

Tagore on Nation & Nationalism

With an Introduction

by

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Sankrityayan Kosambi Study Circle

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INTRODUCTION: RABINDRANATH TAGORE, THE TRAITOR

SUKANTA CHAUDHURI

Now that books have been recognized for the seditious and corrupting instruments they are, we can expose the greatest trafficker of these pernicious objects in modern India. His name is Rabindranath Tagore.

Everything in the man's life, work and background violates the values our nation holds dear. His family migrated from Bangladesh: the place had grown too hot for them after they sullied their Brahmin line by mingling with a certain community. A school drop-out without a degree, he founded an unauthorized school that brazenly defied the approved curriculum of the time (as indeed of ours). He started it on sound traditional lines, but it didn't take long to shed the mask. The misnamed ashram came to harbour aliens of all hues and faiths. "You buy bread from Muslim bakers," he wrote to a colleague; then, worse horror, "so what's your problem with Muslim students?" The place was also overrun with females. He not only educated the betis, which a gracious regimen might permit; he let them sing and dance in public, against all bharatiya decency, and

encouraged widow remarriage, even for his own son — following another mischief-maker from the same benighted province, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar.

When the government thought to tame the unruly province by splitting it in two — something done by the best regimes — he took to the streets, belting out incendiary songs and rousing the rabble. He was under constant police watch; but far from transporting him for sedition, the weak-kneed British never so much as summoned him to the local thana. He showed no gratitude for this clemency. When 400 people were shot in the interest of law and order — at the other end of the country, mind you — he staged an ‘award wapsi’ drama, returning the knighthood that the misguided British had gifted him.

But he had meanwhile got himself another award from Sweden, and used it to impress people. Here’s another puzzle to ponder. As a poet in Bengali, he could have churned out his stuff from Calcutta or his Birbhum village. What sinister motives made him traipse round the world, addressing gatherings everywhere? When he happened to meet a proper leader like Mussolini, he ended up all embarrassed about it. That was because of the wimps he hobnobbed with the rest of his time abroad — Romain Rolland, Hermann Keyserling, that shock-haired scientist Einstein: not the kind of people we would allow into JNU these days.

Some readers might not believe my account. “You are being unkind,” I hear them say. “Let the man speak for himself.” I will proceed to do just that. Let readers judge if every word does not damn him.

On nationalism, for instance: “Blindness, injustice and cruelty are being spawned through exaggeration and falsehood. In fact, this blindness is the basic malady of nationalism,” he writes in Bengali; and in English, “Have you not seen, since the commencement of the existence of the Nation, that the dread of it has been the one goblin-dread with which the whole world has been trembling? Wherever there is a dark corner, there is the suspicion of its secret malevolence... Every sound of footstep, every rustle of movement in the neighbourhood, sends a thrill of terror all around.” Every denizen of India must find such descriptions absurd.

Or again, on religious violence: “When people are blinded by illusion in the guise of religious faith, they can only kill or be killed.” Sometimes he really lets himself go: “India has not kept its religion pure and sacred, so religion has now become its greatest problem... People are killing each other mercilessly, like wild beasts, in the name of religion... Honest atheism is much better than the deluded horror of such religion.” What make-believe world can this be?

The talk of religious purity is disingenuous. He doesn't even keep his religions separate, so how can they remain pure? He imagines a family where one brother is a Christian, another a Muslim, a third

a Vaishnav — but instead of fighting, they live peacefully in an ‘auspicious and beautiful’ manner. Or consider the ending of the novel *Gora*, where the Hindutvavadi hero Gora learns that he isn’t even of Indian stock, but the orphan child of Irish parents. Instead of rejoicing that he has nonetheless imbibed the blessing of Hindutva, he abandons religion altogether. “He has no mother, no father, no country, no race or caste [jati], no name, no gotra, no god,” he feels. Hence he no longer fears pollution or loss of caste: “Today I am Indian. I have no conflict with any community, Hindu, Muslim or Christian. Every caste in India is now my caste: I can eat everyone’s rice.”

Tagore’s engagement with religion in general and Hinduism in particular was always dicey. He knew good Sanskrit and had the Vedas and Upanishads at his fingertips, but much good it did him. He inherited the monotheistic Brahmo reading of those texts, but didn’t stick to that either. His writings bristle with Puranic deities. He sees the figure of Rama the god built up, layer by layer, from the historical reality of Rama the man. In a word, he ends up challenging every conventional religious line. He has no faith in ritual, especially as inert adornments of a religion that has lost its core humanity. Temples hold little meaning for him: his god is more interested in the welfare of common people. This god has fled from the temple to “where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path-maker is breaking stones”.

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In fact, Tagore has had us all fooled: most of the time, he isn't spiritual at all. He keeps dwelling on "dumb hordes with bowed heads, their dimmed faces inscribed with the pain of a hundred centuries": Dalits ("By spurning human touch, you despise the god of humanity"), tortured prisoners ("Judgement's voice weeps silently, alone"), young girls raped and murdered ("No help, no remedy"). He turns positively bolshie in old age, recording "the fierce strife between those who starve and those who gorge, as the spoils of plunder pile higher in the hell we call civilized". There is even what reads suspiciously like a call to armed revolution: "I call to those preparing in every home to wage war with the demons."

Can such writings inspire the India we want to build? Shockingly, the chief custodian of this unedifying store is a Central university, itself his creation. We have even let him supply our national anthem, slyly disguised as honest Hindi. That was due to the wiles of India's first prime minister, to whom, as we now realize, the nation owes all its ills. But Tagore's real crony was that other dubious figure still often called the Father of the Nation. They bickered over all kinds of issues, yet showered each other with compliments: it was Tagore who popularized calling Gandhi 'Mahatma'. More crucially, when Gandhi's band arrived from South Africa, he sheltered them at Santiniketan when few people would have done so. Without that welcome, Gandhi might have returned to Africa, and Indian history proceeded differently.

SUKANTA CHAUDHURI

Rabindranath Tagore has much to answer for. We must not be disarmed by his fine words any longer.

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WHAT IS A NATION

The renowned French thinker Renan¹ has discussed what a nation is. To explain his opinion on this matter, we have to first clarify certain connotations.

It has to be admitted that there is no exact equivalent of the word ‘nation’ in Bangla. In common parlance, *jati* is used as shorthand for *varna* and is also used to connote what is called ‘race’ in English. We will use the word *jati* as a synonym for ‘race’, and not conflate it with what in English is called ‘nation’. The words ‘nation’ and ‘national’, when used in their original sense while writing in Bangla (without attempting translation), can effectively prevent confusion in meaning and expression.

We often use ‘National Congress’ and *Jatiya Mahasabha* interchangeably — but *jatiya* can mean any nationality, be it Bengali, Marathi, Sikh, or any other — it does not necessarily mean a pan-Indian nationality. The Madras and Bombay provinces have not used the root *jati* while translating the word ‘national’. They have named their local national-assemblies *Mahajansabha* and *Sarvajanik Sabha* respectively — Bengalis haven’t even bothered to innovate and feel relieved having named their congregation the ‘Indian Association’. This is where a critical difference can be observed between Bengali nationality, and others such as the

Marathi, which but proves the lack of sincerity in Bengali nationalness.²

The term *mahajan* is used in a specific sense in Bangla and cannot be deployed otherwise. The adjective *sarvajanik* cannot simply be converted to its noun form and used synonymously with ‘nation’. The French equivalents of *sarvajan* and nation denote very different things and one cannot be used in place of the other.

