* Nationalism/Patriotism Conundrum: Nationalism and patriotism are terms used interchangeably. This is despite the fact that there exists a world of difference between the two terms. Nationalism [the ideological foundation of the nation] shared a common past with printing revolution, the emergence of the novel as a literary form, newspapers, long-distance communication networks such as the railways, unified commodity market and so on. It’s a rather young concept. Nations never existed in the premodern/pre-capitalist/pre-colonial world. It refers to a blind adherence to unity against a perceived enemy. Patriotism is a much older concept which refers to the willingness to work and die for one’s own land [the land may refer to a city, a village, or a country].
* ‘The Difference Between patriotism and nationalism is that the patriot is proud of his country for what it does, and the nationalist is proud of his country no matter what it does; the first attitude creates a feeling of responsibility while the second a feeling of blind arrogance that leads to a war’ [Sydney J Harris].
* Indian nationalism: Anticolonial nationalism: features explained
* Some methodological issues: a) positional objectivity b) practical reason

**Early years (1870s-1890s): A Moment of Sympathetic Distance with Hindu Nationalism**

* During these years, Tagore composed poems like Sivaji Utsav in which he celebrated a regional Hindu revivalism by the Maratha king Sivaji who according to the poet dreamt of uniting for eternity "the scattered parts of this land with one religion” [একধর্মরাজ্যপাশে খণ্ড ছিন্ন বিক্ষিপ্ত ভারত বেঁধে দিব আমি]
* In this phase, Tagore was uncritically ambivalent toward the dominant nationalist imagination that India needed to be united by a single religion. Ambivalent, because, Tagore never glossed dharma with religion. Hence, his invocation of dharmarajya [ধর্মরাজ্য] carried a meaning closer to the regime of truth and justice. Uncritical, because he accepted the nation> ‘Bharat’, and projected it as a given in Sivaji’s imagination. Did Sivaji ever envision a united India in the context of the Mughal empire? How could a Maratha identity possibly graduate into a pan-Indian identity? What was at stake in this poetic license?

**The Swadeshi Period (1900-1913): The Moment of Departure**

* During this period, Tagore came up with a host of major essays on nationalism such as “Nesan ki?” (1901-02), “Bharatbarshya Samaj” (1901-02), “Swadeshi Samaj” (1904-05), “Atmaparichay” (1912-13), and two major novels “Gora” (1910) and “Ghare-Baire” (1913).
* In these works, he carried out a systematic critique of nationalism and unravelled its exclusionary impulses along class, community and gender axes. In “Gora”, Tagore confronts the question as to what constitutes the truth in one’s Indianness. Gora discovered himself as a true Indian when he realized, he could not be naturalized as an Indian by birth. In “Ghare-Baire” he cautioned us against the inherent aggression of swadeshi nationalism, which according to him, was an upper class, upper caste, male and Hindu affair that excluded peasants, artisans, Muslims and women from its core and hence it was rejected by the masses.
* During this phase Tagore drew a strong line of distinction between the situations that produced nations in Europe and the non-existence of those objective material conditions in India—race, language, religion, material interests and geographic location: “India was not, and did not need to become, a nation” (“Nesan ki?”). “Nations are not eternal. Each had a beginning; they will all come to an end” (“Nesan ki?”). Note, he never attempted a Bangla translation of the term nation. He believed in its foreign origin and preferred to retain its foreignness:

“We will use the word *jati* as a synonym for the English word ‘race’, and call the nation nation. If the words ‘nation’ and ‘national’ are adopted in the Bengali language, we will be able to avoid many confusions of meaning…I do not hesitate at all in using the word ‘nation’ in its original form. We have received the idea from the English; we should be prepared to acknowledge our debt by retaining the language too”. (Nesan ki?).

In this phase, he began to believe that the idea of nation came to India with colonialism and that it should dissolve with decolonization.

**First World War and Its Aftermath: The Moment of the Consolidation of Critique**

* During this phase, Internationalism and Universal Humanism overwhelmed Nationalism in Tagore. During this period, Tagore emerged as a global public intellectual who travelled all-over the world to preach against nationalism. He held that nationalism in Europe drove the world into the evils of colonialism, greed and warfare.
* Notable essays by Tagore during this phase: “Nationalism in Japan”, “Nationalism in the West” and “Nationalism in India”.
* If in Swadeshi period Tagore considered nationalism an evil for India, during this phase, he went one step further and began to realize that nationalism was an impediment to human embellishment everywhere which included Europe and Japan. He writes: “Because each nation has its own history of thieving, lies and broken faith, therefore there can only flourish international suspicion and jealousy…” (“Nationalism in Japan”, 1917).
* European Civilizations annihilated differences whenever and wherever they encountered them. On the contrary, Indian civilization preserved differences and accommodated them within an evolving social structure founded upon the caste system. However, in so doing, “in her caste regulations India recognized differences, but not the mutability which is the law of life. In trying to avoid collisions she set boundaries of immovable walls, thus giving to her numerous races the negative benefit of peace and order, not the positive opportunity of expansion and movement” (“Nationalism in India”, 1917).

**The final decade of his life (1930s) and the Aftermath: The Moment of Transcendence and Appropriation**

* Tagore became sceptical about the merit of patriotism as an ideal of a high order. In his novel Char Adhyay (1934), the protagonist Atin tells Ela: “To you I confess today—what you all call a patriot, I am not of that kind.” Atin says: “They who do not take cognizance of that which is greater than patriotism, their patriotism is like crossing on a crocodile’s back.” (Translated by Ahona Panda, 2016).
* Tagore’s alternative to Nation: The idea of the samaj (roughly, society). Before the British came, India didn’t have a political unity of a state. As the British leaves, India would have to reclaim its ancient unity of the samaj—one in which the duties would be distributed among its members by the samaj itself. In swadeshi Samaj (1904), he made a crucial distinction between the royal/sovereign power of the state and the authority of popular sovereignty in which “We all rule supreme in our kingdom of the King. How else would we have the will to join our hands with His?” In that famous song, the Poet appears to say, we will tread our own ways guided by our individual wisdom (atmashakti), but in the end, we will reunite and reconnect as a people—the king is the personification of the abstract popular will. In this song (1905), Tagore reveals his political philosophy and positions democracy/popular will over nationalism and patriotism.
* Ironically, Tagore was posthumously destined to be the author of three national anthems of three ex-British colonies in the Indian subcontinent. Should we not remember his troubled encounter with nationalism each time we respect the most sacred song of the Indian nation state?