3 Enchantment, Topophilia, and Idle Leisure: Rabindranath Tagore and Literary Creativity in Modern Bengali Literature

One winter morning – we were visiting Dhaka at the time – one of my relatives entered the room and said, 'Here is your book'. Retrieving it from the pocket of a buttoned-up coat, he handed me a copy of Caẏanikā. *Double-crown, sixteen-page format, pica alphabets; printed in The Indian Press. Writer, Śrī Rabīndranāth Ṭhākur. Publisher, Śrī Cārucandra Bandyopādhyāẏ. Once I got my hands on it, I was lost to Hem, Nabīn and Madhusudan. All the age-appropriate Bangla poems I had read before withered from my heart. Even now, half a century later, whenever I think of some lines by Rabīndranāth [...] I see the double-crown sixteen-paged leaf, the pica alphabets, like an impeccable photostat. Even precisely, if the page was on the left side of the book or the right, I have still not forgotten.*
Buddhadeb Basu[171]

Buddhadeb Basu's (1908–74) reminiscences of his boyhood days paint a picture of conceivable enchantment with Tagore's poetry and its appeal to young Bengalis in the early-twentieth century. Bengali literature received international attention, with Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. This eventful moment gathered various dimensions of modern Bengali literature, bringing an incredibly dynamic journey of the literary culture to fruition. A Nobel Prize meant great fame for the writer and the literary tradition he represented. Translations (of the *Gītāñjali*) into many languages were made available to readers across the globe, especially in Europe. Praising Rabindranath's poetic sensibilities, Ezra Pound wrote in the *Fortnightly Review*, "Bengal is a nation of fifty million people. Superficially, it would seem to be beset with phonographs and railways. Beneath this there would seem to subsist a culture not wholly unlike that of twelfth century Provençe.

171 *Āmār Chelebelā* (My boyhood days, 1973), 53–55. Hem, Nabin and Madhusudan are poets – Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay, Nabinchandra Sen and Michael Madhusudan Datta.

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Mr. Tagore is their great poet and their great musician as well".[172] Writing about the Bengali language, he asserted it to be "an ideal language for poets", being "fluid" and "flexible", and a language of "precision". However, Pound and the rest of the West quickly lost interest in Tagore, his writing, and his language – if not as quickly as they were captivated by his genius.[173] Such sudden and widespread recognition for an Indian in the field of literature in the early-twentieth-century brings to question the nature of cultural encounters and their influences on conceptual transformations within the literary-cultural consciousness, especially in a framework of colonialism, now increasingly moving within the loci of national and political entanglements.[174]

Less than half a century ago, in the context of Urdu and Persian, the colonial administration had presented a scathing critique of the inferior quality of Indian literature. This judgement was extended to other Indian vernaculars in Macaulay's infamous speech. By the early twentieth century, political dynamics had shifted beyond colonialism through increasing and rapid global interactions on the one hand and the beginning of the disintegration of the European enterprise of empire on the other hand. Indian scholars have repeatedly discussed the strange and sudden fame Rabindranath inspired in Europe in the early twentieth century; equally surprising was the abrupt disenchantment voiced in what was considered his inclination towards a vague Eastern mysticism.[175] Rabindranath, too, expressed disdain at the sudden praise; he suspected

172 "Rabindranath Tagore", *The Fortnightly Review*, originally published in March 1913. Later transcribed and provided as a part of the *Tagore Dossier* on the centenary of the Nobel Prize reception. https://fortnightlyreview.co.uk/2013/04/rabindranath-tagore/ accessed on 13th April 2021.

173 Amit Chaudhuri suggests that this disillusionment with Tagore in the West was equally astonishing as the great fascination he inspired, turning him into a global literary celebrity. See "The Accidental Tagore", *Guernica Magazine*, April 2011. https://www.guernicamag.com/chaudhuri_tagore_4_15_11/ accessed on 13th April 2021.

174 Entanglement here is used in the way Kris Manjapra explores the relations between different groups beyond the unidirectional historiography of colonialism and the charms of cultural encounters to specifically look for unequal relations between groups on unequal footing, who, nonetheless, need each other for political reasons. Such entanglements are often period-specific. Manjapra precisely locates 1880–1945 as an "age of entanglement". See *Age of Entanglement* (2014), 3–7.

175 See Amartya Sen's discussion of T. S. Eliot's and Bertrand Russell's disdain towards this alleged mysticism in Tagore, in *Home in the World* (2021), 86–87. Sen cites personal letters of Nimai Chatterjee as the original sources of these. See Sen's notes on page 414. See also Amit Chaudhuri's discussion of Philip Larkin's unabashed scorn for Tagore in *On Tagore* (2012), 4. For an authoritative reading of the (mis)understandings

an immense misunderstanding at play.[176] Apart from the gap in linguistic sensibilities in Bangla and the English translations of Tagore read in the West, this confusion was also effected by the gap of experiences in Europe (scarred by the crisis of the First World War) and India (where reinforced ways of voicing freedom and subjectivity were unfolding). While modern Europe at the time was steeped in feelings and experiences of disenchantment, Indian writers, especially Tagore, were invested in leading the Indian community (and a broader understanding of humanity) towards an emotional experience of enchantment amidst the inchoate conditions of modernity and global dialogues and relations.

The previous chapter focused on a rupture in the relationship between colonial authorities and Urdu intellectuals. In Bengal, while such strains of suspicion were not absent, a parallel relationship emerged between the colonisers and the colonised simultaneously. It was one of active absorption and assimilation of English and European cultural and literary thought by Bengali intellectuals. This impact, particularly throughout the nineteenth century, has been noted historically in the so-called 'Bengal Renaissance'. The early twentieth century saw not only Bengal but the mass of the Indian subcontinent in the throes of a renewed struggle for independence from the ignominies of British rule. Some of the most iconic examples of rebellious sentiments were expressed by Tagore; for instance, in the gesture of returning the knighthood bequeathed for services to literature, expressing his outrage at the Jallianwallah Bagh Massacre of 1919 (R. Chaudhuri 2002: 191). Through the long nineteenth century, Calcutta had become a significant spot on the world map, known as 'the second city of the Empire'. Under the pressures of colonial modernity and the need to assert the significance of Bengali language and cultural heritage, writers, historians, and philosophers were hard-pressed to reinvent their intellectualism in a modern form, and "literariness played a especially significant role in the process" (Kaviraj 2014b: 84). The emotional conflicts and constitution of intellectuals at this time was complex: they were captivated by the literary culture of the West, and simultaneously, they began to harbour strong feelings of rebellion against the Empire.

The consciousness of subjectivity and freedom is seen to dominate the thought processes of Bengali intellectuals at the turn of the century. Such discourses had been gaining momentum through the nineteenth century, making

that ensued between Tagore and the 'West', see Alex Aronson, *Rabindranath Through Western Eyes* (1943), especially "Introduction", xi–xii and 13–24.

176 Amartya Sen (2021), 88. See Martin Kämpchen's quotation of Tagore's letter to C. F. Andrews, *Rabindranath Tagore and Germany* (1991), 14. See also Tagore's letter to Andrews quoted in Aronson (1943), xiv–xv.

their significance felt in the minds and works of established writers like Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the younger but renowned Rabindranath Tagore, among many others. Rabindranath stood at a junction in Bengal's history where he had the fortune of receiving the best of colonial interactions, a Brahmo education, and the social standing of an opulent *jamidār* family steeped in the arts and literary culture.[177] Yet, well-circulated anecdotes from his youth, like being a notorious school dropout and refusing to study law in England, stand at odds with the narrative of lucrative professional prospects provided by the colonial education system, as he repeatedly rejected such opportunities in search of what he understood as 'lonely leisure', the utmost necessarily element in creative processes. Through his global recognition and profound influence on Bengali literary culture, he came to represent the voice of modern Bengali literature. His emotional attitude towards literature was central to this modernity; literature could occupy one's mind at any time, anywhere. Amit Chaudhuri points out that Rabindranath insisted on the etymological significance of the word used in Bengali for literature, *sāhitya*, its root being *sahit* (to be with).[178] Rabindranath excelled in a multitude of genres, writing some of the most remarkable novels, short stories and plays. He was the most emphatic poet and songwriter of his time. He is also the most renowned Bengali writer whose volumes of personal prose and letters remain widely popular; they present comprehensive perspectives on literature and the literary in a most intimate manner. He taught modern Bengalis to feel and live with literature in many ways.

Equally significant is his conception of literature as entangled with the emotion of love and aspects of the leisurely, the quotidian. Leisure as idle freedom for the maturing of human consciousness and literariness became a recurrent motif in his philosophy. In a lecture titled "The Philosophy of Leisure" (1929), he locates leisure as an experience that is of utmost necessity for attainment of an aspect of truth from the Upanishads, i.e., the truth of comprehension (*vijñāna brahma*) and the truth of joy (*ānanda brahma*), "the realm of

177 *Zamindār* is an administrative term, literally, a landholder. In nineteenth-century Bengal, a *zamindār* or *jamīdār* (Bng.) acted as a revenue-collecting landowner under the British Empire, managing peasants working on the land under the Permanent Settlement Act or Zamindari System introduced in 1793. Chitra Deb asserts that Rabindranath's family environment provided him with an expansive and liberal humanism that no other "great house" could have afforded. See "Jorasanko and the Thakur Family" *Calcutta* (1990 b), 64.

178 Chaudhuri, "The Accidental Tagore" (2011). This is reflected in several essays by Tagore, for instance, "*Sāhitya*" (1889), "*Sāhityabicār*" (1926) and "*Sāhityasammilan*" (1926).

wisdom and love", "where number and speed have no meaning"[179] This distinction between "action" pertaining to the West and "contemplation", wisdom and love representing the message of Rabindranath came to be built upon as gaps in the reading of his message in the West.[180] Referring to modern life of acceleration, progress, and speed, he refrains from reading leisure as the binary of progress, explaining the experience of leisure as the experience of "rhythm", "happiness", and "enjoyment" as indispensable (Tagore 1929: 617). The sensory and the emotional are intricately intertwined in his conceptualisation of leisure, humanity, and literature. At a time when writing had become a specialised vocation, with this conception of leisure, Rabindranath made the literary accessible and intimate. Referring to this intimacy and emotional appeal of his poetry, W. B. Yeats wrote in the Introduction to the English translation of *Gītāñjali* that "as the generations pass, travelers will hum them [Rabindranath's verse] on the highway and men rowing upon rivers", and they will be murmured by "lovers, while they await one another".[181]

Focusing on his conceptualisation of literature as quotidian, leisurely, and intimate, this chapter investigates the emotion of love as intricately linked with creativity in Tagore's personal prose. Love here is a wonderous emotion of enchantment or *māẏā*, a longing for and attachment to idle freedom, signified in the yearning for open, natural spaces. It is also the melancholic love for time, accepted in its fleeting nature, for the momentary and the everyday. Through these emotional approaches to space and time as loved, as yearned for, inspiring wonder – in their uncontainability – literary creativity can emerge in the form of a leisurely and intimate experience. The poet is delightfully flustered, inspired by a whim of poetry, for instance, as he enjoys the distraction caused by a buzzing bee:

> *What enchantment caresses me, making me forget my work*
> *My day(s) are spent weaving a web with the melodies of its song.*[182]

179 Rabindranath Tagore, "The Philosophy of Leisure" (1996a [1929]), 616–17. While *vijñāna* is commonly used to refer to science, it is used with reference to the Upanishads as pertaining to 'consciousness' or 'comprehension'. Tagore uses it to refer to the latter.

180 See excerpt from an article in *Vossische Zeitung*, dt. 16.10.1921, quoted by Aronson (1943), 23.

181 See Introduction, *Gitanjali*. Trans. Rabindranath Tagore (1917), xv.

182 "*Kī māẏā deẏ bulāẏe, dilo sab kāj bhulāẏe, belā jāẏ gāner sure jāl buniẏe*". *Gītabitān* (1932) 326. https://www.geetabitan.com/lyrics/G/gharete-bhromor-elo-lyric.html accessed on 30th May 2021.

Exploring the complexity in the abstract emotions of love, wonder, and enchantment, this chapter brings together the various aspects of leisure and literature in Bengal through a close study of the personal prose of Rabindranath, focusing on his collection of letters titled *Chinnapatrābalī* (A collection of torn letters/leaves, 1960). These letters written to his niece provide a rich source of his critical investment and emotional engagement with literature and leisure that influenced a conceptual change in the meaning of literature and the literary for Bengali readers. I first present a brief but necessary understanding of the modern phase of Bengali literary culture as context to the study. In the following sections, I elaborate on Tagore's parsing of the experience of enchantment and the emotion of topophilia, both of which can be seen as intricate extensions of love. Enchantment and topophilia as emotional attitudes are central to the philosophy of literature and leisure propagated by Rabindranath.

Along with the letters in *Chinnapatrābalī*, an earlier collection, titled *Ẏūrop Prabāsīr Patra* (Letters from a sojourner in Europe, 1881), his memoir, *Jīban'smṛti* (Reminiscences, 1991b [1912]) and several relevant essays and lectures are consulted in the chapter. The chapter explores the understudied and complex relationship of leisure, freedom, and civilisation for the poet. It locates the recurrently expressed love for the rural and riverine landscape of Bengal and explores its significance in Rabindranath's love for idle, fulfilling leisure entangled with literature and literary creativity. In a final section, the chapter looks at these entangled conceptualisations of nature, love, enchantment, and leisure as deeply informing Tagore's project of educating children through the primers he penned, i.e., the four volumes of *Sahaj Pāṭh* (Easy reading/lessons, 1930 onwards) and his establishment of the institute of learning at Śantiniketan in 1901. The aim is to trace the entanglements in love, leisure, and literature in Tagore's thoughts, from the days of his youth spent in rural Bengal to his vision for literary education in his advanced years. It also addresses the misunderstanding of this concept of enchantment in the West and Tagore's parallel reputation as the most beloved and enchanting writer for many South Asian readers, especially Bengalis, which arguably continues to persist.

3.1 A 'new race of men in the East': Developments in Modern Bengali Literary Culture

This section presents a context to the modern Bengali literary field with its centre in the urban space of Calcutta and its ongoing evolution before Rabindranath became a representative voice. The transformations in literature are closely linked with sociality and quotidian culture and thus, in many ways, with the leisurely. They are also intertwined with the consciousness of Bengali identity and

the creation of a ‘high’ modern Bangla. Like that of Urdu, Bengali literature’s modern journey is also interjected with the demands of colonial modernity and responses to it by literary stalwarts and reformers. While reform may have been a significant player in the socio-literary field, it was the concept of a re-invention, retrospectively termed a ‘renaissance’ (*nabajāgaraṇ*) that became the most significant agent of transformation, at least in the elite sphere.[183] While Rammohan Roy (1772–1833) and Isvarchandra Vidyasagar (1820–91) struggled for a reformed social space for modern education and literary culture, Michael Madhusudan Datta (1824–73) and Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838–94) projected a sense of this modernity onto literary language. The emergence of Bengali literary culture is also inextricably entangled with the practice of writing in English by Bengalis and their profound encounters with the West. Most writers were captivated with English literature, and some, like Madhusudan and Bankim, wrote in English for some time.[184] Several writers, like Pearychand Mitra (1814–83), read English literature at university and became inspired by the influential teacher and poet, Henry Vivian Derozio (1809–31). Derozio’s students formed a group of reputed freethinkers under the name ‘Young Bengal’, also known as ‘Derozians’. Resisting Hindu religious restraints, they took to an anglicised view of modernity, signified by “freedom and beef steaks”.[185] Armed with radical ideas and practices like consuming alcohol and beef, reading Tom Paine’s *Age of Reason*, this “new race of men in the East”[186] emerged as the necessary harbingers of disruption and scandal in elite Calcutta society. Encounter with English and European cultures and the self-fashioning of modern Bengali literary culture were two strands that worked in parallel at this time.

