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**TAGORE ON SOCIALISM AND RUSSIA**

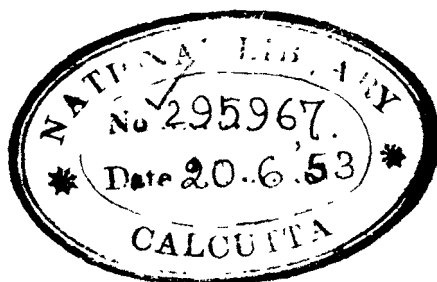
*by Hira Lal Seth*

# TAGORE

ON

## SOCIALISM AND RUSSIA

by  
HIRA LAL SETH



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TAGORE ON CHINA AND JAPAN

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## I

### **Socialism: Red and Green**

Lenin inaugurated socialism in Russia in 1917 and then in 1919, at the first congress of the Comintern sought to spread his ideals to the world. But before the formal establishment of socialism in Russia, many kinds of socialist theories had been propagated the world over. There were the British Fabians, consisting of labour and middle-class intellectuals, who held that they had come in the field as early as Lenin, and sought to spread socialist ideas among the working class of Britain, and also among middle classes. The leaders of the Fabians in the first instance were persons like H. G. Wells, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and George Bernard Shaw. The Fabians wanted to inaugurate socialism through the Parliament of Britain. There was also a British labour party, and a strong party of German social democrats headed by Bernstein and Kautsky, which differed from Lenin, was moderate, and its leaders carried an endless polemic with Lenin before and after the revolution of Russia.

But in the year 1920 another kind of socialism burst into headlines of the world. It was called "green" socialism as if the originators of this idea wanted a name which should stand in glaring contrast to "red" socialism. The "green" socialists were a Bulgarian peasant party. This party with more or less strength has continued to exist in Bulgaria up to our own days though now that the Reds have penetrated into Bulgaria, they might end its useless and prolonged existence. The Bulgarian "green" socialists said that they wanted socialism for the peasants. And for the brief period in which they came into power in 1920, they did introduce this socialism, freeing Bulgarian peasants from the

landlords' taxation, and giving them complete autonomy in village matters. They would not introduce socialism in the cities, and left the top-heavy administration of urban financial interests intact. Labour was none of their concern, they said. The Bulgarian people no doubt grew tired soon of this funny kind of socialism, and ended that regime. In the world outside its contribution was just nil. But they introduced one new word in the vocabulary of socialism—"green" socialism, and also (which is inevitable) were the cause of converting individuals here and there in the world to their viewpoint, though "green" socialist party was established nowhere else. Some individuals still continue to air the view that it is possible to have socialism in the villages, leaving the towns to stew in their own juice, and keeping *laissez faire*, capitalist economy, and all that intact in the latter places. These could be no doubt described as "green" socialists. But the Bulgarian "green" socialists have also given an opportunity to the unscrupulous political enthusiasts the world over to dub anybody as "green," who happens to have sympathy for the cause of the peasants.

Rabindranath Tagore was one of such men. Coming of a family which had roots in the village life, and had for many years settled in village, and having spent some part of his boyhood in the surrounding of peasants, Tagore betrayed great sympathy with these sons of the soil and their problems. But he was not a "green" socialist.

He was a contemporary of Lenin, and though survived him by several years, his fame in his own sphere had spread in the lifetime of Lenin. His works were published, and made familiar to the world about the time that some of the most monumental works of Lenin saw the light of day.

Being a contemporary of Lenin, he was refreshingly free from the (then) current fad of the contemporaries of Lenin, who were also intellectuals—of establishing or associating with rural socialist

parties. Unlike Bernard Shaw or H. G. Wells, Tagore did not become a Fabian, though he visited England frequently and also met these high dignitaries of literary world. He was similarly not a social democrat though he visited all social democratic countries, including that hotbed of social democracy—Germany.

He was not concerned with political rivalries or political labels, but with actualities of life. He was moved by what he saw around him, and fashioned his outlook accordingly. He grew up in peasant surroundings, attended village fairs, and composed songs about poverty and famine in Peasant India while he was still in his teens.

But even then the recurrent theme of his songs was national, and not limited to the peasants only. When he thought of their poverty, he was struck by the fact that poverty stalked the land all over India.

Thus Tagore learned to sympathise with peasants as a patriot, and as a nationalist, and not as a theoretical intellectual (Fabian), or as a peasant partisan ("green" socialist).

Nationalism in India, as in all countries of the East, and also of the Balkans has been primarily an economic urge, because of the fact that these countries are industrially backward and a foreign power, which politically dominates them, also reduces them to be a mere market for its own industries. Hence the nationalists of these countries are always in favour of home industries, and encourage the sale and use of home-grown products.

Economic nationalism had grown up in India long before the advent of the Congress in its modern radical shape, and there was a "buy Indian" movement. Tagore associated himself with this movement in the eighties of the last century. He even fathered such ideas as establishment of a weaving and match factory, and ran for some time the first Indian-owned steamer in one of Bengal's river lines.



Such ideas may seem to be mere money-making moves of a young land-owner, interested in the development of the resources of the country. But in the case of Tagore, he continued an incessant campaign on behalf of the legitimate political aspirations of the country. Mere money-making was the last thing which Tagore desired, for it so turned out that economically he gained very little out of these enterprises, and they were in fact given up as abject failures. Ideologically he gathered courage from these moves, and he was convinced that India must be made self-sufficient in consumers' goods.

The climax of this economic nationalism was reached in 1904, when swadeshi movement received the official blessing of the Congress in Bengal, and was started with the faith characteristic of the people of Bengal.

Tagore supported the swadeshi movement. This influx of popular patriotic sentiment gave him another opportunity to dwell at length on the causes of India-wide scarcity. Once before he had done that, and that was during the eighties, when at the village fair he had recited poems about the poverty in India. Then his thesis was that the condition in modern times was in strange contrast to that prevailing in the days gone by.

Now he elaborated that thesis, and narrated what the past condition was. Then the society played the role of the state, and there was a primitive kind of socialism. The wealth in this primitive socialist society was considered a joint and social trust, the wealthy built wells for the peasants, homes; arranged for their marriages providing them with funds. They compensated them if the harvest was bad and they asked them to share their table whenever any festivities were held in their own family circle. Thus they played the same role, which a trade union or collective farm organisation does today. The wealthy were a sort of collective farm officials, only the trade unions and collective

farms were non-existent then. The primitive man in his own primitive way socialised the property, and creature comforts were denied to none.

That society had ceased to exist. Times had changed now, but if the wealthy could, in keeping with modern needs, carry on similar voluntary liquidation of wealth (Tagore believed in that, scientific socialism does not) the discomforts of the needy would end.

But that had not been done by the society. The State—the British administration—had also not adopted the primitive socialist theories to fit in with modern needs. Tagore thought that blame rested with both the wealthy and the British administration.

Comparing this thesis of primitive socialism, which Tagore gave to the world in 1904 in his numerous writings, with his past poems, we not only find an elaboration of his theory of country-wide poverty, but also we note that economic nationalism which spread in the country had not influenced Tagore in such a way as to make him afraid of the wealthy. He was in favour of "buy Indian" movement and indigenous industries, but he warned the rich that they were not considering wealth as a social trust, and his support of swadeshi movement by no means implied that he was giving a blank cheque to the rich to ride rough-shod over the wishes of the poor.

This is important. Other men besides Tagore have praised the primitive socialism of Indian society. Gandhi is one example of that, but the Mahatma though he sympathises with the poor has not been able to persuade his wealthy friends to make their wealth a social trust.

That was not Tagore's method. He did not curry favour with the rich, not even (as Mahatma says) to get their support in the cause of freedom movement. He wished they would be on the side of the other non-violent fighters of freedom, but whether they joined such a group or not they could

not be absolved of the responsibility for the grovelling poverty in the country.

Was not Tagore drawing a picture of "green" socialism as it existed in the past society in which the village rich were mainly concerned with the peasants? Further, was not Tagore reviving "green" socialism in his own times by holding up such example before his countrymen?

Tagore was doing neither of the two things. The primitive socialism was mainly concerned with the villages, because most of India's population lived in villages; but its application covered the towns also. It was universal in its application. The trustees of wealth were not concerned with the welfare of the peasants only, but of all people; labourers, artisans, builders, carpenters, the workers in cottage industries all shared in the pool of the wealth.

The second question expresses a fear which is also unfounded. Tagore's Swadeshi Samaj was to be revived on more or less primitive socialist lines (with adjustments made in keeping with modern needs), and it was to embrace village as well as town life. That was why he had backed up establishment of factories. The duty of making wealth a "social trust" lay as much on factory-owners as on land-owners. His socialism may be based on idealism like that of Robert Owen, and it may not have been scientific socialism of Lenin, but it was certainly not "green". Tagore treaded the middle way between "red" and "green" socialism.

What was the result of the propounding of this neither "green" nor "red" socialist theory by Tagore on the political situation of the country? Was it insufficient to meet the economic problems of the country? Of course, this theory had its limitations. The modern class-conscious worker needed much more than was offered by Tagore. But in the existing conditions of the times, when nationalism stood sullen, and even cold and disinterested, while poverty was unmasked in all its

nakedness before it, Tagore is not to be too harshly criticised for embarking upon even this Robert Owenish mildly socialist programme based on primitive Swadeshi Samaj. Future historians would no doubt ask in amazement, why intelligent Congress leaders like Gokhale, Syed Mahmud, and others could not conceive of any plan to end the want and poverty in the country, while a rising poet, who had yet to make his name in poetic world, and who was only remotely known as a politician, had hit upon a novel, but all the same practicable and eminently sensible scheme of social reform.

When nationalism was thus indifferent towards the problem, the country owes a debt of gratitude to Tagore for having set political India thinking in this matter. If he had not even enunciated the theory of "neither-green-nor-red socialism" but simply stressed (what he had done before) that all India was being fast engulfed in the tide of poverty, even then the country had reason to be gratified with this man.

Apart from a sullen, and hostile nationalism, there is another reason why Tagore's efforts should not be judged harshly. And that was the chronic orthodoxy of the population. India is an orthodox country, and very illiterate. But it is also a very ancient country with its roots in the past. To convince an Indian about any modern political theory is an extremely uphill task. His mind is not political but religious, and very superstitious. He might think that you were talking at him, or trying to convert him to some this "infidel" idea or that. But present your political and economic theory in the background of the past, tell him that a primitive socialism existed in the Swadeshi Samaj, and he would be all smiles, and listen to your "heaviest" of economic principles. Tagore then by his Robert Owenish socialism paved the way for the later-day socialists. He laid the foundations, so that a superstructure might be raised on it by those who came after him.

Apart from this solid contribution to the cause of the left, Tagore in another way helped the later-day socialists. Terrorism was rampant in Bengal at that time, and while the British suffered some losses in personnel, the flower of the youth were either herded into prison or died in this pursuit of the will-o'-the-wisp idea of the service of the country by terroristic methods. The Congress, of course, discouraged such demented acts of violence, but that was not sufficient. The youth who were engaged in such anti-social activities could be made useful citizens, if they had anything constructive to do. This Tagore suggested when he put forward the scheme of Swadeshi Samaj. His advice to the terrorist youths was to get rid of anti-social notions, and work on the land to increase the wealth and productive capacity of India. A good many of terrorists in our own times have turned socialists. This was in no small measure due to the early efforts of Rabindranath Tagore.

Terrorism is often akin to right extremism and fascism. In trying to combat it, Tagore dealt a blow to fascism and rightism and deprived it of many of its recruits.

Tagore's own family has as a result of such efforts of the Poet produced one great socialist at least—his name is Sameyendranath Tagore.

Thus by one stroke Tagore laid the foundations of the framework of future socialist parties of India—repudiated "green" socialism, and saved many a youth, "green" in life, from the perilous path of violence.

## II

### The Tolstoy Touch

Tolstoy and Tagore resembled each other in more than one way, though the latter was product of a later epoch. Both leaned towards socialism,

though that socialism was not the same which was propounded by Marx and Lenin. Both by their early attitude paved the way for rise of socialism in their countries. There was a Tolstoy touch about all that Tagore said on the subject of socialism. Tolstoy in his lifetime was much concerned about removing the legal and other disabilities in the way of the serfs being recognised as free citizens in Russia. He depicted the condition of abject poverty to which they were reduced. His plays and his novels, such as *The Power of Darkness* and *War and Peace*, dealt with this subject. He had the satisfaction to see the serfs freed in Russia, though the backwardness and poverty among the peasantry continued to exist. For the removal of the latter evils his campaign continued. Tagore had no such satisfaction in the beginning of his campaign, though before his death temporarily at least some radical reforms aimed at uplifting the cause of the peasants were introduced by the Congress ministries.

