸ Tagore, 'Swadeshi Samaj', p.687.

¹³⁹ Tagore, *Nationalism*, p. 82.

¹⁴⁰ Tagore, 'Thoughts', p. 71

¹⁴¹ Letter from Rabindranath Tagore to C.F. Andrews, in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *The Mahatma and the Poet* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1997), pp. 54-62 (p. 61).

greed of the modern nation-state' and their impact on the subject races and universal humanity.¹⁴²

Uma Das Gupta observes that Tagore's was a 'world-embracing and inclusive nationalism', which was valued and adopted by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in the building of India's future.¹⁴³ She further observes: 'Tagore posited the idea that the history of the growth of freedom is the history of the perfection of human relationships'.¹⁴⁴ He was of the view that to gain political freedom from colonialism the primary requirement was to reorganise social unity by acknowledging differences between different races through adjustments, which is intrinsic to India's historical Truth. Was he defying the harsh binaries between the coloniser and the colonised in order to put forward his thoughts on freedom? The Poet-thinker answers the question: 'Our real problem in India is not political. It is social... We in India must realize that we cut a poor figure when we are trying to be [exclusively] political'.¹⁴⁵ He was also aware of India's weakness perpetuated through superstitious and blind reliance on tradition: 'that of the caste system, and the blind and lazy habit of relying upon the authority of traditions that are incongruous anachronisms in the present age'.¹⁴⁶ This is certainly not an overstatement by the Poet who intimately knew what was India's mission through the ages, and that was certainly not wanting in its basis for Truth. He saw the past and the future through the lens of the present.

Challenging the colonial state ideology and its impact on the emergent extremist nationalist ideology in India, he stated:

[Unlike the people of England who] are not burdened with communal duties, since such cares rest with the State... the people of India never depended on the King for their communal welfare [and social wellbeing] ...and the social duties were specifically assigned to the members of the society [*samaj*]... Consequently, *dharma* permeated the whole social fabric... [Moreover, he said] The vital strength in different civilisations is

¹⁴² Stephen N. Hay, 'Rabindranath Tagore in America', *American Quarterly*, 14, no. 3 (Autumn, 1962): pp. 439-463 (p. 446).

¹⁴³ Uma Das Gupta, 'A Self-Respecting Nationalism as Our Salvation', in *The Oxford India Tagore: Selected Writings on Education and Nationalism* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2015 [2009]), pp. 337-408 (p. 339).

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Tagore, *Nationalism*, p. 76.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

variously embodied. The heart of a country lies wherever the people's welfare is centred. A blow aimed at that point is fatal for the whole country.¹⁴⁷

Tagore's focus was on the 'fast disintegrating social system'.¹⁴⁸ He said: 'We [the English-educated] have set up an impregnable barrier [of the language of communication] between the masses and ourselves'.¹⁴⁹ The life force, the 'social liberty', within the limits of *samaj* was on the verge of getting 'crippled'. For the sake of national interest, therefore, the city dwellers (mostly the landlords) and the villagers have to be brought together. The Poet-thinker insisted: 'The great masses of our people live in villages. When the village wants to feel the throb of the greater life of the outside world, the fair (*mela*) is the best way'.¹⁵⁰ His emphasis on the fair as a way to bring back the unity of life suggests that the educated class without resorting to 'empty politics' must remind themselves of the need to surpass the imposed 'rigidity' of the colonial law; it also suggests the need to acknowledge 'human bond' as a central component of social responsibility which could be maintained by revisiting the folk cultural tradition and the spiritual tradition of unconditional hospitality which are innate to *samaj*.¹⁵¹ He said, fairs 'will be occasions for the [highborn and the humble alike], to give and receive', opening up spaces for exchange. It is only then India's freedom in unity amidst diversity would be achieved: for, 'our people have immemorially enjoyed literature and absorbed religion [dharma] through the medium of festivities'.¹⁵²

His essay 'State and Society' demonstrates the difficulties and viabilities of state-centric rule in India. In British-ruled India the Nation-State, he said, has rapidly 'taken possession of everything, from our schools to our daily markets, and has made their undivided rule conspicuous in both concrete and abstract forms'.¹⁵³ It is only natural that Tagore strongly disapproved of narrow power politics, and his condemnation anticipates what the postcolonial theorist and cosmopolitan thinker Homi K. Bhabha calls 'sly civility', a sense of civility imposed from above: 'living feeling power' which spreads from the words spoken to the things signified and forces the mind to take them in and make them conform to the formula'.¹⁵⁴ Imposing the abstract notion of civility, according to Tagore, was analogous

¹⁴⁷ Rabindranath Tagore, 'Society and State', ed. by Humayun Kabir (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1961), pp. 49 - 66 (p. 51).

¹⁴⁸ Rabindranath Tagore, 'Spiritual Civilisation' [1911], in *The English Writings of Tagore*, Volume 3, p. 735.

