Nation and Civilisation in Modern Indian Social and Political Thought

SAMIR KUMAR DAS

University of Calcutta

Instead of viewing Western Political Theory and Modern Indian Social and Political Thought as complete binaries, the paper views them as complementary to each other. It (i) argues that the dominant post-Cold War Western theories of nation and civilization are anomalous and therefore its universalist-theoretical claim is self-contradictory; (ii) posits 'Social and Political Theory' per se as one composite heritage – common to both the West and the Global South; and (iii) seeks to find out how Modern Indian Social and Political Thought plays a key role in the making of 'Social and Political Theory' side by side with the Western theories. We situate Modern Indian Social and Political Thought neither in its splendid isolation from the theories of the West, nor as one single, coherent and perfectly homogenized body of thought, but primarily as a mode of engagement with the Western theories in a way that helps address and wherever possible resolve the anomalies that they have developed and find impossible to resolve on their own. We make albeit select reference to three Indian thinkers – Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Ramananda Chatterjee (1865-1943) - who were writing their discourses in the cusp of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Keywords: Anomaly, bhav (spirit), civilization, end of history, nation.

This paper seeks to understand the complex interrelations between nation and civilization with reference to the dynamics of contemporary international relations. Much of our understanding in this regard is influenced predominantly by the post-Cold War theories of International Relations, which by all accounts have developed anomalies that they are unable to resolve by themselves. The first part of the paper dwells on the question of the relevance of Modern Indian Social and Political Thought vis-à-vis the post-Cold War Western theories of nation and civilization. In Indian academia, a distinction is commonly made between Western Political *Theory* and Modern Indian Political *Thought*.[1] While no explanation is provided in support of this commonly made distinction between theory and thought - besides the obvious one emanating from their respective contexts, one may read it through the colonialist prism and argue that the distinction reproduces the adage of 'theory for them, and thought for us'. This paper refrains from putting this adage into scrutiny. Instead, it (i) argues that the dominant post-Cold War Western theories of nation and civilization are anomalous at least on three counts and therefore its universalist-theoretical claim is self-contradictory; (ii) posits 'Social and Political Theory' per se as one

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[1] Akash Singh Rathore's (Rathore 2017) book is a significant exception in this regard.

composite heritage – common to both the West and the Global South; and (iii) seeks to find out how Modern Indian Social and Political Thought plays a key complementary role in the making of 'Social and Political Theory' side by side with the Western theories. All this builds on the rather unexplored assumption that thought is a resource for theory. In its second part, the paper seeks to find out how Modern Indian Social and Political Thought helps us understand these dynamics in a significant way while trying to resolve the anomalies intrinsic to Western theories.

We make albeit select reference to three Indian thinkers - Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Ramananda Chatterjee (1865-1943) - who were writing their discourses in the cusp of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While Ramananda is usually remembered as the first journalist of modern India and is seldom considered as a thinker per se, his articulations, I will argue, contribute in many uncharacteristic ways to the enrichment of modern Indian Social and Political Thought. One may recollect that this was also the period when the idea of Indian nation and nationalism was fast catching the Indian imagination (Chatterjee 2021) and became for the first time in its history the subject of a wider public debate. Does Modern Indian Thought offer any resolution to the anomalies?

The 'Indian Turn'

Of late there has been a resurgence of Modern Indian Social and Political Thought – commonly described as 'the Indian Turn' in theoretical circles - primarily along three trajectories: First, it is argued that Indian Thought is autonomous and can thrive in isolation, that is to say, independently of its engagement with the Western Theories. It is only by looking inward and remaining self-reflexive and monological that it can sustain and enrich itself. Contrary to the isolationist trajectory, the objective of the radical-extremist one is to clutch on to a 'national perspective' that often betrays an essentialist understanding of its theoretical repertoire and often accounts for the growth of strident right-wing tendencies. Thirdly, the project of theory-building is often understood to mean the creation of appropriate conditions of knowledge production by liberating the South from the hegemony of 'Western-centric theory'. Theory building in the South, according to Boaventura Sousa Santos (2014), calls for a political and social transformation by releasing the possibilities of knowledge in the hemisphere through radical decolonization. Since the project of radical decolonization is envisaged as being external to the body of thought under review, we do not engage with it within the limited scope of this paper.