183 Several scholars have criticised this emulation of the European Renaissance as imitation and retrospective nostalgia by historians. In this context, two terms in wide circulation are ‘renaissance’ and its Bengali counterpart, *nabajāgaraṇ* or ‘new awakening’, referring to the dormant existence of an enlightened consciousness. See Sarkar, “Renaissance and Kaliyuga” (1997b). See also S. Chaudhuri, *Renaissance and renaissances: Europe and Bengal* (2004) and Surajit Dasgupta, “Nabajāgaraṇer Svadeś-bideś”, *Nabajāgaraṇ: Bicār-Bitarka* (2016), 25–31.

184 Madhusudan wrote in English and converted to Christianity. Bankim, the pioneer of the Bengali novel, first wrote an English novel, titled *Rajmohan’s Wife*, (1864).

185 Rosinka Chaudhuri, *Freedom and Beef Steaks* (2012), 1. See also Rajnarayan Basu, *Sekāl ār Ekāl* (1874), 26–29. Basu sees such practices as *nikṛṣṭa* (contemptible).

186 The phrase was disapprovingly used by Alexander Duff, a Christian missionary in India, in his report of how copies of Paine’s *Age of Reason*, *Rights of Man* and Hume’s *Essays* were dispatched to Calcutta in a cargo ship by a publisher from the United States of America, “taking advantage of the reported infidel leanings of a new race of men in the East, and apparently regarding no God but his silver dollars”. See R. Chaudhuri, *Gentlemen Poets in Colonial Bengal* (2002), 23.

3.1.1 The Consciousness of Literary, Cultural, and Civilisational Superiority

The nineteenth century saw a variety of cultural transformations in Bangla, of which the focus here is on the *elite* sphere.[187] As the nineteenth century advanced, the emergence of the literary came to be definably located in aspects of lifestyle and sociality. It inhabited a complex juxtaposition of private emotions propelled by modernity and the public experience of participating in a socio-literary community. Private contemplation, intellectual entertainment, and the sociability of literature – such quasi-intellectual and quasi-quotidian associations became central to the new-found literary aesthetic in Bengal. Literature took over the previous public practices of leisure time, transforming it into a semi-private intellectual engagement. Eminent poet Isvar Gupta wrote in the journal *Saṃbād Prabhākar* of March 1853:

> We have seen an end of the old pleasures of kite-flying, chess, draughts and dice, of idle talk, of the tabla and sitar, of card-playing and pigeon-fancying. Young men now discuss virtuous matters like Bacon's Essays, Shakespeare's plays, Kalidasa's poetry, the verse of the Gita, the meaning of the Vedas.[188]

The parallels in the transformation of attitudes to old leisurely pastimes with the Urdu cultural field are striking. Like in Urdu, in Bengali, too, the literary had also inhabited the leisurely before this technological boom of the print and catalytic encounter with the West, as is repeatedly mentioned in the recollections of the times when poetic contests among poets/'songsters' known as *kabiẏāl* were popular forms of entertainment, as were recitational arts like *kathakatā* and theatrical performances/*yātrā* (Banerjee 2019: 92, 114; R. Basu 1874: 12–14). These leisurely-literary engagements were typically social in nature, like the Urdu *muśā'irāh*, experienced in public or in company. With the modern and technological transformations of the nineteenth century, literature began to take up the mode of private contemplation and practice while continuing its functions of sociality. Furthermore, the literary began to be engaged with expressions of one's consciousness of temporality. The proliferation of print culture and the imposition of clock-time – two ubiquitous factors of the nineteenth century – are seen to have stimulated ways of thinking about time and the literary, where

187 For instance, scholars like Sumanta Banerjee and Sumit Sarkar have delved into the much-neglected popular, folk, and mass cultures of the time. See Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Streets* (2019) and Bandyopādhyāẏ, *Uniś Śataker Kal'kātā o Sarasvatīr Itar Santān* (2013). See Sarkar's "The City Imagined" and "Renaissance and Kaliyuga" in *Writing Social History* (1997 a & b). See also Śrīpāntha, *Kal'kātā* (1999).

188 Quoted in Chitra Deb, "The 'Great Houses' of Old Calcutta" (1990 a), 62.

the literary took up expressions of time, engendering texts that discussed the present and one's location in it (Sarkar 1997b: 186–88). The consciousness of temporality was echoed in the perception of time as useful and valued, under the drive of the colonial regime, experienced by the middle classes, as Sarkar and Sumit Chakrabarti have shown, in the job of a petty clerk (*kerāni*).

Several Bengali writers see the rapid and thorough absorption of Europe in Bengal through literary-cultural fascination in a positive light, while several others, for example, Rajnarayan Basu (1826–99), highlight the negative impact of these encounters. He refers to these as "*iṅrāji śikṣār aniṣṭa*" (the harms of English education).[189] Alternately, Buddhadeb Basu asserts that it was the literature of Europe, rather than its advancements in sciences and other fields "which, for the Bengali mind, had extraordinary, elixir-like qualities" (2018: 54–55). While both positive and negative perceptions of Western influence are seemingly natural in this context, more often than not, such perceptions were complex rather than simply falling into binaries; they were inherently contradictory. Referring to these varying perceptions regarding the West among English-educated Bengali intelligentsia, Tapan Raychaudhuri identifies the tendency among Bengalis, "an anxiety to assess European culture […] as something to be emulated or rejected", as almost obsessive (1988: xi). The growth of Bengal's literary culture was inclined to thrive with less direct, coerced interference from the colonisers; it was majorly steered by Bengali intellectuals, albeit taking active advantage of the social reforms, capital growth and the development of Calcutta as the empire's capital in the East. The Rebellion of 1857 (Bng. *sipāhī bidroha* or Sepoy Mutiny) that had proved to be a disastrous loss for Delhi and North India had a relatively less drastic impact on Bengal's relations with the British.[190] Whereas Delhi and Lucknow witnessed severe retributions from the colonial authorities, Bengal faced less severity due to its complicated relationship with the British. Sudipta Kaviraj sees the eighteenth century as a witness to a "rise of powerful indigenous mercantile interests", via which, the English slowly and steadily entered Bengal. This entry distinctly differs from challenging an older establishment like the Mughal dynasty. He sees this "peculiar character" of the entry of colonialism in Bengal as responsible for a rapid Western impact on Bengali culture and, conse-

189 *Sekāl ār Ekāl* (1874) For him, the worst effect of English education is blind imitation of foreign values by young Bengalis, which has led to a misguided understanding of social values, 60–62.

190 This is arguable, to some extent. Scholars like Kaviraj and Chaudhuri suggest that while the Rebellion brought about a distinct rupture in parts of North India where the uprising originated, in Bengal, such breaks were not directly caused by the actual Rebellion. This is also reflected in sketches of the time, like Kaliprasanna Sinha's *Hutom Pyãcār Nakśā* (2008 [1862]), 16.

quently, on the relations between the two. A significant feature of such a relationship was the remarkable enthusiasm shown by sections of the Bengali elite for the "new institutions and knowledges coming from the West" (Kaviraj 2014b: 76). Buddhadeb Basu explicates this Bengali enthusiasm for English tastes in literary culture through "an inner, a congenital affinity" between the Bengalis and the English, "an affinity which the accidents of history combined to make the best use of. The first contacts took place under extremely happy auspices. Both the Vaishnava romanticism and the Mughal courtliness having declined, Bengal was ready for a spiritual renewal which, at that moment of time, only an impact with the West could produce" (Basu 2018: 55).

These accidents of history enabled Bengalis to thrive and evolve towards an identity based on feelings of 'superior' intellectual and literary culture that was then strongly seen as distinct from other vernacular literary cultures. Kaviraj comments that at this junction, "Bengalis duly developed sub-imperialistic delusions about themselves and considered other groups within the larger territory of the presidency their natural inferiors" (Kavirah 2014b: 82). The latter were primarily non-Bengali speaking communities to the West of Bengal that were added to the presidency and the large Bengali Muslim peasant population. The community identity of (Hindu) Bengalis developed with the concept of *sabhyatā* or civilisation – a concept that gained immense significance in the nineteenth century. While the eighteenth century saw a zeal for the 'civilising mission' among colonialists, the concept of civility itself became a topic of enthusiasm among Bengali writers later in the nineteenth century. In her reading of the various straits of 'civilisation' and 'civility' in Bengal, Rochona Majumdar points out that "the meanings of *sabhyatā* were also inextricably linked to the emergence of a regional identity of being Bengali within the larger Indian nation". She further asserts that "Bengali language, whose development as a vehicle for modern literary and academic expression" was crucial to the "fashioning of a people as civilized or *sabhya*" (Majumdar 2015: 2). Emotions of pride and self-aggrandisement regarding the superiority of Hindu Bengalis as a civilisation were driving forces behind the Bengali "sub-imperialistic delusions" (Kaviraj 2014b: 82).[191]

In his brief essay titled "Bāṅālir Bāhubal" (The strength or prowess of Bengalis), Bankim repeatedly asserts that although Bengalis have historically never been physically powerful people, physical strength is not as significant. He

191 Alternately, Bengali satires of this time often regarded the imitation of English 'civility' by the *bābu* as uncivilised, for it blindly imitated the colonial foreigner. See Chaiti Basu, "The Punch Tradition in Late Nineteenth Century Bengal", *Asian Punches* (2013), 123–24, 129–32.

compares the Bengali’s lack of physical strength to the same lack in the English, who have now become masters of the Sikhs (referring to people from Punjab, historically reputed for their physical strength). If Bengalis can harness the emotional power to desire *jātīẏa sukh* (community-based/national gratification) and if this desire can drive them, it is not impossible to become powerful (Chattopadhyay 1954b: 213). This superiority is perceived to be achievable through self-training, hard work, and a disciplinary exercise in knowledge. Majumdar argues that with ‘self-training’ or discipline (*anuśīlan*) as central to ideas of civility, “such an explication of civilisation could only belong to a limited section of the Bengali populace” (2015: 3). The excluded sections from such identifications were Muslim peasants in Bengal, as well as the heterogeneous population accumulating in cosmopolitan Calcutta (Sarkar 1997a: 166–67). A particular way of demarcating this segregation in communities was asymmetrical counter labels of language identity such as *bāṅāli* (Bengalis) and *hindustānī* (entailing the population to the West of Bengal who spoke Urdu/Hindi/Hindustani), or *abāṅāli* (anyone who was not a Bengali/did not speak the language). While Calcutta gradually emerged as an urban metropolis teeming with heterogeneity in linguistic culture, the attempts at segregating ‘outsiders’ from ‘Bengalis’ became central to the question of civilisation in Bengal.

3.1.2 Towards a ‘High’ Bangla: Language Elitism in the Nineteenth Century

While encounters with English and European education, literature, and culture became “catalyst[s]” (Raychaudhuri 1988: x) that transformed the Bengali literary sphere, these transformations ran parallel to the journey of modern Bangla as a language. Bankim (among other established writers) argued for a difference in formal/written language (*sādhu bhāṣā*) and informal/colloquial language (*calit bhāṣā*) as extremely important for the proper evolution of Bangla. On the other hand, urban prose genres of the early-nineteenth century, including the Bengali *naksha* or *nakˈśā* (often translated as a ‘sketch’) literature, demonstrate a language of the streets, representing the heterogeneity and local flavours of the city.[192] Referring to the richness of the language spoken on the streets, Sumanta Banerjee has adequately noted the remarkable differences between the folk/popular aspect of Bangla and the elite culture of Calcutta, commonly used for literary purposes in the nineteenth century (2019: 160). The diversity in this street language was in “sharp contrast with the literary style of the Bengali bhadra-

192 See Hans Harder, “The Modern Babu and the Metropolis” (2004), 359–62, 376. See also, Harder, “Urbanity in the Vernacular” (2016), 442–43.

loks, who were trying at that time to shape a language heavily dependent on Sanskrit, and a style borrowed from European literature" (ibid.).[193]

Nevertheless, the loose popular genre of the century, which Banerjee describes as "farces, belles-lettres, picaresque novels, satirical sketches", is seen to be in close contact with the street language.[194] The trend of such satires or satirical sketches/*nakˈśā* was started by a Kaliprasanna Sinha, with his innovative urban prose, *Hutom Pyẽcār Nakˈśā* (Sketches by the night owl, [1862]). Such sketches provided observations of life in the booming metropolis, emerging as an adequate style of urban prose, "printed in the city for the city and about the city" (Harder 2016: 442). The narrator in *Hutom* is the eponymous watchful owl, perched at a vantage point, observing the city below and retelling in the language of the streets. The following vignette is a narration of the events following the flight of Wajid Ali from Lucknow and his arrival in Calcutta as retold by Hutom, satirical in tone and rich in Persianate vocabulary:

> An exciting rumour (*"hujuk"/hujug*) erupted in the city: the king of Lucknow ("*lakhˈnauẏer bādˈsā*") has arrived and settled at Mucikholā[195]; he will travel to England ("*bilāt*"). The king's costumes are flamboyant and feminine ("*bāiẏānā poṣāk*"), and his feet are painted. Some say he is lean and beautiful ("*chipˈchipe*"), just like an *apsarā*.[196] Some others say, "Not at all, the king is huge – like a water well ("*kupor mata*") – he is broad and thick, but quite a talented singer". And some say, "Oh, what rubbish! The day the king crossed the waters, I was aboard the same steamer. He is dark-skinned and slender (*ekˈhārā*), wears glasses on his nose, just like our *maulabī sāheb*"[197]. Since the king of Lucknow was released from prison ("*kaẏed theke khālās*") and began to live in Muchikhola, the city turned colourful ("*śahar baṛa gulˈjār haẏe uṭhˈlo*"). (Sinha 2008 [1862]: 102).

193 *Bhadralok*, a compound noun formed of *bhadra* (gentle, civilised) and *lok*, people, refers to the elite community of educated 'gentlemen' in colonial Bengal, with certain parallels to the North-Indian *aśrāf*. Sumanta Banerjee describes it as a "respectable class", emerging from either the upper or middle strata of society, as "administrative employees" and "professionals" with "landed interests" (2019), 60.

194 See Banerjee (2019), 197. Harder also refers to these scattered 'genres' as "early prose narratives" (2004), 362–63.

195 An area of Calcutta near the docks, now called Garden Reach. The colloquial name of the area, Mucikholā/Muchikhola, literally translates as cobbler's or shoemaker's yard due to its leather industry.

