

**The Exploration of Local Culture in Tagore's Selected Letters: A
Discourse Study**

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fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of**

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in

English Language Studies

By

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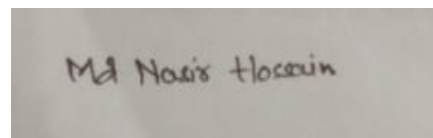
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This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “*The Exploration of Local Culture in Tagore’s Selected Letters: A Discourse Study*” submitted by **Md Nasir Hossain** bearing Regd. No. **19HGHL02** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy in English Language Studies is a bonafide work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance. This dissertation is free from plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for award of any degree or diploma.

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Abstract

The present study is a qualitative study of local culture using discourse tools of selected personal letters of Rabindranath Tagore. Twenty-three letters written between 1878 and 1898 are chosen for the study. The letters are taken from the first two chapters, ‘*Youthful Bravado*’ and ‘*Zamindar*’ from the “*Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*” edited by Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson (1997). Tagore’s letters written to his family members and friends are personal narratives with descriptions of the contemporary times and situations and the local countryside of Bengal.

Paul Gee's Discourse tools are supposed to be flexible and critical in the analysis of texts. Gee has mentioned twenty-eight parameters or tools in the book *How to do Discourse Analysis: A toolkit* (2011) for the study. The vocabulary tool is used for this study because it helps to explore certain socio-cultural aspects through the use of different words and how the writer reveals the local culture. Vocabulary is an essential aspect of language to construct social meaning, expression, emotion, and ideology. Therefore, this qualitative study gives importance to different aspects of culture, both visible and not so visible forms in Tagore’s letters.

The study analyses the letters through Paul Gee's discourse analysis ‘vocabulary tool’ and presents the local culture of Bengal, Tagore’s homeland. The local culture is represented through different cultural themes such as regional identity, religious rituals, rustic household representation, local names, and local culture in terms of nature and Bengali vs. English culture in the study. For a prominent and clear distinction of the local culture, the researcher uses two cultural lenses, such as ‘Big C’ culture and ‘small c’ culture, in the letters. Therefore, for finding

the local cultural aspects of letters and answering the research questions, the researcher has focused on the local cultural words, expressions, emotions, which are used to reflect the Bengali local culture.

The results of the study shows that Tagore's letters help determine the local features of Bengal clearly in the analysis. The study found several vocabulary items used to express the 'Big C' and 'small c' cultural elements in the letters. While exploring the 'Big C' and 'small c' cultures, it is interesting to note that some vocabulary represents both cultural elements that overlap each other in the letters. Therefore, the study presents the local culture through the 'Big C' and 'small c' cultural elements in Tagore's personal letters.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.0. Introduction

The letter is a medium of communication to carry out the messages from one person to another. It can be formal or informal. As it is a medium of communication, it plays a very significant role in communicating messages. Before the invention of any technological device, the letter was the only medium of communication. Through the letters, people used to practice their critical reading, self-expressive writing, and polemical writing and exchanged their ideas with the people in contemporary times. The letter is the sender's narrative that includes various contemporary elements like socio-cultural, political, economic, and social development.

Although the letters are very personal, there are still many elements about the contemporary scenario and ambience presented by the letter writer. In terms of cultural representation, whatever objects exist are part of culture in the society. The letter writers (or any writer) share their personal experience and the ideas of nature, atmosphere, various social events, behaviour, social attitude, manner, beliefs, ideas, etc., which are a part of the culture.

This study analyses Tagore's letters to study his representation of various Bengali culture. He wrote letters to his family members, poets, writers, politicians, scientists, social reformers,

teachers, freedom fighters, kings, and various personalities within and outside the country. He wrote hundreds of letters for different purposes. He focuses on India and its traditionalism, nationalism, humanism, internationalism, interpretational epistemology, freedom of mind, etc., in the letters. However, Tagore portrays the idea of the local culture of Bengal very prominently and distinctively in his personal letters.

Tagore's representation and the culmination of the local culture are beautifully reflected in the letters. In this study, the researcher would like to focus on the letters written by Tagore from 1879 to 1898. Culture has an intimate relationship with the way of life and living style of the people in a society, including religion, attire, economics, social, political system, manner, behaviour, attitude in a specific region. The local culture means the culture of the particular group of people in a specific geographical area. In the personal letters or narratives, the writer presents the subjective point of view with the description of contemporary social events. Moreover, the writer mentions the social situations of the people and includes various aspects of the everyday lifestyle of the people in his/her writings in a specific geographical location which makes the writing more distinctive and unmistakable. In this study, Tagore's representation of local culture is being explored in the letters he has written in his early adulthood.

1.1. Rabindranath Tagore

This section introduces Rabindranath Tagore very briefly to understand his writings and his personality. The Renaissance man of modern India, Rabindranath Thakur, popularly known as

Rabindranath Tagore, was born in 1861 in the Thakur family, Jorasanko, a hub of cultural and intellectual activity of Bengal. Tagore started writing at an early age and lived in Calcutta in West Bengal. His pen name is Bhanusinha Thakur (Bhonita). Tagore's childhood and personal life are fascinating.

Tagore is a significant name with fame for his literary contribution to India. Rabindranath Tagore is a prolific writer in several genres; his works include poems, novels, plays, short stories, essays, and songs. Later in his life, he took up painting as well. He is a polymath, philosopher, musician, artist, poet, dramatist, and known as the Bard of Bengal. He revamps and lends a new look to Bengali literature, music, and art with coeval modernism in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Rabindranath Tagore put our country on the literary map of the world. He is the first Indian writer and the first Asian to be awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1913 for his work '*Gitanjali*', a collection of 157 poems. He is also known as Biswakabi, Kabiguru, and Gurudev. He was a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society and had a serious interest in Asian studies. His works are primarily written in the context of modernism in the Bengal Renaissance period. He married Mrinalini Devi, and they had three daughters and two sons (namely Renuka, Shamindranath, Meera, Rathindranath, and Madhurilata Tagore).

Being a part of the Thakur family, he has been privileged to enjoy a luxurious lifestyle which is evident in the letters and also in his works '*The Home and the World*' and '*Kabuliwala*'. Some of the studies on Tagore's letters discuss the attire, attitude, manner, behaviour, religion, and the economic, social, political systems of Bengal etc. Chakravarty (2015) pointed out that "Tagore's letters add fresh personal notes about his life, relatives, faith, and the idea of nationalism, anti-

colonialism attitude, relation with the national and international leaders.” However, Tagore's representation of culture and tradition is very remarkable and evident in the letters.

1.1.1. Early Literary works of Tagore

Rabindranath's first work was published in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* on 25th February 1875. His brother Satyendra Nath Tagore taught him English. Another brother, Dwijendranath Tagore started publishing a monthly magazine, '*The Bharti*' in Bengali. In 1878, he accompanied his elder brother Satyendra Nath Tagore to England. There he studied English literature under the guidance of Prof Henry Morley. Besides his studies in literature, he also studied western music.

In 1880, he returned to India and wrote two verse plays in Bengali entitled '*Valmiki Pratibha*' and '*Mriyigapa*'. Both of these plays are performed in his family home, and he played the lead role. In 1882, he published his historical verse play entitled '*Rudrachakra*' and a collection of his poems entitled '*Sandhya Sangeet*'. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, a contemporary of Tagore and well-known writer was very much impressed by these two plays. In 1883, he married 10-year-old Mrinalini Devi. In 1884, they lost Kadambari Devi, the wife of Jyotirandranath Tagore, which was very shocking as she was his boyhood companion and of the same age as Tagore. He started a monthly magazine, '*Sadhna*' in 1891. This helps us know his literary family background, and Tagore started his literary journey very early and the above-mentioned works prove his passion for literature.