Just as the vehemence with which Tagore criticised the condition of the peasants was identical to that exhibited by Tolstoy in matter of the serfs, similarly Tagore learned from Tolstoy, how a writer could air views on social reforms without directly associating himself with the political movement of the day. Tolstoy escaped the wrath of the Czars. Tagore also avoided following the example of Congressmen and did not go to prison. Then in Russia, there was no socialist movement in existence, only a violent underground terrorist movement disturbed the calm surface. Tolstoy criticised this movement. Tagore adopted the same policy towards the violent movement in Bengal.

Tolstoy, in spite of the fact that the Russian peasant needed most to be attended to, and his grievances redressed—enunciated a social reform policy, which embraced all Russia, urban or rural. This attitude was best exemplified in his novel *War and Peace*, wherein he pleaded for universal end of war and establishment of a reign of peace and

plenty on earth. This was a clear statement of his disavowal of any faith in methods or technique of "green" socialism.

Tagore was to renounce war as an instrument of policy later on—in the peace decade of 1920—30 and after, and thus plead for universal peace, but so far as the other contents of *War and Peace* were concerned—disavowal of faith in "green" socialism, he adopted the Tolstoy plan.

Some of the best works of Leo Tolstoy were published between the years 1855—70. This is also the period in which *Das Kapital* of Marx appeared, and also several other of the writings of that great socialist leader. Relentless controversy raged in socialist circle about the ideas of Marx. Bukunin, a Russian anarchist, was the most outstanding of Marx opponents. Tolstoy lived through this epoch of socialist controversy without taking sides one way or the other.

Years later Tagore faced with identical situation made a similar move. It goes without saying that the greater socialist movement would have been immensely strengthened if these two men had in their times thrown their lot with it. But for the moment we are not discussing the merits of their action, only pointing out the resemblance between the two. Tagore in this too acted in Tolstoy spirit.

Patriotism was a very strong point with Tolstoy. The serf movement was a politico-economic movement. Freedom of the serfs was a milestone in the history of Russian evolution towards democratic self-government. Important political parties of Russia had made the cause of the serfs a major plank of their political programme. Tolstoy by his campaign was aiding the movement of emancipation of the soviet people. Tagore had also converted his Swadeshi Samaj movement into a politico-economic one. He wanted political freedom as well as social change, though he was not a member of the Congress.

Of course, there was a Tolstoy touch about the Swadeshi Samaj also, but the idea originated not from Tolstoy's writings. It was essentially an Indian concept. The primitive socialism from which he drew his inspiration was part of Indian polity in the past.

Tolstoy drew inspiration from the past, but it was not the primitive socialism of India which inspired him. He was not so versed with India's past history or steeped in Indian tradition. His source of inspiration was Christ. When he pleaded for the serfs or for the amelioration of the lot of the peasants, he repeatedly conjured up before the Russian people and the ruling caste the picture of an ideal Christian society. Christ, he said, was a friend of the down-trodden, he would not like the abject slavish condition of the Russian serfs, peasants or labourers. A follower of Christ was bound to lift his voice against such systems. That is the reason why Christians should be socialists. Mass for the masses. That was the battle cry of Count Leo Tolstoy. That was why his political philosophy came to be known as Christian socialism. The outside world respects him as an advocate of the cause of the serfs, and as the author of that Bible of the pacifists and peace-lovers—*War and Peace*, but the socialists and liberals know him as the great exponent of the doctrine of Christian socialism.

In practice Christian socialism of Tolstoy and Swadeshi Samaj movement of Tagore converge on each other, there being much in common between the two leaders. Trusteeship of wealth is recognised in the Christian socialism also, and the rich are called upon to act as trustees. The *kulak* of the Russian village could not continue to function as of old, if Christian socialism was to be more than a mere catchword. He had to recognise his duties towards the education and welfare of the peasants.

However in practice the Russian *kulak* and the Indian landlord did not prove to be "easy"



converts. Both Tolstoy and Tagore lived to see their dreams (of converting such people to their ideas) finally shattered. Tolstoy thought that the *kulak* bloated with his wealth was ignoring the fundamentals of Christianity. He thought selfishness was on the increase, and it would go on increasing if the thoughts of the *kulaks* remained what they were.

Tagore expressed the same view in his articles written in support of the Swadeshi Samaj movement. He also regretted the spirit of greed abroad among the rich.

And yet how to offset this tendency among the wealthy—would mere denunciation of greed do? The two great men tried this, failed, and then tried another weapon. For some time they thought a good deal of trouble was due to industrialisation. If the village rich remained in the village, they could be ultimately persuaded to shoulder the responsibilities, which the Christian socialists and followers of Swadeshi Samaj urged. Once they went to towns and there established factories, they remained out of touch with the village life and forgot all about it. But Tolstoy and Tagore realised that industrialisation was inevitable. That was the only way to end backwardness. And in any case any protests against it were mere shouting in the wilderness. The latter even actually collaborated in the task of industrialisation.

It was always easy enough to blame the wicked Reds as being responsible for the hostility of the wealthy people towards Christian socialism, or Swadeshi Samaj movement. Some Christian socialists often indulge in such kind of talk. They believe that Red propaganda makes task of moderate socialists difficult.

But neither Tolstoy nor Tagore indulged in such heresy-hunting about the Reds. They would blame the rich for their failings but did not criticise the Reds.

Similarly, liberalism is an anathema to many

such Christian socialists, especially those who happened to be Roman Catholics. They feel that liberalism with its new-fangled ideas makes the rich more sophisticated, and less inclined to village civilisation. The result is uprooting of the village society. Tagore did not agree with this view. For him liberalism was not something which beguiled the rich but it was beneficial. No democracy could function without liberalism.

In Tolstoy's Russia liberalism alone was permitted to exist (to some extent) by the Czars. Most of the legislation about serfs was put through by these liberals.

In India liberals were not as progressive as in Russia or the West, but all the same Tagore did not consider it worth while to have a go at them.

His own socialism bore deep imprint of liberalism. He was brought up in a family where liberal ideas were not uncommon. His education was, not conservative and religious, but partly Western in keeping with liberal tradition. He grew young in an India in which liberalism was permitted to exist by the Government. Even Congress till the turn of the century was a liberal organisation. Liberalism seemed to be just then the rage in India, as in England.

No doubt Tagore presented his ideas in keeping with its tradition, though he referred to the framework of society, not in the immediate present, but in the distant past.

If Tagore had not had this training in liberalism before becoming a Swadeshi Samaj socialist, then the evolution of his ideas towards socialism would have been vitiated by conservatism. There is such a thing as conservative Christian socialist (or a conservative socialist with Swadeshi Samaj as his ideal, which is of course the same thing). Tagore would have been a conservative socialist. He would have aired his ideas on Swadeshi Samaj with caution, and not expressed all the ideas at once, but gradually, so

that his programme would have been spread over several years.

Influence of liberalism hastened his conversion to socialism, just as the spirit of nationalism also helped him to achieve the same end.

Tolstoy's role in Russia was made possible by the existence of liberalism. Like Tagore, the Russian leader had a liberal education, and grew to manhood in a Russia, in which liberal revolution was surging forward.

If liberalism had not been existent in Russia, and it had not exercised a strong influence on Tolstoy, he might have been a conservative (socialist) too. The genius of Tolstoy, the playwright and the novelist, would have been appreciated in any case. He could even without liberalism rise to the height of a Gogol, a Chekhov or Pushkin, but then he would have been a mere author—(though a great author)—but absolutely a back number in political field. That is what his countrymen—the people of Europe—and the generations which came after him would have thought about him. *War and Peace* if at all written would have been in a different setting and perhaps lacked its social importance for us. The same applies to other works of Tolstoy.

But history had chalked out a different course for these two men. They could not simply be "conservative socialists" and thus become back numbers in politics.

Liberalism and socialism were harmoniously blended in their minds, and each helped the other while neither could exist independent of the other.

The same is true of the influence of the communist movement on Tagore and Tolstoy. If both of them were the forerunners of that epoch in their countries, when socialist parties could exist without let or hindrance by anybody, and they paved the way for establishment of scientific socialism—they were also influenced by the ideas of the latter creed.

Both communism and scientific socialism were much in the air in those days (though not in

Tagore's India and Tolstoy's Russia), and these two great men who had of course a broad outlook had occasion to study the writings of Marx, and other socialists. They may not have been converted (as was the fact), but they at least learned to fit in their ideas in keeping with the economic situation of the time. Liberalism broadened their outlook and saved them from orthodoxy and conservatism. Scientific socialism gave them a sense of reality, so that they knew that the epoch in which they lived was fraught with radical economic changes.

They could talk with confidence about the change (which they wanted to be brought about on moderate socialist lines) because Marx had told them that change was inevitable. Suppose this sense of reality had not been instilled in them by Marxism, then they would have talked much like religious reformists. The emphasis on political and economic situation would have been absent. Ethical arguments alone would have been used to denounce the wealthy with the result that the entire Christian socialist or Swadeshi Samaj propaganda would have sounded mediaeval and dated. The influence of Marxism was less obvious, compared to liberalism, but it was there, and its permeation was subtle. What are the disadvantages of a purely religious movement which aims at improving the lot of the workers and the peasants? Has it not the backing of a powerful church? Does it not invoke the blessings of religion in its onward drive?

It has, but the backing of the church is not the same thing as achieving success even for some time. Unless a moderate socialist movement relies on realistic, economic and political slogans it continues to exercise the attention of a favoured few, but for the most it is only a philanthropic act, which like most such acts is admirable in itself but which cannot become a slogan for economic or political emancipation. Philanthropists are not emancipators.

Tagore and Tolstoy did not want to be dubbed as mere religious philanthropists. They thought

that they had a role to play in the social, economic and political revolution in their countries. Helped by the guidance of liberalism, nationalism, and Marxism, and strengthened in their convictions, because of their own unfailing love for the underdog, they manned the ramparts in their countries against conservatism and orthodoxy till the left parties took over charge from them, and incorporated their ideas into their own.

### III

#### **Class or No Class ?**

Both the Christian socialists of Tolstoy and Swadeshi Samajists of Tagore rejected emphatically the doctrine of class-war which forms the cardinal principle of scientific socialism. They were championing the cause of the workers and the peasants, but not as a separate class which had sharp antagonisms with the other class—the propertied people, but as members of a society, which had gone wrong, and which needed to be looked after, just as an ailing person needs constant watch and attention of a physician. They did not recognise existence of antagonism, which ever widened into an unbridgeable gulf. Christ, argued Tolstoy, could never countenance a Christian society in which there were two irreconciled and irreconcilable classes. An ideal Christian (socialist) society must perforce be a community of united citizens, who had no conflicts on economic issues, and did not think themselves as a separate entity from this group or that, but functioned as one united whole.

Class conflict, said Swadeshi Samajists, was absent in the days when primitive socialism reigned supreme, why begin it now, and disturb the relations of various groups in the community ? Why not narrow down the differences to bare minimum on give and take basis instead of accentuating them ?

The object of having a society in which no class antagonisms existed was a laudable one, but the two groups forgot that in this case wish was father to the thought.

Had not the classes changed much in course of ages? Even in Christ's time it was not possible for any oppressed of the world to live under the Christian flag, without having a propertied man as his neighbour, who continuously asserted his class superiority, and vaunted and displayed his ill-begotten and ill-kept wealth. As for the Indian primitive socialism, we have not any complete data available about the functioning of that society, though the Swadeshi Samajists assure us that it was pleasantly free from class domination taint and that the wealthy class, which considered itself to be trustees of wealth, did not show any class effrontery, or indulge in airs of superiority. Be as it may, times have changed since the days of primitive socialism, and as the Swadeshi Samajists say greed has become a dominant factor in the dealings of the wealthy class.

The Swadeshi Samaj socialist is annoyed that the rich refuse to give up their greed, and exchange their full-blooded ruthless economy of each for himself and devil take the hindmost, for the chimerical vision of a Swadeshi Samaj society in which they are to play the roles of the trustees of wealth.

He ought to as a shrewd student of human nature and the capitalist economy attribute this greed to the defective economic system, which places all the means of production in hands of one class and thus gives it an opportunity to dominate over the other. Having thus analysed the basis of capitalist economy, he should make it clear that so long as it lasted, it would bring into existence another class of the have-nots, who would unite to have that power for themselves. That is what Marx says. Capitalism increases its wealth and power, and the number of workers also increases

and their unity is cemented. The conflict between the two classes becomes inevitable.