196 In Hindu mythology, *apsarā* are described as celestial dancers, singers and musicians.

197 A learned Muslim man, often the leader of a community and/or the teacher of religious scriptures.

Observations of historical events (like the Rebellion/mutiny, “*miuṭīni*”), urban characters (“*bābu*”), festivities (“*rath*”, “*durgot·sab*”), comments on human nature, and representation of street-talk, rhymes (popular songs/*gān*) and rumours (*gujab/hujug*) are what make these sketches an excellent form of prose to document the growing life and culture of the city. The rough, colloquial street language, vibrant with vivid metaphors, tinted intonations and provocative allusions, drew heavy criticism from prominent writers like Bankim.

In his essay “Bāṅālā Bhāṣā” (The Bengali language, 1878), Bankim asserts his position in the heated debate regarding the evolution of Bangla between those who proposed a strict adherence to Sanskrit in Bengali writing (for instance, Ramgati Nyayratna) and the opposing group who advocated the use of colloquial Bengali, the language of the streets. Although he seems to rebuke the advocates of strict Sanskrit followers in writing Bangla, Bankim creates an exclusive identity for Bengalis and Bangla literature based on this very linguistic adherence to Sanskrit, rejecting the language of *Hutom*: “[T]he language of Hutom is deprived, the vocabulary is bereft of richness. The narration is weak, it has no form, nor strength. It is not beautiful and although not obscene, it has no cleanliness, nor purity about it. It is not the language in which books should be written” (1954 d: 373). He differentiates between two categories of colloquial language for writing – one of *Hutom* (*hutomī bhāṣā*) and one as used by Mitra in his ‘novel’ *Ālāler Gharer Dulāl* (*ṭekʲcā̃dī bhāṣā*).[198] While the latter is more acceptable, the former should not be entertained. Such assertions were significant in the standardisation of the language as ‘high’ Bangla, accessible to an exclusive community (Banerjee 2019: 14). Influential decisions were made by what Sumit Sarkar calls the “high literati”, creating a new elite, Hindu literary sphere (1997 b: 189). Simultaneously, with the rapid spread of English as an almost mandatory language, an erasure of Persian as a linguistic requirement in Bengal ensued. One of the significant factors in this change, apart from decisive adherence to moderate Sanskritisation, is the general role of the Brahmo Samaj. The association and its ideals served as the cradle for most elite writers who eventually became iconic figures of this literary sphere. They showed the way for ‘*bhadralok* etiquette’;[199] and they played significant roles in refashion-

198 Or ‘the language of Tekchand’, Tekchand Thakur being Pearychand Mitra’s *nom de plume*.

199 Drawing on social etiquette entangled with the gentility of the *bhadralok*, Banerjee suggests four identity markers: residence in concrete houses, attention to sartorial choices, use of chaste Bengali spoken language and a fair knowledge of English language and manners.

ing literary language, borrowing vocabulary and flavour from Sanskrit and the literary-philosophical thought from English.

This collaboration of Sanskrit/Hindu and English/colonial ideologies is seen recurrently in Calcutta's emergent Bengali literary sphere. These conformations also influenced educators like Vidyasagar, known as the founding father of modern Bangla.[200] This is evident in the syllabus he designed for a "modern audience through institutionalized educational curricula", where he listed Sanskrit epics like *Rāmāyaṇa* and "highly aestheticized works by Kalidasa like *Raghuvaṃśa* and *Śakuntalā* along with Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*" (Kaviraj 2014b: 89). In response to the general colonialist critique of vulgarity and degeneracy in the Vidyasagar's cultural and linguistic strategy refuted it with the illustrious Sanskrit classical canon, which, however, "was subtly reconstructed in a discernably Western style through the surreptitious filter of modern taste" (Kaviraj 2014b: 90). Remarkably different from the exact colonial accusations hurled towards Urdu writers, in Bengal, we see a finely manipulated response. We also see enthusiasm for the influence of English education and institutions in the concept of a refashioning or 'new awakening', which nodded to Western inspirations and the richness of the classical traditions. To do this, Bengali writers, too, took recourse to the past – but the image of this past is more refracted as it also extended into the past of Europe.

> The Bengal Renaissance had to shape itself in the face of a politically dominant and culturally powerful adversary. To do so, it followed the trajectory of the adversary's own earlier history, imbibed in most part from that very adversary – as a direct historical model, but far more as the source of the educational, economic and technological factors determining the growth. The result was a remarkable epistemic affinity between the rulers and the ruled. (Sukanta Chaudhuri 2004: 18)

Hand in hand with the 'renaissance', the elite literary culture was supported by the social culture as propagated by the Brahmo ideals, which enhanced this exclusive sociability. Based on Rammohan's reinterpretation of the *Veda*s, the Brahmo Sabha originally aimed to rid Hinduism of what were seen as meaningless practices, like idol worship. After Rammohan's death, within a few decades, the Sabha (meaning a congregation) was revived by Rabindranath's father, Debendranath Tagore (1817–1905) under the new name of Brahmo Samaj (entailing a more organised community), to seek spiritual freedom from age-old

200 He highlights the significance of the "literature of Shakespeare, Milton, Bacon, Sir Walter Scott and others." See Jogendrakumar Chattopadhyay, *Smṛtite Sekāl*, quoted in Rosinka Chaudhuri (2018), xxvi.

rituals. The social-intellectual leanings of Brahmo ideals liberated elite Hindus, thus allowing them to explore and accept European/English ideologies and cultural practices. This liberation was expressed by elite members in their educational aspirations, sartorial choices, and material-cultural display, influencing notions of civility like *sabhyatā* and *bhadratā*. These upheavals brought a sharp, modern transformation in people's faith, practices, politics, language, reading habits, living conditions, dress, etiquette, and intellectual engagements. Literature/*sāhitya*, like a constant companion, was both an agency of this change as well as the vehicle of this change. Kaviraj describes this momentous process and the "significant role" played by literature: "a certain clarity of syntax, chasteness of vocabulary, refinement of pronunciation – all operations influenced by literary texts – became mandatory constituents of the modern Bengali sense of cultivation" (2014 b: 84). It was in a family instrumental to this transformative process that Rabindranath Tagore was born and raised. Historians of the Bengal Renaissance regard Rabindranath as the final figure of this 'awakening', attempting to encapsulate these literary and socio-cultural transformations within the two names, Rammohan and Rabindranath.

3.2 A Modernist Enchantment: Tagore's Ideas of Love, Leisure, and Language

The Tagores inhabited one of old Calcutta's "great houses" (Deb 1990 a: 56–63; 1990 b: 64–67). Dwarkanath Thakur (1794–1846) was a successful entrepreneur, landholder, and wealthy businessman. He owned two English print journals, the *Bengal Harkaru* and *The Englishman*, a leading agency, and lived a life of opulence.[201] He reasoned for the settlement rights of British traders in India. His vision of colonial interaction was one that profited both parties. His vision was neither realised nor did his riches outlive him, leaving his son Debendranath in considerable debt. Debendranath, influenced by Rammohan Roy, his father's close associate, acquired a keen sense of moral uprightness and spiritual detachment. He was invested in the cultivation of Brahmo ideals in societal norms and education, especially of his children. Of his sons, Dwijendranath (1840–1926) was a philosopher and Satyendranath (1842–1923) was a Civil Servant. Jyotirindranath (1849–1925) was closest to the younger Rabindranath, encouraging him in his literary and musical endeavours. Jyotirindranath set up the literary magazine *Bhāratī* (1877) in their Jorasanko home, with their sister

201 "[A]s evinced by the gargantuan banquets at his villa in Belgachhia". See Deb (1990 b), 65.

Swarnakumari as an editor. Chitra Deb writes, "nowhere else in late nineteenth-century Calcutta could we have found such a circle: so vigorous, so easy-flowing in its intellectual flare" (1990 b: 66). It was an institution brimming with literary and artistic-intellectual activities. The house had several libraries and studies, while regular literary discussions took place on the rooftop terrace, attracting a surge of elite and cultured friends.[202] Rabindranath writes of the advantages of this stimulating atmosphere which pervaded their home in those early days.[203] His initial efforts at writing were circulated within the family and gradually began to be published in *Bhāratī* (Deb 1990 b: 66). His first collection of poems titled *Kabikāhinī* (Poet's narration, 1878) was published when he had just turned sixteen. As Andrew Robinson summarises, by his late twenties, Rabindranath "had a deep and genuine appreciation of Sanskrit, Bengali and English literature, a similar grasp of Bengali and Hindustani vocal music and a wide knowledge of English and Irish songs, besides first-hand experience of many aspects of life in England". These interests had enabled him to write poems, plays, stories, novels, essays, operas and songs "that are still read and performed by Bengalis a century later" (Robinson 1991: 2).

Buddhadeb Basu, an ardent disciple of Rabindranath, tries to make sense of the poet's genius for English readers as Bengal's Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dryden, and translators of the Bible; "[t]o describe him in terms of English literature, one must name quite a number of authors, for he compresses in one man's lifetime, the development of several centuries. He has created language, both prose and verse" (Basu 2018: 4). Basu and other Bengali writers of his time, the generation after, strived to break away from his patterns in literary aesthetic for they believed that with the end of Rabindranath, an era had ended; language and literature needed to turn to the pressing realities, the looming feelings of "horror and boredom" (Basu 2018: 14). Nevertheless, they could not but marvel at the development of prose that charted the end of this 'renaissance'/modern phase in Bengali literature, making an ambitious and enchanted leap from "Bankimchandra's stiff formalism to the diamond depths of Rabindranath's later prose" (Basu 2018: 4). Bankim's prose was more innovative and agile than such claims; however, at the end of the century, Rabindranath's prose had indeed achieved a maturity that transformed modern Bangla to "a fully developed and highly complex language" (Kaviraj 2014 b: 91). As Tagore writes in a significant essay titled "Bāṃlābhāṣā-Paricaẏ" (Introduction to the Bengali language, 1938), he inherited a dynamic literary-linguistic tradition,

202 See Rosinka Chaudhuri, "Modernity at Home", *Freedom and Beef Steaks* (2012), 120–54.

203 *My Reminiscences.* Trans. Surendranath Tagore (1991 b), 20.

fashioned by masters like Rammohan, Bankimchandra, and Vidyasagar.[204] He repeatedly refers to the *calit* or colloquial language as *prākṛt*, drawing a parallel with the plurality of vernaculars to *saṃskṛt*/Sanskrit. Referring to European vernaculars to Latin, he emphasises the need to accept this colloquial, fluid, ever-changing language for literature to allow traffic among the inner and outer spatial demarcations (Tagore 1949 [1938]: 393–94). He writes: "[i]n languages of the Western nations, the distinction between this inner and outer forms do not exist. That is why literary language has developed a dynamic life, and colloquial language has acquired a thoughtful richness" (ibid.). The difference in Bengali, he asserts, is due to a formal discipline, not in the language's inherent disposition. He attempted to alleviate this distinction, encouraging a quality in the language that created equal space for both so that modern Bangla could move freely.

Rabindranath argues for a discourse of movement and fluidity as organic rather than disciplined. This discourse of dynamism pertains not only to language and linguistic evolution but also to his elocution of these linguistic formulations. He asserts free-style observation as the praxis of his intellection on language, in contrast with the renowned linguist Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay. As opposed to the latter's vast, geographical, and methodological knowledge of the language, Rabindranath proclaims his own familiarity as one acquired by footloose notes of an explorer, conscious of his feelings along with his observations, drawing affinity with the singing minstrels, the *bāul* cult of Bengal: "I have not accumulated knowledge like static settlers in the kingdom of science; I have roamed the streets, happy, like the *bāul*. Whatever has been collected in my bag of information, I have mixed it with and added my language of joy (*khuśir bhāṣā miliẏe*)" (1949: 391). This affinity with the *bāul*s has been most influential in his thoughts on writing and language and his most valuable contribution towards modern Bangla. He initiated a liberation of modern Bangla into a more fluid language, accommodating the flow of emotions and sentiments. The influence of the free and footloose *bāul* recurs in his literary thought and to borrow the phrase from Amit Chaudhuri, clears a space for emotions which he recognises as wonder or "*bismaẏ*" and happiness, "*ānanda*" or "*khuśi*". Several scholars like Sudipta Kaviraj and Sibaji Bandyopadhyay have identified a particular appeal to emotions, sentimentality, and sympathy as typical of Tagore's literary creativity (Kaviraj 2014b: 91; Bandyopadhyay 2008: 413). Reading Tagore's fiction as a cumulative craft of spontaneity and perception, Bandyopadhyay renders Rabindranath's writing style as "*kholā hāt-*

204 See Rabindranath, "Bāṃlābhāṣā-Paricaẏ", *Rabīndra Racanābalī*. Vol 26 (1949 [1938]), 397.

er khel" or a play of loose/free hand (2008: 411). This does not entail a loss of discipline but, in fact, a reorientation of discipline within literary creativity. The reinvention of literary language and the ability to arouse readers' emotions are central to Rabindranath's art.

Two significant ways in which Rabindranath popularised the use of colloquial language as a literary language, thereby turning the literary experience as intimate, were in his rendering of poetry in music, as a song, and in his propensity to writing poetic prose, many of which are in fact, composed as personal letters. This chapter focuses on the collection of letters written to his niece, published under the title *Chinnapatrābalī* (first published under this title in 1960). I also briefly introduce his earliest collection of published letters, written from his travels in Europe. Composed in his adolescence when he was sent to England to pursue a career in law, these letters were edited and published under the title *Ẏūrop Prabāsīr Patra* ('Letters from a Sojourner in Europe') in 1881. This was one of the first books in Bengali written in a colloquial, intimate language (*calit bhāṣā*) as opposed to the formal language of books.[205] Later, while writing about his childhood days, he mentions this publication as an act of "youthful bravado" (Tagore 1991b: 115). Although these letters were not, by any means, examples of mature writing, their publication was an extremely significant event. That a collection of private letters written by someone so young, describing his impressions of travels and life in a different continent and culture, in the language of intimacy that one shares with family members, is a remarkable signifier of the shifts in Bengali literary etiquette. Such epistolary experiments are seen as "path-finding" innovations in the literary culture of the time (Majumdar 1990: 116). Notwithstanding that such publishing feats were more possible for Rabindranath due to his family's cultural-literary milieu, writing familiar letters with the thought of publication became a novel literary possibility, pre-empting his literary parsing of modern subjectivity. That such a book of familiar letters would be acquired and read by an unfamiliar readership also points at specific shifts in the concepts of literary subjectivity and writerly self.

Addressed to his niece, Indiradebi Chaudhurani, the letters in *Chinnapatrābalī* were composed during 1887–1895, when Rabindranath was between the ages of twenty-six and thirty-four. During these years, he travelled frequently to parts of rural Bengal and Orissa, in charge of his family's estates. Spent mostly in solitude, this period of his life has been expressed by him as the

205 Andrew Robinson and Krishna Dutta eds. *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore* (1997), 7. Also see Swapan Majumdar, "Literature and Literary Life in Old Calcutta" (1990), 116.