I wonder if complete isolation is possible or even desirable. For one thing, concepts such as nation and civilization 'mark our historical time' and have 'entered into the public discourse and shaped the political imagination of the people' (Mahajan 2013:6). For another, complete isolation has forced the traditional institutions of learning (like the *Tols* and *Chatuspathis* etc) to close in on themselves and has been responsible for their slow obsolescence. On the other hand, the restoration of what is called 'the national perspective' often does not seem to recognize the plurality that is inherent in Modern Indian Social and Political Thought. The term 'Indian' is seen to be associated - not so much with essentially thick and 'rightist tendencies towards authenticity discourses that are anti-pluralistic and hyper-nationalistic' – but with what Rathore calls 'thin svaraj that seeks to restore 'the pluralist and egalitarian stands' that exist within 'the traditions of equally authentic Indian thought and practices' (Rathore, 2017, p. 18).

We propose to situate Modern Indian Social and Political Thought neither in its splendid isolation from the theories of the West, nor as a single, coherent and perfectly homogenized body of thought, but primarily as a mode of engagement with the Western theories in a way that helps address and wherever possible resolve the anomalies that they have developed and find impossible to resolve on their own. We define anomalies much in the same way as Thomas S. Kuhn has defined it, as the 'recognition' that the 'facts' such theories[2] prompt us to discover 'somehow violate' the 'expectations' generated by them (Kuhn 1970, p. 160). The West, as we will see, will have to pay a heavy price, Tagore warns us, unless it realizes these anomalies sooner. Viewed in this light, we do not see the West and the non-West as complete binaries, but as two complementary axes of a more generic Social and Political Theory regardless of their ethnic locations and ethnocentricities.

This paper focuses on two of the leading proponents of the post-Cold War theories dwelling on nation and civilization: Samuel P Huntington and Francis Fukuyama. Their theories may provide two relatively distinguishable points of departure for our discussion. Huntington, on the one hand, views civilization as malleable that can be leveraged at will by the nations and nation-states to serve their interests. Being influenced by Hegel, Fukuyama, on the other hand, views it as given and the nations and States are called upon to remain in sync with it. The less they do so the more they are thrown out of reckoning in international politics.

Huntington and his Theory of Civilizations

With a certain depreciation of the post-Westphalian order thanks to globalisation, nation-states are no longer considered as the be-all and end-all of world politics today. Much of the literature on International Relations, however, continues to be framed in the post-Westphalian order in which the nation-state is taken as the irreducible unit of study. With the publication of Huntington's famous 'The Clash of Civilizations' in 1993, the civilizational paradigm seems to have trumped the post-Westphalian landscape of IR (International Relations) studies for a considerable length of time. Huntington's civilizational framework is keyed to a set of three interrelated premises that are relevant for us:

One, 'principal conflicts in global politics', as Huntington reminds us, are likely to take place between 'nations and groups of different civilizations' (Huntington, 1993, 22). Conflicts amongst nation-states are here to stay, but these conflicts are more likely to 'expand and become intense' to the extent the nation-states are successful in 'rallying the support of the nation-states of their own civilization' (Huntington 1993:38). Two, the forces and processes of globalization have helped 'enhance the civilization -consciousness of the people insofar as they are exposed to and 'interact' with people across civilizations. This has only 'invigorated their animosities and differences' (Huntington 1993:26). Three, civilization, for him, is a means of self-identification - both 'the highest cultural grouping of people' and the 'broadest level of cultural identity people have' (Huntington 1993:14): "People have levels of identity, a resident of Rome may define himself with varying degrees of intensity as a Roman, an Italian, a Catholic, a Christian, a European, a Westerner. The civilization to which he belongs is the broadest level of identification with which he intensely identifies' (Huntington 1993:24).

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[2] Thomas S Kuhn, however, uses the term 'paradigm' in his book.