Instead of *mahajan*, the word *mahajati* might be accepted. However, one might need to use an adjective such as *mahat* before the word ‘nation’ in order to signify greatness. In that case, ‘great nation’ would need to be expressed by the redundant phrase *mahati mahajati* (great great Nation), and its opposite by the laughable *kshudra mahajati* (little great nation).³

However, I don’t feel any reluctance to accept the word ‘nation’ in its unchanged form. We have imbibed the idea from the British, and are prepared to acknowledge our debt by articulating it in English. Words such as the Upanishadik *Brahma*, Shankara’s *Maya*, and Buddha’s *Nibbana* are often kept unchanged in English translations, and they should remain so.

Renan says that there was nothing called ‘Nation’⁴ in ancient times. Neither Egypt nor China nor ancient Chaldea knew what a ‘Nation’ was. The Assyrian, Persian, or the Macedonian empires cannot be said to have belonged to Nations as such.

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The Roman Empire was closest to what can be called a Nation. However, before it could even properly crystallize into one, the empire broke apart due to the impact of Barbarian invasions. Its various pieces have, over centuries and through different conflicts, been able to rise as Nations, among which France, England, Germany, and Russia have emerged as the greats.

But why are they called 'Nations'? Why did Switzerland, with its diverse languages and nationalities, become a Nation? Why did Austria remain a mere province instead of growing into a Nation?

Some political theorists argue that kingship is fundamental to any Nation. Some heroic conqueror fights over and wins a land. This is soon forgotten by people, and the dynasty originating from that conqueror becomes centralized and gives birth to a Nation. England, Scotland, and Ireland were not united in the ancient past, nor had they any reason to be, but they were gradually brought together by the might of the king. Italy's transition to nationhood was so delayed because among its many small kings ruling over different principalities, none could become the centripetal figure and unify the entire country.

However, this rule does not hold true in all places. Switzerland and the USA have gradually evolved into Nations through increasing connections and without the agency of any royal dynasty.

Nations without kingship and those that have endured the destruction of kingship are not rare. The king's right is no longer paramount; the national right has gained precedence over it. What is the foundation of such a right; what are its identifiable characteristics?

Many argue that the unity of *jati* or race is the diagnostic trait of any Nation. The King, his deputy, and his council are all transient — race persists forever and its rights alone are genuine.

But, there is no country in Europe where inter-racial mixing hasn't happened. Everyone knows that racial purity is a chimera, be it in England, France, Germany, or Italy. It is impossible to determine who is a Teuton and who is a Kent now. Political theory doesn't care much about racial purity. According to it, one race has diverged into many, and many races have converged into one throughout history.

The same can be said with regard to language. Linguistic unity undoubtedly facilitates the forging of national unity, but not necessarily so. The language of the USA and England is the same, that of Spain and Spanish America is also one, yet they are different nations. On the other hand, multiple languages are spoken in Switzerland, which is still a single, unified nation. The will of the people is a more potent uniting tool than language; it has made Switzerland one in spite of its linguistic diversity.

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Moreover, it is incorrect to say that language constitutes the identity of a race. Prussia speaks German today, it used to speak Slavonic a few centuries back, as Wales uses English now and as Egyptians use Arabic.

A Nation does not obey religious unity either. Someone might be Catholic or Protestant or Jewish or atheist in personal life, but that does not have any bearing on their being English, or French, or German at the same time.

Ties of material interests are strong indeed. Nonetheless, according to Renan they are not enough to constitute Nations. Material interests might lead people to form an assembly with the village moneylender. However, nationalness requires more than this — it is predicated on a national consciousness; besides having a form, it has an inner essence. No one would actually draw an analogy between the moneylender and the motherland.

That geographic or natural boundaries comprise a prime reason for distinguishing a Nation is undeniable. The flows of rivers have carried forward races and mountains have obstructed them. But, can anyone draw on a map and show exactly how far the rights of a Nation should extend? Natural borders have never been final in human history. Mere territory, race, or language do not make up a Nation. Battlefields and workplaces may be founded on pieces of land, but mere land does not constitute the inner essence of a nation. That sacred mass which we call a ‘community of people’ has

humanity as its greatest constituent. The Nation churned out from the depths of history is a psychological substance, an intimate family, which is not restricted by the shape and size of its territory.

It is therefore evident that race, language, material interests, religious unity, and territorial demarcations are not the prime elements that go into the creation of the psychological substance called Nation. What, then, are its key components?

The Nation is a living entity, a psychological substance. Its inner nature consists of two things. One of them is situated in the past, and the other in the present. The former is the collective wealth of ancient memory and the latter is mutual consent, the will to live together — the will to duly protect the undivided and undiluted legacy that has been inherited. People are not moulded into who they are all at once. Likewise, Nations come to express themselves over time through a history of endeavour, sacrifice, and devotion. We have already, to a great extent, been formed by our ancestors. Our national consciousness is founded upon the vigour, greatness, and deeds of the past. The collective glory of the past and the collective will of the present, the precedent of having done great work in the past and the resolve to do so again at present — these are the solemn roots of a community of people. Our love shall be strengthened to the same extent that we have endured sacrifice and hardship for each other. We love the home that we have built together and which we shall bequeath to posterity. An ancient

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Spartan song goes like this: ‘We are who you were...we will be who you are.’ This simple wisdom contains the essence of the universal lore of all Nations.

The glorious memories of the past and the future ideals analogous to such memories — crying, laughing, and hoping together — are real things, the significance of which can be perceived in spite of diversity in race and language; their value far exceeds that of establishing courts or delineating borders. I mention crying together here because the bonds forged while collectively enduring hardship and suffering are much firmer.

The cohesion that is bestowed upon a group of people by their awareness of having sacrificed together in the past and their willingness do so again is what is manifested as a Nation. There is a past behind it, but its directly observable symptom is found in the present. It is nothing but general consensus — the clearly expressed desire to lead life communally.

Renan asks, now that we have banished regal rights and religious hegemony from the state machinery, what is left of it? People, the popular wish, and public needs. Many will argue that wish is volatile, that it is untamed and uneducated — to bestow the onus of protecting the ancient treasure that is a Nation’s nationality on wish alone is to wait for its gradual dissolution and eventual decay.

People's wishes change — is there anything on this planet that doesn't? Nations are not immortal. They had a beginning; they will have an end. Through the transformation of these Nations, a European community might get constituted as well. But no such symptom is visible at the moment. For now, differences between these Nations are good, they are necessary. They defend everyone's independence — one law and one ruler would only bring trouble for autonomy.

Through their diversity, and often through contradictory tendencies, different nations have aided in the expansion of civilization. Each has added a single melody to the great symphony of humanity; they have together synthesized an imagined majesty which is beyond the efforts of any one of them.

In any case, Renan says that human beings are not slaves to race, language, religion, or geography. It is when a community of patient and sympathetic people becomes conscious of its collective character that we get a Nation. This entity will need to prove its strength through individual sacrifices that are aimed at general well-being. So long as it is able to do so, it shall be known as true and have every right to survive.