"most productive period" of his literary life (Tagore *Glimpses* 1991 a: Intr.). At this time, he wrote some of his best-known short stories and plays, edited the family-run journal *Sādhanā* as he lived in and travelled through places like Shilaidaha, Shajadpur, and Patishar. In the Introduction to the English translation, titled *Letters from a Young Poet* (2014), Rosinka Chaudhuri explains that Indiradebi had copied the letters and presented them to Rabindranath later, before he was awarded the Nobel Prize. A selection of these copied letters, along with letters to another friend, Srishchandra Majumdar, was published under the title *Chinnapatra* (torn leaves/fragments of letters) in 1912 and was translated under the title *Glimpses of Bengal* (1991 a [1921]). Later, in 1960, only the letters written to Indira in this collection, along with a hundred and seven additional letters to her, were published under the new title, *Chinnapatrābalī* (A collection of torn leaves/letters). These letters offer an intimate understanding of his engagement with ideas of love, enchantment, freedom, the necessity of fulfilling and idle leisure and his thoughts on writing as literary and philosophical creativity. He writes that he does not believe in 'autobiography' (*jībanˈcarit*). Instead, it is in these letters that he conveys the essence of his writing, his inner self, thus bringing forth a depth to the epistolary genre in Bangla.[206] These letters are repeatedly mentioned as crucial to an understanding of Rabindranath as a writer, a companion to his vast literary career. They also reveal his recognition of what Sudipta Kaviraj calls his "emotional intentionality" (2014 d: 210).

Kaviraj asserts that by the time Rabindranath came to this literary field, modernity with its industrialised, utilitarian, and prosaic attitudes had caused a severe "disenchantment" in the internal lives of people (2014 b: 92). As seen in the last chapter, with the pressures of modernity and the rise of print culture, prose had taken over poetry to make sense of a world that needed to prove itself capable of sober, commonsensical yet sophisticated expressions of modern life. Writing thus became an increasingly "specialized profession", "an extraordinary activity", writes Kaviraj: "Its task was to recreate enchantment in a world that had finally been desacralized and disenchanted. In social terms, this development paralleled the rise of a new concept of entertainment – in a lifestyle increasingly dominated by temporal regimes driven by work" (Kaviraj 2014 b: 96). But modernity also has its enchantments. Admittedly, the usual understanding of modernity as a rupture sets it apart as a temporal entity, cut off from the past (which is more than often nostalgically seen as the horizon of possible enchantments). Nevertheless, scholars have demonstrated the broad

206 *Chinnapatrābalī* (1993), 242–3. From here on, all quotes from this 1993 text are my translations. I have used Chaudhuri's translations from her 2014 edition for longer quotes.

spectrum of the enchantments of modern times.[207] These enchantments may be 'new', but the emotional experience of enchantment is grasped in what Jane Bennett describes most adequately: "to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday" (2001: 4). It is this possibility of feeling, to be captivated and struck with wonder amidst the quotidian, which is central to Rabindranath's conceptualisation of writing. Even without fully agreeing with Kaviraj's argument of disenchantment, we can nonetheless agree on the significance of the literary enchantment propagated by Rabindranath. This sense of enchantment stems from the importance Rabindranath attaches to the experience of the emotional within the literary, as wonderous and uncontainable. His concept of enchantment is modernist, located within the ephemeral and the momentary, inhabiting the quotidian (as easily triggered by the sound of a buzzing bee), rather than in the pre-modern and atemporal sense of enchantment as divine.

The concept of disenchantment (in German, *Entzauberung*, the undoing of magic) that scholars often borrow from Max Weber is based on his understanding of rational and industrial modernity as devoid of the mysterious, unpredictable powers that pre-modern life offered.[208] His understanding of pre-modern, possibly enchanted life is closely linked with religion. Bereft of the possibility of faith in any power higher than the human in modern times, he draws out disenchantment as the meaninglessness of death and life, in the feeling of living as alienation, as "tired of life"/*lebensmüde*.[209] Although disenchantment in the Weberian manner may not be as pervasive in the Bengali society of the time, a new form of emotional engagement towards literature and the arts was ushered in by Rabindranath's expansive literary and educational vision. While several aspects of his literary-educational vision may have been realised gradually with the turn of the century, it was in the last decades of the nineteenth century and his own youthful wonderment that these attachments took shape. The task of understanding Tagore's conception of enchantment in this light is a constricted one; firstly, because the discourse of cultural disenchantment in modern times is heavily repeated and internalised in Western scholarship, and secondly, because scholars who argue for enchantment in the modern times often tend to see it in the light of consumerist and technological allures. The

207 See Jane Bennet, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings and Ethics* (2001). See also Saurabh Dube, 'Introduction', *Enchantments of Modernity: Empire, Nation, Globalization* (2009).

208 "Wissenschaft als Beruf", *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe* (1992 [1917]), 86–87.

209 Ibid., 88. For the English, see Max Weber, *Charisma and Disenchantment. The Vocation Lectures*. Trans. Damion Searls (2020 [1917, 1919]) n.p.

literary enchantment of Rabindranath that this chapter explicates sits differently with the concept-meaning of the English word. Nevertheless, I continue to use the word because it is the most adequate English equivalent of the emotional spectrum that Rabindranath addresses and engages with in his personal and reflective writings. It also encapsulates the literary attachment for generations of readers, who, like Basu (see epigraph), could not resist the *allure* of reading and committing to memory the experience of reading, once introduced to Rabindranath's prose and poetry.

3.2.1 Emotions of Enchantment as Experiences of Otium: Love, Wonder, and Attachment in *Chinnapatrābalī*

This discussion is restricted to the emotional allure of literature that is so integral to Rabindranath's philosophy of writing and to the cult-like following in his readers. The agenda here is to grasp this new or modern emotional engagement with the literature that not only emerged out of the encounters and entanglements of history but also left a long-lasting legacy that surpasses its contemporaneity. This emotional engagement provides a threshold where the literary, against the utilitarian flavour of modernity, is located within experiences and characteristics of otium – in the literary activities of writing and feeling.[210] I focus on the emotions in these experiences and approach otium as an experience entangled with the literary in its emotional manifestations. While the title of this chapter locates two emotional phenomena – topophilia and enchantment – the basic emotion concept that connects the two is that of attachment or love, in Bengali, *moha* and *māẏā*. This love is arrived at after the experience of wonderment and through the feeling of attachment. These feelings are often overlapping, and they remain deeply connected (Bennett 2001: 4). Translating Tagore, Rahul Peter Das explicates how Bengali words for love – for instance, *prem*, can also be entangled with "a whole gamut of expressions for positive feelings" (2010: n.[13],177).

Experiencing love for life, an attachment to its fascinating and wonderous aspects, and the wilful capacity to be struck by observations and emotions are characteristic constituents of an experience of otium.[211] Jane Bennett explicates the experience of enchantment as "a state of wonder, and one of the distinc-

210 See Fludernik's and Nandi's explication of writing and literary creativity as possible experiences of otium (2014), 4. C.f. Richard Adelman's essay in the same volume (2014), 186–89.

211 Discussed in Introduction and Chapter 1 of this study.

tions of this state is the temporary suspension of chronological time and bodily movement. To be enchanted, then, is to participate in a momentarily immobilizing encounter; it is to be transfixed, spellbound" (Bennett 2001: 5). She cites Philip Fisher's description of enchantment as "a moment of pure presence" to emphasise the feeling of time as static, or fading in the background, a temporal inertia.[212] Bennett defines enchantment then as an odd combination of somatic effects – "[t]o be simultaneously transfixed in wonder and transported by sense, to be both caught up and carried away" (2001: 5). In this paradoxical arrest of thought and (in)action, the ability to be struck by something engaging and wonderous, as we shall see, remains central to Rabindranath's concept of artistic freedom, literary creativity, and idle leisure. The feelings of enchantment, enticement, and enthrallment – the sense of attachment or longing, in Bengali, *māẏā-* runs through the letters read in this chapter, connecting leisure, literature, and emotions.

The emotion of *māẏā* (translatable as both enchantment and attachment) had a significant role in Rabindranath's writings, bringing a nuance into the very word and transforming it into a new concept. In his works, it is often read and perceived as spontaneity, innocence, and lucidity of language, eventually becoming the keywords of recognition, locally as well as internationally, of his typical style. It was this sense of enchantment that Yeats and other poets in the West found so surprising and perhaps, perhaps, attractive in Rabindranath's works. Yeats writes in the Introduction to *Gītāñjali* of this feeling of being entranced, which he reads as "spontaneity", "innocence", and "simplicity", drawing a rather simplistic contrast to the cultural disenchantment of Western modernity:

> We write long books where no page perhaps has any quality to make writing a pleasure, being confident in some general design, just as we fight and make money and fill our heads with politics – all dull things in the doing – while Mr. Tagore, like the Indian civilization itself, has been content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its spontaneity. […] An innocence, a simplicity that one does not find elsewhere in literature makes the birds and the leaves seem as near to him as they are near to children. (1917: Intr.)

Apart from equating his writings with the entire Indian civilisation, this sort of (mis)reading of Rabindranath's conceptualisation of enchantment is perhaps

212 "[T]he moment of pure presence within wonder lies in the object's difference and uniqueness being so striking to the mind that it does not remind us of anything and we find ourselves delaying in its presence for a time in which the mind does not move on by association to something else". Philip Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (1998), 131.

what led to his iconic image as the saint-poet or the eastern mystic in the West. As has often been contended, Bengali readers and scholars, on the other hand, find this simplicity, this essence of spontaneity not in relation to any mysticism but rather in his absorption of the quotidian, the local, and in "his modernist love of the momentary".[213] This is, I argue, due to the linguistic turn the concept of *māẏā* undergoes in Bengali at this junction, which remained untranslatable (to a great extent) for a European or even non-Bengali readership. Rabindranath's writings translate *māẏā* to a new variation of enchantment that is not so much divine but modernist in the sense of private, experiential, and quotidian. It entails a break with the previous connotations of the word.

The Monier Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary entry for *māẏā* offers various meanings of the word: "art, wisdom, extraordinary or supernatural power", as well as "illusion, unreality, deception, fraud, trick, sorcery, witchcraft magic".[214] While these meanings carry a supernatural essence, other meanings of the word are "compassion, sympathy". Amit Chaudhuri draws attention to the two simplified, recognised registers of the word in colloquial Bangla. One is the "religious-metaphysical register, to do with the unreality of the visible world", the divine form of attraction (Chaudhuri 2008: 29). This corresponds to the meanings of illusion and unreality. The other is commonly understood as "a homely one, and refers to the almost irrational attachment that human beings feel for another human being or place". This is closer to the meanings of sympathy and compassion, especially in collocation with the word *moha* (love, attachment) (ibid.). Chaudhuri points out that the register of *māẏā* which Rabindranath brings forth is a new one, "a subtly, but decisively modernist one: that of 'enchantment' – a celebration of, rather than a turning away from the visible world, as appearance is remade through perception, poetry, and language" (2008: 30). I would further argue that this new connotation draws on rhetoric of longing and desiring in an abstract fashion, expressed in being interrupted and distracted, or in Bennett's words, "transfixed". He introduces it to the reader through its recurrent appearances in his writing, especially in his poetry and songs. The Bengali verse/song "*e śudhu alasa māẏā/ e sudhu meghera khelā"* (this is only an idle enchantment/ merely a sport of the clouds)

213 See Amit Chaudhuri, *On Tagore* (2012), 127–28. Chaudhuri argues for reading Tagore's efforts at "intervening in and reshaping" his surroundings as an experience of 'total art', like the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but distinct from Wagner's "messianic vision", and absorbed with the everyday and the domestic.

214 Monier Williams Sanskrit-Dictionary (1899), printed page 771–72. https://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/scans/csl-apidev/servepdf.php?dict=MW72&page=0772-b accessed on 30th November 2021.

aptly explains this modern expression of being momentarily enthralled by something as ordinary as the sheer movement of clouds.

This emotion of enchantment is seen to be clearly something disruptive but also pleasurable and enjoyable. Like Bennett's definition of the experiential quality of enchantment, it is engaging on the one hand while simultaneously it renders one idle.[215] Rabindranath often uses *māẏā* in his verses to show a strong collocation with idleness or inaction, a leisurely mood that his writing embraces, assuring the reader of its positivity, rendering this feeling an integral part of living and the appreciation of life. His running argument in the letters of *Chinnapatrābalī* is the importance of acquiring the leisure to feel and value these emotions. For the poet, this is the work of life. While enchantment is expressed in the prose of these letters, the feelings it embodies are often revealed in variegated emotional vocabulary like wonder (*bismaẏ*), affection (*sneha*), attraction (*ākarṣan*) and most prominently in entrancement/rapture (*mugdha*). Joy and sorrow are woven together in the repeated use of the Bengali phrase *sukh-duḥkha*. Melancholy (*biṣād, biṣannatā*) is depicted as a contemplative feeling that gives rise to a desolate and helpless love. While enchantment is expressed in various emotional registers, it is arrived at only once freedom is attained. Freedom is sought from everything – work, duties, sociability, clutter, exuberance, but most of all, from civilisation. Freedom (*mukti*) from civilisation (*sabhyatā)* is integral to this emotion of *māẏā*; the call is to renounce the shackles of civility and love like the wandering *bāul*. A conceptual study of emotions requires a historical study of the same since emotions are historically shaped for particular communities. I do not delve into the historicity of all these emotions here, as it is beyond the present scope; nevertheless, the historical turn of these emotions that Rabindranath conceptualised is explored in the following sections.

For a writer like Rabindranath, aware of his impending, growing literary career, it would have been evident that these letters would become crucial for readers to feel a personal connection with the writer. The language of these letters is affectionate, familiar, and flowing. A strong presence of the poet's emotions flows through them, where he repeatedly expresses his many confused feelings, overflowing joys and sorrows, as well as the profound sense of an intimate relationship with nature. The overarching subjective narrative brings the reader to an unprecedentedly personal space shared with the writer. Scintillating humour, self-mockery, and delightful sensory descriptions help bring a sense of familiarity to the reading. Exploring the sensual and sensory aspects of these letters further explicates the emotional complexities the author addresses.

215 See Jane Bennett's description of engagement, which coincides with this mood: "to be both caught up and carried away" (2001), 5.

They are written in a genuinely leisurely manner, as they testify, often composed in half-lying postures, in the "lonely leisure" of a "tranquil *Phālgun* afternoon", on a "beautiful *Śarat·* morning", while daydreaming, jotted down during prolonged periods of sitting quietly, staring out of the houseboat on the river.[216] The letters are engaging in their conversational style and aloof in their contemplative style. This style of mingling conversation and contemplation is also a form of communication the poet believes is central to a writer's task. Conceptualising Rabindranath's creation of a modern language and subjectivity in the essay "The Poetry of Interiority", Sudipta Kaviraj argues that Rabindranath draws on "earlier languages of the self" in attaining this modern subjectivity by employing familiar terms but simultaneously "displacing their meanings by carefully modulated untraditional use" (2014 d: 189). Kaviraj follows the semantic transformations of the first person singular pronoun 'I' or *āmi* and claims that in Bengali literature while the word *āmi* earlier referred to the grammatical 'I', similar to the prefix of *ātma* in *ātma-jībanī, ātma-kathā*, the 'self' of the new subjectivity brought forth by Rabindranath is a "free-standing noun", meaning the first-person-singular self or "the philosophic-psychological I" (Kaviraj 2014 d: 201). This reshaping of subjectivity engenders a shared space, like in his use of language, with the capacity to emote and reflect thoughts as well as feelings. In the intimacy of epistolary writing, the author shares the space with the reader – both the intimate and immediate reader and the distant and unfamiliar.