1.1.2. *My Life in My Words*

The work '*My Life in My Words*' is Rabindranath Tagore's autobiographical sketch which describes the contemporary situation of Bengal. Tagore's thoughts are always calming. He seems to be very honest in the way he describes natural phenomena, societal events, rituals, attire, social conditions, political situations, financial issues, the education system, etc. Some of these elements are also seen in his letters. '*My Life in My Words*' depicts his thoughts and reflections of contemporary culture. Tagore describes his life, the two world wars, political currents, and people's identity of his times. This book also deals with nationalism, European imperialism, structural problems with Indian and Western society, and the relationship between Europe and Asia. Alongside, '*My Life in My Words*', also describes the local events and a large number of local people. Since he was such a prolific writer, he has opined on so many contemporary issues spanning from the 1880s to the 1930s. The autobiography '*My Life in My Words*' is evident of the contemporary scenario of Bengal and Tagore beautifully expresses his thoughts about the social situation which is reflected in the personal letters as well.

1.1.3. Tagore as nationalist

Rabindranath Tagore is one of the greatest nationalist figures in India for his contribution to the Indian freedom movement. Although Tagore did not overtly support the idea of nationalism, his views of humanism led people to project him as a nationalist. Nandy A. (as mentioned in Hassan, 2014, p.13), in his book, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism*, discusses the concept of nationalism. He gives a comparative analysis of the idea of nationalism between Tagore and Mahatma

Gandhi. Nandy argues that they both respected each other. There were similarities in many aspects of their views, but many significant differences can also be found. These differences are articulated even publicly. He further informs that Tagore was the first to call Gandhi as ‘Mahatma’ and it was Gandhi who was the first to call Tagore as ‘Gurudev’. Nandy brings the statement of Humayun Kabir who opines that Tagore was the first great Indian who defied Eurocentrism which was introduced by colonialism in India and made efforts to revive India's ancient ties with Asia and Africa.

Nandy also discusses the concept of nation that Tagore gives in his book *Nationalism*. He said that “Tagore had deeply influenced Indian nationalism through his poetry, songs, and active participation in the movement” (as mentioned in Hassan, 2014, p.14). He was outspoken in his views which are reflected in his writings as well. Nandy (1994) writes that “Tagore acknowledged the sanctity of the anti-colonial revolution and the futility of the ‘begging’ system for ‘scraps’ used at the time of a liberal organization by the early Indian National Congress. However, he also opposes extremist ideals focused on Western culture, too.” (p.7). Nandy concludes that Tagore's version of patriotism rejected the path of violence or terror that the revolutionaries propagated. It also rejected the concept of “single ethnic Hindu Rashtra as anti-Indian and even anti-Hindu.”

Kundra discussed the life of Tagore and said that “Tagore never joined in the national revolution of India, but he was never entirely detached from it. He was exceptional in his approach toward nationalism. He opened the meeting of the congress party in Kolkata in 1896 by singing ‘Vande Matram’ to his melody. In its narrow sense, though, he does not support nationalism” (Hassan,

2014, p.23). After all, it can be said that the idea of nationalism had a significant impact on Tagore and helped him to switch to a humanist in Indian history. The way he describes the contemporary nationalist scenario and its context prove that it had a significant impact on his life, which is also evident in his letters.

1.1.4. Tagore as an internationalist

Tagore was a humanist, patriot and ultimately transformed into an internationalist. He was critical of some of the national leaders in India and commented on the risks of the nationalistic approach of the contemporary leaders to mobilize the population during the Indian freedom struggle. Tagore is considered an internationalist because of his humanistic attitude and his stand for peace.

Collins (2013) pointed out that Tagore becomes “a straw man for postcolonial critique”. Collin (2013) also said that “Tagore was a pioneer of the idea that anti-colonialism should take the form of social and religious non-instrumental rejuvenation, and therefore his position was contrary to a straightforward dialectic between colonialism and nationalism” (p.153). He believed in a world (utopian, as some would say) where the concept of nations would not exist. He believed that nationalism limited the expanse of one's thinking and wrote about the dangers of nationalist ideology, narrow sightedness, and unequal distribution of resources and wealth as a consequence of a purely nationalist idea. Tagore said about the idea of internationalism that ‘the world is one nest’ which provides an impetus for overall growth, economic progress, the decline in exploitation, and a more harmonious and, most importantly, tolerable social system, being a utilitarian pacifist and yet attempting to convey the idea of how nationalist impulses can also be

constrained. He believed in the idealist approach of no war and promoting mutually beneficial peaceful coexistence, something that the current fascist world could make an effort to learn.

Bhattacharya S. (2015) talks about three different aspects of the internationalism of Tagore. Firstly, Tagore denounced the West European model's self-aggrandizing imperialism in his best-known work, *Nationalism* (1917). The second is that Tagore's conceptions of nationalism (such as the version of President Wilson, the creed of the emerging League of Nations, the British Pacifists' internationalism, and even Japan's version of internationalism) have been cast into the “internationalism” stereotype. Thirdly, Tagore’s political writing prominently shows the idea of internationalism. The wholehearted attitude of Tagore ultimately transformed him into an internationalist and a remarkable personality in Indian history.

Education was one of the key instruments through which Tagore used to foster the cause of internationalism. The educational institution Tagore sought to establish through his method and approach to education was Visva-Bharati in Santiniketan during World War I. In the spiritual wisdom of India, the school was partially conceived as an experiment. To achieve the goal of ‘one world’, Visva-Bharati was set up. It was an effort to recognize and contribute to racial conciliation and world peace without the national arrogance of racism. Later on, the focus moved from human unification to the fusion of Asian civilizations, as it was thought that first, the East needs to be consolidated. Therefore, it is one of the leading centres of Indian studies and then of Asian studies. Ultimately, of course, a challenge may be posed as to whether knowledge is necessary to create harmony. However, one must agree with Tagore that with knowledge unity could be secure. The key aim of Santiniketan was to have realistic education that was connected to life.

Tagore's internationalism was not a political creed or institutional system for pursuing particular political ends. It is not a mere intellectual type of internationalism. It was not all about cosmopolitanism. But there was a moral and spiritual backbone to his internationalism. There was no place in it for exclusivity or non-cooperation in any way, whether ethnic or religious, territorial or national, social, economic, or cultural. The aggressiveness was viewed as unethical or inhuman in some manner, under national necessity or the assertion of ethnic, cultural, and economic supremacy. He equally opposed European, Japanese, and Soviet imperialism. His faith in humanity was the cornerstone of his internationalism.

Internationalism was thought beneficial, and the surrounding mankind will be improved in multiple ways which allow a man to build to his fullest capacity. The distinctiveness of Eastern and Western cultures was an essential component of Tagore's vision of internationalism, and the need for growing relations between two to solve human problems, and a healthy exchange of contributions from these two civilizations for the growth of each other.

Although he is an internationalist, the selected letters for the study also present him as a person who intensely loved his identity, especially his local identity. He has presented the Bengali identity; he seems acutely conscious and fond of his local identity as seen throughout his letters. The way he portrays the Bengali local culture proves his taste, social value, and love for the Bengali identity, which would be explored throughout the selected personal letters of Tagore.

1.2. Culture

Culture is a way of lifestyle of a particular group of people in a place with their language, manner, behaviour, values, customs, rituals, along with the ethnic, religious, and social groups. It is passed on from one generation to the next, succeeding the lifeline of people of a particular time. The National Center for Cultural Competence defines culture as an “integrated pattern of human activity that involves a racial, ethnic, religious or social group's concepts, communications, languages, traditions, ideologies, principles, customs, courtesies, procedures, ways of communicating and responsibilities, relationships, and planned behaviours; and the capacity to pass on the above to future generations.”