Fukuyama and His Endism

Unlike Huntington who still thought nation-states are the key actors in the clash of civilizations, Fukuyama considered civilization represented by the idea of liberalism as the end state of our history and the nations that fail in living up to it are condemned to its scarp heaps. Nowhere is this more eloquently argued in recent years than in Fukuyama's famous essay on 'End of History' (1989) which perhaps provided the theoretical cue. For him 'the unabashed victory of the *idea* of political and economic liberalism' is made possible by 'the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives' to it (Fukuyama, 1989, p.3). What he calls the 'idea' is not the monopoly of the West. Civilizational dynamics, in short, operate regardless of whatever a particular nation-state, region or hemisphere thinks and claims as its own. He views liberalism as 'a large unifying worldview' (Fukuyama, 1989, p.5) – a civilization as it were around which nation-states of the world have been gravitating with varying degrees of success. While the emergence of the post-Cold War world has thrown both fascism and communism as contenders from out of reckoning at the time when he wrote the essay, religion and nationalism are often cited as living alternatives. Fukuyama however attributes the resurgence of both religion and nationalism in recent decades to the 'incompleteness of the liberalism in question' in any particular country, wherever it surfaces (Fukuyama, 1989, p.13) rather than as a failure of the very idea of liberalism per se. As he writes: "Certainly a great deal of the world's ethnic and nationalist tension can be explained in terms of peoples who are forced to live in unrepresentative political systems that they have not chosen" (Fukuyama, 1989,p.15).

Fukuyama admittedly was influenced by Hegel whom he read perhaps through Alexander Kojeve. While the course of civilization, according to him, is independently defined, independently of what the nation-states think and do, not all nations are able to 'realize' and keep pace with it, certainly not in the same measure. Civilizational dynamics are universal insofar as they transcend the limitations of space and time. As Hegel argued:

> The Orientals have not attained the knowledge that spirit – Man as *such* – is free; and because they do not know this, they are not free. … The consciousness of freedom arose among the Greeks, and therefore they were free; but they, and the Romans likewise, knew only that *some* are free – not man as such. Even Plato and Aristotle did not know this. The Greeks therefore, had slaves, and their whole life and maintenance of their splendid liberty, was implicated with the institution of slavery … The German nations, under the influence the Christianity, were the first to attain the consciousness that man, as man is free: that is the *freedom* of spirit which constitutes its essence (Hegel, 1956, p.18).

Hegel, for one, is often accused of having formulated the Universal History of civilization in a way that is also constitutive of the exclusion of the 'Orientals as well as the Eastern nations' in spite of 'its enthusiasm for converting others' according to its own principles (Balakrishnan in Balakrishnan ed. 1996: 204). By the same token, Hegel also denies and delegitimizes others' claims of being a part of the Universal History of civilization by defining the terms of civilization in an a priori way.

Three Anomalies

First of all, if Huntington grimly predicts the imminent and deadly clash of

civilizations that the world is to witness in the post-Cold War world, then how do we explain why notwithstanding the clashes, civilizations also live, persist and coexist and we have incredibly rich and well chronicled history of transactions and exchanges across them. The history of civilizations is as much about their deadly 'clashes' and death as it is about their rich life of co-habitation, co-constitution and coexistence. For Modern Indian Social and Political Thought, the question is not so much that they clash with fatal consequences for human history, but that they live, persist over centuries and millennia, draw from each other and interact among themselves. Much of Indian Thought is focused on the mechanics of their life, mutual survival, and persistence. It was Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) who made the critical distinction between bare human survival that is possible under conditions of constant clashes, wars and acts of 'barbarism 'and is therefore driven merely by an 'impulse' of living and the rich, self-fulfilling and 'civilized' life informed by 'knowledge', that is to say, life in a civilization (Sri Aurobindo, *HC* 1997, p.46).

Besides, Huntington's controversial paper did not seem to have taken into consideration those complex societies in which people belonging to otherwise 'clashing' civilizations are required to coexist and the challenges these societies face albeit with a varying degree of success. In his rejoinder to the critics, he described the USA as an example of such a complex society (Huntington, 1993a, p. 190). Though the rejoinder does not specifically deal with India, it is only apparent that India too qualifies as a complex society embodying within itself a bewildering variety of groups and communities with their diverse civilizational lineages that otherwise might 'clash' against each other if his argument is to be taken as valid.

Indeed, the argument of transactions and exchanges across civilizations has been made very strongly by Amartya Sen. Civilization is seldom to be considered as an indistinguishable integer. The more 'authentic alternative visions' are allowed to grow from within a civilization, the less the clashes become intense, if at all they ever occur (Miles, 2002, p.456). Sen in one of his papers powerfully argues that 'values' that are taken to characterize 'Asia' or for that matter any other civilization are never captive to the region as much as it is to be considered as humanity's common heritage. His paper has effectively severed the connection between a given set of values with any particular civilization. As he illustrates: "'Indian traditions in Western imagination exaggerated the nonmaterial and arcane aspects of Indian traditions compared to its more rationalistic and analytical elements" (Sen, 1997, p.21).