3.2.2 Attachment, Idleness, and Freedom: Subjectivity and Civilisation in Rabindranath's Letters

For Rabindranath, writing is an intimate, expressive exercise, a means to engage with his emotions, thoughts, and place in relation to the world. This engagement, however, is not without doubt and scepticism. He frequently expresses concerns about writing for an unfamiliar audience who may not understand him (Tagore 1993: 243). The act of writing then becomes a bifurcated experience – it remains a specialised craft while it becomes a vehicle for the feeling of being enchanted and being engaged with his intimate thoughts.

216 *Phālgun* is a month in the Bengali calendar, roughly corresponding to mid-February to mid-March, seasonally signifying spring. *Śarat·* is a Bengali season signifying the end of rains and the beginning of winter. In these letters, it appears to be Rabindranath's favourite season. I transliterate it as *Śarat·* here, whereas in quotations from Chaudhuri's translations, I have retained her transliterations. The same applies to other Bengali words, wherever our transliterations differ.

These letters provide a glimpse of Rabindranath's thoughts about writing about his invention of subjectivity. The act of writing is seen not only as his daily work (for example, in editing the journal *Sādhanā*) but also as an activity (like jotting poetry) that comes to fruition in the state of *paripūrṇa ālasyaras* or what can be roughly translated as a 'fulfilling mood of idleness'. Writing these letters become "a delightful necessity" and "a form of literary extravagance" (Tagore 1991 a: Introduction). Leisure is claimed to be an indisputable necessity for reflection and to *taste* the freedom to feel emotions that connect the self to the world. Such leisure, for him, is found in the pure enjoyment of reading an ideal, "lazy book", such as a "good travelogue". He writes that he would read such books not in the hustle of Calcutta but in the mofussils, where "it is very relaxing to sit down with that kind of thick book in hand on a completely secluded afternoon or evening" (Tagore 2014: 350). Rabindranath equates this state of leisureliness to the semantics of leisureliness of the Muslim ruling classes, the *nabāb*/nawabs: "There's something of the *nabāb* in my character" (ibid.). Rosinka Chaudhuri sees this *nabābī* as a "luxury of the mind" (2014: 19). In *Chinnapatrābalī*, Rabindranath weaves a complexity between enchantment/wonder as an emotional ability to be struck by life and the intimate, reflective act of writing. A sense of freedom and idleness is an indispensable necessity for the experience of both. However, this idle leisure not only remains a base, a requirement for these experiences of emotion and writing, but emerges as an end unto itself – to live the mood of leisureliness or *ālasyaras*. This philosophy of idle leisure is strikingly similar to what has been argued as "ideals of freedom" against the Enlightenment notions of humanity's greatness in progress and civilisation (O'Connor 2018: 2). Rabindranath expresses a persistent discomfort with these Western concepts of progress and civilisation and critiques the same with his love for a sense of freedom – both metaphysical (as idle freedom), but also political freedom.

Enchantment is expressed in continuous engagement with the sensory and the strong desire for emptiness and freedom. Sensory enchantment is articulated in joyous outbursts, "leaping like a schoolboy suddenly on a holiday" while describing the furious beauty of a thunderous rainstorm, while elsewhere, it is absorbed as "peace, dropping slow from the sky overhead, as if a golden stream of auspiciousness" that enters his heart through his "entranced pair of eyes" (Tagore 2014: 80, 133). It is felt as "intoxication", overtaking him as he hums and sings (2014: 202). It is what takes hold of his imagination as he walks on the sandbank in the moonlight (2014: 315). Along with enchantment, the craving for freedom runs through the various themes of emptiness, solitude, lonely leisure, an attachment to nature and the desire to create and compose literature and music. References to this sense of 'freedom' appear recurrently in his memoirs, *Jībanˈsmṛti* (1912 [1959]). It is recalled as the feeling while leaving his first

school to join the next one (1912: 33). While schools changed, his fixation regarding "fleeing from school did not change" (Tagore 1912: 34). The yearning for freedom is transformed in later years as one of utmost necessity, a desire for freedom from ties, a need for an immense emptiness. Rabindranath writes of this craving for emptiness in a letter to his wife in 1901: "My inner being awaits and craves a ceaseless emptiness. It is not just the emptiness of the sky, air and light, but an emptiness of the home, of arrangements and furnishings, […] no drawing room, no dining room, nor aristocratic exuberance/*nabābī*".[217]

Craving for emptiness is seen to develop in *Chinnapatrābalī* with constant engagement with the openness of the natural landscape, simplicity of rural life and a deep understanding of the relationship with nature. Emptiness is enjoyed in isolation and solitude; several letters in this collection celebrate these solitary, pleasurable, lazy days empty of worry, activity, and hassle, empty of the urgencies of modern life. But work and laziness are two sides of the same concept for him – a *līlā* or divine play, the divinity being representative of time beyond control. The business of men, their lives and times are deemed insignificant in the face of nature's resplendence and the play of time. Man's egotistic efforts are translated as civilisation, and the emptiness the poet craves, the enchantment with the world, is projected as free of the hustle of civilisation. He describes walking by the river on his own under the rise of a full moon of *kojāgor pūrṇimā* (an occasion for worshipping the Hindu goddess Lakshmi) when, in the absence of people and commotion, he felt like "the one and only last-remaining pulse of a dying world" (Tagore 2014: 104). He then creates a counter-image of the fuss of civilisation after a few lines: "And all of you were on another shore, on the banks of life – where there is the British government and the nineteenth century and tea and cheroots" (ibid.). Civilisation, the business of bound duties and all sorts of unhappy shackles of restrictions are conveyed in his dislike for Calcutta. In a letter dated 18th August 1892, he expresses the beauty of a *śarat·* morning in Shilaidaha, a day shimmering with sunlight after rain showers by the side of a full river. He imagines the "young and beautiful earth goddess" having an endless love affair with "some god of light" (Tagore 2014: 149). Freedom from the shackles of civilised society of Calcutta is expressed best in a letter written in May of 1893, writing from his boat house on the river Padma:

> Here, I alone am the master – no one else has any authority over me or my time. The boat is like my own dressing gown – entering it one can enter a

217 *Ciṭhipatra*, (Correspondences, Vol. I) (1942) 55. I translate the Bng. *nabābī* as aristocratic exuberance.

> time of looseness and leisure – I think as I please, imagine what I please, read as much as I want, write as much as I want, and I can put both my legs up on the table and stare absent-mindedly out at the river and immerse myself as much as I wish in these days full of sky and light and laziness. […] How differently one feels from Calcutta in the space of only one day! […] What is sentimental or poetical in Calcutta – how real and true that is over here! (Tagore 2014: 184–85)

He repeatedly describes himself as someone crazy, wild, a vagrant – someone who is painfully at odds with the idea of civilisation. In a letter written on 13th June 1892, he rages against civilisation, beginning with: "I'm fed up with civilised behaviour (*śiṣṭhācār*) – nowadays, I often sit and recite – 'What if I were rather an Arab Bedouin!' What a healthy, strong, free barbarism (*asabhyatā*)!" After regretting that he is, unfortunately, a "nitpicky Bengali", he tries to sum up his emotions for freedom from civilised society: "As such by nature I'm uncivilised – I find the intimacy of people completely unbearable. Unless there's a lot of empty space all around, I cannot completely unpack my mind" (Tagore 2014: 129: Tagore 1993: 89–90).

For Rabindranath, the concept of civilisation was at odds with the contemporary discourses of the time, based on regional identity and its superiority, as analysed earlier in the chapter. Intriguingly, his figure stands tall over the turn of the century as "the ultimate civilized man" (Sinha 1990: 44). Rochona Majumdar explicates the "different" understanding of civility and civilisation that Rabindranath preached in his late years. His critique of civilisation is a critique of the emotion behind it – a national pride based on narrow-minded definitions – expressed "in innumerable essays, speeches, songs, and poetry" (2015: 28). While national pride is an emotion he struggled with (and this is seen to evolve gradually in his writings), simultaneously, his love for the rustic, rural, and free landscape of Bengal grew to unbridled leaps. Freedom and civilisation are concepts here that Rabindranath responds to as a modern, colonial subject with much rage directed against the unrighteous powers of the British in India, expressing his outrage against colonial prejudices and practices. For example, in a letter dated 10th February 1893, he reports a dinner conversation with an "uncouth Englishman", who said that "the moral standard in this country was low, people here did not have enough belief in the sacredness of life" (Tagore 2014: 160). This long letter expresses his anger and even physical discomfort at how colonial subjects are treated. He writes of the "sugary English smiles" and "polite English conversation" as empty, false, and "deeply untrue!" (Tagore 2014: 162).

Critical of narrow ideas of civilisation, Rabindranath projects an emotion of enchantment for the local, the natural, and the everyday. The time spent in these villages, where people had a "simplicity", expanded his creative powers immensely. Satyajit Ray, explaining the effect of this contact with the land and

its people on the poet, comments in his widely famous documentary on the poet:

> With a worldly wisdom unusual in a poet but characteristic of the Tagores, Rabindranath… set about in a practical way to improve the lot of the poor peasants of his estates, and his varied work in this field is on record. But his gain from this intimate contact with the fundamental aspects of life and nature and the influence of this contact on his life and work are beyond measure. (Ray *Rabindranath Tagore*, 1961)

Glimpses of this influence come to light in a letter written from Shilaidaha dated 4th July 1893. The overflowing river flooded the fields, and Rabindranath observes from his boat the activities of the poor farmers, "bringing back their unripe grains"; he "can constantly hear the sounds of lament". He acknowledges the cruelty of the world, of nature and that "the complaints of these hundreds and thousands of wretched innocents is not reaching anywhere". Undercutting these philosophical musings, he comments, "philosophical sorrow is one thing, and the sorrow of ripening grain getting submerged is quite another" (Tagore 2014: 197–98). Rabindranath's experiences of rural life in these parts influence two streams of thought about the Indian/Bengali village in his writings, as argued by Dipesh Chakrabarty: in one, there is "trenchant critique of society" in the village, depicting social evils, superstition, and oppression; and the other depicts the rural village "as a land of arcadian and pastoral beauty" (2000: 150–53). Chakrabarty locates the former in Tagore's reflection of the village in his short stories and the latter in his poetic compositions "(not always in verse)". These letters constitute the latter, poetic compositions that are the antithesis to the progressive and civilised world "outside of historical time" (Chakrabarty 2000: 153). It is through these "imagined" ways of seeing the nation that Chakrabarty explicates Rabindranath's ambivalence towards nationalism.

In these reflections, we are presented with a way of thinking, feeling, and desiring based on the basic tenets of human subjectivity in a pact with freedom in nature and an enchantment with the quotidian. This desire accompanied him until his final years, after the disillusionment of the national struggles, the Swadeshi Movement and the looming global disaster of the Second World War. Rochona Majumdar sees this desire as an intention to build a "civilizational humanism that would draw its resources from the rural and the popular cleansed of all abjection" (2015: 31). In this way of life, freedom and the leisure to feel think and be entranced are seen as indispensable. Rabindranath Tagore attempted to create a way of life to inculcate these feelings among children in the legendary school he built in 1901. These themes and emotions appear repeatedly in his pedagogical ideas. While he brought forth a modern subjectivity and an emotion of enchantment in his writings and songs, he also brought

Bengali literature closer to nature and rural Bengal, questioning to a certain extent the centrality of Calcutta in its then-contemporary discourse. His creation of enchantment with nature can be read as an attempt at re-enchanting nature (Bennett 2001: 91). However, the question of re-enchantment vis-à-vis nature is a tricky one. At the same time, in his representations of rural life in nature, the realities of oppression in village life come forth, far from discourses of enchantment. It is enough for the purpose here to focus on Tagore's shift of the source of enchantment in nature and the natural sublime through what Chakrabarty refers to as "imagination" beyond the difficulties of "realism" (2000: 149–50).[218]

In his view, nature as the source of enchantment encourages artistic contemplation in an immense space rather than in the possible enchantments of modern and urban Calcutta. This understanding of immensity in natural, open spaces, too, was an invention that informed his conceptions of subjectivity and the writerly self, entangled with his concept of contemplative leisure and the emergence of a free, thinking-feeling being. In this sense, Rabindranath's conceptualisation of idle leisure and otium highlights and critiques the shackles and context of colonial capitalism and Western concepts of civilisation that are seen as selective. For the colonised to express the political, metaphorical, and sensory freedom inherent to the concept of otium, Rabindranath turns to the centrality of emotions like love and attachment to nature. Nature is idealised not only as a source of leisure, idle freedom, and enchantment but also embodies a way of life steeped in the rhythmic and the sensory, beyond the constrictions and machinery of Western civilisation. Drawing on the idea of ecospirituality, Bennett (2001) reads attachment to nature as contributing to a certain kind of "enchanted materialism", distinct and separate from its representation as something divine. As for Tagore's modernist enchantment, it is not nature's divinity but the ability to be open to the enchantment of the senses and clear an emotional space for reflection.

218 Chakrabarty argues that for this purpose, Rabindranath uses European Romanticism and Hindu metaphysics. Chakrabarty, however, ignores the deep influence of the folk components of Bengali (oral) literary and musical traditions on Rabindranath, for example, the influence of the *bāul* (2000), 150–51. See also Supriya Chaudhuri's reading of rural Bengal in Tagore's stories, "Imagined Worlds: The Prose Fiction of Rabindranath Tagore" (2020), 132–38.

3.3 Love of Space and the Discourse of 'Lonely Leisure' in *Chinnapatrābalī*

As Rabindranath spent more time in rural Bengal, he appreciated the bareness of village life and the sublime beauty of the natural landscape.[219] Although he travelled frequently during these years (some of the letters are written from Calcutta and London), it is the days he spent in Shilaidaha, Shahjadpur, and Patishar, amongst other mofussil towns and villages, living on and off the Tagore family's estates (and in his houseboat on the river Padma) that form the impressive backdrop of his writings at this time. Coursing through these letters, "like a ceaseless heartbeat, is Tagore's deep love for the natural splendour of Bengal".[220] Rosinka Chaudhuri comments on the significance of this space's physical landscape, roads, rivers, and waterways. Such aspects of nature perceived as lively and wonderous are constitutive of what Jane Bennett calls an "enchanted materialism" (2001: 80–84, 92). For Rabindranath, while nature is animated, it is instead the deep connection or relationship with the human consciousness through which the immense workings of nature can be fully explored. Chaudhuri explicates this in Rabindranath's "domestic" relationship with nature. The poet's relationship with nature concurs with Yi-Fu Tuan's definition of the increasingly significant term *topophilia*. Topophilia, originating in the Greek *topos* – place, and *philia* – love of, entails a strong sense of attachment to a place. It encapsulates the prowess of emotions or "the affective bond between people and place or setting" (Tuan 1974: 4).