Language is a very important part of the culture. A child born into a particular locality learns the culture of the place along with one's language. In fact, language shapes the culture in a specific way. In addition to recognizing the linguistic aspect of language, history is a crucial factor in supplying the student with a well-rounded education in the language chosen, which offers a basis for understanding one's own culture. Ned Seelye (1976) said that “Learning a language in isolation from its cultural origins in its contextual usage stops one from being socialized.” There is no special insight into the national, societal, religious, or economic system except through the experience of linguistic structure alone.

1.2.1. Types of culture

Brook (1968) suggests that two domains are significant in culture; the first one is ‘Big C’ and the second is ‘small c’ (as cited in Jing Xiao, 2010). The following section endeavours to explain what ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ are and their significance.

The culture of ‘Big C’ refers to the culture that is more noticeable like the vacations, sculptures, popular music, fiction, and food that provide certain visible aspects of culture. The ‘Big C’ cultural features will first be identified while learning about a new culture; they are the most overt aspects of culture. In comparison, ‘little c’ culture is identified with a place, community of people, language, etc., in the more invisible type of culture. Communication types, verbal and non-verbal symbols, cultural expectations (what is right and wrong in social interactions), behaviour, myths and legends, etc., are examples of ‘little c’ culture.

Hall (1997) also mentioned two elements of culture, i.e., ‘Surface culture’ and ‘Deep culture’. Surface culture refers to the most visible culture which can be used, tasted, sensed, noticed, and touched. It includes some aspects like food, music, visual arts, language, celebrations, and games. The visual elements of culture are essential components of how societies connect and retain their sense of unity. However, some aspects of culture such as recipes, games, and arts etc. will keep changing with time. In contrast, “‘Deep culture’ is the invisible culture that is associated with a region, group of people, language, etc. Some examples of ‘Deep culture’ include communication styles (facial expressions, gesture, eye contact, touching, body language etc.), verbal and non-verbal language symbols, cultural norms (what is proper and improper in social interactions), behaviour, myths and legends.” Deep culture is also part of everyday living and is an absolutely essential part of life for the people of a particular region. So, Hall defines the surface culture as the most visible and deep culture as the invisible culture. After reading Brook and Hall, it is found that the cultures which are easily accessible and visible that come under ‘Big

C' or 'surface culture', and in contrast, 'small c' or 'deep culture' are invisible and inaccessible to the people.

Peterson (2004) pointed out the “‘Big C’ culture as the culture which discussed the big or grand themes. It includes geography, art, classical music, literature, political problems, and standards of society, legal basis, core societal norms, history, and cognitive processes.” On the other hand, Peterson (2004) defines “‘little c’ culture as the culture which is focusing on common, minor themes and used by a particular group of people in a specific place. It covers vision, perspective, performance or preferences, motion, body position, use of space, types of clothes, food, hobbies, current music, popular issues, certain knowledge, etc.” (Lee, 2009 & Nisargandha, 2019, p.4).

Chen (2004) has suggested a cultural framework based on the model of Lessard-Clouston (1996). Chen includes seven ‘Big C’ themes such as music, social norms, education, economics, politics, history, and geography and nine themes such as everyday routine, lifestyle, holiday, food, gesture, nature, greeting, customs, and values, etc. that come under ‘small c’ culture (as cited in Songmei Liu, 2013 p. 31). After studying Peterson and Chen, ‘Big C’ culture is the culture that is big in terms of theme and more noticeable to the people, on the other hand ‘small c’ culture is the culture that is small in theme and invisible to the people.

Lee (2009) divided the culture based on the concrete themes and he refers to the “‘Big C’ culture as the culture which is easily accessible and apparent to the people and also a culture that represents a set of facts and statistics relating to arts, history, geography, business, education, festival, and custom.” On the other hand, the ‘small c’ culture applies to the unseen and broader

meaning of a target culture, i.e., the mainstream socio-cultural ideals, norms, and attitudes, taking into account such socio-cultural factors as age, gender, and social status.” (as cited in Songmei Liu, 2013 p. 31 & Nisargandha, 2019, p.4). After reading Peterson’s and Lee’s classification of culture, ‘Big C’ culture is represented as the culture which deals with big, overt themes or grand themes that are easily accessible and apparent to all the people. On the other hand, ‘small c’ culture focuses on the common, minor themes in a specific place and unseen or unnoticed by people as well. After reading all the above studies, ‘Big C’ culture generally refers to the visible that is easily accessible to the people and ‘small c’ culture signifies invisible that is not easily accessible to the people who are outside of the culture.

1.2.2. The Proposed Categorization of Themes under ‘big C’ and ‘small c’ culture:

After having discussed the categorization of culture by Brook (1968), Hall (1976), Chen (2004), Peterson (2004) & Lee (2009), it is found that the cultural aspects are different in various parts of the world as people belong to different regions, belief systems, values etc. Therefore, the elements of ‘Big C’ culture and ‘small c’ culture also differ in subtle ways from culture to culture. Thus the researcher has proposed the categorization of ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture by categorizing different elements into these two broad categories based on accessibility or visibility. The ‘Big C’ culture is the culture that is easily visible, accessible to the people. On the other hand, ‘small c’ culture is invisible and inaccessible to the people.

The proposed categorization of themes under 'Big C' and 'small c' is as follows.

No./ Section	Big C	small c
1.	Religious Rituals	Non-verbal communication
2.	Festivals	Manners and Mannerisms
3.	Clothing and appearance	Leisure activities
4.	Art, literature, Music	Daily routines
5.	Geography/	Role of gender
6.	Sports	Values and belief systems
7.	Environment	Attitudes and Feelings
8.	Food	

9.	Science and Technology	
10.	Socio-economic conditions	
11.	Historical monuments	
12.	Social customs	
13.	Names of people and places	

Table1: The proposed categorization of themes under ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture

The above-proposed categorization of the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture plays a significant role to distinguish each theme in the analysis chapter and helps in understanding the significance of the themes.

1. 3. Purpose of the Study

The study aims to locate local culture (using Paul Gee’s tool of vocabulary) in Tagore's personal letters. Tagore’s letters express his insightful view of nature, local ambience, and a portrait of societal events very clearly, especially in the personal letters penned down during the first two decades of his adulthood (1879-1898).

The study analyses the letters through Paul Gee's model of discourse analysis and uses a specific tool, 'vocabulary'. The letters are personal narratives that convey various socio-cultural aspects distinctively through words or phrases. The study views culture from the point of view of Brook, Hall, Chen, Lee & Peterson classification of 'Big C' and 'small c' cultures which play a vital role in identifying different local cultural aspects in the letters.

In the context of the study, there is a need to explore what 'local' signifies in general. Localization is a term or collection of emotional feelings or expressions associated with physical objects in a given geographical area. It includes various social, political, historical, cultural, and economic systems. In this context, it was Hannerz who said that "the cosmopolitans and locals have a common interest in the survival of cultural diversity, saying that there can be no cosmopolitan without the local" (1996, p.16). It may then be said that localities are nothing but global raw materials, and globality has no other significance or meaning without a local culture. The local and global cultures are interrelated. The expressions of local culture and global culture are also mutually interdependent. However, the researcher would try to analyze the local cultural influence in Tagore's letters, and the significant questions are put down below

- What are the themes used to represent the local culture in Tagore's letters?
- How are the 'Big C' and 'small c' cultures expressed in Tagore's letters?