Neither the Swadeshi Samaj nor the Christian socialist would argue that way. He raises a good deal of ballyhoo about capitalist greed and then starts talking about the "illness" that has overwhelmed the society, and the physician (social reformists) it needs. The "greedy" capitalist he considers to be a victim of this illness. This sounds very much amusing to the capitalist, who says in effect: "Very well, if I am ill, let me remain so, and amass as much wealth as I can, I would rather not be a 'healthy' man if I am to exist without this wealth. In any case, you can go on talking that sentimental stuff about my being ill and all that. It is immensely amusing, and it does not prevent me from my present occupation."

And so the ill continues to be ill, and the physician goes on trying his remedy of social reform.

To continue his argument about the "illness" of society the Swadeshi Samaj socialist points out that there are some defects in the workers, and the peasants too. They are not greedy. Of course, they are mainly victims and dupes, and are to be "pitied." But some of them are orthodox, superstitious conservative, and carry on discriminatory measures against untouchables, whom they consider to be a little beneath them. The social reformist wants to end the domination of the untouchable by both the workers and the peasants, and the capitalist, just as he wants to save the workers and the peasants from the greed of the last mentioned.

This kind of arguing in a circle, and apportioning the blame on all alike, with a slight emphasis on the "greater guilt" of the capitalist class, because of its "resources, education," and the fact that the others (according to the philosophy of the Swadeshi Samajists) look to the capitalist class to play its role of trusteeship of wealth, which the capitalist refuses to do—saves the Swadeshi Samajists from the

conundrum of championing one class to the exclusion of the other.

Though in this way the Swadeshi Samajist tries to dodge the existence of class conflict, it is not in terms of these efforts that the ultimate achievements of this group of socialists are to be judged. These efforts, however laudable they are, fail to satisfy the various classes.

There is one plank in their programme which deserves attention, and which has in fact received wide attention, and that is the vision of the classless society which they put forward before the people. Our programme of trusteeship of wealth, they say, would lead to a classless society.

The classless society is the goal of the Marxian socialist, and the anarchist too—this vision revives the sagging spirits of the worker. But how is it to be achieved? The Swadeshi Samajist merely dangles this glorious reward before the eyes of the people, just as the *mulla* goads on the pious with the promise of heaven in the next world.

If it were a question of lack of faith among the workers and the peasants about their future, then these promises could have any meaning and these people would have clung to them. But it is not now a question of substituting the new faith of Swadeshi Samaj for the old faith of religious solace. For the awakened and class-conscious worker both the faiths fall short of his needs. He could not be satisfied with them. He does not want mere faith, but facts and figures about future plans of progress. If classless society is to be the aim, you have to tell him, how it is to be achieved. The Swadeshi Samajists rely on curbing the elements of greed from the human society.

They presuppose the existence of a very high level of human civilisation, instead of actually creating it first. In this they are not far different from Gandhi who has been sometimes not unjustly pilloried for his limitless faith in non-violence, though lately the Mahatma has changed his outlook



and favoured an all-out offensive against the Axis Powers.

And they have no plan about the elaborate details of a system which they want to usher in. Even the anarchists with their crude plans of changing the system of society with unscientific violence could tell you that they have trade unions which would take over the administration of the factories from the capitalist and run them efficiently. In the village, they say, organisations of peasants would take over the control of the land. Shops and stores, banks and co-operative societies would be run by their employees. Prisons, and police work are to be abolished, since the administration is to be run on the basis of mutual co-operation. There is some vagueness about the last-mentioned plan, since it is not clear how crime would cease to exist even in a classless society, and criminal tendencies among the disgruntled elements of population vanish as if overnight without a well-planned and long-established system of education. Also the anarchists are rather over-optimistic when they declare that trade unions would take over the individual factories and run them without a centralised State to guide this socialisation for a long period in the wider interests of the community. But defective as this plan is, and in part even unrealistic, it is nevertheless a plan which would be carried out in an anarchist-conceived classless society.

The anarchists work patiently, though at crucial moments they act with maddening impatience. They have their trade unions wherever they have made any headway. In Spain before the Franco regime took over, there were two very strong anarchist trade unions—the *Federacion Anarquista Iberica* and the *Confederacion Nacional de Trabajo*—and they had their plans of classless society. In parts of Catalonia, these anarchists set up miniature classless societies. Similarly, syndicalists have their plan of a classless society, and they want syndicates of workers to run the administration.

The Marxists, who have of all these parties the sanest and the most practical plan of a classless society, want it to be established after a preliminary period of proletarian dictatorship. They believe that the society which has lived through the communist phase of the revolution would be ready to accept the classless administration based on mutual co-operation. They call it the "withering away" of the State. They educate the workers from the very beginning to get ready for this change. They purge relentlessly and methodically all opposition to such a classless society whether it emanates from the *kulk*, or the dispossessed rich. They train the workers in the art of self-rule, so that when the time comes, they should be able to take over administration (which in effect they run even now themselves) from the centralised workers' State, and run it themselves. The peasant has similarly an initiative for democratic self-rule in the communist system, which is not enjoyed by peasants elsewhere, and which gives him the requisite training for the running of a farm in a classless society. The farm is even now his own, but the guidance of a centralised State is there and that is proposed to be abolished in the final phase of the working-class revolution.

Crime is also liquidated by the communist State. The citizens participate in the court administration, and aid in police work. The latter task is sometimes entrusted to workers' militias, so that when the State withers away the system of mutual co-operation of citizens in prevention of crimes once established could be extended still further, and there could be less possibility of citizens turning towards anti-socialist activities. Thus like an artist the Marxian socialist lays peg upon peg and builds up the framework of a classless society over a period of tens even hundreds of years. To match this meticulous planning, what has the Christian socialist of Tolstoy or the Swadeshi Samajist of Tagore to offer? Tolstoy's followers among the peasants and the workers of Russia were numerous.

He had also following among the political parties, so had Tagore, who was known as Gurudeva in Indian political circles. But they have no organised unions or peasant organisations, which could play decisive role in a classless society.

Also their undefined classless society raised numerous conundrums, which had yet to be solved. For instance, how was the wealthy factory-owner who voluntarily shares his wealth with the workers to function in the new society? It is assumed that he would, on the advice of Tagorean socialists, share his wealth with workers, and further give up greed as an evil. But would he play a leading role in administration of the factory? Obviously he would. Then what is to prevent him from becoming greedy once again after a period of some years, the State having withered away as if overnight?

Similarly, the land-owners could give the land to the peasants, become pious for some time, but then suppose the land-owners band together, and being better organised, and better educated devise ingenious ways of using force to keep what they formally had. What was to prevent them from doing that? How were the peasant organisations to forestall and prevent such moves?

The case of the untouchables also raises a conundrum. The untouchables are given equal rights, but what proof is there that orthodoxy is finally purged from the hearts of the Indians where it has been rooted for centuries? Untouchability would not be stopped by legislation but by mutual consent. In case of legislation (and the executive to see to it that the legislation is brought into force and carried out), even if there has been no change of heart on part of a minority of people, the law continues to exist, and its inexorable pincers pin down any forward movement of the rebels of malcontents. But in absence of legislation and where mutual consent is the law, change of heart remains a problem. It is not a question of a few individuals here and there determined to revive untouchability who have to be

dealt with. For then the Swadeshi Samajists could of course practise social boycott of such individuals, and bring them to knees. It was a vast number of people all over the country who had to be dealt with as anti-untouchability bloc. These men could at any time resume oppression of the untouchables.

It is not known how crime could be dealt with in a Tagorean or a Swadeshi Samajists classless society. It is even more difficult to keep the criminal elements in restraint than it is to restrain the greed of the capitalist. The courts could also be not free from corruption since the "once wealthy" could exercise their influence to tip the scales of justice on one side or the other.

Education in a suddenly sprung up classless society of the above type would be yet another problem. Even if this society springs up in ten, fifteen or fifty years' time, it is doubtful if the Swadeshi Samajists could have the plans cut and dried to transform India educationally. Like the anti-untouchability sentiment, the orthodoxy about education is also deep-rooted in Indian mind. Even if the classless society adopts a uniform programme of education, what is there to prevent a large group of orthodox educationists from fussing about with hare-brained schemes of popularising Hindi, Sanskrit, Urdu, or any of the numerous other languages spoken over this vast continent?

Women's rights would also be presumably recognised in a classless society of the Swadeshi Samajists, but here again the main enemy is the incurable ignorance and orthodoxy of the people. Without a State legislation to prevent it, women's oppression would go on unchecked. "Mutual consent administration" would not prevent it. People would invariably lie about the condition of their women-folk, and make it difficult for the world outside the house four-walls to know the truth about the condition of the women.

Thus in the existing state of affairs in India class differences were here even more deep-rooted

than elsewhere. Even if the element of greed was ended by the Swadeshi Samaj socialists, in future there were no safeguards for the peasant and the worker. Being class-conscious, he did not accept the Tagore view that class differences did not exist, but that the society was only "ill", and could be cured of this illness. He did not see the cure prove its effectiveness, and even the classless society, which sounded at first an attractive catch-word, in practice turned out to be a very complicated affair with wheels within wheels.

#### IV

### The Village Green

If the classless society campaign of moderate socialist followers of Tagore turned out to be a fanciful notion far removed from reality, did they give up the entire campaign of socialism? They cannot do that and still continue to remain loyal to the village green—the paradise of all poets, philosophers, and reformists with a weakness for quiet surroundings of village, and the beauties of countryside. The village green attracts all these classes of people. They go there and calm their mind, and be in a better mood to think about the problems of the day. But suppose that (as is the case in the modern age) the poet goes to the village to adjust his mental equilibrium, and finds there not peace and calmness, but hell let loose in form of poverty, want, misery, sickness and the villagers illiterate folk increasing their despondency by interpreting all these calamities in terms of mythological sayings, and declaring in effect that the end of the world was at hand, and such signs as they saw around them, were only the first phase of that mighty deluge. How could one find peace in such surroundings?

One might perhaps do so, if one had not at any

time in life ever thought of politics or felt the prick of the social conscience. Then perhaps one could be blind to the dirge of the villages; and go about sightseeing or hunting (if thus inclined), and ignore the misery and poverty of villages.

Tagore was not built of that fibre. He could not give up thought of the village green, simply because some of the Swadeshi Samaj programme had seemed fanciful to the folks of the villages.

If classless society could not be practicable (as conceived by the Swadeshi Samajists), then there were other measures which could help in ameliorating the condition of the peasants.

One of these was the ending of exorbitant and at times utterly unreasonable demands of the moneylenders. Some administrative plans were afoot to curb the activities of the moneylenders, but these moves were not far-reaching, just as they are today, when in certain provinces, especially Punjab, rigorous measures have been adopted with the same end in view. Therefore then the need of unofficial action was greater than it is today. Tagore undertook this task during the swadeshi movement in Bengal. He said that the moneylenders were ruining the peasantry by advancing money to them at high rate of interest.

But in this case he thought that a village *panchayat* should be constituted to stop this practice, and educate the peasants who were more often than not mere victims of moneylenders, because of their being too illiterate, to demand their legitimate rights. It seems the *panchayat* could not be the right sort of administrative body to curb the activities of the moneylender, and this plan might have proved to be as unimpressive as the classless society scheme, but for the fact that here Tagore was concerned with the immediate present rather than the distant future. He did not talk about the *millenia* of the socialist age which he wished to usher in, but stressed more the immediate economic grievance of a famished peasantry. The money-

lenders may have been stiff in most cases, but at least the peasantry sympathised with Tagore.

They could also similarly understand his anxiety about the Government monopolising all the work of peasant welfare, especially when that Government happened to be a foreign regime. He had said that people looked too much to the Government. If the Government were to establish agricultural banks, and lend to the cultivators at a lower rate of interest, the cultivators would continue to be dependent upon the mercy of extraneous power. In this way he thought the chains of slavery of the country would be forged, and the cultivators would lose the independent initiative.

In another way Tagore fostered a feeling of sympathy for himself among the people of villages. That was by spreading Bengali literature, which, he said, had not depended upon official encouragement, so far as its growth was concerned. This literature was the result of spontaneous effort of the people of Bengal. At that time not many books were published in Bengali. Tagore was modest about its claims to compete with other languages, and thought that the literature in other languages had a variety, which was not to be found in Bengali literature. But in spite of it the Bengal people attached great importance to it, because it was the result of their own efforts, represented their own innermost sentiments. Its poverty was excusable, because it had a great future. And what is more it did not depend upon outside favour for its existence and growth—it depended only upon the people of Bengal.