I thus conclude this discussion of Renan's thoughts. Let us now prepare to apply his valuable insights to subsequent discussion on our own country.

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Translator's Notes:

1. Ernest Renan, nineteenth century French political philosopher and historian of religion. His 1882 lecture, titled “Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?” (What is a nation?), delivered on the 11th of March, 1882, at the Sorbonne, is being referred to here.
2. The grammatically rare word ‘nationalness’ seems to reach closest to the meaning that Rabindranath intended to convey through the linguistically hybrid term that he coined — *ন্যাশনালত্ব* (Nationalatva).
3. Tagore preferred not to translate the word ‘nation’ into Bangla. Later, he reluctantly suggested the terms *অধিজাতি* (Adhijati) and *রাষ্ট্রজাতি* (Rashtrajati) as possible Bangla equivalents for ‘nation’ in 1919 and 1932 respectively, which can be found as entries 1 and 12 in *বাংলা শব্দতত্ত্ব-সংযোজন* (‘Additions to Bangla Lexicology’), as included in *Rabindra Rachanabali* Vol. 28 Visva Bharati Edition.
4. The ‘n’ has hereinafter been capitalized wherever Tagore refers to the abstract idea of the nation or the conceptual entity of the nation-state, as he has done in his English writings on nation and nationalism, though not in a very consistent manner. Partha Chatterjee also points this out in his Sunil Sen Memorial Lecture, titled ‘Rabindrik Nation Ki?’ delivered in Bangla, at Rabindra Bharati University, on 29th April, 2003. See Partha Chatterjee, *Praja O Tantra* (Kolkata: Anushtup, 2005), 82.

First Published in 1901 as ‘নেশন কি’ (‘Nation Ki’) in *বঙ্গদর্শন* (Bangadarshan). The text has been taken from *Rabindra Rachanabali* Vol. 12 Birth Centenary Edition, published by the Govt. of West Bengal in 1961. Translated from Bangla by Suchintan Das.

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Our real problem in India is not political. It is social. This is a condition not only prevailing in India, but among all nations. I do not believe in an exclusive political interest. Politics in the West have dominated Western ideals, and we in India are trying to imitate you. We have to remember that in Europe, where peoples had their racial unity from the beginning, and where natural resources were insufficient for the inhabitants, the civilization has naturally taken the character of political and commercial aggressiveness. For on the one hand they had no internal complications, and on the other they had to deal with neighbours who were strong and rapacious. To have perfect combination among themselves and a watchful attitude of animosity against others was taken as the solution of their problems. In former days they organized and plundered, in the present age the same spirit continues — and they organize and exploit the whole world.

But from the earliest beginnings of history, India has had her own problem constantly before her — it is the race problem. Each nation must be conscious of its mission and we, in India, must realize that we cut a poor figure when we are trying to be political, simply because we have not yet been finally able to accomplish what was set before us by our providence.

This problem of race unity which we have been trying to solve for so many years has likewise to be faced by you here in America. Many people in this country ask me what is happening as to the caste distinctions in India. But when this question is asked me, it is usually done with a superior air. And I feel tempted to put the same question to our American critics with a slight modification, 'What have you done with the Red Indian and the Negro?' For you have not got over your attitude of caste toward them. You have used violent methods to keep aloof from other races, but until you have solved the question here in America, you have no right to question India.

In spite of our great difficulty, however, India has done something. She has tried to make an adjustment of races, to acknowledge the real differences between them where these exist, and yet seek for some basis of unity. This basis has come through our saints, like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya and others, preaching one God to all races of India.

In finding the solution of our problem we shall have helped to solve the world problem as well. What India has been, the whole world is now. The whole world is becoming one country through scientific facility. And the moment is arriving when you also must find a basis of unity which is not political. If India can offer to the world her solution, it will be a contribution to humanity. There is only one history — the history of man. All national histories are

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merely chapters in the larger one. And we are content in India to suffer for such a great cause.

Each individual has his self-love. Therefore, his brute instinct leads him to fight with others in the sole pursuit of his self-interest. But man has also his higher instincts of sympathy and mutual help. The people who are lacking in this higher moral power and who therefore cannot combine in fellowship with one another must perish or live in a state of degradation. Only those peoples have survived and achieved civilization who have this spirit of cooperation strong in them. So, we find that from the beginning of history men had to choose between fighting with one another and combining, between serving their own interest or the common interest of all.

In our early history when the geographical limits of each country and also the facilities of communication were small, this problem was comparatively small in dimension. It was sufficient for men to develop their sense of unity within their area of segregation. In those days they combined among themselves and fought against others. But it was this moral spirit of combination which was the true basis of their greatness, and this fostered their art, science and religion. At that early time the most important fact that man had to take count of was the fact of the members of one particular race of men coming in close contact with one another. Those who truly grasped this fact through their higher nature made their mark in history.

The most important fact of the present age is that all the different races of men have come close together. And again, we are confronted with two alternatives. The problem is whether the different groups of peoples shall go on fighting with one another or find out some true basis of reconciliation and mutual help; whether it will be interminable competition or cooperation.

I have no hesitation in saying that those who are gifted with the moral power of love and vision of spiritual unity, who have the least feeling of enmity against aliens, and the sympathetic insight to place themselves in the position of others will be the fittest to take their permanent place in the age that is lying before us, and those who are constantly developing their instinct of fight and intolerance of aliens will be eliminated. For this is the problem before us, and we have to prove our humanity by solving it through the help of our higher nature. The gigantic organizations for hurting others and warding off their blows, for making money by dragging others back, will not help us. On the contrary, by their crushing weight, their enormous cost and their deadening effect upon the living humanity they will seriously impede our freedom in the larger life of a higher civilization.

During the evolution of the Nation the moral culture of brotherhood was limited by geographical boundaries, because at that time those boundaries were true. Now they have become imaginary lines of tradition divested of the qualities of real obstacles.

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So, the time has come when man's moral nature must deal with this great fact with all seriousness or perish. The first impulse of this change of circumstance has been the churning up of man's baser passions of greed and cruel hatred. If this persists indefinitely and armaments go on exaggerating themselves to unimaginable absurdities, and machines and store-houses envelop this fair earth with their dirt and smoke and ugliness, then it will end in a conflagration of suicide. Therefore, man will have to exert all his power of love and clarity of vision to make another great moral adjustment which will comprehend the whole world of men and not merely the fractional groups of nationality. The call has come to every individual in the present age to prepare himself and his surroundings for this dawn of a new era when man shall discover his soul in the spiritual unity of all human beings.

If it is given at all to the West to struggle out of these tangles of the lower slopes to the spiritual summit of humanity, then I cannot but think that it is the special mission of America to fulfil this hope of God and man. You are the country of expectation, desiring something else than what is. Europe has her subtle habits of mind and her conventions. But America, as yet, has come to no conclusions. I realize how much America is untrammelled by the traditions of the past, and I can appreciate that experimentalism is a sign of America's youth. The foundation of her glory is in the future,

rather than in the past; and if one is gifted with the power of clairvoyance, one will be able to love the America that is to be.