Secondly, Western theories set nations and nationalisms off their hook, but do not know how to contain them. As a result, it has witnessed the rise of nations and nationalism in the post-War years with their devastating consequences for the world. Although Hegel viewed civilization as an independent flow that remains unaffected by what the nations and States do to it, he is also accused of his ethnocentric bias. Laclau, for instance, describes his formulation as 'the universalisation of its own [German] particularism' (Laclau 1996:24). Indian Thought, on the other hand, points to the organic and integral nature of nation and civilization. The nation, according to it, is certainly not what the State makes it to be; 'a civilizational nation 'on the contrary is invested with the potential of being alternatively constituted. The modern protagonists of Pan-Asianism, Prasenjit Duara informs us, were part of a pan-Asian 'cultural movement' - who, according to him, played a key role in introducing 'an alternative conception of the region' (Duara, 2010, 969-970 ff). That such alternative conceptions are available in history points to the irreducibly plural character of the

civilization. What Duara calls the 'alternative conception and vision' of civilization on the other hand acquires political salience insofar as it has the power of reining in the excesses that the nation-states more often than not are found to commit in their exuberance, acting as a counterweight to the current surge of narrow, belligerent, and arrogant nationalisms across the globe and keeps them within limits. At the heart of the process lies a nationalist imaginary that not only draws on but evolves into the civilization and remains bound by it. Following the three Indian thinkers, let us call it *civilizational nation*. The coming into being of a civilizational nation betrays an organic process and any attempt at forcibly narrowing or importing civilization from outside is inevitably fraught with disaster. If Tagore warned us against the destructive influences of the import following his visit to Japan, the present-day world bears ample testimony to the dangerous consequences of the Western attempts at exporting 'freedom' and 'democracy' to such far-off lands as Afghanistan and the Levant (Das 2006: 39-52) – the only difference being that Japan appeared to have exercised its choice while Afghanistan and the countries of the Levant did not. The superior law of civilization and world order, as Tagore argued, will prevail over the law of nations.

Thirdly, if the West has taken civilizational differences as given and unalterable, Indian Thought attempts to explain why such hardening of differences takes place, how such hardening only reflects the power asymmetry that exists between the West and the non-West, between the colonizers and the colonized, between the conquerors and the conquered and so forth. As Ramananda Chatterjee shows, the realpolitik intent of ruling the colonies is held responsible for creating and accentuating the civilizational differences and triggering the clashes between them. The reverse is not true. Civilizational differences are invoked and used to lend legitimacy to the colonial Powers and their rule.

Nation and Civilization in Indian Thought

The final part of this paper is organized into three sections revolving around the above three anomalies, viz. coexistence of civilizations, civilization as a means of disciplining narrow, strident and belligerent nationalisms and the power asymmetry that remains central to the hardening civilizational differences. All this is prefaced by an understanding of civilization in Indian Thought.

Bhav and Civilization

For both Swami Vivekananda and Tagore, it is the *bhav* - also spelt as *bhava* - and freely translated by us as spirit[3] that informs and 'embodies' a motley of peoples otherwise divided into races, communities, gender groups, nations and so forth in a civilization. While describing *bhav*, Swami Vivekananda also argues that 'there is no *bhav* over which only one community has a monopoly (Vivekananda,1977, p.3).

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[3] We propose to use the term 'spirit' in preference to the commonly used English word 'emotion' in this context. Sharma, for instance, prefers to translate it into 'emotion' although he reminds us that in recent Cognitive Theory, emotion and rationality are seldom posited as complete binaries. He also argues that what is called *bhav* dos not exist as a finished product in our mind, but gets 'formed in the mind to produce a conception or imagination' (Sharma 2010:26-7). Indian thinkers reflecting on the concept of civilization deployed the term *bhav*- not as emotion - but as spirit that one *discovers* from within one's mind in order to characterize a motley combination of groups and communities of people sharing it.

Since a *bhav* cuts across groups and communities, it disentangles the otherwise essentialist connection often established between a community and the spirit that is believed to be peculiar to it. As one reads his writings very closely one realizes that *bhavs* can be of different orders depending on the specificity of the respective communities they are supposed to characterize. Thus, the *bhav* that informs a jati in India's Varna (caste) hierarchy will have a much smaller denotation than the one that does our nation or civilization.