He wanted the Bengal literary society to help him and his followers in the mission of spreading Bengali literature in the village green. He praised the activities of this society, because without any display of its achievements, it had been doing hard, serious work to gather information about the province and had thus added greatly to the store of knowledge of the people of Bengal. It was spreading the consciousness of Bengali unity in the country. It was

now high time that it should become more broad-based and have greater representation of the people in its ranks. He wanted it to establish branches in districts and every year hold meetings at its different centres.

Also a practical move in direction of making the village green a better place to live in was the formation of village unions (*mandlis*) after the provincial conference held at Pabna early in 1908 under the presidentship of Rabindranath Tagore. These unions were in no sense representative of one class, as the Marxist unions are, and could not be entrusted with the task of constituting a classless State, but they could certainly perform the immediate task set before them by Tagore.

He wanted the provincial conference to have branches in every district, and every village. The village union should be constituted, each with an executive body of its own. Its task was to guide village activities in day-to-day matters and it was also to provide the villagers with the needs of life. That was the way to foster a spirit of self-government all over the country. The union should also help in establishment of primary schools, schools for crafts, paddy stores, co-operative stores, and banks. Discussion about the affairs of the union should be encouraged among the villagers, and the union should have for this purpose assembly hall, where the villagers could gather. These halls should also be used for providing them with amusement, and the members of the union executive should settle the village quarrels through arbitration ; and thus help in creating harmonious relations between various factions.

Tagore made it clear that for the peasants to improve their lot, they should make collective effort for this purpose. Piecemeal work or individual efforts could lead nowhere. The land should not be cultivated separately by each peasant. Use of machines saved the labour, and should be encouraged. But the poor peasant may not have the wherewithal for purpose of mechanised agriculture.



This was the task of the union executive, who should be in charge of collective cultivation.

Tagore illustrated the example of this collectivised mechanised agriculture by saying that if canes were crushed by a machine on a co-operative basis the union would bear the expenses of procuring of a machine for this purpose. Another example was of jute fields. Jute is an important industry of Bengal and a very paying one if collectivisation was introduced in this industry. If jute fields could be pooled and cultivated together, the raw jute after the harvest could be pressed in a pressing machine purchased by the union for this very purpose.

The cow-breeding, production of butter and *ghee* could be carried on collective lines by the milkmen, and thus the cost of production could be lowered.

The weavers could have a co-operative society of their own which could introduce textile machinery of the latest type. The individual weavers could supply their labour and in this way production could be increased so that it could lead to the ultimate prosperity of all.

Here was a simple, though not very ambitious programme to begin with. It was what a British labour party or a German social democrat party might have adopted in the beginning of their political career. Given goodwill on both sides, there was room for co-operation between Tagorean socialists and scientific socialists, and communists (parties did not exist then) on this programme.

The communists in Russia after the emergency communism of early days adopted a policy, which Lenin called "new economic policy" or NEP. It was mild, and at times it appeared to benefit the capitalist class, but the communists ignored this criticism, and carried on their programme.

This was the NEP of Tagore. He was not a communist, but a mild socialist who had dreamed dreams of a classless society and *Swadeshi Samaj*, but found that most of these ideas were fanciful, and now like a practical socialist announced a NEP at

the Pabna political conference in 1908.

Lenin's NEP had a mixed reception. The *kulak* was up in arms against it. Certain sections of right socialists welcomed it, extreme left socialists denounced it as capitalistic.

Tagore's NEP fared none too better. The classes which sabotaged his previous plans of Swadeshi Samaj were now again the disturbing element. Even the Bengal middle class which had in the beginning adopted crude terroristic methods had recanted on advice of Tagore, and turned to constructive work, was now once again going into wilderness. Immediately after the Pabna conference, violent outrages were committed in Bengal on a hitherto undreamt-of scale. The work of Tagore's NEP was considerably held up.

Lenin's NEP suffered due to the opposition, underground, and surface. There was reduced production in several industries. Food situation was serious for some time. The people who had food-stocks had invariably rightist sympathies, and when the Bolsheviks demanded it for distribution among the people, the stocks were not given to them, and instead burnt by these very classes. Similarly cattle and live-stock were not handed over to the socialist State, and were instead coldly butchered by the reckless rightists. There were crises in Russia due to all this. Some had short-range effects, others had long-range repercussions on the entire future course of history in Russia. There was famine in certain areas of Russia in 1932, which was exaggerated considerably by the conservative press of the Western countries, which found in this a peg to hang upon their crude anti-soviet propaganda.

Difficulties arising in internal situation in Russia were effectively met with by that supreme political strategist, and realist Lenin in his lifetime. Yet other obstacles which continued to linger on were dealt with by his heirs, and successors in Bolshevik party. They had political power and ran the administration of the State. It was easy enough for them to do it.

The trouble was ended finally, though it took a lot of time to do so.

Tagore had not these advantages. He relied too much on Bengal's sense of solidarity and high-minded patriotism. There was patriotism to be sure in Bengal and sense of solidarity also, but in class matters, Bengalees like most human beings thought on sectional lines ; and that was why Tagore's NEP was given a deadly blow, while it was yet underway. The scope of his work was seriously limited by widespread opposition. The Poet-Socialist-Reformist tried to put village economy of Bengal on a sound footing. He could achieve only the barest of results. Bengal village life remained topsy-turvy, so that there have been recurrent famines in that province, the largest and the most terrible of such calamities has been only recently ended. It should go down in Indian history like the Black Death which raged in England in the middle ages. Black Death has come over Bengal laying desolate its village green, as well as the towns, depopulating the land, and robbing it not only of actual, but for some time it seems also of its potential wealth.

Among many other causes of Bengal famine, not the least important of these has been the inability of the Bengal land-owners to meet generously the terms of peasants as outlined by Tagore. They did not collaborate with *mandlis* (unions) and thus prevented setting up of a village economy in Bengal, which should withstand the storms and convulsions of all famines. The men and women of Bengal whose relatives had been victimised in famine have only to thank the obstinacy of these men, who were guilty of a crime against the nation.

## V

### Lenin and Tagore

The NEP was not the only point of resemblance

between Lenin and Tagore. There were other matters such as aversion to "green" socialism, which united them together. The two had also a broad humanitarian outlook, and were steeped in internationalist tradition. They differed in matter of class-war, proletarian dictatorship, and the classless society. The aims of Swadeshi Samaj socialism were sound, but in methods and planning it was substantially different from the communist doctrine. Tagore also avoided bitter and Walter-Duranty-like criticism of Russia. In view of this fact, where is one to draw a line of demarcation between the views of the two leaders? Are we to describe them as protagonists of the same cause, or of two different causes?

In these days of united people's front against fascism, when people as far removed from socialism as Winston Churchill and Roosevelt are being bracketed with Stalin—it would be a mere cloud-cuckoo land idealism to depict Tagore as an adversary of Lenin. The main reason why these leaders are being bracketed with Stalin is that they back up the cause of peace and internationalism. But Tagore espoused this cause to a very great extent. Throughout the Eastern hemisphere, where his influence was strong, he denounced wars of aggression. Even the last war, he thought to be a war between rival imperialisms. In this conflict his sympathies lay with England and France though he wanted them to shed their imperialist outlook. Therefore he was nearer to Lenin, and Stalin, and other soviet leaders than Roosevelt and Churchill, whose united front is of recent origin, and who were in the past not well-disposed towards Russia.

In defining his attitude towards soviet leaders, we should keep in mind that Russia honours not only living anti-fascist leaders, but it has great respect for the past writers, and *litterateurs*, who contributed their mite towards making this earth a better place to live in.

Lenin taught Russian people to respect the

literary giants of the past like Shakespeare, Gogol, Pushkin, Chehove and Tolstoy. Tagore, and Gorki, belonged to the latter epoch of writers in this list, but they were entitled to respect for the same reason.

Tagore is on the same footing as Tolstoy. He deserves respect of the Russian people not only as a great *litterateur*, but also as a socialist, who by his own brand of Christian socialism paved the way for the growth of scientific socialism. If Tolstoy occupies an important place in Russian history, the same is true of Tagore who enjoys similar position in the East.

Leninist criterion of greatness applies to Tagore as to Tolstoy, and so far as historical role in the cause of peace and socialism is concerned, he fulfils the Leninist condition in that respect also. Therefore Tagore could not be described as adversary of Lenin. He was nearer to the soviet leader because of his historic role in the East, and Leninism and socialism received added strength due to this contribution.

Leninism in the East enjoys popularity due to its attitude towards national question. It favours the freedom of the people of the East. Take away this hall-mark achievement of Leninism in the East, and Leninism ceases to have any meaning. Without freedom of the nations of the East Leninism is impracticable. In matter of the national question of the East, Tagore played the same role as Lenin. He enjoyed immense popularity in the East as a poet and philosopher of progressive age. The East considered him as a symbol of its greatness. To these millions of Eastern people in the Indies, Philippine, China, Burma, Siam, Indo-China, Malaya and India his voice ran out in a clearer tone asking them to demand their freedom. It was not a cry based on any racial theory. If Leninism bans racial antagonisms, Tagore also considers them as a taboo. He did not want racial war. That would have brought about another tyrannical regime. The Japanese, for

instance, were harping on this racial war theme. If it had come, it would have meant then, as it does today, the enslaving of the entire East.

Tagore prevented this tide of tyranny from sweeping over the Eastern hemisphere. Lenin analysed the imperialism in the East as the final stage of capitalism of Western countries. That capitalism wishing to expand was laying hands upon the countries of the East. Capitalist exploitation of its own working class was bad enough. The exploitation of working class in the "Empire" was worse. Tagore's analysis was based on the theory that it was wicked for one man to dominate the other, and fleece him of all his wealth. He saw the greed of the Western countries as clearly as Lenin did. He further declared it to be the greed of their capitalist class, but he did not employ the Marxist phraseology in explaining Western domination in the East. The reasons of his condemnation were ethical. They were socialist in the sense that Tagore was appalled at the exploitation of the underdog. It was not Marxian socialism, but of a much milder form (Christian or Swadeshi Samaj socialism).

Lenin appealed to the people of the East to free themselves from slavery and establish a socialist regime, and thus live like human beings, and not as mere instruments of another's will.

Tagore said that they should have freedom and an opportunity to develop all the great gifts which men had and which distinguished them from animals. That amounted to the same thing as Lenin said. The aim was evolution of man. It took two different courses after freedom, but the goal was same.

Elaborating further his national question attitude of the two men, we find that it gives us a pretty accurate picture of their feelings regarding all the various problems of life. The tension in their minds felt as a result of the abject slavery of the underdog, and worldwide permeation of imperialism, was same. Only Tagore, gifted with a more emo-

tional temperament and a sensitive nature of a poet, absorbed this tension in his poetic work, and portrayed in his writings the misery of his time, or he took up the Swadeshi Samaj work and tried to introduce a mild form of socialism. This tension also provoked him to warn those who dominated the underdog that it was not likely to last—that evolution of man would take its natural form—awakening would come, and barriers in way of freedom ended. Thus he also became a prophet about the future wars and revolutions. Lenin, who felt this tension, was gifted with an analytical mind, and was profoundly under the influence of Hegel and Marx. He became a world revolutionary, because he wanted to apply his analysis to the field of politics. He did not absorb this tension in poetry, but in action. He was also a prophet of wars and revolutions but he made prophecies on basis of his analysis, and not sentiments as Tagore did.

The prophecies of both these men proved to be true. They were respected for this reason. In some matters they made identical prophecies. For instance take the case of Japan. The Japanese had fought a war with Russia in 1904. Lenin had not forgotten that, but he thought that to be a war in which the Czarist regime was equally guilty with the Tokio regime. It was when Japanese invaded Russia after the revolution (and were turned out of Vladivostok only in 1921) that Lenin declared that Japan would one day become a menace to the peace of entire orient. He discounted any possibility of its attack on Russia but saw that the menace to China was acute. For this reason he started arming the Chinese armies, and rendering all fiscal, industrial and military aid.

American and British policy in the orient, he said, would remain one of the balance of power. They would back one day China, the other day Japan. This was to continue till the Jap imperialism unmasked itself in all its crudity.

Similarly Tagore in 1916 predicted the rise of

Japan as an imperialist power in the East. He saw Japan's neighbours being made a morsel of by that country and its jingoist ruling caste.

He warned the Chinese of the imminent danger to their homes and hearths and all that they held dear.