This is an exploratory study looking at the various themes and elements of local culture as represented by Tagore in his letters. It is a qualitative study on how different vocabulary items

construct the cultural meaning of Bengali local culture through Paul Gee's tools of discourse analysis.

The letters analyzed are written between 1879 and 1898, and published in the edited book *“Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore”* by Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson.

1.4. Scope for the study

The research attempts to study local culture and its various aspects as represented in Tagore's letters. This study looks at the letters of Tagore in pursuit of the theme of local culture through the discourse analysis tool of Paul Gee. The study focuses primarily on local culture and will track various words and phrases indicating local culture from the text. Therefore, the study traces the local culture through the personal letters of Rabindranath Tagore.

In this study, Tagore's letters written between 1879 and 1898 are selected for analysis. These letters were written in his early adulthood to people who were very close to him. There are several descriptions of his locale, society, and rituals of that period that are evident in his letters. The researcher has chosen to analyse and unfold the theme of the local culture in this particular period.

1.5. Objectives

The primary purpose of this study is to explore local culture through Paul Gee's ‘vocabulary’ discourse analysis tool. The culture is significantly expressed through various local descriptions

in that specific geographical location. Several writers have presented their own local culture through various genres like drama, novels, and poetry. This study explores the local elements in the text and understands the role of localization in constructing the culture with the help of two cultural lenses: ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture.

1.6. Research Questions

- What are the themes used to represent the local culture in Tagore’s letters?
- How are the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ cultures expressed in Tagore’s letters?

1.7. Justification for the study

Although there has been much work done on Tagore's writings, there has not been much research that has been carried out on the aspect of local culture in Tagore's letters. These are some studies that have been conducted on the letters of Tagore. Firstly, Edward (1976) said that Tagore can present any writing in fair and lyrical expression to the audience, especially in the letters because all the letters are written lucidly and entertainingly. Secondly, Radice (1993) did one study on Tagore’s letters and focused on various things such as social attitude, political attitude, ideology, behaviours and contribution to the literary field. Radice also mentions that Tagore helps the people to uplift society by making an umbrella factory in Santiniketan. Sutherland (1998) also pointed out that Tagore represents the life of the middle path between modernism and traditionalism. Similarly, Aparajita (1998) reflects primarily on the concepts of nationalism,

traditionalism, and most notably, equality of mind in the letters. He divided his work into various sections like family life, travel, friends, school, Indian freedom movement, social life, and Shantiniketan. Adding to the study, Roy and Sen (2012) talked about contemporary issues i. e. Nationalism, the problems of people, philosophical ideas, etc., in the letters. Uma Dasgupta (2014) also talked about the contribution of Rabindranath Tagore and his versatility in literature. Amiya P. Sen (2015) talked about Tagore and religion, especially the concept of God and his philanthropist attitude which is reflected in some of his letters. Moreover, Chakraborty (2015) mentioned that Tagore's letters include personal notes about his life, relatives, and faiths, anti-colonialism attitude and relations with the national and international personality. Although these studies have talked about traditionalism and various themes in the letters, there is no study that exclusively focuses on the representation of local culture. Therefore, this study explores local culture as represented in Tagore's personal letters.

1.8. Organization of the Study

The dissertation consists of five chapters. The first chapter introduces the study and Tagore's early literary works, autobiographical sketch *'My life in My Words'*, and Tagore as a nationalist and an internationalist. The second section describes the culture and its types such as 'Big C' and 'small c' (based on all five researchers such as Brook, Hall, Chen, Peterson, & Lee) and the proposed categorization of culture for analysing Tagore's letters. The third section includes the purpose, scope, and justification of the study. The fourth section includes the research objectives, research questions, and organization of the study.

Chapter two reviews the literature on Tagore's letters, some studies on Tagore's work related to culture and related studies and some studies on Paul Gee's discourse tools. This chapter also includes theoretical section which consists of four main approaches of discourse analysis.

Chapter three is the research methodology which includes discourse analysis, Paul Gee's discourse analysis, Paul Gee's theory and method, and descriptions of the parameters of analysis: Culture and its types 'Big C' and 'small c' culture and vocabulary tool, data collection procedure, and the overview of the letters.

Chapter four is the analysis of data of 'Local culture in Tagore's letters' is divided into six sub-sections such as local cultural identity, local culture in ritual, local culture through rustic household representations, local culture in terms of names, local culture in natural beauty, and 'Bengali vs. English' culture. This chapter analyses the letters to answer the research questions.

Chapter five is the conclusion which talks about the summary of the findings, implications of the study, limitations of the study, and scope for further study.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

2.0. Introduction:

This chapter discusses the literature which forms the background to the study of Rabindranath Tagore's personal letters. Several studies have been published on Tagore's works, but we will look at a few selected studies which are relevant to the present study. The first section discusses some studies which are related to Tagore's letters and some other works. The second section deals with the studies on Paul Gee's Discourse analysis tools and finally the third section focuses on studies related to culture in Tagore's works.

2.1. Review of Research on Tagore's Works:

In this section, the researcher focuses on some of the previous studies related to Tagore's letters. These are some studies that give importance to Tagore's versatility as one of the greatest literary personalities in India who have command in all genres. Therefore, the following studies would explore various themes and backgrounds of the letters.

Rabindranath Tagore has been acclaimed as an excellent writer not only in India but the world at large. Gupta. U. (2014) says that Rabindranath's contribution to Bengali literature is extraordinary in every genre such as poetry, prose, lyrics, drama and short story. Tagore's fame spread all over the world after he was awarded the Nobel Prize for *Gitanjali* in 1913. Radice

(1993) also commented that Gitanjali is one of the best books that he had ever read. Dinesh Chandra Sen (1922) observes that “Bengal has not given Rabindranath to Europe. Rather Europe has given him to the Bengalis.” (p.591) Therefore, Tagore’s writings have been established as excellent literary pieces worldwide.

Just like his other genres, even the letters written by Tagore are praiseworthy and present his ideas on culture, humanism, socialism, naturalism, political system, economic system, religion, ritual, localization, globalization, attitudes, ideologies and behaviour of the people, etc. Biswabharti University collected Tagore’s personal letters and published them as ‘*Chinnapatrabali*’ in 1963, but later on, Andrew Robinson and Krishna Dutta have edited the collection by simplifying the sentence forms by making the language less rigid, archaic and obscure, and divided the letters chronologically into different periods of his life and categorised them thematically.

Some studies point out that Tagore’s letters depict his life and his beliefs as well as the Bengali culture and lifestyle very distinctively. Amiya P. Sen (2014) rightly tracked the personality and idiosyncratic nature of Tagore in the letters. He also said that Tagore’s letters bring newness through the fresh notes about his life, beliefs, the idea of humanism, anti-colonialism attitude, relations with the national and international leaders, Bengali culture, tradition, natural ambience, and the descriptions of the contemporary situations of the local areas etc.

Tagore’s attitude towards the people irrespective of any geographical location has been shown in the following study. Sutherland G. (1998) reviewed the “*Selected Letters of Rabindranath*

Tagore” and stated that Tagore represents the life of the middle path between modernism and traditionalism. He divided the letters into various themes like family life, travel, friends, school, Indian freedom movement, social life, and Shantiniketan. He observed that each aspect of nature is reflected through his letters.

