

Freedom, An alternative discourse: A Critical reading of Tagore's 'Spirit of Freedom'

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Abstract

In 1922 when the whole country was ablaze with the fiery spirit of nationalism and a desperate cry for political liberation, Tagore penned an essay 'Spirit of Freedom' included in his book *Creative Unity*. A close scrutiny of this essay reveals how Tagore ventures to construct an alternative discourse of freedom by shifting the focus from the external to the internal world. For Tagore struggle for political liberation is an exercise in fatuity without a corresponding change in the spiritual domain. He defines freedom as an inner state of being, in which the soul of the individual not only emancipates itself from all kinds of servitude to the external material living conditions but also overcomes all temptations to enslave others. Tagore's essay anticipates the works of such Frankfurt theorists like Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm and suggests an idea of inner governmentality and posits true freedom as internal. The essay seeks to examine how the theoretical insights into the nature of human freedom derived from the works of these Western thinkers help us understand and appreciate the enduring relevance of Tagore's 'Spirit of Freedom'.

Keywords: Freedom, Political Liberation, Individualism, Nation



With Mahatma Gandhi's heroic emergence as the undisputed nationalist mass leader through his clarion call for non-cooperation movement against the British Raj and his capturing of the congress citadel, India's freedom struggle gathered momentum in 1922. In this turbulent and tempestuous time when the whole country was ablaze with the fiery spirit of nationalism and an intense and desperate cry for political liberation, Tagore penned an essay bearing the title 'Spirit of Freedom' and it was incorporated in his book *Creative Unity*. A close scrutiny of this essay reveals how Tagore has striven to construct an alternative discourse of freedom by shifting the focus from the external to the internal world. For Tagore struggle for political liberation is an exercise in fatuity without a corresponding change in the spiritual domain. Tagore asseverates emphatically that his countrymen should not aspire for freedom of external conditions, for freedom is not a transferrable commodity. At the very outset Tagore contends:

When Freedom is not an inner idea which imparts strength to our activities and breadth to our creations, when it is merely a thing of external circumstance, it is like an open space to one who is blindfolded. (Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus Vol. I* 168)

He defines freedom as an inner state of being, in which the soul of the individual not only emancipates itself from all kinds of servitude to the external material living conditions but also overcomes all temptations to enslave others. Tagore here seems to be referring to the lasting psychological effects of colonization. Colonization apart from inducing the colonized to accept their subjugation as natural, instigates them to emulate the colonizers and to recognize their virtue as not being themselves but being the other, their master, the privileged and the oppressor. Thus, the colonial power structure reproduces itself in the psyche of the colonized and is eventually reflected in their ignominious effort to form and subordinate the other. What Tagore understands as freedom is a complete overthrow of the colonial power structure that has been interiorized by the colonized. It is perhaps with this intention that Tagore emphasizes the power of creative unity, for the colonial discourse has established difference as an apparatus of power.

While dealing with the limits and pitfalls of the practice of Nationalism in India Tagore constantly keeps on reminding his readers how the very idea of nationalism imported from the West proves inadequate and ineffectual to address the fundamental problems and issues of India. Nationalism in India, Tagore argued in his book *Nationalism*, has diverted the country's attention from its primary needs. "Our real problem in India", Tagore contended, "is not political. It is social". The nationalist movement in India prompted and promoted an almost fanatic pursuit of political goals to the exclusion of burning social problems. Neither the Moderates nor the Extremists in Congress recognized this critical need. The former according to Tagore had "no constructive idea", and had no sense that "what India most needed was constructive work coming from within herself." (Tagore, *Nationalism* 97) They lost power "because the people soon came to realize how futile was the half policy adopted by them." (Tagore, *Nationalism* 113). The Extremists, in their programme, Tagore contended, claimed to espouse the traditional Indian truths and indigenous culture but, in reality they were nothing but passionate champions of Western nationalism." Their ideals were based on Western history. They had no sympathy with the special problems of India. They did not recognize the patent fact that there were pauses in our social organization which made the Indian capable of coping with the aliens...the domination in India of the caste system, and