As one sieves through the pages of Indian thinkers, one is rather led to believe that *bhav* spreads from inside out embracing slowly the diversity of individuals, groups, and communities within a civilization. Any act that goes against the slow and gradual unfolding of the *bhav* characterizing a civilization bears out disastrous consequences for a nation. What Tagore noticed in his *Japan Jatri* as the dominant trend back in 1919 led to that great disaster of the First World War for which Japan – more than any other country of Asia – had to pay a high price. Japan, according to him, is the only country in Asia that 'could keep pace with Europe' by way of rushing for the rise on a fast forward track in just 200 or 300 years after it realized that 'the power that enabled Europe to become all-conquering in the world can be resisted only with the same [kind of] power': It internalized this "power of Europe" within a few years:

> The guns and cannons of Europe, drill and parade, industries, office and court, rules and laws were uprooted in their entirety and planted in the country. It is not like absorbing new lessons gradually and then building upon it, certainly not like raising a child from its infancy to youth; - but like welcoming it at its full youth like [one does in the case of] the son-in-law... They made the lessons from Europe stand overnight like a tree with its roots and branches kept intact on their own soil (Tagore, 1326 BS,p.108).

The spirit must grow from one's own soil. Japan paid dearly for being its exception. Often our continued adherence to our own civilization for millennia was considered by Europe as a source of our weakness: "Europe started announcing that one who is meek has an interest in propagating mildness, forgiveness and renunciation. Those who are defeated in this world have an advantage in [subscribing to] this ethos. Those who are winsome (*joyshil*) will find this as an impediment. This lesson attracted Japan. It is for this reason that the kingly power of Japan [in his time] looks down upon the power of this ethos (*dharma*)" (Tagore, 1326 BS, 118).

It is possible to read *bhav* in Modern Indian Social and Political Thought against its usual essentialist grain. Tagore, for instance, argues that every civilization has an organizing principle or spirit that, according to him, stands as its very foundation and a civilization in order to develop itself requires *some form of a bhaver oikya* or the unity of spirits in order that there is a certain convergence of *bhavs* represented by the wide diversity of groups and communities that come under its rubric (Tagore, 2015, p.202). The problem of modern Europe, according to him, is that it does not seem to have any single organizing principle. The 'modern civilization of Europe' is a medley of distinct – albeit opposite – forces (such as the earthly versus divine, kingship versus republicanism and so forth). Distinct and sometimes opposite principles seem to struggle amongst themselves to acquire 'supremacy in the society without anyone of them becoming successful in knocking others out' (Tagore 2015:202). Europe, according to him, represents a stalemate of many *bhavs*.

In a society where diverse principles or spirits fight amongst them for gaining supremacy and thus threatens to tear the body politic apart, the responsibility of integrating and unifying the society is conceded to the State. If there is anything that holds the European nations together it is the *rashtriya swartha* or the interests of the State (Tagore, 2015, p.204) while in the India this function of integrating the societies within a civilization was historically performed by the society itself. In short, the reunification of a nation with its own *bhav* is a prerequisite for keeping the civilization alive. As Tagore observes: "History of India is not our history; we are called upon to perform it" (Tagore 2015:720). Assuming that any performance is likely to be imperfect, yet perfectible, our entitlement to civilization is perpetually deferred. It is the permanent imperative of perfecting our performance that works against any complacence and arrogance and guards us against the nationalist abuses and excesses.

Coexistence of Civilizations

The coexistence of groups and communities across civilizations, according to Tagore, is made possible by way of transcending the world of necessity. Significantly, Swami Vivekananda too made a distinction between what he calls 'necessary function in the world' and the world of everyday necessity. Merely responding to the call of everyday necessity is not enough to hold a society of diverse groups and communities together. Tagore doubted if the division of labour that industrialization in Europe had introduced would ever bring the people together. Division of labour serves the necessity of manning the industries and running them. But does this have the power of organizing the society and keeping it from falling apart? Insofar as we are driven by everyday necessity, 'civilizations across the world look the same' (Tagore 1326:78):

> [T]he matter of necessity has steamrolled human habits. The world of necessity has widened its jaws and has gobbled up most of the things in this world. The nature becomes only the nature of necessity; human beings too become the human beings of necessity... one's identity as a human being takes a backseat. We are so much used to it that this brutality escapes our notice (Tagore, 1326 BS,pp.78-79 ff).