Although Tagore is well known for the *Gitanjali* and other literary writings he is also appreciated for his simple language and mature understanding of critical human issues. Edward C. Dimcock (1976) in “*Imperfect Encounter: Letters of William Rothenstein and Rabindranath Tagore*” represents Tagore as a brave personality, with no fear or anxiety about anyone, knowledge in every field, a thoughtful, proud, and independent man. He also said that Tagore could present any writing in fair and lyrical expression to the audience, especially the letters because Tagore wrote the letters lucidly and entertainingly. He also said that there is enough mixture of homely humour and mature judgment on critical human issues to give us a glimpse of a man different from the mysterious author of ‘*Gitanjali*’. (Dimcock, 1976, p.350)

Tagore’s letters discuss various ideas about patriotism, politics, social attitudes and internationalism. Aparajita R. (1998), in her article reviewing the letters of Rabindranath Tagore focuses on the concepts of nationalism, India and Indianness, and the traditionalism of Tagore. His insistence on the need to be more human has influenced his realistic work in education, politics, and social development.

Another of Tagore's works, "*Songs Offerings*" is also a masterpiece which is a collection of devotional songs written in simple language and later translated by himself into English. Saha S. (2016), in her work, "*Stylistic Analysis of Tagore's Song Offerings*" mentions that Tagore talks about his devotion, feelings, love, and emotions in a very simple way especially after the loss of his family members (sister-in-law, daughter, and son). The stylistic analysis is about how the writer uses language - words, phrases, and sentences - figurative language in a specific genre to express the feelings, emotions, thoughts, and expressions.

From the above studies, it is found that Tagore's language, emotions, and thoughts have been expressed very beautifully in the letters. Tagore's writings also have been established as excellent literary pieces worldwide as he covered various thematic aspects such as culture, humanism, socialism, naturalism, nationalism, traditionalism, anti-colonial attitude, political system, economic system, religious rituals, localization, globalization, and social issues of the people. The letters also present the local Bengali culture and realistic descriptions of social life in Bengal. After all, Tagore made use of language - words and phrases- to represent the ethos and culture of Bengal, his homeland.

2.2. Review of research on Tagore's work related to culture:

In this section, the researcher focuses on some of the previous studies related to the culture conducted in Tagore's work. In the following, there are some cultural elements used by the researcher.

Tagore has given us the richness of his ideas and the accomplishments in the letters. Sen S. (1943), in his works *“Rabindranath Tagore on Rural Construction”*, focuses on Tagore's local descriptions of Shelidah, and Shantiniketan. In terms of culture, Tagore describes different household elements, people's behaviour, attitude, many social issues etc. in the letters very distinctively. Adding to the point, that one of Tagore's national songs, he calls for unity of the people and sang one song during the Swadeshi movement: “If nobody answers your call, walk alone.”(Tagore, 1905) For years, through essays and addresses, poems, books, songs, he tried to get his countrymen to inspire and work for each other. He also explored various socio-cultural aspects in his letters. Tagore himself had an exaggerated sense of rural and urban lifestyle as he belonged to the Zamindar family. Therefore, Sen depicts different social and cultural aspects in Tagore's letters and songs.

There are some letters that depict the culture through the society, country, and values of unity, geographical beauty and descriptions of the local areas. Datta D. (2018), in his work *“Connecting Cultures: Rethinking Rabindranath Tagore's 'Ideals of Education'”*, pointed out Tagore's views on education that local and global education should not be two sides of the continuum. Moreover, education without borders can help to restore balance and unity between man and society, country and nation. In the article, Datta discusses Tagore's related writings on education, reflecting on his concentrated educational attempts to navigate the nation's borders and geography to regain lost rhythm. In contemporary times, Tagore saw that education in India was in the middle of a double-layer crisis of colonization and rising nationalism. He is a non-dogmatic champion of peace and the values of unity. He has sought to do this in his educational models by moving beyond the realms of the breakdown of cultural distinctions and without

compromising local/individual relations. He is acknowledging that there are no arbitrary borders whether it is national, theological, or geographical. Tagore's distinctive conceptualization of open-ended education frameworks makes him different, proven by his scholarly and practical efforts. Therefore, it implies that the transmission of cultures has created a 'large base' for education in India and can provide safe conditions and guidance for building transnational/international solidarity. (p.412-423) Therefore, the representation of culture and education is very beautifully portrayed in Tagore's work.

Tagore's social attitude, political attitude, ideology, and social behaviours are portrayed very beautifully throughout his letters. In his letters, he discusses various contemporary issues, i. e., nationalism, people's challenges, and philosophical ideas. Tagore presented different social and cultural aspects of society through the beautiful use of language.

2.3. Review of Research on Paul Gee's Discourse analysis:

This section focuses on some of the previous studies based on Paul Gee's Discourse analysis. The following studies make use of Paul Gee's discourse analysis tools with a specific focus on the vocabulary tool and some other tools as well.

Discourse analysis has explored the relationship between language function and the processes of language users, the socio-cultural context and the role of cognition. Xinzhang Yang (2001) basing on Paul Gee's work "*An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and method*", states that when we produce a document, we create six fields of 'truth' simultaneously: the meaning

and importance of the material world, activities, identities and relationships, politics, interactions and semiotics (p.12).

Mariza Georgalou (2011) critically looks at all the 28 discourse analysis tools and states that Gee's tool kit is more realistic and invites readers to participate in the Discourse Analysis by following a suggested series of "how-to" to analyse the text. In terms of the vocabulary tool, he said that "the types of words that are being used like content words, function words, informal words in everyday texts, and formal words in specialist contexts." (p.2). More specifically, the author extends the Discourse Analysis approach to both speech and writing, considering them as two distinct but equivalent modes of communication (cf. Sifianou, 2001: 25). Interestingly, these 28 tools can be used to analyse static and moving pictures, drawings, video games, advertisements, videos, and songs, which are all considered multimodal texts.

It is found that there is an essential relationship between the linguistic/paralinguistic behaviours and social environments of participants. Nadir Ali & Nadia Anwar, in their works *"Vicissitudes of Aphasic Identity: Discourse Analysis under James Paul Gee's Identity Framework"* presented a study of aphasic identity through discourse analysis of Paul Gee's framework. In this work, the researcher mainly shows the use of the identity interpretation in the context of James Paul Gee to explain the identity vicissitudes of aphasia patients as a basis for discourse analysis. The interviews and questionnaires are used as the data collection method. The interviews were collected, transcribed and analysed via Paul Gee's Discourse Analysis toolkit, including four identity viewpoints navigated by nature, affinity, institution and discourse. The study found that post-stroke identification of rehabilitation is a significant problem for survivors, families and

health providers. Nadir Ali & Nadia Anwar (2019) also mentioned that “Discourse Analysis is particularly relevant to participants who are impaired in verbal communication, and seek assistance from other communications sources, including body language, such as gestures, looks or other visual signals, such as written expressions, etc. to construct the identity.” (p. 100)

The researcher qualitatively studied each verbal and non-verbal expression of the participants. Therefore, throughout the study, the aphasic identity has been shown with the help of Paul Gee’s tools. The researcher analysed verbal and non-verbal expressions like gestures, visual signals, and written expressions in the analysis section.

These are some of the studies conducted by the different researchers using Paul Gee’s tools including vocabulary tools. The above studies primarily focus on the use of vocabulary. Therefore, we see that the vocabulary tool can be used to find the social aspects, cultural aspects, and attitudes.

Overall, after studying and reviewing the previous studies related to Tagore’s letters and other works, the researcher has not found any research on the local culture as expressed by Rabindranath Tagore in his letters. So, this study would explore the local culture extensively in Tagore’s personal letters. So far no study has explored Tagore’s work through Paul Gee’s discourse tools. The researcher would analyze the letters to view the local culture through two cultural lenses such as the 'Big C' and 'small c' cultural aspects in the dissertation. Therefore, the researcher would like to explore one of the major themes about the local culture in this study.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

This section deals with the brief introduction of discourse, discourse analysis, different theoretical approaches of discourse analysis and chosen Paul Gee's theoretical approach in details.