the blind and lazy habit of relying upon the authority of traditions that are incongruous anachronisms in the present age.” (Tagore, *Nationalism* 113-14). Nationalism imported from the west cannot inspire a social and moral reform that according to Tagore was most important for contemporary India. The real task that lies before India is that of constructing a healthy and balanced society, and “society is the expression of those moral and spiritual aspirations of man which belong to his higher nature.” (Tagore, *Nationalism* 120). Dennis Dalton in his *Indian Idea of Freedom* has succinctly summed up Tagore’s argument in this context:

If India pursues political independence to the exclusion of all else, she may attain a sovereign state; it will be one, however, in which the old social and moral maladies are not purged but magnified. Above all, a narrow quest for political liberty will only obscure India’s real goal which must always remain that of moral and spiritual freedom for the individual in society. (Dalton 195)

Tagore characterizes Western civilization as ‘political’ or state-centric, unlike the Eastern civilization whose basis is society and the spiritual ideal of man. The word society here is used by Tagore to indicate the Indian concept of *samaj*, which for him represents a non-political entity. *Samaj* for Tagore signified the totality of the structure of Indian society which not only defined the people of India but also constituted them. While state is a category external to the individual, there is an organic connection between *Samaj* and the people. A closer and more critical scrutiny of Tagore’s ideas reveals what Tagore here is striving to establish is a distinction between mechanical state and organic *Samaj*. Shobhanlal Dutta Gupta in his essay “Tagore’s View of Politics and the Contemporary World” contends:

For Tagore, the West’s understanding of nationhood involved a notion of exclusiveness and universalization. This led to disrespect for others, and a justification of domination and arrogance that, he felt, was inapplicable to the East. The traditions of the East did not support this outlook...For Tagore, the uniqueness of the East lay in its alternative understanding of freedom. Unlike the West’s focus on activism, materialism, individualism and utilitarianism, the East viewed freedom as the spiritual liberation of the self, which in turn was integrally associated with the idea of social and moral responsibility as enshrined in the collective. (Chaudhuri, *The Cambridge Companion to Rabindranath Tagore* 281)

The emergence of a philosophy of freedom in modern India can be traced back to the writings of Swami Vivekananda and one discovers a close parallel between Tagore’s alternative discourse of freedom and Vivekananda’s insistence on spiritual freedom. Spiritual freedom for Vivekananda signifies the ultimate expansion of the human self which prompts realization of one’s identity with the Absolute and with mankind in general. However, Swami Vivekananda aspired to incorporate the modern western conception of social and political liberty into the traditional Indian philosophy of spiritual freedom. While the ancient Indian philosophers put emphasis exclusively upon the attainment of a spiritual freedom on a higher supra-mundane plane, Swami Vivekananda, the scion of Bengal Renaissance accommodated both the secular and the sacred in his philosophy and contended that man must enjoy freedom in the lower realms in order to achieve spiritual freedom at the highest level. Thus, Vivekananda has discovered a continuity and connection between all forms of freedom and stresses on the necessity of all



these forms for the uninhibited growth and self-realization of individual. Swami Vivekananda asserts:

The Hindu says political and social independence are well and good, but the real thing is spiritual independence—*Mukti*. This is our national purpose. (Vivekananda 458)

Swami Vivekananda then proceeds to make a statement that was often echoed by many Indian thinkers who produced discourses on freedom including Tagore:

One may gain political and social independence, but if one is a slave to his passions and desires, one cannot feel the pure joy of real freedom. (Vivekananda 419)

This paper however seeks to examine closely and critically Tagore's essay 'Spirit of Freedom' that seems to have challenged the Western conception of freedom, a conception which is inextricably involved with the ideology of a utilitarian materialism and therefore has contributed substantially to the consolidation and perpetuation of the repressive mechanism of Power. Tagore has raised some questions, made certain observations that can be interpreted using the theoretical tools provided by such thinkers as Louis Althusser and Frankfurt theorists like Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse and by applying these theories the paper will attempt to explore the essay by Tagore as a critique of European modernity and the Enlightenment Rationality which eventually gave birth to a totalitarian regime.