America is destined to justify Western civilization to the East. Europe has lost faith in humanity, and has become distrustful and sickly. America, on the other hand, is not pessimistic or blasé. You know, as a people, that there is such a thing as a better and a best; and that knowledge drives you on. There are habits that are not merely passive but aggressively arrogant. They are not like mere walls but are like hedges of stinging nettles. Europe has been cultivating these hedges of habits for long years till they have grown round her dense and strong and high. The pride of her traditions has sent its roots deep into her heart. I do not wish to contend that it is unreasonable. But pride in every form breeds blindness at the end. Like all artificial stimulants its first effect is a heightening of consciousness and then with the increasing dose it muddles it and brings in exultation that is misleading. Europe has gradually grown hardened in her pride of all her outer and inner habits. She not only cannot forget that she is Western, but she takes every opportunity to hurl this fact against others to humiliate them. This is why she is growing incapable of imparting to the East what is best in herself, and of accepting in a right spirit the wisdom that the East has stored for centuries.

In America national habits and traditions have not had time to spread their clutching roots round your hearts. You have constantly

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felt and complained of its disadvantages when you compared your nomadic restlessness with the settled traditions of Europe — the Europe which can show her picture of greatness to the best advantage because she can fix it against the background of the Past. But in this present age of transition, when a new era of civilization is sending its trumpet call to all peoples of the world across an unlimited future, this very freedom of detachment will enable you to accept its invitation and to achieve the goal for which Europe began her journey but lost herself midway. For she was tempted out of her path by her pride of power and greed of possession.

Not merely your freedom from habits of mind in the individuals but also the freedom of your history from all unclean entanglements fits you in your career of holding the banner of civilization of the future. All the great nations of Europe have their victims in other parts of the world. This not only deadens their moral sympathy but also their intellectual sympathy, which is so necessary for the understanding of races which are different from one's own. Englishmen can never truly understand India because their minds are not disinterested with regard to that country. If you compare England with Germany or France you will find she has produced the smallest number of scholars who have studied Indian literature and philosophy with any amount of sympathetic insight or thoroughness. This attitude of apathy and contempt is natural where the relationship is abnormal and founded upon national selfishness

and pride. But your history has been disinterested and that is why you have been able to help Japan in her lessons in Western civilization and that is why China can look upon you with her best confidence in this her darkest period of danger. In fact, you are carrying all the responsibility of a great future because you are untrammelled by the grasping miserliness of a past. Therefore, of all countries of the earth America has to be fully conscious of this future, her vision must not be obscured and her faith in humanity must be strong with the strength of youth.

A parallelism exists between America and India — the parallelism of welding together into one body various races.

In my country, we have been seeking to find out something common to all races, which will prove their real unity. No nation looking for a mere political or commercial basis of unity will find such a solution sufficient. Men of thought and power will discover the spiritual unity, will realize it, and preach it.

India has never had a real sense of nationalism. Even though from childhood I had been taught that the idolatry of Nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity, I believe I have outgrown that teaching, and it is my conviction that my countrymen will gain truly their India by fighting against that education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity.

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The educated Indian at present is trying to absorb some lessons from history contrary to the lessons of our ancestors. The East, in fact, is attempting to take unto itself a history which is not the outcome of its own living. Japan, for example, thinks she is getting powerful through adopting Western methods, but, after she has exhausted her inheritance, only the borrowed weapons of civilization will remain to her. She will not have developed herself from within.

Europe has her past. Europe's strength therefore lies in her history. We, in India, must make up our minds that we cannot borrow other people's history, and that if we stifle our own, we are committing suicide. When you borrow things that do not belong to your life, they only serve to crush your life.

And therefore, I believe that it does India no good to compete with Western civilization in its own field. But we shall be more than compensated if, in spite of the insults heaped upon us, we follow our own destiny.

There are lessons which impart information or train our minds for intellectual pursuits. These are simple and can be acquired and used with advantage. But there are others which affect our deeper nature and change our direction of life. Before we accept them and pay their value by selling our own inheritance, we must pause and think deeply. In man's history there come ages of fireworks which dazzle us by their force and movement. They laugh not only at our modest household lamps but also at the eternal stars. But let us not for that

provocation be precipitate in our desire to dismiss our lamps. Let us patiently bear our present insult and realize that these fireworks have splendour but not permanence, because of the extreme explosiveness which is the cause of their power, and also of their exhaustion. They are spending a fatal quantity of energy and substance compared to their gain and production.

Anyhow our ideals have been evolved through our own history and even if we wished we could only make poor fireworks of them, because their materials are different from yours, as is also their moral purpose. If we cherish the desire of paying our all for buying a political nationality it will be as absurd as if Switzerland had staked her existence in her ambition to build up a navy powerful enough to compete with that of England. The mistake that we make is in thinking that man's channel of greatness is only one — the one which has made itself painfully evident for the time being by its depth of insolence.

We must know for certain that there is a future before us and that future is waiting for those who are rich in moral ideals and not in mere things. And it is the privilege of man to work for fruits that are beyond his immediate reach, and to adjust his life not in slavish conformity to the examples of some present success or even to his own prudent past, limited in its aspiration, but to an infinite future bearing in its heart the ideals of our highest expectations.

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We must, however, know it is providential that the West has come to India. Yet, someone must show the East to the West, and convince the West that the East has her contribution to make in the history of civilization. India is no beggar of the West. And yet even though the West may think she is, I am not for thrusting off Western civilization and becoming segregated in our independence. Let us have a deep association. If Providence wants England to be the channel of that communication, of that deeper association, I am willing to accept it with all humility. I have great faith in human nature, and I think the West will find its true mission. I speak bitterly of Western civilization when I am conscious that it is betraying its trust and thwarting its own purpose.

The West must not make herself a curse to the world by using her power for her own selfish needs, but by teaching the ignorant and helping the weak, by saving herself from the worst danger that the strong is liable to incur by making the feeble to acquire power enough to resist her intrusion. And also, she must not make her materialism to be the final thing, but must realize that she is doing a service in freeing the spiritual being from the tyranny of matter.

I am not against one nation in particular, but against the general idea of all nations. What is the Nation?

It is the aspect of a whole people as an organized power. This organization incessantly keeps up the insistence of the population on becoming strong and efficient. But this strenuous effort after

strength and efficiency drains man's energy from his higher nature where he is self-sacrificing and creative.

For thereby man's power of sacrifice is diverted from his ultimate object, which is moral, to the maintenance of this organization, which is mechanical. Yet in this he feels all the satisfaction of moral exaltation and therefore becomes supremely dangerous to humanity. He feels relieved of the urging of his conscience when he can transfer his responsibility to this machine which is the creation of his intellect and not of his complete moral personality. By this device the people which loves freedom perpetuates slavery in a large portion of the world with the comfortable feeling of pride of having done its duty; men who are naturally just can be cruelly unjust both in their act and their thought, accompanied by a feeling that they are helping the world in receiving its deserts; men who are honest can blindly go on robbing others of their human rights for self-aggrandizement, all the while abusing the deprived for not deserving better treatment. We have seen in our everyday life even small organizations of business and profession produce callousness of feeling in men who are not naturally bad, and we can well imagine what a moral havoc it is causing in a world where whole peoples are furiously organizing themselves for gaining wealth and power.