2.4.1. Discourse

The term 'discourse' is an elastic term that has a complex history. 'Discourse' is used with a range of meanings by different theorists. Originally the term comes from the Latin word 'discursus' which denotes conversation or 'speech'. The study of discourse has its origins in the role of language in texts and the way we perceive the world. Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short (1981) said that "Discourse is linguistic communication that is seen as an interaction between the speaker and the listener, as an interpersonal activity defined by its social purpose" (p.209).

Harris examined the language to describe how the elements of language distribute in texts and how these elements combine across different patterns in the text. This kind of finding patterns of language elements in the text is called discourse analysis. Discourse analysis also determines how ideas develop and change over time in a different context. This method was first introduced by Zellig Harris (in 1952) in research studies to examine the relationship between speech and writing. Harris pointed out two significant features of discourse analysis, such as i). Analysis of language, ii). The relationship between the linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour.

Discourse is the analysis of writing or speech and seeks to figure out the true meaning of the expression which includes different sociological, political, economic, psychological and other

aspects. It also explores how language works and includes an ideological, essential context and different social influences. It gives importance to the inferred context, content, and form of the text. Keith Johnson and Helen Johnson (1998) rightly mention that “Discourse analysis is the study of how stretches language used in communication assumes message, purposes, and unity for their use: the quality of coherence”-(Johnson and Johnson, p.7).

Discourse Analysis is also a method of social sciences and its allied branches that is used for communication and analysing the text. It is reflecting on how multiple world views are produced through the discourse of both the spoken and written texts. It is used as a method in a variety of disciplines which includes media, communication studies and cultural studies.

In the discipline of Discourse, Discourse Analysis means studying various knowledge sources and deconstructing the language attached to certain phenomena. As Philips and Jorgensen (2002) rightly pointed out that “discourse analysis includes an analysis of the trends followed by people's utterances as they are part of various aspects of social life” (p.1). To understand the conversation of the character or speaker in the text, context plays an important role. The contexts can be the physical, social, psychological or the positions of the individuals who are involved in the conversation.

Discourse constructs the object or event itself which allows, facilitates and limits the possibilities of understanding the object and enables and constrains what can be said by whom, where and when. For instance, in the late 19th century, the idea of homosexuality came into being with a particular understanding which constructed the subject (homosexual) via medical, moral and

legal discourse. People who are positioned as homosexual are seen as ‘sick’ illegal, and need to be punished.

Discourse generally arises from social institutions such as the media and politics. It also encompasses different sociological characteristics within the context of cultures, such as cultural phenomena, political scenarios, religion, the law and the lifestyle of the people in a society. Foucault describes “Discourses as a cluster of the statements which measures language as a medium of representing knowledge in a certain topic in a specific moment” (Foucault, 2002, p.121)

2.5. Review of Different Model of Discourse Analysis

There are different models that exist in the field of discourse analysis. In this section, four discourse models have been described briefly - Van Dijk’s Socio-Cognitive model, Fairclough’s Socio-Cultural Method, Wodak’s Discourse Historical Method and Paul Gee’s Discourse model. So the different models of discourse model are described below briefly.

2.5.1. Van Dijk’s Socio-Cognitive model

Van Dijk is a man of social commitment which led him to focus on ethnic groups and minorities and their representation in different platforms be it everyday conversations or parliamentary discourses. He also focuses on the semantic movement and tries to differentiate between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ which are positive and negative attitudes respectively. He also talked about socio-cognition which facilitates between society and discourse. As the people are part of society, their

behaviour and opinions are conveyed by their ideologies. It can also be said that mental representation is articulated in such a way that sets up 'Us' and 'Them'. Teun Van Dijk's approach to CDA combines cognitive theories with linguistics and social theories. In his theories, he gives main importance to cognition. Later on, his approach was criticised for focusing more on the reproduction of ideologies rather than the transformation. However, this framework allows the discussion and analysis of ideologies involved in a set of discourses.

2.5.2. Wodak's Discourse Historical Method

Wodak and her colleague came up with a new theory of discourse analysis based on sociolinguistics and the ideas of the Frankfurt school that is Discourse sociolinguistics. Discourse sociolinguistics is focused on the study of the text in relation to various societal aspects. It is an approach that can identify and describe the underlying meanings that are embedded in a specific text. (Wodak, 1996, p.8)

Wodak has given much importance to the interdisciplinary approach and eclectic nature of critical discourse analysis. On the other hand, Van Dijk said that for doing critical discourse analysis, the interdisciplinary approach plays a very significant role. She also keeps track in various fields or disciplines like linguistics, poetics, and other social research fields.

Wodak and Ludwig mention that there are three new consequences of Critical Discourse analysis.

- i. The discourse always involves power and ideology,

- ii. Discourse is always historical.
- iii. In discourse analysis interpretation is much important so the listener and reader depend on their background knowledge, information and position etc.

(Wodak & Ludwig, 1999:12-13, 2006:21)

Therefore, Wodak gives importance to the interdisciplinary approach of critical discourse analysis in relation to the socio-linguistics which includes power, ideology, historical elements, poetics, etc.

2.5.3. Norman Fairclough

Fairclough's area of study is known as Textually Oriented Discourse Analysis (TODA) which is mainly concerned with formal linguistics, textual properties, sociolinguistics, speech, genre and formal sociological practices. Critical discourse analysis is an approach to the field of discourse that argues the social practice (non-linguistics) and linguistic practices constitute one another and focus on investigating how societal power is established and reinforced through language use. Fairclough N. (2008) said that Critical discourse analysis of nominalization defined nominalization as a syntactic transformation and a syntactic mechanism, which is one way to build the meaning of the text. Nominalization is also often represented as a textual process in the text. Critical discourse research is not how we see potential instances of reification (or ideology) as an activity carried out in isolation from systematic theoretical and analytical contexts but how we can contribute to the ability of those frameworks to resolve discourse problems. The significant characteristic of reification known in this context is that it is not just a way of representing, interpreting and thinking but also it also includes the properties, interactions and

acts of man-made things really come to control people's lives in reality. Therefore, Reification is something that happens to the true-life process and reversing or minimizing which means altering reality, not just the dimension of debate. (Fairclough, 2008, p.811-819)

2.5.3.1. Fairclough's Socio-Cultural Method

Fairclough has developed three types of dimensions for the analysis of discourse. The three dimensions are i. Text (whether it is written or spoken or visual image), ii. Discourse practice and orders of discourse, and iii. Socio-cultural practice (Kress & Hodge, 1979)

Text and Analysis of texture

Text analysis is all about the analysis of texture, form, organization and commentaries of the text. There are various tools which are use to analyse the text and are described below

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is all about how the words are used throughout the text to develop the ideology, connotation, denotation, and formality of the text. Fairclough (2006) rightly mentions, "over wording is a sign of intense preoccupation which focuses on the ideological struggle" (p.12). So, some questions would be, how are the words used through synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms or over wording to construct the ideology? How are the words chosen to develop the relationship with the reader in terms of the formality of vocabulary? Is there euphemism or metaphor? What connotations do they convey? What aspects of reality are over-worded? What are the ways in which things are classified?

Transitivity

Transitivity is the degree of nominalization. The conversion of the process into nominal has the effect of back-grounding the process itself by omitting information about agents of power. It is important to notice what is depicted as an agent, and therefore powered and affected in the text. So, the question would be what pattern of transitivity is found in the text?

Mood and Modality

The modality of text is a set both with the use of specific words (may, might, can, could, will, must, it seems to me, without doubt, or inclusive or exclusive pronoun) and intonation pattern to convey the degree of certainty and authority. So, the questions would be how is mood enacted: Declarative, Imperative or Interrogative? Which values express choices of modality?