¹⁴⁹ Tagore, 'Society and State', p. 54.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁵⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, *Locations of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 102.

to hypnotism, a mystical formula that not only reduced a large portion of village society to destitution but also made rural people into ‘brutes’ in a subject nation. At the same time, it was also viciously destroying the natural flow of the social process: the continuity of spiritual life, the civilisational strength of the unity of life qua hospitality that embodied the diverse indigenous configuration of the society (*samaj*).¹⁵⁵

He puts forward his social thinking in a slightly different vein in the essay ‘Choto O Boro’.

Whatever may be the form of the present...I am hopeful...But we have some obligations here. If we *fear* our inferior position, then the British will also stoop low and prove mean to frighten us. The entire might of the lesser English is on the inferior strength of ours. The world has reached that future age where the unarmed will have to confront the weapons...The onus of proving this greatness is on us. It will be... accomplished on a great ideal – not based on sheer mercy. It will also not be achieved with guns, cannons and warships...The participation with one-sided supremacy is no union at all...Let that be our *unbounded* strength to endure pain for the sake of *truth* and *justice*.¹⁵⁶

It is pertinent to mention here that in the struggle for Indian independence to which Tagore remained firmly rooted, although he remained outside the mainstream politics, he found in the Mahatma that unbounded strength. He said: At the juncture of tremendous political unrest ‘Mahatma Gandhi came and stood at the cottage door of the destitute millions.’¹⁵⁷

From Dejection to Hope

Tagore saw in Gandhi, and in the latter’s capacity to subvert the violence unleashed by the authorities through non-violent resistance. Even though they debated the issues of non-cooperation, burning of foreign cloth and spinning, as right and wrong methods in the struggle for freedom, Tagore wrote

[...] our authorities have shown their claws... In this crisis you [...] have stood among

¹⁵⁵ Tagore, ‘Society and State’, p. 49.

¹⁵⁶ Rabindranath Tagore, ‘Choto o Boro’ [1917] (‘The Small and the Great’), in *Rabindra Rachanabali*, Volume 13, pp. 249-264 (pp. 263 - 264).

¹⁵⁷ Rabindranath Tagore, ‘The Call of Truth’, in *The Mahatma and the Poet*, p. 76; Uma Das Gupta. ‘In Pursuit of a Different Freedom: Tagore’s World University at Santiniketan’ *India International Centre Quarterly*, 29. 3/4 (2002-2003): pp. 25-38 (p. 30).

us [like Lord Buddha] to proclaim your faith in the ideal which you know to be that of India, the ideal which is both against the cowardliness of hidden revenge and the cowed submissiveness of the terror-stricken.¹⁵⁸

As the above extract shows, Tagore was hopeful of India's political freedom under Gandhi's leadership, and he cautioned Gandhi in the same letter that India will win freedom 'when she can prove that she is morally superior to the people who rule her by right of conquest. He insisted '[India] must willingly accept her penance of suffering'.¹⁵⁹ It may be mentioned here that the letter stated above was written by Tagore in reply to Gandhi's request for a message on the 'national struggle' since he felt the need 'to gather round this mighty struggle the ennobling influence of those who approve of it'.¹⁶⁰ It is in reply to the letter Tagore addressed Gandhi as the 'Mahatma' and as a 'great leader of men'.¹⁶¹ However, it is well known that when it came to the Indian nationalist discourse, the two illuminating figures of modern India, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, differed in addressing issues of the non-cooperation movement and modern education. But both the Poet and the Mahatma stood for the unity in diversity in the *samaj* and the 'freedom of the people to rule themselves'.¹⁶² Tagore did acknowledge Gandhi's contribution to the idea of freedom sans non-violence in India and abroad: 'At Gandhi's call India blossomed forth to new greatness, just as once before in earlier times when Buddha proclaimed the truth of fellow-feeling and compassion among all living creatures'.¹⁶³ In Serbia, when he was asked, 'What is India teaching us today?' Rabindranath said

Nowadays, India is sending a new light to humanity, and it is Gandhi [the Mahatma]...He teaches us that...the vastness and beauty of a man are in his freedom, i.e., his spiritual depth, and there should be no violence as a response to the evil because it will not be eradicated in that way.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁸ Letter from Tagore to Gandhi, dated April 12, 1919, in Bhattacharya, *The Mahatma and the Poet*, p. 49.

¹⁵⁹ Letter from Tagore to Gandhi, dated April 12, 1919, in *ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁶⁰ Letter from Gandhi to Tagore, dated April 5, 1919, in *ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁶¹ Letter from Tagore to Gandhi, dated April 12, 1919, in *ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁶² See more on this attribute to freedom, Bashabi Fraser, 'From Despondency to Magnanimity: The Centrality of *Ahimsa* in Rabindranath Tagore's Idea of *Samaj*', in *Ahimsa: Tagore and Gandhi*, ed. by Dipannita Datta and Aleksandra Maksić (Serbia: Gradska narodna biblioteka "Žarko Zrenjanin", 2021), pp. 119-140.