Nationalism is a great menace. It is the particular thing which for years has been at the bottom of India's troubles. And inasmuch as we have been ruled and dominated by a nation that is strictly

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political in its attitude, we have tried to develop within ourselves, despite our inheritance from the past, a belief in our eventual political destiny.

There are different parties in India, with different ideals. Some are struggling for political independence. Others think that the time has not arrived for that, and yet believe that India should have the rights that the English colonies have. They wish to gain autonomy as far as possible.

In the beginning of our history of political agitation in India there was not that conflict between parties which there is to-day. In that time there was a party known as the Indian congress; it had no real programme. They had a few grievances for redress by the authorities. They wanted larger representation in the Council House, and more freedom in the Municipal government. They wanted scraps of things, but they had no constructive ideal. Therefore, I was lacking in enthusiasm for their methods. It was my conviction that what India most needed was constructive work coming from within herself. In this work we must take all risks and go on doing our duties which by right are ours, though in the teeth of persecution; winning moral victory at every step, by our failure, and suffering. We must show those who are over us that we have the strength of moral power in ourselves, the power to suffer for truth. Where we have nothing to show, we only have to beg. It would be mischievous if the gifts we wish for were granted to us

right now, and I have told my countrymen, time and time again, to combine for the work of creating opportunities to give vent to our spirit of self-sacrifice, and not for the purpose of begging.

The party, however, lost power because the people soon came to realize how futile was the half policy adopted by them. The party split, and there arrived the Extremists, who advocated independence of action, and discarded the begging method, — the easiest method of relieving one's mind from his responsibility towards his country. Their ideals were based on Western history. They had no sympathy with the special problems of India. They did not recognize the patent fact that there were causes in our social organization which made the Indian incapable of coping with the alien. What would we do if, for any reason, England was driven away? We should simply be victims for other nations. The same social weaknesses would prevail. The thing we, in India, have to think of is this — to remove those social customs and ideals which have generated a want of self-respect and a complete dependence on those above us, — a state of affairs which has been brought about entirely by the domination in India 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.

Once again, I draw your attention to the difficulties India has had to encounter and her struggle to overcome them. Her problem was the problem of the world in miniature. India is too vast in its area

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and too diverse in its races. It is many countries packed in one geographical receptacle. It is just the opposite of what Europe truly is, namely one country made into many. Thus, Europe in its culture and growth has had the advantage of the strength of the many, as well as the strength of the one. India, on the contrary, being naturally many, yet adventitiously one has all along suffered from the looseness of its diversity and the feebleness of its unity. A true unity is like a round globe, it rolls on, carrying its burden easily; but diversity is a many-cornered thing which has to be dragged and pushed with all force. Be it said to the credit of India that this diversity was not her own creation; she has had to accept it as a fact from the beginning of her history. In America and Australia, Europe has simplified her problem by almost exterminating the original population. Even in the present age this spirit of extermination is making itself manifest, by inhospitably shutting out aliens, through those who themselves were aliens in the lands they now occupy. But India tolerated difference of races from the first, and that spirit of toleration has acted all through her history.

Her caste system is the outcome of this spirit of toleration. For India has all along been trying experiments in evolving a social unity within which all the different peoples could be held together, yet fully enjoying the freedom of maintaining their own differences. The tie has been as loose as possible, yet as close as the circumstances

permitted. This has produced something like a United States of a social federation, whose common name is Hinduism.

India had felt that diversity of races there must be and should be whatever may be its drawback, and you can never coerce nature into your narrow limits of convenience without paying one day very dearly for it. In this India was right; but what she failed to realize was that in human beings' differences are not like the physical barriers of mountains, fixed forever — they are fluid with life's flow, they are changing their courses and their shapes and volume.

Therefore, in her caste regulations India recognized differences, but not the mutability which is the law of life. In trying to avoid collisions she set up boundaries of immovable walls, thus giving to her numerous races the negative benefit of peace and order but not the positive opportunity of expansion and movement. She accepted nature where it produces diversity, but ignored it where it uses that diversity for its world-game of infinite permutations and combinations. She treated life in all truth where it is manifold, but insulted it where it is ever moving. Therefore, Life departed from her social system and in its place, she is worshipping with all ceremony the magnificent cage of countless compartments that she has manufactured.

The same thing happened where she tried to ward off the collisions of trade interests. She associated different trades and professions with different castes. It had the effect of allaying for good the

interminable jealousy and hatred of competition — the competition which breeds cruelty and makes the atmosphere thick with lies and deception. In this also India laid all her emphasis upon the law of heredity, ignoring the law of mutation, and thus gradually reduced arts into crafts and genius into skill.

However, what Western observers fail to discern is that in her caste system India in all seriousness accepted her responsibility to solve the race problem in such a manner as to avoid all friction, and yet to afford each race freedom within its boundaries. Let us admit in this India has not achieved a full measure of success. But this you must also concede, that the West, being more favourably situated as to homogeneity of races, has never given her attention to this problem, and whenever confronted with it she has tried to make it easy by ignoring it altogether. And this is the source of her anti-Asiatic agitations for depriving the aliens of their right to earn their honest living on these shores. In most of your colonies you only admit them on condition of their accepting the menial position of hewers of wood and drawers of water. Either you shut your doors against the aliens or reduce them into slavery. And this is your solution of the problem of race-conflict. Whatever may be its merits you will have to admit that it does not spring from the higher impulses of civilization, but from the lower passions of greed and hatred. You say this is human nature — and India also thought she knew human nature when she strongly barricaded her race

distinctions by the fixed barriers of social gradations. But we have found out to our cost that human nature is not what it seems, but what it is in truth; which is in its infinite possibilities. And when we in our blindness insult humanity for its ragged appearance it sheds its disguise to disclose to us that we have insulted our God. The degradation which we cast upon others in our pride or self-interest degrades our own humanity — and this is the punishment which is most terrible because we do not detect it till it is too late.

Not only in your relation with aliens but also with the different sections of your own society you have not brought harmony of reconciliation. The spirit of conflict and competition is allowed the full freedom of its reckless career. And because its genesis is the greed of wealth and power it can never come to any other end but a violent death. In India the production of commodities was brought under the law of social adjustments. Its basis was cooperation having for its object the perfect satisfaction of social needs. But in the West, it is guided by the impulse of competition whose end is the gain of wealth for individuals. But the individual is like the geometrical line; it is length without breadth. It has not got the depth to be able to hold anything permanently. Therefore, its greed or gain can never come to finality. In its lengthening process of growth, it can cross other lines and cause entanglements, but will ever go on missing the ideal of completeness in its thinness of isolation.

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In all our physical appetites we recognize a limit. We know that to exceed that limit is to exceed the limit of health. But has this lust for wealth and power no bounds beyond which is death's dominion? In these national carnivals of materialism are not the Western peoples spending most of their vital energy in merely producing things and neglecting the creation of ideals? And can a civilization ignore the law of moral health and go on in its endless process of inflation by gorging upon material things? Man, in his social ideals naturally tries to regulate his appetites, subordinating them to the higher purpose of his nature. But in the economic world our appetites follow no other restrictions but those of supply and demand which can be artificially fostered, affording individuals opportunities for indulgence in an endless feast of grossness. In India our social instincts imposed restrictions upon our appetites, — maybe it went to the extreme of repression, — but in the West, the spirit of the economic organization having no moral purpose goads the people into the perpetual pursuit of wealth; — but has this no wholesome limit?