He further said that Japan had been encouraged by the Western Powers in the hope that it would let them alone in the East and allow their interests to flourish unmolested. But the Japanese turned against the very people who had helped and sheltered them.

He thought China could and would survive such a war of aggression. It has. He also warned the West against benefitting at the expense of China and India, and suggested that the Westerners should willingly forego their rights and privileges.

Lenin predicted that India and China would be the first converts to socialism. That has proved to be true in case of China, where a powerful socialist movement exists, and the socialists control part of China. China's final conversion to socialism may be a little delayed, but it is inevitable.

In India, similarly, socialism is an anathema. A powerful socialist movement headed by the Congress socialist party exists, and it has considerable majority in the Congress.

Calculation on basis of years is always a difficult affair, and Lenin never attempted it. But judging from the political temper of India, socialism may be installed in power in some parts of the country as soon as representative government starts functioning. The last democratic regime, though only nominally so, worked out plans, which were in part on model of a socialist State.

Tagore has attempted no prophecy about socialist State in the two countries, but he has often blessed these movements aimed at liberation of the underdog. In his messages to the Chinese republic, he spoke with an eye on the rights, and the functions of China's teeming millions in the future constitution.



of China. To him what mattered was not the China of its industrial gentry in a few such cities, as Chungking, Canton, Nanking and Shanghai, but the China of the countryside, the farms, the rickshaw coolie, or the labourer in the British, Japanese or American-owned mines. When he said "China shall rise again" out of the smouldering heap of the war, he had in view the mighty convulsions which were shaking the very fibre of the rural and down-trodden China. He did not say in as many words that red revolution would triumph in China, but it did not require a Jawaharlal Nehru to read these meanings into his writings. They were clear to the plain man in China. He asked him to go ahead and liberate the country not only from foreign yoke, but the gruesome, and hated poverty, which was eating into the vitals of China.

Similarly the plain man in India heard words of encouragement from the Poet-Sage-Statesman. In his political messages, his songs about fishermen, the pathetic appeals on behalf of famine or earthquake-stricken areas, it was possible to discern a glimmer of hope for the future destiny of the common man.

The Swadeshi Samaj movement had a faulty structure, and fanciful plans in some respects, but it was socialistic and Tagore's utterances in this respect embodied a clearly expressed hope that the victory in the future lay with the common man and socialism was inevitable in India.

But the most important prophecy of Lenin related to the world war. His view about imperialist domination in the East was but one aspect of his analysis of the evils of imperialism. He said that capitalism taking the shape of imperialism had not only dominated the greater part of the world, but also created a situation in which there was rivalry between various Powers. This rivalry was the forerunner of world war No. 2. But he also thought such an imperialist war could be converted into a people's war, as indeed it had been. Lenin's

prophecy holds good. What he said about prevention of war can also be made use of now by the different Powers. He said that the peace-loving nations should shed their imperialist outlook and unite together to prevent another war. This can be done now.

Tagore also foresaw a cataclysmic conflict in the world and gave a warning accordingly. He was critical not only of the imperialist greed but also of "uncontrolled science", which, he said, would prove the undoing of the world. He wanted the man to balance his mind between art (artistic pursuits and love of Nature) and science, for only then could he achieve progress, as well as have the wisdom to maintain that progress, and further increase it. He saw in the West a prevailing tendency towards exclusive devotion to science, and said danger was inherent in it.

Science then becomes, not the slave of man, but its master.

The mad pursuit of science has reached its climax in the Nazi German State, where they have produced a Wellsian array of scientific weapons such as the flying bomb, the jet-propelled plane, the wireless-driven tank, rocket-shell, and a host of other scientific weapons. This would spell the doom of the German militarists. According to Tagorean reasoning such a state of mind ultimately leads to decay.

The democratic countries have also perfected weapons of destruction, but so far these have been used in destruction of the aggressor. There is no tendency to let science dominate reason, and they are avoiding the methods of Nazi frightful warfare. Success would surely come to them for they listen to dictates of reason and not of science, which is in Tagore's words "proud of its superficial muscle."

In a message after the declaration of hostilities Tagore pointed out that for the imperialist Powers of West to make it a people's war, it was necessary to shed their imperialist outlook, and pursue a

democratic path in internal and external affairs.

This was in substance in keeping with Lenin's thesis of people's war, and it is hoped that the United Nations in order to bring the war to a speedy and victorious end would act in keeping with this tradition. Thus it would be observed that about war, peace, imperialism, the Far East and socialism (in India and China) the prophets, Lenin and Tagore, had foreseen the trend of events and given vent to their sentiments in terms which seemed to be identical.

Prophet Lenin's work was supplemented by his consort Krupsakya, who was an inveterate and indefatigable communist herself and well-versed in the philosophy of dialectical materialism. She analysed the world situation with as uncanny sense of observation which was displayed by her husband. She made prophecies about war, peace, imperialism, socialism and women's role in U.S.S.R. She died recently, and the mission of service of communism, and women's cause, which she had espoused, reached its completion on her death.

Tagore had no such prophetic consort. He did all the prophesying himself, and if in spite of all these shortcomings as compared to Lenin, he continued to utter true prophecies all his life, it redounds to his credit, and speaks volumes for his genius as a poet, which fact enabled him to see the danger ahead, even when the other people had not the faintest idea of its existence.

Longevity was a point of resemblance between Tagore and Lenin. The latter died when his life task of achieving revolution in Russia had been completed. He lived to see the tiny Bolshevik party rise to incomparable heights in Russia. Tagore died long after his name had become a byword among the people of the East. But even after death of Lenin, Leninism had spread all over the world. Hitler, who has talked so much nonsense, has in his unguarded moment made an observation about Leninism, which applies to

Tagore also. He said that Leninism would (if not checked by the German people, which they have failed to do) spread the world over just as Christianity and Buddhism have. If, he said, so far Leninism was only limited to Russia, that was not to be wondered at. Centuries after death of Christ, Christianity had only made headway in part of Europe, in the southern fringes of it. The same was true of Buddhism. It was only after a passage of a long period that these religions became widespread in the world.

It is not certain, if Leninism, an economic doctrine, and thus to be explained away in terms of reason, could have any resemblance with Christianity or Buddhism, based on mysticism, divine fervour, sentimentalism and some moral credos—and also it may not spread as slowly as these two religions have but there could be no doubt that ultimately it would become popular all over the world.

Hitler has further remarked that Lenin would be worshipped as a Christ or a Buddha. That is also a statement with a strange blend of truth and untruth. Lenin may be respected the world over but he would not be worshipped by his followers.

The same is true of Tagore, and his ideas of socialism and humanism. These ideas have now spread over the East and though they are being absorbed by scientific socialism, Tagore, like Lenin, is destined for immortality, and his utterances and prophecies would be respected just as those made by Lenin would be for ever enshrined in human memory.

## VI

### More Efforts

The Poet-Statesman, who resembles Lenin in many ways and who had his indomitable courage, had also like the Russian leader made repeated efforts to end the economic and political misery of

his country. Failures have not discouraged him, just as partial success did not make him giddy.

After enunciating the NEP at Pabna conference, Tagore tried, though not with great success, to give effect to these plans. Then followed a period of his literary fame soaring to unknown heights. He was awarded the Nobel Prize and the world acclaimed him as a great man—one of the greatest men of this century.

Here was something to be giddy about, yet he refused to be fooled by success.

Success and money provided him an opportunity to do greater social service. It was in 1914, that he purchased more land, this time in the village Surul, about a mile and half from Santiniketan. On this site later on was built the institution of Sriniketan. The object in purchasing the land was to make the place the centre of Tagore's educational and social service activity.

In 1915 Tagore took prominent part in the work of Bengal Social Service League. He was soon able to become a dominant figure in the society and planned a programme, which embodied among other things the following principles :

1. Teaching the illiterate reading, writing and arithmetic.
2. Pamphlets to be published in order to promote public health, initiate people in first aid, nursing, etc. Small classes were also to be held for this purpose.
3. Collective effort was to be made to end malaria, tuberculosis, dyspepsia and other diseases.
4. Methods were to be devised (and also given effect to) to prevent infant mortality.
5. Drinking water facilities to be provided in villages.
6. Co-operative credit societies to be established and people taught about its advantages.

7. Public help to be organised in case of famine, flood and epidemic.

Compared to Tagore's NEP of Pabna political conference, this was a mild programme, its sphere of action was also very much limited—the village or the vicinity of the village where Tagore had acquired new property, and become a benevolent landlord.

Such a mild programme, and harmless, so far as the interests of the propertied classes were concerned, which it left untouched, might have been accorded a good reception by the educated and landed classes of Bengal. They should have come forward to help Tagore with men to go to villages, and teach the illiterate reading, writing and arithmetic, to promote and spread the knowledge of public health, and to establish co-operative societies, and they should have also given money to make "collective effort" to combat tuberculosis and the kindred diseases, to dig wells, and provide drinking water facilities to the villagers, and finally to offer relief to the needy in case of such calamities as famine, flood and epidemic. But Tagore complained bitterly in some Bengali lectures delivered at the time about the way in which the educated classes cold-shouldered his schemes of social reform. Terrorism, of course, distracted their attention, but now another will-o'-the-wisp idea engaged the attention of the youth, and that was with spread of education, there was even greater scramble for posts and high offices. If these people had in this process not altogether forgotten the duties of social service, even their zest for posts could be pardoned, for after all not all people can live by their writings, poems, novels, or become scientists or technicians. But according to Tagore the "educated soared in the realm of thought, like clouds in the sky, far away from the earth." This was unpatriotic and betokened an utter ignorance of the state of affairs in the rest of the country. Tagore continuing the metaphor insists that these clouds should descend on earth in

shape of rain ; only then there could be unity between them and the Earth. In other words the educated classes should let others benefit from their education.

In spite of these appeals couched in a highly poetic language, the educated classes remained coy and distant. Perhaps it was because compared to our own times there were fewer educated persons at that time, and they considered themselves to be fortunate folk, too much "above" the common man to give any thought to him. In our own days it has not been difficult to get educated men to carry on the task of education in the villages under the Wardha scheme of education.

Tagore also visited North Bengal estate of his, and there tried to carry on the same task of social reform. Everywhere he saw appalling corruption and molesting of the peasants, who being weak and ignorant could not at all raise their voice in complaint or seek redress.

To the Bengal zemindars he urged that they should end their attitude of aloofness and help in the urgent task of rehabilitating the condition of the peasant. He had not however much hope of help, for the Bengal zemindar is one of the oldest products of the feudal system in India. It was when the "permanent settlement" was effected in Bengal, that the zemindars' existence came to be recognised in the feudal system of Bengal. This "permanent settlement" was an administrative land move, but it benefitted the zemindar and not the peasant.

Since then the Bengal zemindars had multiplied in numbers, and in strength. The peasants had grown weak, till their condition had become intolerable. "Weakness" in the words of Tagore "spread like an infection." Tagore insisted that this was not conducive to health in the village life. Healthy relations could grow only when there was equality of strength among the various groups, which constituted the village life. It was a misfortune to have the weak side by side with the strong.

The cause of the weakness of society was that it had kept the masses in an impotent state and thus weakened its own foundations. He asked the weak (the peasants) to become as strong as the zemindars by education, unity and co-operation.

Whether the weak having become strong could be tolerated by the already strong, is the question that easily comes to the lips on reading the above view of Tagore. Did it not mean that then class conflict was inevitable? Tagore hoped it could be avoided.

However, this attitude of strengthening the peasants was a far cry from his previous moves of social reform. It was a sign—a very potent one, of that change in Tagore's economic and political outlook which reached its climax in his visit to Russia, when he avowed faith in most if not all doctrines of scientific socialism.

More efforts at social reform were no doubt a very difficult job in the villages of that period, and certainly in part disappointing, but these influenced the outlook of the Poet, and changed it accordingly. Every time he emerged as a greater friend of the underdog.

## VII

### The Industrial Problem

Industrial problem had figured in the calculations of Tagore about social reform but industries were not so far widespread, and therefore of necessity, the interest remained centred over the rural economy though uplift in towns was also a plank of Swadeshi Samaj programme. Now with the growth of industry and also due to the fact that most of India's industrial labour was recruited from the villages, the problems of town and village became inextricably mixed up with each other. A sentimental socialist would have found in all this an



endless theme for raising the alarm cry of "cities exploiting the villages." That would have attracted considerable attention at the time, and it would have made the cities enemies of villages and *vice versa*. But Tagore who had previously favoured industrialisation and preached what was in effect a plan to introduce machine in the village life could not be guilty of raising any such sentimental ballyhoo.