Topicality

Topicality is the topic or theme position of the text. Which topics are chosen to fill the theme position in the clause at the initial or fore grounded in choosing what is given the topic position, the writer creates a perspective that influences the reader's perceptions.

Politeness

Politeness is the facial expressions or activities which can be changed in a moment. Specific politeness conventions embody specific social and power relations. Whether it is the Positive face which is generally used for understanding, admiration and on the other hand, the negative

face which shows negative impressions to the audience. So, the questions would be what kind of human “facial expression” is enacted? (Kress & Hodge, 1979)

Presupposition

Fairclough (1995, p.14) inveterate of the existence of the author in a text, flowing from absent to fore grounded: absent/presupposed/back grounded/fore grounded. So, the questions would be, are there presuppositions or assumptions made by a speaker or writers which are not explicitly stated and which appear to be taken for granted?

Ambiguity

Are there any suggestive statements implying double meanings, so that when the statement is challenged, the author can deny any culpability?

Interactional control features

Interactional control features include turn-taking (how talking turns are distributed), exchange system (for an instance-question answer), control of topic or change of topic, opening or closing interactions, (ways in which earlier parts of a text or interaction are paraphrased) Which are the interactional control features of the text?

After all, Fairclough’s socio-cultural discourse theory includes various aspects likes nominalization, reification, interactions, resolve discourse problem and the socio-culture through various tools in the text which is mentioned above.

2.5.4. Paul Gee's theory and method

Paul Gee is one of the central figures in the study of discourses. Gee has developed four units for the analysis of discourse in the book *How to do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit* (2011). Gee illustrates a very critical difference within DA: some DA approaches are closely related to the study of grammar, while others rely on concepts, problems and topics articulated in talks and writings. In the text *How to do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit*, Gee (2011) offers 28 tools for discourse study. Gee's approaches allow teachers and scholars to create layers of context-related meaning by posing questions about the text and material or concepts 'hidden' in discourses.

An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method and the book *How to do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit* is a follow-up to Gee's seminal (1st ed. 1999; 2nd ed.2005). He talks about a total of 28 discourse analysis tools to unfold the discourse. These tools are categorized into four different sections, namely, 'Language and Context', 'Saying, Doing, and Designing', 'Building Things in the World', and 'Theoretical Tools' in the book. All these four units are consists of a total of 28 tools which are described below (Chen, 2014, p.1-6)

2.5.4.1. Language and Context

This unit looks at the linguistic meaning and includes many approaches for evaluating pragmatic variables (e.g. assumptions, implicatures and intonations). It also pursues with an outline of language learning, with a clear emphasis on socio-cultural topics. Then, it shifts into the linguistic sense controversy and how it changes the meanings of our messages. As Gee (2014) mentions, "the physical environment in which communication takes place and everything in it; the fundamentals, gazing, gestures and movements of those present and what has been said and

done before; any shared understanding of those involved, including shared cultural knowledge” (p.12). There are six tools in the first section which are described briefly below.

The Deixis Tool

The Deixis tool is based on the fact that deictic phrases (personal pronouns, adverbials of time and space) bind expression and writing with meaning in the text. As Gee (2014) pointed out that “deictic markers are used to link what is said to context and to make assumptions about what listeners know or can find out already” (p. 16). How does the speaker use the terms or words whose reference must be decided from context (e.g., I/me, he/he, she/he, we/us, they/them, here/there, this/that, now/then, yesterday/today)? Based on what is being said, what can one infer about the context? What does the speaker believe one is aware of?

The Fill in Tool

This tool involves the information, conclusions and inferences that must be taken to the conversation by listeners/readers. As Gee (2014) mentions, “what knowledge, assumptions and inferences do listeners need to bring to bear in order for this communication to be clear and understandable to the speaker intended it?” (p. 18). In order to explain or understand what the speaker said, what details do you need? From what the speaker said, what can you infer?

The Making strange Tool

This tool asks that the listeners/readers should attempt to behave as though they are strangers in all conversations. As Gee (2014) points out, “try to act as if you were an ‘outsider’ for any

communication. Ask yourself, what could anyone (Martian, perhaps) find strange (unclear, confusing, worth questioning) if this individual did not share the knowledge and assumptions and make such conclusions that communication becomes so natural and accepted by the insiders?” (p.19)

The Subject Tool

The Subject tool focuses on how the themes are picked and what speakers/writers plan to say about them. As Gee (2014) points out “ask why participants have chosen the topic/topics they have and what they say about the topic” (p. 25). why did the speaker want to talk about these issues (e.g., man, location, goods, or idea)? Would the speaker have spoken about these topics in some other way? Why would the speaker have arranged his/her speech this way?

The Intonation Tool

The intonation tool talks about how the pitch of a speaker relates to the sense of an utterance. As Gee (2014) mentions that “what sort of unit of idea did the speaker use? What details did the speaker make important (in terms of where the intonational emphasis is located)? What knowledge was the history of the speaker as supplied or old by making it less relevant? What kind of attitudinal and/or emotional (emotional) sense does the intonation contour convey? When working with written messages, frequently read them out loud and wonder what kind of intonation contour readers need to apply to the sentences to make them completely meaningful” (p.34)

The Frame Problem Tool

In this tool, the analysis of the conversation should make allowances for all elements of context that they deem important to the data's meaning. As Gee (2014) mention that “always extend your understanding of the context as far as you can to see if parts of the context are important that you may not have considered relevant at first, or if you might explore completely new aspects of the context.” (p.45)

2.5.4.2. The Doing and Not Just Saying Tool

This unit looks at how language can perform various functions and construct structures/meanings in the world. Gee provides a ‘building/designing view’ in contrast to the container/conduit view of language. This section includes a total of six tools namely, the Doing and not just Saying tool, the Why this Way and not that Way tool, the Integration tool, the Topic and Theme tool, the Stanza tool, and the Vocabulary tool. In the following section, all these tools are described in detail.

The Doing and Not Just Saying Tool

The tool asks the question not only about what the speaker means but what he/she is trying to do in any interaction. As Gee (2014) rightly pointed out that “ask not just what the speakers say for any communication, but what they try to do, remembering they may try to do more than one thing, for any communication.” (p.52)

The Why This Way and Not That Way

It asks what kinds of grammatical constructs for any communication and why speakers/writers design their messages in this manner, but not in any other way. Gee (2014) rightly points out that “always ask how it would say otherwise, what the speaker tried to say, and how he did so, and not in another way.” (p.63)

The Integration Tool

It asks how the clauses integrate into utterances or sentences for some interaction. Gee (2014) mentions that “What was left behind and what was included in terms of optional arguments? What has been left out and used by translating the clauses into phrases? How were information being expressed in the primary, subordinate, and embedded clauses and phrases encompassing a clause's value of information? What are the perspectives?” (p.68). Throughout this tool, the above-mentioned questions answers could be found.

The Topic and Theme Tool

For any conversation, inquire what the subject and theme for each clause are. Ask if such a choice makes the theme as the subject or not. Gee (2014) mentions some questions such as “Why

were these choices made? If the theme is not the subject/theme and therefore deviates from the normal (unmarked) preference, what is it and why was it chosen?” (p.74) The tool covers various aspects of the theme of the utterances of the speaker and each aspect of the text.

The Stanza Tool

It looks for clusters of thoughts and how they cluster into more significant blocks of knowledge for each conversation (which is long enough). It is not easily found but very important for organizing the interpretation of data and it also shows that how one display that interpretation.