He illustrates this point with his first-hand accounts of Europe and Japan:

> When I have been to Europe, I have noticed their industries, the milling workers; their wealth and prowess (*pratap*) have captivated me. Yet all this is 'external'. But what catches our attention by piercing the disguise of modernity in Japan is the creativity of their hearts. That is not egoism, nor is it pomp, but [it is] worship. Prowess is what expands itself and makes others bow in front of it; but worship propagates whatever is larger than itself; that is why the preparations (*aayojan*) for worship are sacred and pure and not merely huge and many (Tagore,1326 BS, p. 100).

How does one compare the industrial work ethic of the West with the ethos of worship of human relations in India – human relations that only help us broaden our selves and reach out to others? Tagore has the answer:

That kinship (*atmeeyata*) relations are established even through the relations in the workplace are perhaps the lesson of our East. The West keeps work firm on its footing; human relations do not find any expression there. There is no doubt that the work becomes strong as a result of this... In the East, human relations within the

society are both diverse and deep. Our relations are never severed from the forefathers who have deceased. The web of our kinship is spread far and wide. We are quite accustomed to the practice of meeting the variegated demands of this wide variety of relations; we derive pleasure from out of it. Our servants too demand – not money – but kinship. Our work becomes unbearably steep wherever we cannot place [these] demands; our *spirit* suffers while doing such work. The reason why many a time there is a lack of understanding between the English masters and their Bengali employees is – the English masters do not understand the demands of the Bengali employees; Bengali employees are unable to understand the strict discipline of work demanded by the English masters. Englishmen are accustomed to responding to the demands of work; Bengalis are used to responding to the human demands. It is for this reason that they are not agreeable to each other (Tagore, 1326 BS,pp. 48-49ff, emphasis ours).

Tagore's equivalence between spirit and human relations should not escape our notice. For, the spirit, in this sense, has the capacity of withstanding the collapse of industries and escaping the dehumanization that results from such collapse. In his last reflective piece on 'Crisis of Civilization' written a few months before his death, he regrets having seen an England that he could hardly hold in high esteem any longer. He admits that he was once overwhelmed by the 'eternal message (*bani*) of the English people' that the 'width of their heart' could 'transcend all narrow confines' (Tagore, 2015, p.1202). He quickly adds that this dependence was certainly misplaced and is not always a matter of pride. When the colonial rule threw us into 'abysmal poverty' – the acute want of food, shelter, and clothing necessary for our survival, thanks to the 'limitless and slighting indifference of the civilized nation towards crores[4] of people' - all of us were singing in chorus the greatness of the 'civilized world' (Tagore, 2015, p.1202). He regrets that without the 'secret indulgence' of 'the upper echelons of the government' this 'insulting, uncivilized outcome' of colonialism could not have been produced. Colonialism has shown us its 'prowess – the image of power (*shaktirup*), not the image of emancipation' (*muktirup*). In a stark rejoinder as it were to Fukuyama - decades before he published his controversial essay on 'Clash of Civilizations' – Tagore declares: "Clashes [between civilizations] are unable to create anything. They only poison our vision and distort our strength. One cannot forget that the responsibility of opening the lion's gate[5] (*simhadwar*) between the East and West falls on the Bengalis" (Tagore 1326 BS: 116).

Civilizing Narrow Nationalisms

As one reads Tagore carefully, one is led to believe that Tagore's writings seem to have been guided by a threefold hierarchy in which civilization is situated above nation while at a still higher level lies the supreme principle that he variously describes as *Mahabharatbarsha* or Greater India (Tagore, 2015, p.722), 'the Law of the world' or *Biswabidhan* (Tagore, 2015, p. 719) and *sarbangin hit* or all-round Welfare (Tagore, 2015, p.709), *Manabdharma* or Religion of Man (Tagore, 2015, p.709*), Prakritik Niyam* or Law of Nature (Tagore, 2015, p.702) and *Dhrubadharma* or eternal religion (Tagore, 2015, p. 205) and so forth.

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[4] Indian count of one crore is equal to 10 million.

[5] Usually considered as the main gate of entry etched with the figure of a lion.

Figure 1: Tagore's Hierarchy of Nation, Civilization and Law of the World

The Law of the World

Civilization
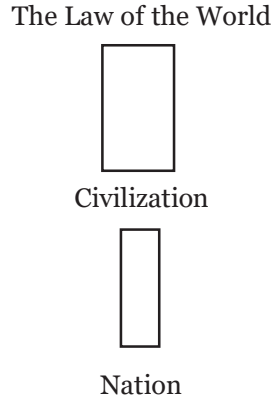
Nation

While a nation is embodied in civilization, the latter acquires diverse forms depending on the specific national contexts in which it gets embodied. Civilization, in other words, is embodied in the concrete form of a nation. The organizing principle that holds diverse nations together within a civilization also expresses and manifests itself through the uniqueness of each nation and national culture.