What he wanted was to restore a balance between town and village life, so that harmonious relations could function between the two. This could only happen, when the village labourers whether clerks or factory hands were given a wage which could help them to lead a happy life. The villages and towns, he said, were there to benefit each other, and not forge new chains of exploitation. From the villages flowed "food, health and fellow-feeling" and towns in turn gave the gifts of "wealth, knowledge and energy."

But while he discouraged the town-dwellers from considering villages as mere recruitment centres for their labour power, he also cautioned the villagers. According to him life and joys of life had gone out of them, and they existed merely to continue an endless pursuit of wealth. The city was considered to be "office", and the village "home", but the joys of home were neglected and the worker became a morsel of "the hungry jaws of office." The latter place became the be-all and end-all of his life. He warned that mere acquisition of wealth or greatness does not lead to happiness.

He was then aiming at a sort of "strength through joy" movement, but without its necessary German corollary of worship of the cult of force or militarism. "Strength" was not to burst its bounds and become an instrument of oppression in the hands of the strong and thus lead to either exploitation of one class, or to the other evil of militarism. But it was to be used for self-defence, and increasing still further the productive capacity of society.

Joy meant enjoyment of good health, eating of good food, and imbibing the spirit of fellow-feeling in the villages, but this "healthy" state of body and mind was not to be limited to a favoured few, but was to be enjoyed by all; and the food was similarly to be made available to all. What was his attitude towards formation of industrial organisations to defend the cause of the workers? Was he in his preoccupation with "strength through joy" movement avoiding this crucial problem of the working class? Did he once again make an effort to appeal to the rich to treat the poor generously, and after that stop at that, hoping that that was sufficient for the time being? Of course, he still wanted to convert the rich, but since the formation of village *mandlis* and his talk about making the peasants as the landlords, a new element had been introduced into his outlook, and if he wanted peasants to be strong and have their own organisations he could not be averse to formation of any such bodies among the workers.

Indeed he wanted all the weak to become strong, and this applied to untouchables, labourers, peasants, office workers and the like, indeed all those people who found their rights being trodden upon by others.

What about international contact of the working class? Other working-class organisations existed in the world. Did Tagore encourage the contact of the Indian workers with those of foreign countries? It was primarily a matter for the industrial organisations of the country. So far as Tagore was concerned, he was an internationalist to the core, and during his travel in America and the Far East in 1916-17 he did visit the industrial organisations of those countries, and acquainted them with the conditions of workers in India. In his utterances there he gave vent to the sentiments that the struggle of the underdog everywhere was same, and the bonds between the oppressed of all countries were great. This of course included the industrial

organisations of India.

On his return to his homeland, he told the workers what he had seen there. The establishing of contact with the foreign workers was then purely a technical matter. In practice that link had been established, and Tagore who was a "twentieth-century minnesinger" of India, wandering in the countries of the East and in America, was the main link between the working class of India and that of the other countries of the world.

Few enlightened men of India with radical outlook went abroad in those days and came back with their head full of new ideas, and their eyes wide open. Tagore was one of such men and the great influence that he exerted over the working-class movement of the country after his return from abroad has yet to be assessed in its true extent. After the end of the first world war, and in the early twenties, there was an upward swing of the working-class movement in this country. Trade unions gathered strength, newer working-class organisations were formed, and if success fell short of expectations, it was because reckless adventurers like M. N. Roy had made their way into the political field, and were making a strange hush of the entire affair.

Tagore's influence on this working-class movement was profound, and though the Poet did not immediately rush into headlines as the other Bengali Roy did, his influence was subtle, and its extent remains unassessed till our own days.

Why it may be asked, if Tagore and enlightened nationalists like him had brought new ideas from abroad about working-class organisation, the nationalist movement did not take the matter into its own hands, and guide the working-class movement, making it the spearhead of the national struggle?

The nationalist movement was just then only emerging from the phase of nineteenth-century liberalism and taking on the Gandhian path. Its evolution was by no means swift, and at least nothing

comparable to that of dynamic minds like Tagore, who had expressed ideas far advanced to those of the nationalists of the time. It was obsessed with the idea of swaraj which it interpreted in entirely a different context and it had not yet thought of swaraj for the working class and the peasants which was indeed what socialism meant. The entire shape of the working-class movement in the country would have been different if the nationalist movement had adopted working-class slogans. Tagore had no influence over this movement. The leadership under which this movement worked came from the middle-class intelligentsia, who were for ever living in the realm of thoughts high up in the clouds, who refused to come down to earth in spite of the repeated advice of Tagore. How could he transform the mental outlook of this class, to which he had belonged for so long, and which he had now at last begun to disown in disgust having become conscious of an ever-widening chasm between him and the members of this class?

Tagore had then to deal with twin dangers to the working-class movement, the one was national inertia, and disinterestedness, which seemed to relegate working-class affairs to an endless oblivion, so far as the major struggle with Britain was concerned and the other was the adventurist moves of such men as Roy, who first encouraged the working-class movement and then left it.

What could he do? He was not an influential Congressman with some party behind him to bring about a decisive change in Congress attitude towards the workers. His moral influence was strong in Congress but so was Gandhi's. The Congress in dealing with class issues ignores the "moral influence," and calmly executes its own decisions, which are often actuated by the back-chamber moves of the dominant class.

Tagore was not a trade unionist with a large following, and equipped with technical knowledge about the working-class organisations. Though he

had some knowledge of certain working-class and peasant organisations in Bengal, that was in itself insufficient, and in any case these few organisations did not mirror the condition of other working-class parties. Even if they acted on Tagore's advice, millions of organisations in India remained outside the orbit of his influence.

But if the National Congress and the working-class organisations had officially no connection with Tagore, and thus could not accept his direct intervention, they at least adopted some of his ideas. The National Congress realised the need of winning over the working class, and the leaders of the workers' unions were awakened to the need of having connection with foreign working-class organisations, and also adopting national slogans. In past the working-class organisations were well led, for they had patriotic and sensible leaders, who cared for the cause of scientific socialism and nationalism. These organisations had even without Tagore's advice taken the right step and in certain matters were in advance of his ideas, but even they benefitted from the backing of a powerful personality like Tagore.

Thus Tagore exercised an all-round beneficent influence on the working-class movement, whether it was affiliated to the Congress or not.

## VIII

### **Unionism versus Socialism**

While nationalist inertia and opportunist adventurism, and hysteria were still rampant in the country, and menaced the working-class movement another danger lurked in the background. Some people finding that there was a swing in the country towards socialist movement consolidated their ranks, and formed a party called the Unionist Party. This party was rooted in the soil of the Punjab. Its protagonist was the then president of the Punjab Pro-

vincial Congress Committee—Mian (later Sir) Fazal-i-Husain. The Unionist Party aimed at smoothing out the differences between the peasants and the landlords, and together forming into a huge phalanx against (as they termed it) the danger of city capitalism and village moneylender and *Bania* class. This might have been described as an Indian version of Bulgarian "green" socialism, but for the fact that no socialism in the villages was envisaged, only a compromise in the existing state of affairs was aimed at. To the "green" socialist village landlordism is a real danger. He would leave city capitalism more or less intact. So would the unionist except for the fact that minor changes should be brought in that capitalism, to reduce its powers and give the village-dweller, the much desired (and undefined) "security" against it. The unionist did not revive an Indian "green" socialism, but instead borrowed some ideas from Tagore and others from Tolstoy, and socialist leaders, and adjusting them to suit their own purpose (with anti-urban capitalism as their main cry), they inaugurated the movement of unionism. The unionist movement had of course some success to begin with. But it was only in the villages. The worker of the cities remained unmoved by their anti-capitalist tirades. What was Tagore's attitude towards unionism? Could he agree to it? How could he do that when the very idea of unionism seemed to stir up an internecine strife between the town and the village and thus end the harmony which Tagore aimed at? If ever Tagore thought of a compromise between the peasants of the villages and the landlords (and he was then being fast disillusioned about the success of such a project), it was not to present a "united front" to the *Bania*, the moneylender, and the city capitalist. For Tagore city and rural capitalism were indistinguishable from each other, and both had to be reformed.

Also Tagore suggested the formation of village *mandlis* (peasant unions). But under the unionist programme it was not possible to have any such unions.

Tagore's plans of education clearly emphasised the need of giving greater education to the peasants. The unionists also introduced such education but they had in view the welfare of all classes, and not of the working class alone which needed it most.

Tagore wanted to end the oppression of the moneylender, but not at the same time make the peasant subservient to the co-operative banks, etc. He thought that the *panchayat* system could best restore the economic prosperity of the village. Altogether then the aims of Tagore and the unionists differed. Each pulled different ways. The unionists wanted to improve the lot of the peasants, but with landlords occupying the dominant place in their scheme of things.

But since the unionists were also at that time nationalists, perhaps, it may be said Tagore could have some soft corner in his heart for them. He might have welcomed a nationalist (even with belated nationalism) party taking up cudgels on behalf of the down-trodden villagers, and reviving life in the village green. Perhaps he might have. But if the unionists were nationalists in tone, they had not much else to recommend them. Supposing that they succeeded in converting the entire nationalists to their point of view, but even then a wide gap would remain between their ideals and socialism. The nationalist movement would not be converted to socialist ideas, but instead become part and parcel of a movement of village revivalism.

What price then the nationalism of the unionist? If unionism by itself failed to satisfy the Tagorean ideals of socialism, how could it in alliance with nationalism become altogether a different thing?

And that alliance too was short-lived. It was a mere coalition, the sort of thing that conservative, labour, and liberals put up in England, some time, and which (except on the present occasion when this coalition would last, till the teeth of Dragon Hitler are finally knocked out) lasts only for a short time. Tagore was shrewd enough to see that the Congress-

unionist *gleichschaltung* was to prove a short-lived one.

He did not then tie up himself with the unionists or set up a unionist party in Bengal.

Was it not possible to change the structure of Unionist Party? Could not Tagore exert a benevolent influence over this party by joining it, the protagonists of unionists would say? But here again Tagore faced the same trouble which was present in the case of the working-class organisations, and that was Tagore had no professional knowledge of the working of such organisations. He could not simply be "one of them", at least not feel like it, if he ever entered such organisations, and consequently he could not mobilise opinion in his favour, form parties inside the Unionist Party and finally convert it over to his viewpoint.

Also it seems the game was not worth the candle. The Unionist Party has now gained prominence in the Punjab though here again its supremacy is being challenged by the League. Then it had not much following, nothing like its present strength.

However, other poets and *litterateurs* joined the Unionist Party and strengthened it. One of these was Sir Mohammed Iqbal. But Iqbal, though he has won fame in India as an Urdu poet, was not a social poet, in the sense Tagore was. His poetry is mystic, spiritual, at times vaguely philosophical and metaphysical, but it has nothing to do with socialism. Iqbal was a protagonist of reaction, and of old order. It was easy for him to make common cause with the unionists, but not for Tagore.

He could both write poetry steeped in unionist spirit, and talk, and act like a unionist also—that depending upon the mood in which the Poet found himself.

Tagore could not do that. He could not write even poetry for the unionists, his poems were steeped in a different tradition. So was the case with his other writings.

As a poet and a writer, as much as a politician,



Tagore rejected the doctrine of unionism in all its implications.

## IX

### Tagore's Novels

Tagore has written numerous articles on the subject of *Swadeshi Samaj*, his NEP scheme enunciated at the Pabna political conference, and his later efforts about making Sriniketan the hub of socialist activity deserve attention in this connection. Even so he is pre-eminently a novelist and a poet and not a political writer. Though his belief first in moderate socialism and then in scientific socialism (except in certain matters in which he continued to differ from Marxian socialists) vitiated his entire literary outlook, and gave all his writings, especially those on political subjects, necessarily a political tinge; he did not gain fame as a political writer. This fact has been testified by Iqbal Singh, who is the latest addition to the list of Tagore analysts. Writing in *Life and Letters Today* he says:

" Tagore was not, of course, a political writer. Nor, on the other hand, was he an indifferent dweller of some remote mystical ivory tower. In some ways the growth, and clarification of his political ideas offers a true index of the development of political consciousness in India during the past fifty years. Like most intellectuals of his class, and age, he began by voicing his belief in the possibility of a synthesis of the so-called civilisations of East and West. It is interesting to record that one of his earliest essays takes up this theme and develops the argument at great length. In reality, this theme, which has found repeated expression in endless variations among the middle-class intelligentsia of India, was no more than a

wish-fulfilment, an intellectual reflex of the political expectations of Indian *bourgeoisie*. It was a wish-fulfilment, which it be added, was doomed to eternal frustration. Bitter political experience was to bring disillusionment; the rosy dream of a union between East and West was to meet a brutal awakening in the blood-bath of Amritsar. Tagore shared in the general disenchantment of his class. Shared, but with a significant difference. While this chastened mood of disenchantment was to lead many intellectuals of his generation into a *cul-de-sac* of revivalism or isolationism, with Tagore, it did the reverse: it turned his vision to wider horizons. As a result he began increasingly to identify himself with the struggle of the oppressed humanity everywhere. Above all he began to see in the stirring of the great masses of Asia, and Africa, the unfolding perspectives of a new civilisation where culture and happiness will not be the monopoly of a class or race, but the common inheritance of man. To have perceived this, in spite of the limitations and prejudices of his class and time, affords us, perhaps the final measure of Tagore's greatness."