The ideals that strive to take form in social institutions have two objects. One is to regulate our passions and appetites for harmonious development of man, and the other is to help him in cultivating disinterested love for his fellow-creatures. Therefore, society is the expression of moral and spiritual aspirations of man which belong to his higher nature.

Our food is creative, it builds our body; but not so wine, which stimulates. Our social ideals create the human world, but when our mind is diverted from them to greed of power then in that state of intoxication we live in a world of abnormality where our strength is not health and our liberty is not freedom. Therefore, political freedom does not give us freedom when our mind is not free. An automobile does not create freedom of movement, because it is a mere machine. When I myself am free I can use the automobile for the purpose of my freedom.

We must never forget in the present day that those people who have got their political freedom are not necessarily free, they are merely powerful. The passions which are unbridled in them are creating huge organizations of slavery in the disguise of freedom. Those who have made the gain of money their highest end are unconsciously selling their life and soul to rich persons or to the combinations that represent money. Those who are enamoured of their political power and gloat over their extension of dominion over foreign races gradually surrender their own freedom and humanity to the organizations necessary for holding other peoples in slavery. In the so-called free countries, the majority of the people are not free, they are driven by the minority to a goal which is not even known to them. This becomes possible only because people do not acknowledge moral and spiritual freedom as their object. They create huge eddies with their passions and they feel dizzily inebriated

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with the mere velocity of their whirling movement, taking that to be freedom. But the doom which is waiting to overtake them is as certain as death — for man's truth is moral truth and his emancipation is in the spiritual life.

The general opinion of the majority of the present day nationalists in India is that we have come to a final completeness in our social and spiritual ideals, the task of the constructive work of society having been done several thousand years before we were born, and that now we are free to employ all our activities in the political direction. We never dream of blaming our social inadequacy as the origin of our present helplessness, for we have accepted as the creed of our nationalism that this social system has been perfected for all time to come by our ancestors who had the superhuman vision of all eternity, and supernatural power for making infinite provision for future ages. Therefore, for all our miseries and shortcomings we hold responsible the historical surprises that burst upon us from outside. This is the reason why we think that our one task is to build a political miracle of freedom upon the quicksand of social slavery. In fact, we want to dam up the true course of our own historical stream and only borrow power from the sources of other peoples' history.

Those of us in India who have 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 tyranny of injustice.

When our nationalists talk about ideals, they forget that the basis of nationalism is wanting. The very people who are upholding these ideals are themselves the most conservative in their social practice. Nationalists say, for example, look at Switzerland, where, in spite of race differences, the peoples have solidified into a nation. Yet, remember that in Switzerland the races can mingle, they can intermarry, because they are of the same blood. In India there is no common birthright. And when we talk of Western Nationality, we forget that the nations there do not have that physical repulsion, one for the other, that we have between different castes. Have we an instance in the whole world where a people who are not allowed to mingle their blood shed their blood for one another except by coercion or for mercenary purposes? And can we ever hope that these moral barriers against our race amalgamation will not stand in the way of our political unity?

Then again, we must give full recognition to this fact that our social restrictions are still tyrannical, so much so as to make men cowards.

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If a man tells me he has heterodox ideas, but that he cannot follow them because he would be socially ostracized, I excuse him for having to live a life of untruth, in order to live at all. The social habit of mind which impels us to make the life of our fellow-beings a burden to them where they differ from us even in such a thing as their choice of food is sure to persist in our political organization and result in creating engines of coercion to crush every rational difference which, is the sign of life. And tyranny will only add to the inevitable lies and hypocrisy in our political life. Is the mere name of freedom so valuable that we should be willing to sacrifice for its sake our moral freedom?

The intemperance of our habits does not immediately show its effects when we are in the vigour of our youth. But it gradually consumes that vigour, and when the period of decline sets in then we have to settle accounts and pay off our debts, which leads us to insolvency. In the West you are still able to carry your head high though your humanity is suffering every moment from its dipsomania of organizing power. India also in the heyday of her youth could carry in her vital organs the dead weight of her social organizations stiffened to rigid perfection, but it has been fatal to her, and has produced a gradual paralysis of her living nature. And this is the reason why the educated community of India has become insensible of her social needs. They are taking the very immobility of our social structures as the sign of their perfection, — and because

the healthy feeling of pain is dead in the limbs of our social organism, they delude themselves into thinking that it needs no ministrations. Therefore, they think that all their energies need their only scope in the political field. It is like a man whose legs have become shrivelled and useless, trying to delude himself that these limbs have grown still because they have attained their ultimate salvation, and all that is wrong about him is the shortness of his sticks.

So much for the social and the political regeneration of India. Now we come to her industries, and I am very often asked whether there is in India any industrial regeneration since the advent of the British Government. It must be remembered that at the beginning of the British rule in India our industries were suppressed and since then we have not met with any real help or encouragement to enable us to make a stand against the monster commercial organizations of the world. The nations have decreed that we must remain purely an agricultural people, even forgetting the use of arms for all time to come. Thus, India in being turned into so many predigested morsels of food ready to be swallowed at any moment by any nation which has even the most rudimentary set of teeth in its head.

India, therefore has very little outlet for her industrial originality. I personally do not believe in the unwieldy organizations of the present day. The very fact that they are ugly shows that they are in discordance with the whole creation. The vast powers of nature do

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not reveal their truth in hideousness, but in beauty. Beauty is the signature which the Creator stamps upon his works when he is satisfied with them. All our products that insolently ignore the laws of perfection and are unashamed in their display of ungainliness bear the perpetual weight of God's displeasure. So far as your commerce lacks the dignity of grace it is untrue. Beauty and her twin brother Truth require leisure, and self-control for their growth. But the greed of gain has no time or limit to its capaciousness. It's one object is to produce and consume.

It has neither pity for beautiful nature, nor for living human beings. It is ruthlessly ready without a moment's hesitation to crush beauty and life out of them, moulding them into money. It is this ugly vulgarity of commerce which brought upon it the censure of contempt in our earlier days when men had leisure to have an unclouded vision of perfection in humanity. Men in those times were rightly ashamed of the instinct of mere money-making. But in this scientific age money, by its very abnormal bulk, has won its throne. And when from its eminence of piled-up things it insults the higher instincts of man, banishing beauty and noble sentiments from its surroundings, we submit. For we in our meanness have accepted bribes from its hands and our imagination has grovelled in the dust before its immensity of flesh.

But its unwieldiness itself and its endless complexities are its true signs of failure. The swimmer who is an expert does not exhibit his

muscular force by violent movements, but exhibits some power which is invisible and which shows itself in perfect grace and reposefulness. The true distinction of man from animals is in his power and worth which are inner and invisible. But the present-day commercial civilization of man is not only taking too much time and space but killing time and space. Its movements are violent, its noise is discordantly loud. It is carrying its own damnation because it is trampling into distortion the humanity upon which it stands. It is strenuously turning out money at the cost of happiness. Man is reducing himself to his minimum, in order to be able to make amplest room for his organizations. He is deriding his human sentiments into shame because they are apt to stand in the way of his machines.