According to Tagore, the higher law in the hierarchy always prevails over the lower law. This universal law lies at the heart of any hierarchy. Tagore argues that whatever is 'good' is always associative and never exists in isolation, for it is felt only by associating one with the others (*loiya*): "What is best, the most perfect, the final truth is [so] always in association with others" (Tagore, 2015, p. 719) He criticizes the freedom of a disembodied and deontological individual as 'loveless, unencumbered, empty freedom' (Tagore, 2015, p. 705). The freedom in the West lies in the mastery over external wealth or *bahyasampad* (Tagore, 2015, p. 705) that only indulges in the command over things. Tagore describes such wealth that is accumulated beyond what is needed as 'the garbage of civilization' or *sabhyatar abarjana* (Tagore, 2015, p.707).

Asymmetry of Power

For Ramananda Chatterjee, the civilizational differences have to do with the power asymmetry that exists between the West and the non-West, between the British and the Indians, between the colonizers and the colonized – an asymmetry that cannot be mitigated till the colonial power is successfully combated. Chatterjee's contribution lies in squarely introducing the question of power to the Indian discourse of International Relations during his time. It is the asymmetry of power that defines the civilizational differences and not the other way round. While the colonial masters criticised us for not being sufficiently 'civilized' and therefore 'unfit' for claiming self-rule, Chatterjee's response is twofold: At one level, he points out that the Indians are no less 'civilized' than their British counterparts. Nations are 'civilized' in their own ways and there is no one single golden rule to become 'civilized' in the world. Perhaps in an anticipation of the contemporary post-developmentalist theorists, he too believed that there could be multiple – if not competing – trajectories of development, progress, and civilization. At another, his historical insight prompted him to assert

that one does not have to be 'civilized 'or 'fit 'in order to be able to govern oneself. In fact, according to him, one must govern oneself in order to prove that one is 'civilized 'enough and 'fit' for it. One's act of being involved in the practice of self-government itself makes one both 'civilized' and 'fit'. Civilizational differences are simply irrelevant to the question of self-rule in India.

Again, the first strand of his response is double-edged: If the Indians are accused of being uncivilized and unfit for self-rule, then the Englishmen are no better. He draws from his deep historical insight and observes:

> Englishmen did not come to a country of savages, but to one where the art of Government had in previous age made great progress… In the British period, too, Indians have on the whole proved their fitness for any kind of work, civil or military, which they have been allowed to do. So, it cannot be said that they are   totally unfit for the performance of all kinds of civil and military work (Chatterjee, 2016, p.9).

He continues in the same vein:

> …[M]ay we remind all so-called "superior" races of one fact! Human history is not limited by the few centuries of occidental ascendancy. The Hindus, the Egyptians, the Chinese were civilized before all or at least the majority of European races. Why could not the Europeans make their opportunity when the Egyptians made theirs! Does the fact show the inferiority of European races? (Chatterjee, 2016, p. 10).

In short, our 'civilization' does not make us any less qualified for rule than that of our colonial masters. He now sums up the argument: "Our history… does not disqualify us for self-rule" (Chatterjee 2016:13).

Conversely, history of the Western Powers is as much a history of brutalization and tyranny, insurrection, and defeat as it is one of triumph, conquest, and annexation. In an obvious dig at the colonial masters, Chatterjee notes: "Every country which is now free and independent, was captured at some period or other of its history" (Chatterjee, 2016, p.13). He maintains: "The truth is, all nations have been conquered; and all peoples have submitted to tyrannies which would provoke sheep or spaniels to insurrection" (Chatterjee 2016:14). All this is borne by his reading of the history of nations across the world:"If India is incapable of self-government, all nations are incapable of it; for the evidence is the same everywhere" (Chatterjee, 2016, p. 14).