Iqbal Singh in his analysis of the writings of Tagore makes it clear that the Poet was moved first by the idea of bringing about a harmony between the philosophy of East and West. Yet many people are moved by such an ideal, and they don't end by becoming internationalists. Their style of writing also remains unchanged. Examples of such men are Syed Ahmed Khan, and the early Congress Presidents. They all wanted synthesis of East and West but they died with this slogan on their lips, and refused to move with the times. They could not gain from experience, and rise above the narrow confines of their class as Tagore had done. They were destined to tread the path of peurile reformism

all their lives.

Tagore had begun his career not only as an advocate of synthesis of East and West, but also as a friend of the underdog. So that when he was disenchanted with the West, and saw its imperialism in all its nakedness, he was able to turn to socialism as the panacea of all ills. He realised that Eastern philosophy as such was no substitute for socialism.

And because he was a poet with a broad horizon, he did not think of socialism and radicalism in terms of his own country, but thought of the entire suffering humanity and felt his heart-ache for it.

Here one asks, having developed a socialistic and internationalist outlook, why did not the Bengal Poet write novels like H. G. Wells, turning out a *Kipps*, *Men Like Gods* or similar stories?

Tagore did not take the path of Wells because of the element of poet in him. He loved dramatic situations, character sketches, plots, and all the fine webs which poets with great sensitive nature like to weave. Wells was a student of science. Tagore of Nature. And Wells was no poet. Some of his characters are well-drawn, and destined for long life, but there is not the poetic touch of Tagore. Neither of the two could step into each other's shoes. (While Tagore was alive), their goal was one, but styles essentially different.

Tagore's novels resemble those of Tolstoy, with whom his political philosophy also coincided. Tolstoy was also primarily a creative artist and a dramatist. He loved the poor from very beginning, not because he had like Wells economically analysed the situation, but because of a moral sense of right or wrong. This was what his characters talked about. They were taken from real life, and not as in case of some Wells' novels from the world of fantasy. Tagore's characters were also of flesh and blood and realistic. He did not fly into the world of fantasy in such a way as to be shorn of all contact with the earth. Novel writing for Tagore and Tolstoy did serve a social purpose, but dramatic

incidents and poetic touches were not to be forgotten in search for a social ideal.'

Today other writers of left have improved upon the style of Wells and they write novels, primarily with social purpose, but keeping in view that dramatic interest should not be sacrificed. These dramatists are responsible for the productions of Unity Theatre in Britain, and also of Group Theatre, which serves the same purpose. Some of these left writers and dramatists like the late Earnest Toller, Hemingway, Stephen Spender, Federcio Garcia Lorca, Alexie Tolstoy, etc., are destined for immortality.

These men have turned out productions which are all things considered equal to those of Tolstoy, and in some cases even superior.

But in Tolstoy's and even in Tagore's time, such blend of socialism and high art in novels and dramas was unknown. These two were an example by themselves. But if Tagore was different from the modern left writers and novelists who have developed the art of social novel to perfection, he had also some differences with a novelist of his country who made his name towards the end of Tagore's life. This novelist was Mulkh Raj Anand, a young Punjabi, with distinctly socialist and Marxian leanings. He burst into limelight in the early thirties as a short-story writer, and then followed a succession of novels with a socialist message *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, *Two Leaves and a Bud*, *Village*, *Across the Black Waters*, etc. Most of these novels had a good press in England. In some cases their technique was considered faulty by some critics, but Mulkh Raj Anand is a young writer, and could of course adjust himself and bring about the desired change in his technique. For an oriental writer the Western technique and language are superb. Some of these novels, *Village* and *Untouchable* especially, would last long.

So far as the technique is concerned Tagore may be more poetic and dramatic than H. G. Wells,

but he has been often criticised by the Western critics for his faulty technique. Iqbal Singh in his article, *Tagore : A Determination*, quoted previously is responsible for the statement that *Gora* and *Wreck* of Tagore have dated to the point of being unreadable.

That may be so, but the social message of Tagore's novels is there. It is not of course expressed with the emphasis which Anand employs.

For that reason these novels of Tagore would be read, and even liked though it is true the time and scene are different, and they do not deal with the present-day India.

*Gora* is in some respects identical to Mulkh Raj Anand's *Village*, yet in other ways different. The hero of the *Village* is a Punjabi Sikh youth Lal Singh or "Lallu" as his mother fondly calls him. The portraits drawn deal mainly with village life, though some town figures are imported, but the background remains essentially that of village green. "Gora" on the other hand is town bred, who goes to village with Brayne Sahib's "Socrates"-like zeal to find out the truth about the village life. He comes across scenes of exploitation, epidemic, and such other bane of village life, which had awakened in Tagore the urge of spreading the ideals of Swadeshi Samaj. The village sojourn of "Gora" is not without its attendant calamities, which usually befall men with zeal to convert others to their viewpoint, especially when these "others" happen to be the "uncouth" lads of the village. "Gora's" enthusiasm for village reform gets him involved in a scuffle between a batch of students and some constables on a minor issue. He assists the students and helps them to drive away the police and consequently he is arrested and gaoled.

This incident is not far removed from similar experiences of "Lallu", though the latter is not gaoled. He offends the village hierarchy by doing what is usually considered to be a sacrilege and one of the seven deadly sins among the Sikhs—and that

is gets his hair cut. Thereupon the "devout" or the village seize upon him, blacken his face, put a garland of shoes round his neck, mount him on an ass, and make him wander all the streets of the village with street urchins, shouting themselves hoarse behind him, and passers-by and shopkeepers gaping on, and treating it as a mighty carnival of mirth and fun. "Lallu" never got over this insult, and consequently ran away from home and got himself enlisted in the army.

*Gora* also deals with the woes of the village women, with particular reference to the utterly disreputable system of dowry, which is the worst feature of *mariage de convenance* in Indian society. In the *Village* the same problem is discussed. Sketches of the women of Lal Singh's village are given, and there is that mighty *prima donna* of the village green, the mother of Lal Singh called "Gujri", whom her husband calls as "Gujrai", just as he calls "Lallu" as "Lal Singha".

In short then Tagore's *Gora* as well as Mulkh Raj's *Village* depict the village life as it is, with all its vividness and contrasts, the clash of East and West, and the panorama of Hindu, Sikh and Mohammedan tradition, which absorbs the attention of the villagers, keeping them utterly ignorant about the progress of science and civilisation. *Home and the World* is another Tagore novel dealing with village life, but it is not like *Gora* and could not be compared to any of Mulkh Raj Anand's books. There is no other important novel dealing with village uplift, though there are numerous short stories, essays and other articles on this subject from the pen of Tagore. One of these short stories, indeed one of his earliest attempts was *Clouds and Sunshine*. Here the role of "Gora" is played by young Susibushan, a law graduate, who is fired with a similar zeal; and who also like "Gora" suffers imprisonment for a very long period covering five years. The nearest approach that we have to Susibushan in Anand is the young Master of Arts in his

book *Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts* but that hero of Anand is not fired with the zeal of village reform, but is shown as a victim of dire poverty among the lower strata of educated classes. The Master of Arts suffers much more than Susibushan and ultimately dies a tragic death.

Obviously, in spite of the striking resemblance between certain features of *Gora* and *Village*, there is a lot of difference between the writings of Mulkh Raj Anand and Rabindranath Tagore. If the latter had only written more *Goras* he might have gone down in history as a great socialist novelist. As it is we could only say that some of his novels have a socialist message to give like those of Tolstoy.

But the main difference is in characters. Tagore's heroes are middle-class youths who view social affairs in villages and towns in a reformist spirit no doubt, but it is a detached class outlook which vitiates their entire philosophy of life. They don't speak as members of a class-conscious proletariat.

Mulkh Raj Anand's characters are proletarians, peasants, coolies, sons of peasants, lumpen proletariat youths. They speak out their heart about the woes of their class. There are, of course, the money-lenders, the tea-farm proprietors, the *sahebblags* and the village landlords in Anand's novels, but these men are exposed for what they are worth. Their victims heap contempt on them, and knock the bottom out of their calumnies. If Tagore is India's Tolstoy, then Mulkh Raj Anand is Gorky or Alexie Tolstoy, the young Russian writer, who figures so much in the present soviet writers' front against fascism.

Tagore could not be the socialist novelist like Mulkh Raj Anand, because it was long after his best novels had appeared that he avowed faith in some of the doctrines of scientific socialism. Even then he could not entirely shake off the influence of his class.

To the posterity, then, the important thing

about Tagore the Novelist is not what he has said in his novels. That has been since then said with greater force by others; nor the way he has drawn his characters. Others have drawn better characters in their novels. They are also not very much amazed at the poetic element in his novels. They give him credit for it. That is what ranks him among great poets. But others have such achievements to their credit.

What they like about Tagore, and would continue to do so, is that keeping in view the limitations in which he found the society (including himself) at that time, he was able to lift his head high up, and undertake the task of propagating moderate socialism in his novels.

He could sit in the ivory tower of mysticism, and write sentimental and mystical novels, full of either romance or spiritualism or both. That could be easily done, but Tagore did not do it.

As a poet, Tagore used many of his poems to represent the poverty and misery of his age. He began this talk with his early youth songs about village poverty, thereafter he used this medium of expression quite often. He thought this was the one way to end the poverty of the village. Tagore summed up the role of the poet in the village struggle in the following oft-quoted passage in his book *City and Village* :

“Our object is to try to flood the choked bed of village life with the stream of happiness. For this, the scholars, the poets, the musicians, the artists, have to collaborate, to offer their contributions.”

Tagore not only followed this golden rule all his life, but persuaded others at Sriniketan, with similar scholarly, poetic or artistic tendencies, to employ all the romances of their art in bringing to a successful end the struggle of the toilers of our age. Sriniketan sings this song at particular occasions, and it gives some idea of the cause to which the inmates of that institution have dedicated





## X

### The New Civilisation

Russia is the heaven of all socialist novelists, indeed all socialists to whichever walk of life they belong. They take pilgrimage to it at one time or other of their life, if they happen to have succeeded in literary and artistic pursuits, and collected enough money to proceed to that Mecca of the left. Some go there with carping spirit, like Andre Gide and H. G. Wells. While there they never try to shed their narrow intellectualism or class mentality and view the soviet civilisation as one giant experiment in human development. They instead remain confined in the narrow four-walls of their own prejudices, and on their return let loose an effuvia of unrestrained criticism of U.S.S.R.

Yet others go to Russia, with partial understanding of its problems, see the life there, remain unconvinced or half-convinced, and promise to come back again. Of this kind of men is George Bernard Shaw who paid a visit to Russia in the early years after the revolution, promised Lenin to come back again after ten years, and though Lenin was no more, Shaw fulfilled his promise, went, and came back pleased with what he saw. Thereafter he was less critical of U.S.S.R.

And finally there is that set of novelists who have a broad sympathy with the cause of socialism—who want to study Russian experiment in detail with an open mind. These men do not view the Russian life with tainted prejudiced outlook, and consequently they benefit from soviet example and come back all smiles, though they may not have become whole-hogging socialists in this process.

Rabindranath belonged to this later category of novelists. He went to Russia, when the tide of first five-year plan was on. The period of unrestrained enthusiasm, and emergency communism was over. The Russian leaders were in all seriousness

attending to the task of eternal reconstruction, for there were the centuries-old debris of social prejudice, and orthodox sentiments to be cleared up. Russia was coming of age.