In our mythology we have the legend that the man who performs penances for attaining immortality has to meet with temptations sent by Indra, the Lord of the immortals. If he is lured by them, he is lost. The West has been striving for centuries after its goal of immortality. Indra has sent her the temptation to try her. It is the gorgeous temptation of wealth. She has accepted it and her civilization of humanity has lost its path in the wilderness of machinery.

This commercialism with its barbarity of ugly decorations is a terrible menace to all humanity. Because it is setting up the ideal of power over that of perfection. It is making the cult of self-seeking

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exult in its naked shamelessness. Our nerves are more delicate than our muscles. Things that are the most precious in us are helpless as babes when we take away from them the careful protection which they claim from us for their very preciousness. Therefore, when the callous rudeness of power runs amuck in the broad-way of humanity it scares away by its grossness the ideals which we have cherished with the martyrdom of centuries.

The temptation which is fatal for the strong is still more so for the weak. And I do not welcome it in our Indian life even though it be sent by the lord of the Immortals. Let our life be simple in its outer aspect and rich in its inner gain. Let our civilization take its firm stand upon its basis of social cooperation and not upon that of economic exploitation and conflict. How to do it in the teeth of the drainage of our life-blood by the economic dragons is the task set before the thinkers of all oriental nations who have faith in the human soul. It is a sign of laziness and impotency to accept conditions imposed upon us by others who have other ideals than ours. We should actively try to adapt the world powers to guide our history to its own perfect end.

From the above you will know that I am not an economist. I am willing to acknowledge that there is a law of demand and supply and an infatuation of man for more things than are good for him. And yet I will persist in believing that there is such a thing as the harmony of completeness in humanity, where poverty does not take

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away his riches, where defeat may lead him to victory, death to immortality, and in the compensation of Eternal Justice those who are the last may yet have their insult transmuted into a golden triumph.

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THE NATION

The peoples are living beings. They have their distinct personalities. But nations are organizations of power, and therefore their inner aspects and outward expressions are everywhere monotonously the same. Their differences are merely differences in degree of efficiency.

In the modern world the fight is going on between the living spirit of the people and the methods of nation-organizing. It is like the struggle that began in Central Asia between cultivated areas of man's habitation and the continually encroaching desert sands, till the human region of life and beauty was choked out of existence. When the spread of higher ideals of humanity is not held to be important, the hardening method of national efficiency gains a certain strength; and for some limited period of time, at least, it proudly asserts itself as the fittest to survive. But it is the survival of that part of man which is the least living. And this is the reason why dead monotony is the sign of the spread of the Nation. The modern towns, which present the physiognomy due to this dominance of the Nation, are everywhere the same, from San Francisco to London, from London to Tokyo. They show no faces, but merely masks.

The peoples, being living personalities, must have their self-expression, and this leads to their distinctive creations. These

creations are literature, art, social symbols and ceremonials. They are like different dishes at one common feast. They add richness to our enjoyment and understanding of truth. They are making the world of man fertile of life and variedly beautiful.

But the nations do not create, they merely produce and destroy. Organizations for production are necessary. Even organizations for destruction may be so. But when, actuated by greed and hatred, they crowd away into a corner the living man who creates, then the harmony is lost, and the people's history runs at a break-neck speed towards some fatal catastrophe.

Humanity, where it is living, is guided by inner ideals; but where it is a dead organization it becomes impervious to them. Its building process is only an external process, and in its response to the moral guidance it has to pass through obstacles that are gross and non-plastic.

Man, as a person has his individuality, which is the field where his spirit has its freedom to express itself and to grow. The professional man carries a rigid crust around him which has very little variation and hardly any elasticity. This professionalism is the region where men specialize their knowledge and organize their power, mercilessly elbowing each other in their struggle to come to the front. Professionalism is necessary, without doubt; but it must not be allowed to exceed its healthy limits, to assume complete mastery

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over the personal man, making him narrow and hard, exclusively intent upon pursuit of success at the cost of his faith in ideals.

In ancient India professions were kept within limits by social regulation. They were considered primarily as social necessities, and in the second place as the means of livelihood for individuals. Thus man, being free from the constant urging of unbounded competition, could have leisure to cultivate his nature in its completeness.

The Cult of the Nation is the professionalism of the people. This cult is becoming their greatest danger, because it is bringing them enormous success, making them impatient of the claims of higher ideals. The greater the amount of success, the stronger are the conflicts of interest and jealousy and hatred which are aroused in men's minds, thereby making it more and more necessary for other peoples, who are still living, to stiffen into nations. With the growth of nationalism, man has become the greatest menace to man. Therefore, the continual presence of panic goads that very nationalism into ever-increasing menace.

Crowd psychology is a blind force. Like steam and other physical forces, it can be utilized for creating a tremendous amount of power. And therefore, rulers of men, who, out of greed and fear, are bent upon turning their peoples into machines of power, try to train this crowd psychology for their special purposes. They hold it to be their duty to foster in the popular mind universal panic, unreasoning

pride in their own race, and hatred of others. Newspapers, school-books, and even religious services are made use of for this object; and those who have the courage to express their disapprobation of this blind and impious cult are either punished in the law-courts, or are socially ostracized. The individual thinks, even when he feels; but the same individual, when he feels with the crowd, does not reason at all. His moral sense becomes blurred. This suppression of higher humanity in crowd minds is productive of enormous strength. For the crowd mind is essentially primitive; its forces are elemental. Therefore, the Nation is for ever watching to take advantage of this enormous power of darkness.

The people's instinct of self-preservation has been made dominant at particular times of crisis. Then, for the time being, the consciousness of its solidarity becomes aggressively wide-awake. But in the Nation, this hyper-consciousness is kept alive for all time by artificial means. A man has to act the part of a policeman when he finds his house invaded by burglars. But if that remains his normal condition, then his consciousness of his household becomes acute and over-wrought, making him fly at every stranger passing near his house. This intensity of self-consciousness is nothing of which a man should feel proud; certainly, it is not healthful. In like manner, incessant self-consciousness in a nation is highly injurious for the people. It serves its immediate purpose, but at the cost of the eternal in man.

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When a whole body of men train themselves for a particular narrow purpose, it becomes a common interest with them to keep up that purpose and preach absolute loyalty to it. Nationalism is the training of a whole people for a narrow ideal; and when it gets hold of their minds it is sure to lead them to moral degeneracy and intellectual blindness. We cannot but hold firm the faith that this Age of Nationalism, of gigantic vanity and selfishness, is only a passing phase in civilization, and those who are making permanent arrangements for accommodating this temporary mood of history will be unable to fit themselves for the coming age, when the true spirit of freedom will have sway.