Expanding upon the intricacies of Rabindranath's relationship with nature in the letters of *Chinnapatrābalī*, Rosinka Chaudhuri suggests an intriguing correlation between the various poetics of time and space he alludes to, in music, song, and image in relation to the time of day, annual seasons, and daily phenomenon like moonlight, breeze, the sport of clouds.[221] In conjunction with a feeling of deep attachment (joyful as well as melancholic), these elements constitute a kind of *enchanted materialism* that is not divine but located in the emotional, the affective, and the sensory. For Tuan, joyful attachment and emotions of pleasure, contentment, and assurance are central to the experience of

219 As he also noted the complex evils of village life in his stories. Chakrabarty (2000), 149–53.

220 See the blurb of Chaudhuri's English translation (2014).

221 See, for example, Rabindranath's understanding of European music as the "world of the day", "coming together like a huge, forceful tangle of harmony", and "our Indian music" as the "world of the night", "a pure, tender, serious, unmixed *rāginī*". Chaudhuri's translation (2014), 260.

topophilia. In these letters, the descriptions of beloved natural spaces, sound, light, and air that nourish him are constantly referred to as life forces. In this section of the chapter, I explore particularly the relation between these natural elements and the poet's solitary, leisurely state as expressed in the emotion of love/longing/attachment (*māẏā*) for the space, a topophilia for the expansive rural landscape of Bengal. Resisting all kinds of work, immersing himself in the detailed beauty of the surroundings, breathing in the light, the space, and the image of the lush waterbodies is a recurrent reportage in these letters. At times, Rabindranath writes that this inability to be engaged in any work is something that he has no control over; it is enforced upon him by nature. For instance, he admits to citing "the breezes of India as an excuse for rebellion against undertaking [his] duties" (Tagore 2014: 348). His love for these natural elements and the immense space fuels his literary creativity; the space, in turn, overtakes the rhythm of his daily life. He repeatedly admits – that today, this beautiful day, is not to be wasted in pursuit of mundane work. The love for this lush riverine landscape becomes a major influence not only in his feelings and writings but also in his growing desire to be free, become unbound, and be left alone with his daydreaming.

Supriya Chaudhuri suggests that the intimate relationship that the young writer develops with this space is perhaps akin to the European equivalent of "intimate immensity" (2020: 134), theorised by Gaston Bachelard in his phenomenological classic, *The Poetics of Space* (1994 [1958]). Bachelard expands on the term "topophilia" as "felicitous space" or "the space we love" (1994: Introduction). While topophilia originated as a poetic expression coined by W. H. Auden, it has been expanded upon by Bachelard and, more recently, by Tuan. The concept has transformed, acquiring a quality of love specific to particular cultural identities that reverberate in the experience of space. Tuan's study is based on the sensual correlation between the environment and culture and is considered a milestone in human geography. Following his definition in the study of Rabindranath's relationship with nature allows us to unpack the "vivid and concrete as personal experience" (Tuan 1974: 4). Bachelard's poetics is based on phenomenology, focusing on the study of consciousness, human experience and poetic image. Of his brilliant explorations, the one that echoes in Rabindranath's letters is the experience of immensity in the poetic image and the consciousness of daydreaming. Daydreaming is a significant state in these letters, given expression to in the flow of words, long sentences in streams of thoughts and shifting modes of consciousness. In the following subsections, I read the conception of nature as attachment, in the concept of love, as conducive to otium in its sense of work and leisure, where both are intertwined experiences merged with the human experience of being in an exploration of aesthetic contemplation.

3.3.1 Topophilia and the Cultural Construction of Nature as the Experience of Intimate Belonging

Chinnapatrābalī is one of the earliest modern Bengali texts of topophilia. Identifying topophilia itself as a palimpsest, a 'text' written over other texts, Anna Suvorova asserts that the "memory of a place" and its "mental reconstruction" are equally significant as "empiric experiment and rational analysis" (Suvorova 2011: 2). This identification concurs with Rabindranath's topophilia for the rural landscape of Bengal. The love for the landscape runs famously in his body of writings, memorialised in his amorous lyric "*āmār sonār bāṃlā*" (my golden Bengal). Composed in 1905 (when the first Bengal partition was declared), the song foregrounds an emotion of affinity, a shared love for the land and critiques separatist nationalist politics; later, however, the song was recognised as the national anthem of Bangladesh after its creation in 1971. The twentieth century, or its better half, witnesses various nationalist conflicts, not only in South Asia but on a global scale. The question of appropriation of the love for a particular landscape and problematic patriotism recalling the superiority of the motherland or fatherland is difficult. Dipesh Chakrabarty has addressed this problem for Rabindranath through the idea of complex "imagination", while Sudipta Kaviraj reads Rabindranath's love for the country in a secular light as "critical" and cautious (Kaviraj 2014c: 148–53; Chakrabarty 2000: 149–79). Both Chakrabarty and Kaviraj find Rabindranath's writings on the Bengali countryside overflowing with sentimentality. Addressing the complexity of this unexplored 'sentimentality', I address this love for the rural landscape of Bengal through the lens of topophilia of both place (Bengal) and space (open, immense space).

The love and longing recorded in these letters are addressed to the two intermingling entities of place and space. While the natural landscape of Bengal does encompass the open and immense space of the sublime, close attention to the letters also reveals Rabindranath's wonder with the immensity of open, abstract space. This wonder for abstract space can be seen in his earlier letters sent from England, collected under the title *Ẏūrop Prabāsīr Patra*. During this English sojourn, Rabindranath stayed with his elder brother, Satyendranath and his children, Indiradebi (the recipient of the letters in *Chinnapatrābalī*) and Surendranath, in their home in Brighton. In a letter probably written to his sister-in-law, Kadambari, he compares the mild breeze blowing in the afternoons in Torquay and the noontime winter breezes in Bengal. He describes the trees and flowers and sheep grazing in the English countryside with a sense of wonder. Writing of the seaside, remarkably, he comments on the effect of nature on his senses – the scent of the sea is described as "invigorating" (*svāstha-janak*) and the sound of the waves a repetitive roaring (*hu hu śabda*), identifying the setting as "an appropriate place for spending [his] time idling" (Tagore 1960: 193).

Rabindranath's love for open spaces has to be read within the difference between what Tuan distinguishes as space and place: "*Place is security, space is freedom*"; one denotes attachment, and the other expresses longing (Tuan 1977: 3). The longing for freedom is expressed in topophilia of space while the attachment to the Bengali landscape is to be read in the love for place, with its cultural identity. Topophilia of space can be read, for example, in his desire for light, comparing it to that expressed by Goethe, and his longing for expansive space: "Goethe had said before he died: *More light!* – if I had to express a wish at a time like that, I would say: *More light and more space!*" (Tagore 2014: 279). Topophilia of space contributes to topophilia of place and *vice-versa*, as each requires the other to be defined. The immersive and idle state Rabindranath writes of is encapsulated in the simultaneous experience of space-time – space as freedom and time as ease.[222] Referring to this experience of freedom and ease in the open, natural landscape as contributing to Rabindranath's thought and literary creativity, Abul Ahsan Choudhury uses the term "*ās*ˈ*mān*ˈ*dāri*" or inhabiting the skies, poetically entailing a spirited and emotional/philosophical engagement, in juxtaposition to the mundane work of *jamidāri*, i.e., managing estates (Choudhury 2014: 30). Simultaneously, topophilia, especially directed towards the landscape of rural Bengal as intimate is constructed as 'golden Bengal', contrasted with the disdain for the urban hustle of cities. In a letter sent from London, he scorns the English rain, contrasting it with his exuberant love for monsoon rainstorms in Bengal:

> When it rains in our land, one can hear the forceful rainfall, see the clouds, the thunder, the lightning and the storm – there is a feeling of wondrous joy in it. It is not the same here. It rains in a monotonous pitter-patter of suppressed, continuous footsteps – a feeling of dampness all around. […] At times, one gets to hear that there was lightning yesterday, but apparently, the lightning has no voice of its own. Perhaps one needs a microphone to appreciate the sound of lightning here.[223] The sun is a subject of rumour. If it does show its face on a fateful morning, I remind myself that it will not last.

This experience is then contrasted with the memory of his love for natural elements in Bengal, and the comparison reveals how space and place affect his

222 *Ibid*., 118. See Feld, "Places Sensed, Senses Placed" (2014).

223 Lightning is almost always paired with a powerful sound of thunder in Bengal. The missing sound might appear a strange thing to emphasise for those unfamiliar with the thunder-lightning experience. This difference in perceptions of a local and a visitor is explained by Tuan in cultural attitudes to space and environment in *Topophilia* (1974), 63.

creative abilities, directing towards the construction of an intimate place through intimate experience:

> I feel my intellect and mental powers have become soft in this gloomy place. No writing seems possible – in fact, I cannot even write a proper letter. Whenever I think of writing letters or anything else, somehow, I start yawning. The memory of sunlight and moonlight of our land comes to me, as if in a beautiful dream. I have especially understood the significant value of the beautiful morning evenings and moonlit nights of our land after coming here.[224] (1960: 38)

Rabindranath's love for the landscape in Bengal is decidedly cultural-environment-specific, echoing Tuan's parsing of topophilia. In *Chinnapatrābalī*, he explores this love for the landscape of rural Bengal as one of security and attachment, of intimate belonging and home, of love, spatially described with the experiential in the sense of dwelling and resting, in otium, and at ease. This intimate place is constructed through the recognition of emotions for the space, for example, in the following letter written from London on 3rd October 1890:

> When I come to this country, I really, truly think of that wretched, unfortunate Bhāratbhūmi of ours as my mother. She does not have the power this country has, but she loves us. All the love I have felt since I was born, all the happiness, is in her lap. The attractive spit and polish of this place will never be able to lure me – it'll be such a relief to return to her. (Tagore 2014: 60)

Sudipta Kaviraj compares the personification of nature, land, and country in Tagore's thought to that in Bankim's, bringing a sharp difference in them. Whereas the motherland imagined by Bankim in his song '*Bande Mātaram*' takes the form of a Hindu deity, the image of the motherland in Tagore is read as a critically conceived, "secular" one (Kaviraj 2014c: 148–52). However, for Tagore, the creation of the secular image of the motherland towards a conscious critique of aggressive nationalism is a much later conceptualisation after the hostile ultra-nationalism in Europe during the world wars. In the letters of *Chinnapatrābalī*, written much earlier, nature in Bengal is indeed an affectionate mother, full of the emotions of love and care, joy, and melancholy. He writes that as he strolled around the riverbank, he perceived nature as looking at him "with a deep, silent and tender melancholy of a mother looking at a sick child" (Tagore 2014: 101). Elsewhere he describes the day as lazy, lying around and turning, with an idleness that penetrates one's mind, rocking with one's

224 From *Ẏūrop Prabāsīr Patra* (1960 [1881].) All quotations from this collection are my translations.

thoughts, humming a tune and drooping one's eyes with sleepiness, "like a mother who sits with her son and rocks him on her lap with her back to the afternoon sun in the winter" (Tagore 2014: 63). This intimate bond with nature, akin to that of a mother and child is a recurrent theme in the representation of Bengali landscape.

Topophilia of place indeed emerges as a palimpsest through reconstructions of this fascination for rural Bengal. After Rabindranath, the novelist Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay and poets Kazi Nazrul Islam and Jibanananda Das have been noted for their foregrounding of nature in Bengali literature. Nazrul famously rendered this love in his songs. Like Rabindranath, much of Bibhutibhushan's love for rural Bengal emerges from his personal experiences living and working in mofussil towns. His novel *Pather Pãcāli* (Song of the road, 1929) came to represent this love for place in a way that became immortalised later in Satyajit Ray's 1955 cinematic adaptation, particularly in a single famous shot of a train, shooting through an autumn landscape with floating clouds in a vast sky and fields of *kāś* (reed). This attachment to and longing for open space and natural landscape is intricately linked to the intimate experience of idle leisure and otium for Rabindranath; it continued to inform his philosophy and literary creativity. In contrast, the hustle-and-bustle of life in the city – be it Calcutta or London – is expressed as exhaustive. In fact, in the previously mentioned letter written from London, he comments on the brevity of daylight and the madness of activity in London: "It is as if the days here arrive at 10 am to work in offices and take their leave at 4 pm. Forget about having some leisure after work – here, there is simply no leisure to work" (Tagore 1960: 38). Even early in his adolescence, leisure or the space, the time, and the opportunity of idleness are perceived not in their difference from but in their intricate connection with work. Later, in his essay on the philosophy of leisure, he uses the metaphor of sunlight and fruit and the significance of "surrendering" fruit to "caresses of sun-lit leisure" (Tagore 1996: 617). Much earlier, this understanding of the kind of work he believed was meant for him, i.e., the work of poetry and its entanglement with lonely leisure, achieved ripeness and creative productivity in the letters of *Chinnapatrābalī*.