The cynics would say that if Tagore had gone to Russia, he would have seen the Russian purges and executions, and come back disillusioned with the Russian life. That is mere wishful thinking. When the Russian revolution broke out Tagore was away in America and the Far East, had occasion to hear and read detailed chronicle of the internal situation in Russia, and this means that both the unfavourable and favourable accounts of Russian revolution were brought within his knowledge. Not many papers in America were fond of soviet ideas and this is also true of Japan, which has been and is still the hotbed of anti-soviet propaganda in the world. If anything Tagore was presented with a predominantly dark picture of U.S.S.R., with only white specks here and there.

If then he wanted to take a hostile stand against Russia—unthinkingly hostile—what was there to prevent him from doing that, unless it be the qualms of conscience, which most conservative and White critics of Russia never seem to feel? Further when he returned to India he was in a country where newspapers and public men (including that doyen of all Bengal, Deshbandhu Chitranjan Das) were shrieking anathemas against U.S.S.R. Indian newspapers carried stories about religious atrocities in Russia, which even White counter-revolutionaries might have felt shy of spreading among the people.

Altogether in India, the air was thick with anti-soviet propaganda, and the great Bengali Poet lived in this atmosphere for quite a long time, before visiting U.S.S.R. He had time to weigh the pros and cons about Russia, and he dismissed all such anti-Red propaganda as mere bunkum, and proceeded to Russia with an open mind.

As man of letters, Tagore naturally exhibited tendency towards the soviet literature and also

wished to study the system of education prevailing in U.S.S.R. He was struck with the contrast between the progress achieved in this direction in Russia—a free country and India—another country tied to the apron string of a foreign Power—Russia like India had a population teeming with illiterates. To educate such a population spread over a vast continent without the elementary means of communications was no mean task. Yet the Russians achieved it. How was all this achieved? What was that Russian system of popular education which had so much revitalised the soviet life? Should it be emulated in India? Of course, yes, said Tagore, when he returned to India having studied the soviet system. He was addressing Sriniketan about his impressions of U.S.S.R.

He told his audience that the old system of popular education was not all that one could desire. The facilities of teaching, which are available today, were absent then, and modern science and knowledge were non-existent. The education was spread on a small scale, and there were fewer comforts and conveniences. The rest of the country no doubt imbibed this spirit of learning though not as thoroughly as one might wish. Religious functions or those pertaining to social affairs chiefly served an educational purpose. The village life was all the richer for it, and this was at least a partial attempt at unification of the country.

That old system, continued Tagore, had been relegated to a limbo of forgotten things, and what was introduced in India today in its place amounted to just nothing. Only a small privileged class benefitted from the new system of education. These few people who become educated live in separation from the rest of the country. They are like small islands in an ocean of ignorance. The result of the foreign education has been that these people live like aliens in their own land. This is a great tragedy for the society, and it has led to paralysis so far as progress in vital affairs is concerned. A few

voices every now and then are raised urging ending of the evil. But these fail to move any one. In no other country of the world, there is intellectual starvation to the extent it is found in India.

In another place in one of his letters from Russia, he contrasted the condition of education in two countries. He considered the caste divisions, religious conflicts, unemployment, economic stringency, all due to this lack of education. The Simon Commission Report after castigating the Indian people for many of their sins admitted that Britain had not educated India as it ought to have done. He suggested the visiting of Simon Commission to Russia before it came to India.

A new education tax had been imposed in Bengal. This struck our Russian pilgrim to be entirely novel, and unwarranted procedure. He said that the tax which was imposed to raise money for education should be paid by all. It was amazing that the exchequer could bear all the expenses for its administration of law and order, but not for education of the people. Was not the new tax a proof positive of Indian indifference to the cause of education?

Even this was a mild reproof to Indian educationists compared to what he had in store for them in another letter from Russia. He declared in it that he had reached the age of seventy, and so far, he did not lose patience. He had watched the appalling ignorance in the country, and shifted on the blame to "our destiny." Apart from that he continued himself the work of education, with the small resources he had. This was on a small scale and done in the teeth of opposition, and indifference of the people of India. There was only verbal patronage from the authorities who, however, neither supplied funds nor experts.

But now, Tagore wrote, he was getting angry. There was reason for it. He had seen with his own eyes the achievements of U.S.S.R. If he had not done that, he could never believe it, that they had

not only taught the alphabet to hundreds of men within a decade, but had imparted to them the dignity of man.

He did not now blame the "destiny" for the backwardness of India in all spheres, particularly in villages and he did not think that it was irremediable. Man had created this misery, and he alone could end it, if he had only the will to do so.

But though Tagore had as a result of his visit to Russia become convinced that "destiny" was a nonsensical term, which had been made current in India to deepen the already existing spirit of pessimism; the educationists and those who were responsible for spread of education did not think in the same strain. So far as they were concerned, his advice was not at all needed. So once again he had to get busy in the education work, doing it all by himself or getting it done with the help of a small but efficient band of his colleagues. His small resources were once again put to use, and there was of course the indifference or hostility of the people to be dealt with. Official patronage was to be meagre.

But what did that matter? This time Tagore was even more indifferent to obstacles. Had not the visit to Russia put a new heart in him? It had. He had not only become an irrevocable enemy of destiny, but also learned some valuable constructive suggestions from the education-planning chiefs of U.S.S.R. This he was now to put into practical use.

Education was not the only aspect of soviet life which had impressed Tagore during his visit to U.S.S.R. He had seen the soviet citizen at work in factories, in fields, in new roads, or giant electrical or metallurgical plants.

He had nothing but praise for the Russian labourer and his trade unions. Having seen the trade union organisation at work in America and Japan, he did not indulge in that kind of criticism about trade unions of U.S.S.R. in which the labour leaders of the above two countries are past masters. The Americans and Japanese (and also British trade

unionists of past) criticised Russian trade unions freely; and thought them to be subservient to the State, having little freedom of action themselves. Now some of the American and most British trade unions think differently about Russian labour organisations. They have recanted of their past stand, and collaborate with U.S.S.R. (except the A. F. of L. —American Federation of Labour). But Tagore from the beginning adopted an eminently sensible and sane attitude towards Russian unions. He did not criticise them, and did not believe that freedom of action was denied to soviet labour.

Similarly he thought Russia was playing a great role in encouraging science and art under State patronage. In the Pabna manifesto as well as his writings about Swadeshi Samaj Tagore had made it clear that science and art could play a great part in resuscitating life in villages.

Soviet women also impressed him because of their advanced outlook on life, and their freedom. Tagore brought up in a country where elementary rights of women were unknown and movement for their freedom discouraged did not take a prejudiced view about the question of such a freedom in U.S.S.R. In fact all his education plans and all his moves in the country were aimed at placing women on an equal footing with men; so that they should have all opportunities of achieving great things in life which were denied to them previously. His writings after that were if anything more outspoken on the subject; and he pleaded with greater fervour for the cause of women in India.

The soviet civilisation in all its varied colours made a deep impression on Tagore and he came back all the richer in knowledge, and inspired with nobler tasks. The aim was now to build up a similar civilisation in India.

## XI

### Onward Russia

Russian visit also introduced ideological change in the outlook of Rabindranath Tagore. As his views on labour problems, women's freedom, education, science, and art showed, there were distinctly signs of Russian influence on him. But the greatest change that came in his outlook related to the role of the State in the future socialist society. Formerly in his *Swadeshi Samaj* writings Tagore had made it clear that he wanted the society to function without the help of the State on basis of mutual co-operation. That was not his view after the visit to U.S.S.R. He realised that giant planning in various spheres of life was impossible without a State functioning at the top and guaranteeing as it were "a safe conduct to an army of socialist planning experts." It was not possible to organise such a huge job without State help, and while the public remained hostile, indifferent or even to some extent inclined to accept such plans. Suppose certain elements in the population wish to torpedo the plan and hatch intrigues to achieve this end. A socialist society without a State could not stop all this.

This was the realism of soviet leaders, and it impressed Tagore. He had in essence accepted the existence of class conflict. Though he may not have said that he wanted dictatorship of the proletariat, at least the State was to have immense powers to execute socialist planning.

The "State" is the main issue between anarchists and communists, and those moderate socialists who believe that society could solve the economic problem by having recourse to "charity" as the best means of saving the world from misery. Tagore by implicitly recognising the Marxist view of functions of State had set at rest the lies about his being an anarchist. He had also shown that he had moved a step further from his stand of a moderate socialist.



But Tagore not merely paid a lip sympathy to the Marxists when he recognised their view of State. His slogan was "get on with solid work." Like the Russian leaders, he did not want to sit idle. In one of his letters from Russia or *Russiar Chithi* he described an incident since then quoted often that in his early days of literary career, he spent some time in a boating excursion. He used to devote himself to literature then, and fancied that the be-all and end-all of his life was to go on writing literary pieces and that he was not fit for any other work. But he had not been able to convince anybody that the real job of a work in the cause of freedom was to be done in the village and that task must be attended to at once. The result of these ruminations was that Tagore left his literary work for some time and decided to undertake the work of village welfare.

In another Russian letter he tells that after the end of Pabna conference, he told a big political leader that if Indians wanted to do some political work, then they must develop the work of village reform. That was the first and the foremost thing to be done. The political "big" laughed at Tagore's suggestion and Tagore realised that Indian leaders were apathetic in this matter, and had only borrowed foreign ideas of liberalism, without feeling about the misery of the underdog. There was one advantage of such an attitude and that was one could indulge in excitement, but avoid responsibility of crucial problems.

But if one admitted, says Tagore, that India was one's own country, then it became the duty of every man to accept responsibility and "to get on to solid work on their behalf without further loss of time."

Tagore was one of those who considered India as their "homeland," who realised their responsibility and wanted to lose no time in getting on to solid work. The above two statements show how finally the isolationism which Tagore practised as a writer for some time was ended. From that time onward he began to take a "regular" interest in the

village reform work. For such a tireless worker, the Russian example of "quick relief for villages" was welcome, and he could not but follow their plans.

But mere willingness to follow the soviet plans was not sufficient. There were other hurdles in the way of Tagore which had to be cleared up. Just as his education plans never materialised, the same was true of his other plans. In the case of economic plans the State had to be convinced about their usefulness and persuaded to apply them. This could not be done, though best efforts were made by Tagore in this direction.

But though they did not accept his plans, they allowed the Russian letters to be published, and thus the Poet was able to pay a homage to U.S.S.R. at a time when that gallant country was being assailed from all sides, and subjected to a barrage of hostile criticism.

There was only one other man in India who had similarly made encouraging remarks about U.S.S.R. at that time. His name was Jawaharlal Nehru, whose book about Russian travel appeared at about the same time that Tagore's Russian letters were being hailed in press as one of the few trustworthy accounts about Russia written by a foreign observer.

But there is one vital difference between the writings of Nehru and those of Tagore. Nehru, in spite of the fact that at present he enjoys international reputation, did not begin to evince an early interest in socialism as Tagore had done. In fact he was near forty when he praised Russia. The result was that for long this attitude of Nehru about Russia continued to persist—he merely praised that country but did not unfold similar plans for India. This he was to do in 1933, and after. Tagore, on the other hand, had thrashed out socialist problems previously. His was not the attitude of "mere praise" for the soviet regime—but he made a constructive approach instead. Therefore at that time he was a step ahead of Nehru. Nehru has admitted the debt that India owed to Tagore for having shown the way, when he said, "He has given to our nationalism the outlook

of internationalism."

Tagore had indeed by his expression of sympathy laid the foundations of an Indian foreign policy—here was internationalism—not of the liberals but of a socialist. Nehru took up the internationalist policy of Tagore towards Russia and elaborated it on the lines of the Poet. It then became the policy of the Congress.

People in India have from time to time shown aversion towards U.S.S.R. Anti-soviet propaganda has prevailed on them. Not even the top leaders of Congress have been free from it. But Tagore pursued one policy about Russia. He was loyal to it and loyalty was for him "the essence of honour."

After the end of this war "good neighbourly" relations with Russia would be established. Then it would be time to assess the real extent of Tagore's efforts. People would thank this great Poet for his contribution to world peace. Indo-Russian friendship is one of the dominant factors in the peace of the orient.

But when Tagore thought of Russia as a "good neighbour", he did not visualise a treacherous German attack against U.S.S.R. That was of course a sudden development, which baffled all observers of foreign politics. But Tagore had expressed belief in his Russian letters in the strength and integrity of Red Army. He was not fooled by the talk about its having become weakened as a result of purges and did not think that it was technically inferior to any other modern army of the world. And he knew what he was talking about. He had travelled in the capitals of Europe and the Far East, and seen the modern armies of other nations. Red Army fights on and it has in ample measure justified the confidence Tagore reposed in it. It is the symbol of onward march of Russia, which is indeed a prelude to march forward of entire oppressed humanity.