In his essay "Spirit of Freedom" Tagore observes how in the West men are flattered to believe firmly in the illusion of freedom while they are surreptitiously subjected to Power. Tagore writes:

The people are drugged with the hashish of false hopes and urged to deeds of frightfulness by the goadings of manufactured panics; their higher feelings are exploited by devious channels of unctuous hypocrisy, their pockets picked under anaesthetics of flattery, their very psychology affected by conspiracy of money and unscrupulous diplomacy...the people of the West are flattered into believing that they are free, and they have the sovereign power in their hands. (Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus* Vol. 1 168)

Such observations remind us of Althusser's thesis regarding ideology in which ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. For Althusser, ideology is not simply a case of the powerful imposing ideas upon the weak, subjects are born into ideology and collude with ideology by allowing it to bestow social meaning upon their existence. Thus, while we believe we are acting out of free will we are in reality acted upon by the system. Tagore writes: 'The mob mind is allowed the enjoyment of an apparent liberty while true freedom is curtailed on every side. Its thoughts are fashioned according to the plans of organized interests; in its choosing of ideas and forming of opinions it is hindered either by some punitive force or by the constant insinuation of untruths, it is made in an artificial world of hypnotic phrases' (Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus* Vol. 1 169). In another essay entitled "The Nation" included in *Creative Unity*, Tagore makes incisive observations on mass psychology:

Crowd psychology is a blind force. Like steam and other physical forces, it can be utilized for creating a tremendous amount of power. And therefore, rulers of men,

who, out of greed and fear, are bent upon turning their peoples into machines of power, try to train this crowd psychology for their special purposes. They hold it to be their duty to foster in the popular mind universal panic, unreasoning pride in their own race, and hatred of others. Newspapers, school-books, and even religious services are made use of for this object; and those who have the courage to express their disapprobation of this blind and impious cult are either punished in the law-courts, or socially ostracized. (Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus* Vol. 1 176)

Althusser has talked of RSA and ISA, while the former coerces the individual to subjection by punitive measures the latter ensures the willing subordination of the subjects to the existing system. What Tagore in these lines says about the punitive force and the artificial world of hypnotic phrases roughly corresponds with Althusser's theoretical formulations of Repressive and Ideological state apparatuses.

Tagore's essay seems to have anticipated what George Bernard Shaw in his Radio broadcast delivered on 17th June 1935 will say on the illusoriness and elusiveness of the idea of freedom in the West. Shaw in his radio talk observes:

They enforce your slavery and call it freedom... Naturally the master class, through its parliaments and schools and newspapers, makes the most desperate efforts to prevent us from realizing our slavery. (Shaw 147)

Tagore's experiences in the West have convinced him of the moral degeneration of Western civilization and such degradation according to Tagore has resulted from an obsessive preoccupation with an all-consuming urge for the multiplication of profit and a frenzied pursuit of a gross materialism. Such intoxication with Mammon-worship and power has imprisoned the soul of the western people and has reduced the celebration of the much-trumpeted political freedom into a travesty. Tagore writes:

My experience in the West, where I have realized the immense power of money and of organized propaganda, - working everywhere behind screens of camouflage, creating an atmosphere of distrust, timidity, and antipathy, - has impressed me deeply with the truth that real freedom is of mind and spirit; it can never come to us from outside. (Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus* Vol. 1 170)

Earlier in the essay Tagore has referred to a 'mentality of mutual distrust and fear' that characterizes men of the modern West and has observed:

The people who have sacrificed their souls to the passion of profit-making and drunkenness of power are constantly pursued by phantoms of panic and suspicion, and therefore are ruthless even where they are least afraid of mischances. (Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus* Vol. 1 169)

The development of modern industrial society in Europe has not only alienated man from nature but also from his fellow mortals and eventually from his own self. Such isolation of the individual has engendered an all-pervasive atmosphere of fear, doubt, mutual suspicion and distrust. Freedom from the ties and bonds of old pre-industrial, pre-individualistic society has thus generated in man an anxiety, insecurity, sense of powerlessness and in order to overcome this tormented mental state modern man seeks escape into new dependencies and submissions. These theoretical reflections upon the culture of modernity



that emerged from the European Enlightenment constitute the core of the thesis of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Adorno and Horkheimer and *Fear of Freedom* by Erich Fromm.