3.3.2 The Work of Poetry as Idle, Sensual, and Lonely Leisure

The letters in *Chinnapatrābalī* express Rabindranath's reflections on work in two significant ways. There is mundane work like managing the estate that disturbs the delightful taste (*rasa*) of leisure, and this has to be resisted so that he can enjoy and immerse in leisureliness. On the other hand, there is the great work – the work of poetry, the work of contemplation, and the work of feeling,

for which, topophilia is necessary and conducive as is idle freedom and the very same leisureliness. In this kind of work (the work of the poet as a feeling-thinking person), the distinction between work and leisure does not exist, and Rabindranath can be seen to draw resources from topophiliac leisure as a lifeforce for the work of poetic composition and literary creativity. In a letter written on 6th April 1895 from Calcutta, he explains to Indira "a type of work which is composed in part in leisure, which sucks out the juice of leisure in vast quantities, or it cannot grow" (Tagore 2014: 348). In the following lines, he asserts that his "education and personality" make him feel that he was born for that kind of work (the great work of a poet). The letter ends with a confident assertion of the greatness of this work: "great work, by its very nature, demands, like a great tree, a lot of time and space – that is exactly what I call leisure (*ālasya*), renunciation (*bairāgya*), meditation (*dhyān*)" (Tagore 2014: 349; 1993: 302). In this translation, Chaudhuri uses the word leisure for *ālasya* (usually translated as laziness), signifying a conceptual entanglement perceived in its mood and affective rendering beyond the semantic difference. He extracts this leisureliness from his obsessive love for his environment, light and space, air and sky. The natural landscape of Bengal attracts him dearly, offering a sense of security in metaphors of motherhood and the intimate relationship.[225] At the same time, his love for this wild and free nature overtakes him; the great work of poetry is then described as not actively *doing* poetry but in *being* and *feeling* it. The letter mentioned above describes the idleness induced in him by the natural surroundings and his inability to do anything as he simply immerses himself:

> Motion, by itself, has an attraction of its own – the shore on both sides continuously keeps sliding away from in front of one's eyes; that's why I've been looking the whole day, I can't turn my eyes from it – I don't feel like reading, don't feel like writing, there's no work, I just sit silently here and look. It's not for the variety of scenery alone – there may be nothing on either side, only the bare line of the treeless shore – it's the continuity of motion that's the chief attraction. I'm not putting in any effort or work, yet the tireless motion outside envelops the mind in quite a slow, pleasant sort of way. It's the sort of feeling when the mind has no work, but no rest either. It's like sitting on a chair and absent-mindedly swinging one's legs. (Tagore 2014: 69)

Scholars in the West have read contemplative idleness as "aesthetic contemplation" after Friedrich Schiller's discourse of aesthetic education, but also later in the context of English romantics. The idleness associated with this aesthetic contemplation for Rabindranath is immersed in the sensory and the sensual,

225 Tuan locates the parent as the child's "primary place" (1977), 138–39.

tactile experiences of the natural material. Reading this attachment to the natural elements as sensory perceptions of vision and sound, I propose that the affective subjectivity of such sensual experiences is inextricably entangled with the experience of fulfilling idleness and lonely leisure – what he writes of in Bangla as "*paripūrṇa ālasya-ras*" (fulfilling mood of idleness) and "*nirjan abasar*" (lonely leisure) (Tagore 1993: 279): "All around it's very quiet in the sun, the mind becomes very capricious – I pick up a book, but don't feel like reading. A kind of grassy smell emanates from the riverbank where the boat is tied, and from time to time, you feel the hot, steamy breath of the earth upon your body" (Tagore 2014: 83). He describes the paddy fields and their movement in the breeze, the ducks and the boats on the water, the gathering of people to board a ferry at a bank nearby, and his own engagement with it all – "I like to watch this coming and going of boats over a length of time" (ibid., 84). Seeing or vision is as much of a poetic activity as writing poetry, and the play of light is the constant inspiration for the poet. *Ceẏe thākā*, or to 'keep looking', is an (in)activity that appears repeatedly. Floating on the Ichāmatī river on his way to Calcutta, Tagore writes of the lovely, bright day: "you couldn't turn your eyes away from the scene on either side of the small river" (2014: 247). Consuming this light and space becomes indispensable for him, as shown in the phrases "I had drunk the first sunlight on this earth with my entire body" and "my hunger wants to spread its flame everywhere" (2014: 204). Visuality is strongly linked to the *intimate experience* of topophilia and the *rare experience* of wonder (Fisher 1998: 124–33; Tuan 1977: 161–62). Gazing and looking on, consuming the visuality of nature with wonder and love, Rabindranath's attachment to this landscape is also kinesthetic. The consciousness of his sensory experiences is heightened in his description of their intoxication with nature's materials. While the materialism of nature is alive and animate, the perception of place itself is a pause (Tuan 1977: 138), and this restful dwelling becomes a source for his lifework, poetry.

For the leisurely work of poetry, the light of the sky becomes a necessary, sensual intoxication, and its expanse is described in the Urdu word *sāqi*, or 'wine-bearer' in this letter written on a July day of 1895 in Shahjadpur:

> […] the ceiling is quite a bit above my head and because there are two open verandas on either side, immense quantities of light from the sky keep raining down upon my head – and it's a very sweet feeling to write and read and sit and think in that light. […] Every part of my room and my mind – my work and my leisure – is happy and satisfied, full of flavour and life, new and beautiful. […] How I love the sky and the light with all my heart! The sky is my *sāqi* [wine bearer] holding an upturned clear-blue glass cup; the golden light enters my bloodstream like wine and makes me coeval with the gods. (Tagore 2014: 359)

Like seeing, the appreciation of sounds and immersion in rhythms are other obsessions in the letters. This is a period of his life rich in music; he composed many songs in his melancholic solitude with nature as he immersed himself in the sonatas of Beethoven and Chopin.

Poetic verses, lines from songs, and lyrical phrases emerge in his thoughts as naturally as the flow of water. In a letter written from Shilaidaha in April 1892, he writes to Indira of his inability to work, the many loose thoughts in his mind and of "this beautiful morning": "[a] lovely breeze has been blowing since morning. I'm not feeling like doing any work. […] I remembered that song of yours, '*Pāẏeriẏā bāje jhanaka jhanaka jhana jhana – nana nana nana* '" (Tagore 2014: 110). The line is a description of the sonorous *jhana-nana* rhythm made by anklets. He writes, "in the sweet breeze in the middle of the river, my head resonates with that sort of *jhana-nana* sound of anklets, but only from this side or that – hidden – not letting itself be caught or seen. So I've been sitting quietly" (2014: 110). While songs and melodies keep him from his work, he is also strongly drawn to the sounds made by man and nature in unison. He describes such sounds and their effect on him with great adoration: "The few monotonous *ṭhak-ṭhak ṭhuk-ṭhāk* sounds of this place, the cries of the naked children playing, the high-pitched tender songs of the cowherds, the *jhup-jhāp* noise of the oars, the sharp, sad sound of the oil mill hitting the *nikhād* note, all of these sounds of work come together and are in a sort of proportion to the bird call and the sound of the leaves" (2014: 201). He wreathes these sounds together, perceiving them as a part of a long "dreamlike sonata full of peace and enveloped in pity, somewhat in the mould of Chopin, but composed and bound to a very vast, spread-out, yet restrained metre" (ibid.). In the very next letter, he writes of composing one of his songs, "*baṛa bedanār mata*" (like a profound pain), saying that its tune might not be "appropriate for a performative drawing-room gathering. […] This sort of song should be sung in seclusion" (2014: 202).[226] While his time in the secluded natural landscape is a perfect opportunity for him to compose songs, in a letter written from Calcutta, he questions the connection between such enchantment of feeling and space, between the outdoors and the inner space of the mind. The letter questions if "this amazing realm of melody and feeling – is this only in the mind? Is there nothing like it anywhere else? Is it just a mirage?" (2014: 351). Such phenomenological observations and rhetorical questions refer to the modernist split in subjectivity that Kaviraj attributes to Rabindranath in his dual use of the self-pronoun, *āmi*.

226 "*baṛa bedanār mata bejecho tumi he āmār prāṇe/man ye kyāman kare mane-mane tāhā manꞌi jāne*" (Like a profound hurt, you have played in my heart/what my heart feels, my heart alone knows).

3.3.3 Contemplation and the Consciousness of Immensity: The Politics of Love

While enchantment makes him feel a loss of his immediate, intimate consciousness in his musings on poetry and aesthetic contemplation, Rabindranath seeks out a transformation within the self. Through the sensory perceptions of seeing and hearing, transforming to an alternate, empathetic self, his aesthetic contemplation gradually fills the spectrum of idle leisure and pleasure of poetry to that of awareness of his social consciousness.[227] In a beautiful letter written from Shilaidaha, he describes the blazing of sun, the shimmer of the water and the sounds of splashing boats, and a cool winter breeze while he strives for his immediate identity:

> If I were alone, I would be lying, engrossed, on a long armchair near the window – I would daydream, I would be able to hear the deep notes of the Bilāwalī rāginī that is within this sky so bright with sunlight, and I would feel my own existence dissolved, spread across, rocked in the waves of this sunlight, water and breeze – I would experience myself lying down on a bed of unfragmented, endless time – I would feel myself flow in the chatter and gurgle of the ever-rippling waterfall of life that wells up in the forms of grass and shrubs, leaves and creepers, birds and animals throughout this world – my own personal envelope of personhood would dissolve in this śaraṭ sunshine and become a part of this clear sky and I would be beyond time and place. (Tagore 2014: 383–84)

The letter ends abruptly, admitting, that in the current circumstances, it is difficult to immerse in such thoughts as he is someone's husband, someone else's father, a Mr so and so. The crucial phrase that reflects on the division of the self, "my own personal envelope of personhood" is written in the Bangla original as "*āmār nijer byaktigata nijatva-ābaraṇ*", reminiscent of the phrase "*āmār atīta se āmi*" (I which is beyond this-I) that Kaviraj mentions in his study of Rabindranath's concept of subjectivity (2014 d: 215). Regarding the two selves, Rabindranath's philosophy is to lose the narrow, imprisoning self "to find that larger, fuller, more fulfilling self" (ibid.). Although in the above-quoted letter, the poet loses his larger self to the narrower self, there are many, in fact, too many instances where he attempts to reach for the larger self, losing the imprisoning, immediate self. In these letters, one of the most remarkable ways of doing that is to indulge in daydreaming. In the following section, I explore

227 Adelman develops a reading of "aesthetic contemplation" in Coleridge as that of "moral consciousness" (2011), 130. Rabindranath's awareness of consciousness is not in relation to divinity but to subjectivity and sociality.

this experience of daydreaming to locate how the experience of idle leisure, topophilia and aesthetic contemplation eventually contribute to Rabindranath's spectrum of literary and political thought, emerging in the conceptual transformation of abstract love to political love.

"Daydreaming", writes Gaston Bachelard, "undoubtedly feeds on all kinds of sights, but through a sort of natural inclination, it contemplates grandeur. This contemplation produces an attitude that is so special, an inner state that is so unlike any other that the daydream transports the dreamer outside the immediate world" (1994: 183). In case the outside world is already an "elsewhere", in natural surroundings, it is immense (Bachelard 1994: 184). The immensity of this natural grandeur is referred to again and again in these letters, in expressions of wonder and enthrallment. Rabindranath writes that he wants to write about the same thing every day – the afternoons, the light, the sky, and the air, because he cannot "surmount the attraction they hold" for him, turning the rare experience into one of allure and enchantment. He is keenly aware that the grandeur he visualizes may appear quite "ordinary" to anyone else. The effect of visual nature on him is depicted as insurmountable: "I cannot describe what the heart feels at this sight" (Tagore 2014: 135). This sense of wonder and bafflement is almost always accompanied by daydreaming, fits of imagination, and contemplation. The acts of consciousness he experiences as recorded in these letters vary from imagining, creating, and daydreaming. Curious about these various acts of consciousness, he asks why we "always compare what is beautiful to a dream?" He tries to answer the question: "perhaps in order to express the sheer extraordinariness of it, that is, as if it doesn't bear the slightest trace of the weight of reality" (Tagore 2014: 227). Daydreaming, for Bachelard, "is original contemplation" (1994: 184). Since "immense" is not an object, the experience of immensity is then directed towards "imagining consciousness", and works of art become "by-products" of this experience. The "real product" we are left with is the "consciousness of enlargement" (ibid.).

Immensity is a phenomenon already present in the experiencing person that flourishes most in solitude. This solitude of contemplation is what Rabindranath had found (or it had found him) in these years in the rural landscape, in his houseboat on the river. The immensity of these spaces experienced in such solitude does not leave the person once the experience is over. It grows as an expansion, an enlargement of the universe within the person. In a letter from Calcutta, he unravels the significance of this enlargement: "Unless one sits down alone under a free sky or on the shore of a vast ocean, one cannot experience one's own hidden inner mystery properly" (2014: 182–83). The immensity of the 'elsewhere', either under a free sky or on the shore of a vast ocean, is inextricably tied to the inner mystery of the self. Writing of the

vocabulary of the immense, Bachelard comments that "all the words marked for grandeur by a poet are keys to the universe, to the dual universe of the Cosmos and the depths of the human spirit" (1994: 198). For Rabindranath, such vocabulary is displayed in his repeated call for freedom in *śūṇya* (empty), *asīm* (infinite), *aśeṣ* (endless). Referring to Rilke's letters, Bachelard writes of the "immensity" through which the two kinds of space – the "space of immensity" and "world space" blend and that when "human solitude deepens, the two immensities touch and become identical" (1994: 203). This dual immensity is the poetic space, the phenomenological 'elsewhere', the search which continues to follow Rabindranath throughout his literary life and it is to this elsewhere that he directs his readers, celebrated in the flight of the *Balākā* (flying geese), "*hethā nay hethā nay, anya kothāo, anya konokhāne*" (not here, not here, elsewhere, somewhere else).[228] At the same time, the materiality of natural, universal space is used to present an immensity of space, large enough for humans to heal in the verses he wrote in Nuremberg (1926) in an effort to lift the defeated spirit in the aftermath of the Great War: "*āmār mukti ālay ālay, ei ākāśe, āmār mukti dhulāy dhulāy, ghāse ghāse*" (my liberation is in light, in this sky, my liberation lays in dust, amongst the grass).[229] An internalisation of the immensity of human consciousness vis-à-vis open, natural spaces gradually reveals the relevance of nature and enchantment for the poet and his humanitarian politics.

The emotion of love for the natural, rural landscape of Bengal is a love of space that evolves through sensory enchantments and freedom from civilisational modernity. This love is seen in its celebratory splendour in the lyrics of "*āmār sonār bāṃlā*" (my golden Bengal):

> *My golden Bengal, I love you*
> *Forever your skies, your breezes play the flute in my heart*
> *In Phālgun, o mother, the scent of your mango forests drives me insane*
> *In Agrahāyaṇ, what have I seen in your lush fields, but the sweetest smile!*
> *What elegance, what shadows, what affection and enchantment!*
> *What shade have you spread under the Banyan, along the river banks!*

228 *Balākā*, flying geese or cranes, is a significant work of poetry by Rabindranath, published in 1916.

229 There is much to be discussed on the perception of Tagore in Germany. Here, however, the reference is to the post-First World War "spiritual crisis" in Germany, where he was welcomed as a "saviour", "a Christ-like figure who would give moral guidance and spiritual succour to a demoralized and confused people". See Martin Kämpchen (1991), 17. This perception, of course, was challenged by many factions within the German press. Ibid., 18–19. See also, Manjapra (2014), 2, 12, 98–100.

Mother, your words sound like nectar to my ears
When melancholy comes over your face, I flow in tears.[230]

In her work on political emotions, Martha Nussbaum reads the love expressed by Rabindranath in the lyrics of 'golden Bengal' as "Tagore's capacious humanism, his aspiration toward an inclusive 'religion of humanity'" (2013: 2). In Nussbaum's reading of the song as inspiring "love", she finds that the politics of love that Rabindranath indulges in is personal rather than patriotic (2013: 243). For her, the song gives voice to the "image of the speaker – a representative inhabitant of Bengal", the *bāul* or wandering minstrels, who stand on the opposite end of society from the English-educated *bhadralok* (Nussbaum 2013: 13).

In this intriguing turn of literary art, Rabindranath came close to becoming a writer from the so-called high culture of the city whose songs and poems would be sung by minstrels and villagers. Although such a claim borders on exaggeration, as Rabindranath remains the poet and writer of the educated *bhadralok*, nevertheless, his attempts to decentralise *bhadralok* culture in his writings make him a revolutionary in many ways. Most significantly, free of the contours of social standing, caste, gender and sexuality, this inclusive identity of a feeling human spirit in the figure of his ideal Bengali reader is seen to have a long-lasting impact on his ideas of love for universal humanity, for the righteous duty (*dharma*) of humanity and his philosophy of education. Although his final essay, "Sabhyatār Saṅkaṭ" ("Crisis in Civilisation" 1996 b [1941]) on the eve of the Second World War reveals a deep sorrow for human predilection in "crumbling ruins", Rabindranath refused to lose "faith in Man" (1996 b: 726). Enchantment with life and the literary flourished through his career and legacies – as the most beloved poet/writer in Bengal, a humanist and philosopher, and a celebrated educator. In the following section, I turn to this influence of enchantment, the relationship between freedom and love for nature, in his principles of pedagogy for generations of Bengali children.