With the unchecked growth of Nationalism, the moral foundation of man's civilization is unconsciously undergoing a change. The ideal of the social man is unselfishness, but the ideal of the Nation, like that of the professional man, is selfishness. This is why selfishness in the individual is condemned, while in the nation it is extolled, which leads to hopeless moral blindness, confusing the religion of the people with the religion of the nation. Therefore, to take an example, we find men more and more convinced of the superior claims of Christianity, merely because Christian nations are in possession of the greater part of the world. It is like supporting a robber's religion by quoting the amount of his stolen property. Nations celebrate their successful massacre of men in their churches. They forget that Thugs also ascribed their success in manslaughter

to the favour of their goddess. But in the case of the latter their goddess frankly represented the principle of destruction. It was the criminal tribe's own murderous instinct deified – the instinct, not of one individual, but of the whole community, and therefore held sacred. In the same manner, in modern churches, selfishness, hatred and vanity in their collective aspect of national instincts do not scruple to share the homage paid to God.

Of course, pursuit of self-interest need not be wholly selfish; it can even be in harmony with the interest of all. Therefore, ideally speaking, the nationalism, which stands for the expression of the collective self-interest of a people, need not be ashamed of itself if it maintains its true limitations. But what we see in practice is, that every nation which has prospered has done so through its career of aggressive selfishness either in commercial adventures or in foreign possessions, or in both. And this material prosperity not only feeds continually the selfish instincts of the people, but impresses men's minds with the lesson that, for a nation, selfishness is a necessity and therefore a virtue. It is the emphasis laid in Europe upon the idea of the Nation's constant increase of power, which is becoming the greatest danger to man, both in its direct activity and its power of infection.

We must admit that evils there are in human nature, in spite of our faith in moral laws and our training in self-control. But they carry on their foreheads their own brand of infamy, their very success

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adding to their monstrosity. All through man's history there will be some who suffer, and others who cause suffering. The conquest of evil will never be a fully accomplished fact, but a continuous process like the process of burning in a flame.

In former ages, when some particular people became turbulent and tried to rob others of their human rights, they sometimes achieved success and sometimes failed. And it amounted to nothing more than that. But when this idea of the Nation, which has met with universal acceptance in the present day, tries to pass off the cult of collective selfishness as a moral duty, simply because that selfishness is gigantic in stature, it not only commits depredation, but attacks the very vitals of humanity. It unconsciously generates in people's minds an attitude of defiance against moral law. For men are taught by repeated devices the lesson that the Nation is greater than the people, while yet it scatters to the winds the moral law that the people have held sacred.

It has been said that a disease becomes most acutely critical when the brain is affected. For it is the brain that is constantly directing the siege against all disease forces. The spirit of national selfishness is that brain disease of a people which shows itself in red eyes and clenched fists, in violence of talk and movements, all the while shattering its natural restorative powers. But the power of self-sacrifice, together with the moral faculty of sympathy and co-operation, is the guiding spirit of social vitality. Its function is to

maintain a beneficent relation of harmony with its surroundings. But when it begins to ignore the moral law which is universal and uses it only within the bounds of its own narrow sphere, then its strength becomes like the strength of madness which ends in self-destruction.

What is worse, this aberration of a people, decked with the showy title of 'patriotism', proudly walks abroad, passing itself off as a highly moral influence. Thus, it has spread its inflammatory contagion all over the world, proclaiming its fever flush to be the best sign of health. It is causing in the hearts of peoples, naturally inoffensive, a feeling of envy at not having their temperature as high as that of their delirious neighbours and not being able to cause as much mischief, but merely having to suffer from it.

I have often been asked by my Western friends how to cope with this evil, which has attained such sinister strength and vast dimensions. In fact, I have often been blamed for merely giving warning, and offering no alternative. When we suffer as a result of a particular system, we believe that some other system would bring us better luck. We are apt to forget that all systems produce evil sooner or later, when the psychology which is at the root of them is wrong. The system which is national to-day may assume the shape of the international tomorrow; but so long as men have not forsaken their idolatry of primitive instincts and collective passions, the new system will only become a new instrument of suffering. And because

THE NATION

we are trained to confound efficient system with moral goodness itself, every ruined system makes us more and more distrustful of moral law.

Therefore, I do not put my faith in any new institution, but in the individuals all over the world who think clearly, feel nobly, and act rightly, thus becoming the channels of moral truth. Our moral ideals do not work with chisels and hammers. Like trees, they spread their roots in the soil and their branches in the sky, without consulting any architect for their plans.

First published in 1922 as 'The Nation' in *Creative Unity*. The text has been taken from the Macmillan Edition of the same, published from London in 1922.

THE SUNSET OF THE CENTURY

(Written in the Bengali on the last day of last century)

The last sun of the century sets amidst the bloodred
clouds of the West and the whirlwind of
hatred.

The naked passion of self-love of Nations, in its
drunken delirium of greed, is dancing to the
clash of steel and the howling verses of
vengeance.

The hungry self of the Nation shall burst in a
violence of fury from its own shameless
feeding.

For it has made the world its food,
And licking it, crunching it, and swallowing it in
big morsels,

It swells and swells

Till in the midst of its unholy feast descends the
sudden shaft of heaven piercing its heart of
grossness.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

The crimson glow of light on the horizon is not the
light of thy dawn of peace, my Motherland.

It is the glimmer of the funeral pyre burning to
ashes the vast flesh, the self-love of the
Nation, dead under its own excess.

Thy morning waits behind the patient dark of the
East,
Meek and silent.

Keep watch, India.

Bring your offerings of worship for that sacred
sunrise.

Let the first hymn of its welcome sound in your
voice, and sing,

"Come, Peace, thou daughter of God's own great
suffering.

Come with thy treasure of contentment, the sword
of fortitude,

And meekness crowning thy forehead."

Be not ashamed, my brothers, to stand before the
proud and the powerful

With your white robe of simpleness.

Let your crown be of humility, your freedom the
freedom of the soul.

THE SUNSET OF THE CENTURY

Build God's throne daily upon the ample bareness
of your poverty
And know that what is huge is not great and pride
is not everlasting.

Originally written in Bangla on the last day of the nineteenth century. Translated by Tagore himself and first published in 1917 as 'The Sunset of The Century' in *Nationalism*. The text has been taken from the Macmillan Limited Edition of the same, published from San Francisco for the Book Club of California in 1917.

“When I get to hear that someone is trying to unearth my considered opinion on politics, society, and religion from my writings, I know for sure that his own opinion will inevitably be amalgamated with mine. Documentary testimony, when presented with an advocate’s interpretation, cannot be deemed to be evidence per se. Because the same evidence could be cited by the opposing counsel to argue the contrary. The reason behind this is selectivity: the specific meaning of an utterance depends on the specific use for which it has been selected.”

——— Rabindranath Tagore in *Kalantar*

Rabindranath Tagore (7 May 1861 — 7 August 1941) has been a defining presence in Bangla literature since the late nineteenth century. This cosmopolitan humanist was the first person from outside Europe to receive a Nobel Prize, and continues to be revered as a cultural colossus. Although Tagore is widely known for his poetry and fiction, his essays and speeches are of remarkable relevance as well. An ardent critic of nationalism, Tagore’s concern for the preservation of civilizational values and the progress of humanity, is more pertinent now than ever.

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This book contains three essays by Rabindranath Tagore, which trace the evolution of his prescient thoughts on nation and nationalism, namely ‘What is a Nation’ (translated from Bangla), ‘Nationalism in India’, and ‘The Nation’. It also contains his poem, ‘The Sunset of the Century’ and an introduction by Sukanta Chaudhuri.