In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* Adorno and Horkheimer assert:

The programme of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world...yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant. (Adorno 3)

Man has attempted to impose order and meaning on reality, has struggled to understand the world for the purpose of dominating it, and this attempt has been motivated by Western rationality for centuries. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that by the rational conquest of nature man has attempted to overcome his fears from it, but this attempt has eventually produced disastrous consequences. The fear-driven violence directed by man towards nature is eventually directed towards other humans. The rational program of the Enlightenment was an attempt to establish man as an autonomous subject independent of nature. However, the main thesis of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is that this program involved man taking over its own nature and the repression of urges, feelings, desires and so forth. Moving away from nature has thus led man, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, to a state in which the principle of oppression reigns supreme over all the aspects of human life. This oppression is manifested in the limits of human rationality which has become, as it were, "a one-track mind" designed for the sole purpose of subduing, exploiting and possessing nature and other human beings alike.

Enlightenment thus estranged man from nature and other men and prompted him to interiorize a psychic structure of domination. The freedom from fear that the project of Enlightenment promised, consequently gave birth to a sense of insecurity in man who being increasingly isolated from the world around him, is perpetually haunted by fear, doubt and suspicion. Erich Fromm in his book *Fear of Freedom* contends that in pre-individualistic society there were certain bonds defined by Fromm as primary ties which provided man a sense of security and stability but restricted his freedom. Since the Reformation a process of individuation has taken place and this has set man free from all such ties. But modern individual emancipated from those bonds has not attained freedom in the positive sense of the realization of the potentials of his individual self. Freedom from nature and authority in spite of ensuring independence and rationality has rendered modern man anxious and powerless through his isolation. Since modern man does not belong anywhere or to anything he is constantly overwhelmed by the sense of his own insignificance. In works like *Fear of Freedom*, *To Have or to Be*, Fromm consistently keeps on referring to the distinction between Positive and Negative freedom. While the former inspires man to find out a goal toward which to move, the latter merely rebels against restrictions and dependence. Fromm emphasises the need to progress from 'Freedom from' to 'Freedom to'. The emergence of modern individualism, celebration of individual liberty thus has consolidated the reign of terror by intensifying the aloneness of man and contributing to his tragic predicament. What is interesting to note is how Tagore in the present essay has anticipated Fromm's theoretical insights into or speculations upon the existential predicament of modern man when he makes his trenchant observation:

The appalling scenes of inhumanity and injustice, which are growing familiar to us, are the outcome of a psychology that deals with terror. (Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus* Vol. 1 169)



In the essay under study Tagore refers to a 'slave-owning mentality' which according to him has generated an atmosphere of 'mutual distrust and fear' in the west and has reduced the ideal of freedom to an illusion. Tagore asserts:

The mentality is that of a slave-owning community, with a mutilated multitude of men tied to its commercial and political treadmill. It is the mentality of mutual distrust and fear. (Tagore, *Omnibus* Vol. 1 171)

What Tagore seems to have suggested here is the habit and the practice of reducing everything including human beings and relationships into private property and possession that characterizes the acquisitive society. Freedom according to Tagore is not a particular commodity, any object that we can acquire and possess, but an act of transcending a particular mind set, an attitude that recognizes and insists on acquiring, owning and making profit as the inalienable rights of the individual in modern industrial society. Herbert Marcuse in his *An Essay on Liberation* argues:

The so-called consumer economy and the politics of corporate capitalism have created a second nature in man which ties him libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form. The need for possessing, consuming has become a biological need. (Marcuse 11)