¹⁶³ Ashis Nandy, *Time Warps: Silent and Evasive Pasts in Indian Politics and Religion* (London: Hust & Company, 2002), p. 224.

¹⁶⁴ See for further discussion, Dipannita Datta, 'Introduction' and 'Ahimsa in an Era of Violence', in *Ahimsa: Tagore and Gandhi*, ed. by Dipannita Datta and Aleksandra Maksić (Serbia: Gradska narodna biblioteka "Žarko Zrenjanin", 2021), pp. 25-38 and pp. 58-81.

Tagore also saw the uprightness/righteousness in Gandhi to hold to the spirit of *ahimsa* beyond the caste lines and religious prejudices: ‘So the name Mahatma’ (the Great Soul). He insisted: ‘Who else has unreservedly [felt and] accepted the vast masses of the Indian people as his own flesh and blood?’¹⁶⁵ It may also be noted here that Tagore acknowledged ‘the freedom that the great European noble minds stood up for’: ‘the rights of man irrespective of colour and creed’, ‘their disinterested love of freedom that owned no geographical boundaries or national self-seeking’.¹⁶⁶ And in equal disdain, he said, modern Europe was ‘tempted out of her path [of greatness] by her pride of power and greed of possession... holding the banner of civilization of future’. Therefore, he painfully stated, the great western stream of civilisation ‘live under the delusion that they are free [but] are every day sacrificing... freedom and humanity to the fetish of nationalism’.¹⁶⁷ Tagore’s creative self ‘was a magisterial protest against the dominant theories of violence and counter-violence’, which also established an alternative discourse on freedom that the *samaj* provides and effectively rejuvenates the life of the nation under harness with all its inclusive social-cultural features (as discussed above).

Tagore’s understanding of freedom as this study shows is an engagement with the search for the ‘truth of oneness’ (unity in diversity) as inscribed in messages of Upanishads. Furthermore, as we have seen in the discussion can translate into the ‘harmony in feeling and action’¹⁶⁸ that engender possibilities of self-empowerment – of *atmashakti* (an apparatus of social justice). His pronouncement may sound too idealistic and also may not be the whole truth; nonetheless, Tagore’s conception and words of freedom is part of the contingent and historical development of ideas of truth and justice within the complex interweaving of the ‘superimposed’ modern nationhood and his quiet wisdom and practical action that assures the wellbeing of forthcoming generations.

Indeed, Tagore was a believer of freedom in its most robust sense: freedom from the slavery of taste and freedom from pride and prejudices. Most importantly, he stood for the cultures that respect the freedom of the so-called ‘other’. His was a call for creative freedom for a harmonious society where every individual would participate conscientiously in the collective knowledge and co-operate willingly to maintain an inner strength of the society.

¹⁶⁵ Rabindranath Tagore, ‘The Call for Truth’ [1921], in *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Volume 3, ed. by Sisir Kumar Das (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), pp. 412- 425 (p. 418).

¹⁶⁶ Tagore, *Nationalism*, p. 13.

¹⁶⁷ The excerpts are from Hay, ‘Rabindranath Tagore in America’ p. 446. For further study, readers may see, Tagore, ‘Nationalism in the West’, in *Nationalism*, especially p. 49.

¹⁶⁸ Tagore, *Sadhana*, pp. 100-159.

His non-dogmatic defence of Oneness that underscores his vision of freedom in human relationships across borders matches with Gandhi's. Four years after Tagore's death Gandhi revisited Santiniketan and said, "I started with a disposition to detect a conflict between Gurudev and myself but ended with the glorious discovery that there was none."¹⁶⁹ Both, the Poet and the Mahatma believed in freedom, which was based on the warmth of fellowship, which was liberated from prejudices and narrowness. Their deep understanding of the links between the diversity of centre and periphery, between multiple truths of tradition and modernity, the past and the present, the East and West, which underlines plural perspectives of freedom are Indian in character and are also suited to our contemporary dehumanising conditions. However, a question comes to mind. Tagore did not live to see that. Perhaps we will need to revisit them over and over again for Tagore's and Gandhi's ideals of freedoms are powerful and acceptable for our contemporary understanding of civil society and 'to make sense of the trauma of the present' in the larger global context today.¹⁷⁰ As this essay has attempted to present, Tagore's poetic principle of oneness not only underpins the basis of the expansive meanings of creative freedom(s) as perceived by the Poet through his intuition, experience, and knowledge. It also informs his practical works, such as the eradication of social exclusion through diverse educational models, which have contributed to the life of the nation and can continue to do so.

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¹⁶⁹ Bhattacharya, *Mahatma and Poet*, p. 35; Kripalani, *Rabindranath*, p. 339; Datta *Ahimsa*, p. 73.

¹⁷⁰ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 63.

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