3.4 Tagore's Pedagogical Project: Making Space for Enchantment, Teaching Love

Rabindranath's idea of freedom, which Martha Nussbaum refers to as "critical freedom" (2013: 210), is based on the individual subject's ability to reach

230 *Phālgun* and *Agrahāẏaṇ* are months in the Bengali calendar. *Phālgun* roughly overlaps with mid-February to mid-March and *Agrahāẏaṇ* with mid-November to mid-December. My translation.

beyond social and formal constructs and be able to exercise freely in individual emotions. With subjectivity, the immediate question that arises is of intimate relationships; for an individual to be able to love another individual is central to this idea of humanity. Simultaneously, the artistic or creative freedom of the individual is in "expressing the infinite".[231] While delivering the Hibbert Lectures in Oxford in 1930, Rabindranath recalls the time he spent in these parts of rural Bengal and remembers feeling that he had found his *religion/"dharma"* at last, "the religion of man", "in which the infinite became defined in humanity"; it required of him "love and cooperation" (1961 [1931]: 96). The lectures were later published under the title *The Religion of Man* (1931). He recalls how he stumbled upon this realisation "in an idle moment on a day in July, when morning clouds thickened on the eastern horizon and a caressing shadow lay on the tremulous bamboo branches, while an excited group of village boys was noisily dragging from the bank an old fishing-boat" (Tagore 1961: 98). The need for idle freedom becomes indispensable to his notions of not only artistic creativity but also for the education of humans in their duty or responsibility (*dharma*, inadequately translated as 'religion').[232] Around the same time, in the previously mentioned lecture, "The Philosophy of Leisure" (1996 a [1929]), Tagore developed the idea of idle freedom and asserted that the most significant role of leisure is to sustain "the deeper life process of our being" as opposed to the superfluous "spirit of progress" which occupies our mind (1996 a: 618).

The same year he delivered the Hibbert Lectures, Rabindranath published two Bengali primers for children, titled *Sahaj Pāṭh* (Easy reading/lessons), in two volumes. Sibaji Bandyopadhyay writes of Rabindranath's primer as a rebellious

231 "And freedom in its process of creation gives rise to perpetual suggestions of something further than its obvious purpose. For freedom is for expressing the infinite; it imposes limits in its works, not to keep them in permanence but to break them over and over again, and to reveal the endless in unending surprises". See Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man* (1961 [1931]), 55–56.

232 *Dharma* is often written as 'religion', like Tagore does. However, the two are not equivalents in their usage. As has often been noted, the concept of the Indic *dharma* is broader, encompassing not only "law" or "ordinance" but also "justice" and "duty". See entry in Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary, 1899. See https://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/scans/csl-apidev/servepdf.php?dict=MW&page=510 accessed on 15th June 2021. While *dharma* retains a strong adherence to the religious, in Tagore's formulations, it encompasses beyond particular religion, a more immense, universal humanity – the *religion*, *responsibility* or *duty* of man (as the title of the lecture suggests).

attempt to offer the child reader this freedom.[233] Previously, the commonly read children's Bengali primer was Vidyasagar's *Barṇa Paricaẏ* (Introduction to letters/alphabets, 1855). In *Barṇa Paricaẏ*, education is imparted to children through the dialectic of the representative Gopal and Rakhal, respectively, the good boy and the bad boy. "Gopal is a conscientious boy; he does whatever his parents tell him to do […] he does not play in the streets while going to school […] never neglects his studies […] All children ought to be like Gopal"; while "Rakhal is not inclined to be as responsible as Gopal. He does what he likes; […] plays on the streets on his way to take lessons. Rakhal is very inattentive when it comes to learning". The comparison ends in warning: "if one becomes like him [Rakhal] one will never learn how to read or write".[234] Before Rabindranath, other educators also came up with primers devoid of this disciplinary dialectic of good and bad – for instance, Jogindranath Sarkar's *Hāsikhuśi* (Gaiety/Jollity, 1897). The liveliness of *Hāsikhuśi* is due to its stark difference from previous primers like *Barṇa Paricaẏ* and *Śiśuśikṣā*, in tone ("*svar*"), in the composition of melody ("*surꣳsaṃyojanā*") in sentences that created rhythm ("*chanda*"). But this sensory appeal, which was a mere tendency in *Hāsikhuśi,* became the norm in Rabindranath's *Sahaj Pāṭh* (Bandyopadhyay 2005: 90).

In Volume I of *Sahaj Pāṭh*, after a brief introduction to Bengali alphabets in rhyming couplets where the alphabets themselves have subjectivity, the first prose sentences are "Ram picks flowers in the forest. He has a red shawl around him and a basket in his hands" (Tagore 1930: 23). In the original Bangla, these sentences flow lucidly in a sonorous harmony: *Rām bane phul pāṛe. Gāẏe tār lāl śāl. Hāte tār sāji.* The narrator of the first volume leaps with rhymes and sounds through verses and prose that introduce her/him not only to the social world but the individual world of imagination, where (s)he dares to question, "Why does father go to the office and not to new lands?" (1930: 50). The child narrator has the authority to place his/her subjectivity to the objects around him/her, where (s)he imagines the light of the lamp, sitting down idly and wondering in an enchanted curiosity, "if only I could fly", and suddenly, growing wings one day, escapes the room in the form of a firefly! (1930: 52) In the second volume, in a beautifully absurd dream poem, the narrator dreams that the city of Calcutta cannot be contained anymore. In the midst of the dissolving chaos of crumbling urbanity, the child-dreamer's school is seen as running away. Grammar and math books run amuck as the maps on the wall flutter like the wings

233 See Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, *The Gopal-Rakhal Dialectic* (2015). See also, Bandyopadhyay's "Cokh o Anubhab kare yena Chandabidyut·" in *Ābār Śiśuśikśā* (2005), 88–126, especially, 100–2.

234 From Vidyasagar's *Barṇa Paricaẏ*, quoted in Bandyopadhyay (2015), 1.

of a bird; the bell tolls and doesn't stop at anyone's command (1930: 39). Rabindranath liberated children's education from the disciplinary into a playful space where stimulating emotions of wonder, allure, and enchantment can be organically experienced. He also famously reinvented the language of children's rhymes (in Bengali, *charā*), which contributed towards learning as an activity beyond the sombre disciplinary spaces of the study and the classroom, returning it to its intimate, sensory, and rhythmic orality and aurality. He recalls his poetic deliberation of verses from Vidyasagar's primer, "*jal paṛe*", "*jal paṛiteche*" (the falling of water/rain) and "*pātā naṛiteche*" (the trembling of leaves) as the simpler, melodious "*jal paṛe, pātā naṛe*" (it rains and the leaves tremble) – his first act of poetry[235]: "When I now remember the joy I felt that day, I realise the significance of harmony in poetry. Because there is harmony, the utterance remains incomplete even after it has been articulated – when its message has been conveyed, its music does not end; the harmony indulges in a play with the ear and the mind" (Tagore 1912: 3).

The four volumes of *Sahaj Pāṭh* are invested in imparting the child reader not with an introduction to learning alone but to initiate her//him to see, hear, smell, feel and acquire a taste for imagination and wonder that allows her/him to enjoy life and literature through cognition with sensory semantics (Noor 2021: 291–93, 307–13). The language in these primers is colloquial and easy-flowing, with a careful ear for richness and rhythm. The books were delightfully illustrated by eminent artist Nandalal Bose. Flipping through the pages of these primers is an absolute treat for a growing child. Quoting Buddhadeb Basu on *Sahaj Pāṭh* and its role in inculcating "a taste for literature", Bandyopadhyay writes that through the child narrator, the child reader has been given the power to imagine, respond, and sympathise (2015: 302). Immediately problematising this imaginative freedom of the child (and, to some extent, Rabindranath's pedagogy), he asks, "Does the child narrator really not have a specified social identity or standing?" (Bandyopadhyay 2015: 302). Like the child narrator of *Sahaj Pāṭh*, the mature narrator of *Chinnapatrābalī*, too, is an individual who learns in leisure. While fulfilling leisure and critical freedom of the mind are seen as absolute necessities for both imagining the world and learning about it for a child, as well as for the poetic exercises of a poet, such creative imagination and leisurely dalliance are not naturally accessible. The cooks, cleaners, and caretakers of the Tagore estate houses, the farmers, boatmen, and fishermen in *Chinnapatrābalī* are observed to be constantly working,

235 *Jībanˈsmṛti* (1959 [1912]), 3. See also Bandyopadhyay's reference to this poetic act in changing the descriptive verbs into an endless creative process infused with imagination and emotion (2005), 90–91.

as are the gardeners, the maids, and the milkmen in *Sahaj Pāṭh*. While the child narrator of *Sahaj Pāṭh* is deemed to come to terms with his upper/middle social strata, as growing up in society will teach him, he is nonetheless armed with the power of imagination and the emotion of sympathy. Through the development of these faculties, *a space is cleared* (to borrow the term from Chaudhuri and Tagore) for complex personal and political emotions like enchantment and love so that they may lead the growing reader to understand, respect and abide by the 'religion of man'.

Rabindranath's pedagogic project officially started with the establishment of his school, 'Pāṭhabhavan' (in 1901), and college (est. 1921, later turned into a central university after India's independence) named 'Biṣvabhāratī'. Biṣvabhāratī is often translated as India's communion with the world (but also, arguably, an Indian perspective of the entire world, to acquire a knowledge of the world entire). The institute complex, spilling over the local area, is called 'Śāntiniketan', the abode of peace and tranquillity. Located around a hundred and sixty kilometres from Calcutta, the pedagogical project directs education away from classrooms and formal and utilitarian education systems as imitated by colonial education systems. The agenda was to re-orient learning towards a process that was organic and close to nature, leading to the flourishing of imaginative capacities in students, an education connected to "life's totality" (O'Connell 2020: 294–306). Legendarily, the classes took place under the shade of large mango and banyan trees. The institutes of learning allowed students to freely choose their interests beyond the demarcation of fields and disciplines of study (Sen 2021: 93). In locating his school and college in the district of Birbhum, Rabindranath brought his passion for folk music through his fascination for the *bāul*s together with his pedagogical philosophy. He emphasises the aspects of freedom and love as acts of divinity in the religion (the way of life) of the *bāul* sect, "who have no images, temples, scriptures, or ceremonials, who declare in their songs the divinity of Man, and express for him an intense feeling of love" (Tagore 1961: 19). Unlike ascetics, the *bāul* do not believe in renunciation but in spiritual and joyful attachment.[236] Tracing Rabindranath's fascination and inspiration from the footloose, free, and wandering spirit of the *bāul*s in his pedagogy and poetry, Nussbaum explicates the hopes of the poet-philosopher of teaching the emotion of love to students of not only the school and university, but of life: "society must preserve at its heart, and continually have access to, a kind of fresh joy and delight in the world, in nature, and in people, preferring love and joy to the dead lives of material acquisition" (2013: 93). This

236 See Kshiti Mohan Sen's appendix cited by Rabindranath in *The Religion of Man*, entitled "The Baül Singers of Bengal" (1961), 211.

enchantment with the *bāul*, too, is a cultivation of his days spent in nature, engendering a leisurely flavour in his writings, laced with love for humanity, and freedom from the constraints of civilisational modernity (Choudhury 2014: 30–31, 74).

3.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter explored the emotional aspects closely linked to otium and the leisurely that inform Rabindranath Tagore's literary creativity and ideas of humanism. While the emotions explored here are seen in their optimistic attitudes, the texts addressed also reveal a broad emotional intentionality, inviting readers to share a feeling of intimacy with the writer. These texts – often referred to as 'personal prose' constitute the genres of letters, memoirs, essays, and lectures. While Rabindranath's works have drawn immense attention from scholars, few studies have paid attention to these genres and the intimate platform they create for the study of his emotional explorations that support his thoughts on literary creativity and humanism. The most significant emotion that runs through his personal prose is that of love for the abstract, the quotidian, and the universal. The various connotations of love are seen as complex, and I have addressed them through the lenses of enchantment, attachment/longing, and topophilia. While enchantment is read as an experience he refers to in registers of wonderment (*bismaẏ*) and attachment (*māẏā*), it influences his thoughts on not only the grand and the quotidian experiences of life but also his fashioning of language as captivating and alluring. Addressing topophilia allows us to trace his love for nature in both a concrete construction of place as intimate belonging and in the abstract experience of open space as immensity. While topophilia of place, the sublime landscape of Bengal, is seen to inform his ideas on leisure, topophilia of space allows his thoughts on freedom to be developed into the phenomenology of immensity towards a political love for humanity.

The idea of fulfilling leisure (*paripūrṇa ālasya ras*) has been addressed through these studies of enchantment and topophilia, where love for nature and the wonder that it instils in the poet are projected on literary creativity for Rabindranath. Otium in nature is read as an experience that both allows him to work and distracts him from it, blurring the lines between work and leisure as distinct. The work here is the great work of poetry; and can only be composed in idle freedom, lonely leisure, and intimate immensity of spatial immersion. In the letters studied here, enchanted materialism of nature and the natural experience is contrasted with the civilised drudgery of urban modernity. Freedom, attained in this immensity of space, is also freedom of thought, in which the

literary and life philosophy of the wandering singers, the *bāul* sect of Bengal deeply influences the poet. These influences of enchantment, love of nature, and the leisurely, free spirit of the *bāul* can then be seen as influencing Rabindranath's pedagogical project, explored briefly in the last section of the chapter. Critiquing the colonial education system, Rabindranath argued for a way of approaching pedagogy that does not preach efficiency and utilitarian values but remains connected to emotions to nourish the human in the student. For this to happen, learning, for him, is connected to nature, idle leisure, and love. Fulfilling, idle leisure reverberates as a significant concept in his literary thought and ideas of universal humanity in the notion of political love.

This chapter argues that certain ideas of leisureliness are reinstated into modern Bengali literary tradition through the concepts of enchantment and topophilia in Rabindranath's verses and personal prose. The necessity of leisure entangled with critical freedom and a disarming love for the landscape of rural Bengal is embraced in Bengali literary tradition as the necessary condition for artistic temperaments to flourish and literary attempts to succeed. In successfully imbibing his writings with a taste for freedom and leisureliness, Rabindranath Tagore's lifework has instilled enchantment in the hearts and minds of generations of Bengali readers to come. Writing of his deep intimacy with these letters and the feeling of irrepressible longing experienced in idle moods and leisurely feelings in his mature years, Buddhadeb Basu writes in his memoirs: "Of all of Rabindranath's prose, I have read *Chinnapatra* the most number of times throughout my life. […] Even today, if I need to flip through its pages – however busy I am at that moment – I cannot suppress my craving for reading two to four pages from it even if it is quite unnecessary" (1973: 58).