A closer look at the essay under study and many of his other works shows what Tagore actually indicates is a revolution within, an eradication of the psychic structures, historically and culturally manufactured 'biological need' that modern industrial society has generated in man and an alternative way of living and thinking in terms of being instead of having. Private property in an acquisitive capitalist society is not only an institution, but an instinct, a disposition, a particular way of looking at life. Tagore emphatically asserts:

He only has freedom who ideally loves freedom himself and is glad to extend it to others. He who cares to have slaves must chain himself to them; he who builds walls to create exclusion for others builds walls across his own freedom; he who distrusts freedom in others loses his moral right to it. Sooner or later, he is lured into the meshes of physical and moral servility. (Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus* Vol. 1 170)

Here 'building walls to create exclusion for others' refers to the habits and practices of the modern acquisitive industrial society which according to Erich Fromm is based on a having mode of existence. Fromm in his book *To Have or To Be* has offered a penetrating analysis of this having mode of existence:

The norms by which society functions also mould the character of its members (social character). In an industrial society these are: the wish to acquire property, to keep it and to increase it, i.e., to make a profit, and those who own property are admired and envied as superior beings... A brilliant picture of bourgeois obsession with property is given by Max Stirner. Persons are transformed into things; their relations to each other assume the character of ownership. "Individualism", which in its positive sense means liberation from social chains, means, in the negative sense, "self-ownership", the right- and the duty- to invest one's energy in the success of one's own person. (Fromm 61)

Erich Fromm identifies man's ego as 'the most important object of our property feeling, for it comprises many things: our body, our name, our social status, our possessions, the image we have of ourselves and the image we want others to have of us' (Fromm). Tagore too in many of his writings has diagnosed man's self-imprisonment, narcissistic preoccupation with his selfish interests and cravings as the root of his bondage and has defined true freedom as a spiritual deliverance of man from his finite separate self to the enlightened realization of the infinite in him, a realization of his inseparable connection with humanity in general and the world at large, the essential unity of all creations. In *Sadhana* Tagore observes:

When man's consciousness is restricted only to the immediate vicinity of his human self, the deeper roots of his nature do not find their permanent soil, his spirit his ever on the brink of starvation, and in the place of healthful strength he substitutes rounds of stimulation. (Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus* Vol. 4 81)

In another essay in *Sadhana* Tagore writes:

That this separateness of self is considered by man as his most precious possession is proofed by the sufferings he undergoes and the sins he commits for its sake. But the consciousness of separation has come from the eating of the fruit of knowledge. It has led man to shame and crime and death; yet it is dearer to him than any paradise where he self lies, securely slumbering in perfect innocence in the womb of mother nature. (Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus* Vol. 4 118)

Tagore concludes:

We can look at our self in its two different aspects. The self which displays itself, and the self which transcends itself and there by reveals its own meaning. To display itself it tries to be big, to stand upon the pedestal of its accumulations and to retain everything to itself. To reveal itself it gives up everything it has... (Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus* Vol. 4 122)

Thus, Tagore makes a crucial distinction between two selves in man, the finite and the infinite. While the finite is the outer self, a self which is conditioned and determined by the historical factors, the infinite is the transcendental inner self and for Tagore the essence of true freedom is the realization of this transcendental self as essentially and eternally free, an act of overcoming man's self-enforced confinement to his finite self which indefatigably struggles to preserve its separateness and celebrates its independence as its freedom. While both colonialism and nationalist resistance to it foregrounded and thrived on the differences between man and man, Tagore's idea of freedom urges his countrymen to break all the walls of separation and division and rediscover the original unity not only with the entire humanity but with the whole world of creation. In order to gain this freedom, the people of India must wage a war within, a war with the obstacles and enemies that lurk inside their mind, must practice freedom of thought independent of the customs and conventions held sacrosanct by time. In his essay "Spiritual Freedom" Tagore writes:

There is no external means of taking freedom by the throat. It is the inward process of losing ourselves that leads to it. Bondage in all its forms has its stronghold in the inner self and not in the outside world; it is in the dimming of

our consciousness, in the narrowing of our perspective, in the wrong valuation of things. (Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus* Vol. 2 135)

In the present essay Rabindranath therefore provokes his countrymen to “ask themselves if the freedom to which they aspire is one of external conditions” (Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus* Vol. 1 170). Tagore raises an array of disconcerting questions at a time when the patriotic fervour has assumed the shape of a mass-hysteria in his motherland. It is through these questions that Tagore strives to drive his message home to his countrymen and urges them to introspection and self-criticism:

Have they acquired a true love of freedom? Have they faith in it? Are they ready to make space in their society for the minds of their children to grow up in the ideal of human dignity, unhindered by restrictions that are unjust and irrational? (Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus* Vol. 1 170)

Tagore then launches into a violent diatribe against the iniquities and injustices that prevail in the social fabric of contemporary India. He refers to the social discriminations, compartmentalization and an inflexible system of classifications to which the majority of his countrymen subscribe with utmost docility and such servile subservience to inane social customs and conventions, self-imposed subjugation to the authority of rites and rituals and the practice of excluding, marginalizing, ostracizing others in the name of caste, Tagore holds, directly oppose, run counter to the spirit of freedom.

For Tagore the vanity and futility of the social divisions lie in their artificiality, their conflict with the organic laws of growth. He argues:

By squeezing human beings in the grip of an inelastic system and forcibly holding them fixed, we have ignored the laws of life and growth. (Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus* Vol.1 171)

Since the social divisions that have ruled India for centuries do not have the “same inevitableness of organic law” (Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus* Vol. 1 171), Tagore poignantly poses the unsettling question “how can we blame an alien people for subjecting us to a political order which they are tempted to believe eternal?” (Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus* Vol. 1 171)

The binary opposition between the mechanical and the organic principles that is implied in these utterances may be interpreted as inherited from the Romantic Aesthetic. In his monumental work *The Great Chain of Being* the American author A.O. Lovejoy traces a shift in European thought in the latter half of the 18th century from a conception of the cosmos as a static mechanism to a conception of it as a dynamic organism. The metaphor of a perfectly running machine, for example a watch, is replaced by the metaphor of tree. Morse Peckham has offered us an outline of the new metaphysic that emerged in the latter part of the eighteenth century:

The first quality of an organism is that it is not something made, it is something... growing. We have a philosophy of becoming, not a philosophy of being. Furthermore, the relation of its component parts is not that of the parts of a machine which have been made separately, ... but the relation of leaves to stem to trunk to root to earth.... an organism has the quality of life. It does not develop additively; it grows organically. (Peckham 8)

This organic philosophy of change and becoming has found a potent expression in Tagore's conception of freedom as essentially creative that challenges and subverts inert subservience to mechanical laws imposed by authority. For Tagore the idea of freedom is related to the idea of creation, and to attain freedom is not merely to acquire or possess something ready at hand but to keep on creating and recreating oneself incessantly and to get delivered from the fixity of the mechanical reproduction of the habitual modes of being to the flexibility and creativity of the infinite and organic becoming.

Tagore inherited a culture that has celebrated the triumph of man's spiritual freedom over and above all external constraints and the limitations of material living conditions. Therefore, unlike Foucault, Tagore does not recognize Power as either invincible or ineluctable. Power is all-pervasive and its network is extended across every aspect of life, but Tagore can envisage the possibility of resistance to power in the inner domain of man. In one of his Santiniketan essays Tagore affirms:

In Europe the glory of freedom is always sung. The meaning of this freedom is the freedom to acquire, the freedom to consume, the freedom to work. Such freedom is not a small thing. In this world to protect such freedom one needs a lot of power and arrangements. But ancient India has spurned such freedom by saying "Then what". Such freedom was not recognized as freedom by her. India sought freedom over desires, she yearned for a freedom from action too. (Santiniketan, *my translation*).