All civilizations do not flourish in the same way. Unlike Hegel or Fukuyama, Chatterjee feels that there is no one universal yardstick of measuring civilizations. But being civilized in one sphere prepares a nation for being civilized in other spheres too. Civilizations, according to him, spill across the diverse spheres. As he puts it:

> Different kinds of genius, talent and capacity are not separate and independent entities; they are organically connected and correlated. If a nation gives evidence of genius, talent and ability in some spheres of human activity it is safe to presume that it possesses the power to shine in other spheres of activity too, if only it be allowed the opportunity to do so. We shall not speak of the ancient times, even in these so-called degenerate days the Indian is found among the world's great spiritual teachers and thinkers, the world's great litterateurs, the world's great artists, the world's great statesmen, and the world's great captains of industry" (Chatterjee, 2016, p.9).

Why do the colonial masters find it impossible to recognize the 'civilization' of the colonized? The refusal is, in short, the prerequisite for colonial rule. For, if the colonized are recognized as 'civilized' at the same time, they will instantly make colonial rule and its civilizing mission redundant. Colonialism cannot thrive without having to resolutely deny this recognition:

> There are many Deputy Collectors who can teach many Magistrates their duties. But the former always occupy a subordinate position. In the army, even the winners of the Victoria Cross cannot hope even to be lieutenants... There is no doubt, a natural reluctance, on the part of Englishmen to acknowledge our fitness. For if our fitness were admitted, there would be only two courses open. One would be to give us all the posts for which we were declared fit; but that would mean the exclusion of Englishmen from many lucrative careers. The other would be to declare practically that, though Indians might be fit, Englishmen for selfish reasons, were resolved by the exercise of power to prevent them from getting their due. But the rulers of India could not naturally make such a brutal declaration (Chatterjee, 2016, p.7).

How then do we give credence to our claim to self-rule? Chatterjee argues that there could be two ways of answering the question: One, by way of entering an argument with our colonial masters and keep persuading them in the process to repose faith in our civilizational fitness till we are successful in convincing them. According to Chatterjee, we had done enough in this regard without any avail. Two, by way of directly engaging ourselves in the practice of self-rule in order to demonstrate our civilizational fitness: "We are not perfectly fit for self-rule – no nation is. We are not entirely unfit for self-rule – no nation is. Fitness grows by practice and exercise. We want to grow more and more in that way, which is the only way" (Chatterjee, 2016, p. 17).Self-rule, in other words, is the sine qua non of civilization and the claim to self-rule is always to be couched in nationalist terms.

Conclusion

Let me now conclude. First, what is called 'the Indian turn' in theory signifies a turn of the West towards India insofar as the Western Theorists try to resolve the anomalies their theories develop, but find impossible to resolve on their own. We argue that Modern Indian Social and Political Thought helps us address, if not resolve, some of the anomalies that are inherent in the Western theories. We do not view Western theories and Indian Thought as crude binaries – but complementary to each other. An appraisal of their complementarities is an essential first step towards developing a composite Social and Political Theory. Secondly and contrary to the commonplace belief, Modern Indian Social and Political Thought does not define either nation or civilization in essentialist terms. Civilization does not exist in a void, but within a variety of nations sharing and living it. While nation is the embodiment of civilization, the variegated nature of the same civilization across nations is anathema to any dominating and monochromatic understanding of civilization. Thirdly, the pluralistic nature of Indian civilization, according to the Indian Thought, acts as a counterweight to the rise of narrow and belligerent nationalisms being sponsored and perpetrated across the world now. It constantly keeps alive the possibilities of alternatively constituting nations and nationalisms and thus keeps them within limits. Viewed in this way, civilization does not allude to a distant cosmic law – too distant to be brought to bear on the present-day context of nationalist

excesses and its authoritarian abuses. A nation that allows itself to remain divorced from its civilization pays dearly for its complacency and belligerence. Japan's devastative experience of World War I is illustrative of this. Nation and civilization are caught as it were in a web in which each exercises a restraining influence on the other. Finally, Indian Thought turns our focus away from the clash of civilizations to the *art* of their coexistence, cohabitation, and co-constitution. Human history *also* bears testimony to how civilizations live, how they coexist by drawing from each other and through a process of mutual enrichment and miscegenation. In other words, 'clash of civilizations' can occur only when they acquire a hardened and reified form by way of reflecting the power asymmetry that exists between nations and States. Modern Indian Social and Political Thought calls upon the people to 'perform their civilization', as Tagore would have said. Performing any civilization is bound to be perpetually imperfect and the very realization of these imperfections is what keeps human pursuit of civilization alive. Civilization is more about how it is performed and much less about how it is codified in the power asymmetry of nations.

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