Tagore's essay anticipates the works of such Frankfurt theorists like Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm and suggests an idea of inner governmentality and posits true freedom as internal. Marcuse in his *An Essay on Liberation* pleads for the necessity of developing a new sensibility of freedom as traditional conceptions of human freedom have been rendered obsolete by the burgeoning of advanced industrial society. Fromm in his *Fear of Freedom* has distinguished between Negative and Positive freedom. While the former is obsessed too much with the attainment of freedom from a particular situation and therefore inextricably enmeshed in that situation, the latter focusses on a new sensibility, a positive inner state to which one seeks deliverance. The meaning of Positive freedom has been further clarified by Fromm in his *To Have or To Be* where he defines the fundamental characteristic of the being mode of human life as 'that of being active, not in the sense of outward activity. Of busyness, but of inner activity, the productive use of our human powers.' (Fromm 76). Fromm elaborates on this idea:

To be active means to give expression to one's faculties, talents, to the wealth of human gifts with which- though in varying degrees-every human being is endowed. It means to renew oneself, to grow, to flow out, to love, to transcend the prison of one's isolated ego, to be interested, to "list", to give. (Fromm 76)

Tagore's essay 'Spirit of Freedom' contains ample suggestions of the possibility of the production of a new sensibility which is gloriously independent of all external constraints and limits. In order to show the extent of degeneration and stupefaction of the Indian sensibility Tagore alludes to ancient India where man understood freedom to be a superabundance of life and a passionate affirmation of the spirit of creation. Tagore writes:

When India gave voice to immortal thoughts, in the time of fullest vigour of vitality, her children had the fearless spirit of the seekers of truth... The freedom



of mind which it produced expressed itself in a wealth of creation... (Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus* Vol. 1 171)

Thus, for Tagore freedom does not signify a set of rights and privileges to be won through political agitation, readily available after the political transfer of power, but rather an attitude, a sensibility that is essentially creative and has to cultivate within us. Cultivation of this sensibility sets human mind free from the cage of egocentricism and enables it to realize its unity with all creation. Fromm in *To Have or To Be* asserts:

Only to the extent that we decrease the mode of having...stop finding security and identity by clinging to what we have...by holding onto our ego and our possessions-can the mode of being emerge. 'To be' requires giving up one's egocentricity and selfishness. (Fromm 76-77)

For Tagore too freedom consists in the perception of unity with all creation. And in order to realize this unity the veil of the small 'I', the term Tagore often uses for describing egocentricity, has to be torn asunder and the individual must extend himself into the consciousness of *bhuma* or the great or the total. Without such a realization and the moral elevation, spiritual ennoblement that result from it, political liberation will contribute very little to the process of building up a free nation. Towards the end of his essay Tagore warns:

And men, who contemptuously treat their own brothers as eternal babies... coercing them... by the cruel threat of persecution into following a blind lane...driving a number of them into hypocrisy and into moral inertia...will be incapable of holding a just freedom in politics, and of fighting in freedom's cause. (Tagore, *Rabindranath Tagore Omnibus* Vol. 1 172)

Since fetters are forged not in the world external to man, but in the mind of human subjects, freedom from such 'mind-forged manacles', those 'ingrown patterns', too has to be conceived and gained in the mental domain. Freedom is a state of mind, a sensibility in which we are not enslaved by our authoritarian, totalitarian desire to subject others to servitude, but recognize our fellow beings as free individuals who are not inferior to us, but our equals. Tagore's poetic vision delves deeper into the psychological roots of our bondage and establishes the limitations of political liberation. Friedrich Engels defined freedom as the recognition of necessity. For Tagore this necessity is the realization of the essential unity of all creations, a realization that will eventually set human subjects free from such binary oppositions as masters and slaves, colonizer and colonized. We may conclude that, what motivated Tagore to conceptualize freedom as an inner state of being rather than a possession or property one must have, is his submission to the fundamental tenets of Indian spirituality which recognizes and valorizes freedom as the essential and inalienable condition of humanity.

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