The Vocabulary Tool

This tool asks what kinds of terms are used and the purposes behind those uses in the text. Vocabulary is an essential aspect of language to construct social meaning, expression, emotion, and ideology in any language. As Gee (2014) pointed out that “for any communication, ask what sorts of words are being used for the communication. How is the word functioning to mark the communication in terms of style (register, social language)? How does it contribute to the purposes for communicating?”(p.61). Paul Gee’s vocabulary tool looks at two categories of vocabulary: formal vocabulary and informal vocabulary. Adding to the point, it can also be studied from three different perspectives: the basic everyday words, more formal words and technical words in narrow domains.

2.5.4.3. Building Things in the World

This Unit revisits the focus of the meaning from a reflexive perspective and explores how language relates to constructing and restoring the meaning. Gee lists seven main building tasks accomplished by integrating language-in-use and other non-verbal tools: Meaning, Events, Personalities, Partnerships, Politics (Distribution of Social Goods), Interactions, and Sign Systems/Knowledge (pp. 95-98). The following tools are described in details.

The Context is Reflexive Tool

When analyzing the meaning of the conversation, the tool asks how the speakers/writers construct or mould the specific context and whether the repetition, transition or alteration of content is actively or unconsciously done. As Gee (2014) mentions, “how is what the speaker is saying and how he or she is saying it helping to create or shape (possibly even manipulate) what listeners will take as the relevant context?” (p.91)

The Significance Building Tool

This tool asks how the vocabulary and grammatical instruments are used to build up or minimize the meaning of objects for some conversation. As Gee (2014) mentions, “ask how words and grammatical devices are used for any communication to build up or decrease significance (importance, relevance) for certain things and not others.”(p.98)

The Activities Building Tool

For any contact, the tool inquires what activity/practice this communication constructs or executes. As Gee (2014) mentions, “what activity or activities is this communication seeking to get others to recognize as being accomplished? Ask also what social groups, institutions, or cultures support and norm (set norms for) whatever activities are being built or enacted.” (p.104)

The Identities Building Tool

For any communication, the tool asks that what historically familiar personalities the speaker is attempting to create or get people to remember. As Gee (2014) points out, “question what socially identifiable persona or identity the speaker is attempting to create or get people to remember. Ask, too, how the speaker is putting others, whose persona the speaker is 'inviting' them to pick up” (p. 116). What personalities (e.g., coach, birdwatcher) does the speaker have? What is the speaker concerned about other people's identities? Where does the speaker place the personalities of others in contrast to his or her own identities?

The Relationships Building Tool

This tool asks how words and grammatical instruments are used to create, maintain, or alter social connections with some conversation. As Gee (2014) points out, “for any communication, ask how words and various grammatical devices are being used to build and sustain or change relationships of various sorts among the speaker, other people, social groups, cultures, and/or institutions. (p.121)

The Politics Building Tool

For all correspondence, this tool asks if words and grammatical instruments are used to create what counts as a social good and to convey this good too, or withhold it from others. As Gee (2014) points out, “question if vocabulary and grammatical instruments are used to create a perspective on how social goods are or should be provided in society.” (p.126)

The Connections Building Tool

It asks how the words and grammatical instruments attach or disconnect items with some correspondence. As Gee (2014) points out, “always ask, as well, how the words and grammar being used in a communication make things relevant or irrelevant to other things or ignores their relevance to each other.” (p.132)

The Cohesion Tool

For some correspondence, the tool questions how continuity functions in the text to connect pieces of information and in what ways in the text. As Gee (2014) points out, “In the text, how does harmony work to link pieces of knowledge and in what way? How does the text struggle to connect other pieces of information to one another? What does the speaker seek to convey or do with the manner he or she does by using coherent devices?”(p.137)

Systems and Knowledge Building Tool

The tool asks how words and grammatical instruments are used to privilege or de-privilege unique sign systems or information with some correspondence. As Gee (2014) points out, “ask

how privilege or de-privilege related sign systems (e.g., Spanish vs. English, technical language vs. ordinary language, signs vs. images, words vs. equations, etc.) or various ways of understanding and believing or pretending to knowledge and belief are used for some communication?” (p.142)

The Topic Flow or Topic Chaining Tool

For some correspondence, the tool inquires what the themes of all the main clauses are and how they apply to each other. As Gee (2014) points out, “topics are less influential subjects in subordinated and embedded clauses than are subordinated to the main chain of subjects in main clauses, but it is useful to question why they add to the main chain of subjects. Ask, too, whether people have indicated that they are moving subjects and whether they have ‘topically spoken’ by first referring back to the old subject. Look, as well, for topic shifted structures and how they are being used.” (p.152)

2.5.4.4. Theoretical Tools

In the final section, Gee takes Discourse Analysis out of linguistic barriers and explores it from the point of view of cultural/psychological anthropology, culture, literary criticism, sociolinguistics, theory and cognitive/cultural psychology. The final six tools are discussed as follows:

The Situated Meaning Tool

For any communication, the tool asks the placed meanings of its terms and phrases in the text. As Gee (2014) points out, “ask terms and phrases on what positioned meanings they have with some conversation. That is, considering the context and how the context is perceived, what particular meanings do listeners have to assign to these words and phrases?”(p.159)

Social Languages Tool

For any communication, the tool asks if it uses words and grammatical devices to signal and translate a given social language. As Gee (2014) points out, “communication can blend or switch between two or more social languages. A social language, in particular, can consist of words or phrases from more than one language” (for example, English and Spanish may be mixed) (p.167)

The Intertextuality Tool

For any communication, the tool asks how words and grammatical devices are used to communicate with (quoting, relating to, or alluding to) other messages in the text. As Gee (2014) points out, “ask how phrases and grammatical constructs (e.g., direct or indirect quotations) are used to quote, refer to or refer to other ‘texts’ for some correspondence. (that is, what others have said or written) or other styles of language (social languages).” (p.172)

Figured World Tool

For any communication, the tool asks what sort of prototypic stories/worlds the communication assumes and means. As Gee (2014) points out, “what participants, activities, ways of interacting,

forms of language, people, objects, environments, and institutions, as well as values, are in these figured worlds?” (p.177)

The Big “D” Discourse Tool

For any communication, the tool asks if the speaker/listener manipulates language and other semiotic instruments to operate on unique social roles and social behaviours. As Gee (2014) mentions, “ask how a person uses language, as well as ways of acting, believing, dressing, valuing, interacting, and using various items, tools, and technologies in certain types of environments to establish a specific socially recognizable identity and engage in one or more socially identifiable activities” (p. 181). What ways of using words, behaving, communicating, believing, valuing, dressing, and using different objects would the speaker follow to be known as a certain sort of person? What behaviour, relationships, principles, attitudes, and artefacts, methods, and technology are correlated with this identity?

The Big “C” Conversation Tool

The tool asks that what historical or social topics and debates are meant to be known to the readers/listeners for some contact. As Gee (2014) mentions, “for any interaction, ask what topics, sides, debates, and claims the communication means that listeners or readers know or what challenges, sides, debates, and claims they need to know in order to understand the communication in terms of larger historical and social issues and debates. Can conversation be seen as conducting a historical or generally recognized dialogue or debate between or between discourses?” (p.191)

In this section, there are main four approaches of discourse analysis likes Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive model, Fairclough's Socio-Cultural Method, Wodak's Discourse Historical Method and Paul Gee's Discourse model has been shown. After analyzing all the four approaches above, the researcher chooses Paul Gee's discourse model because this is really flexible, simplifies and helps to understand the local culture that is represented in Tagore's letters. Although Paul Gee mentions 28 tools in his discourse model, the researcher chooses the vocabulary tool for flexibility and focuses on each cultural word (the 'Big C' and 'small c' cultural words) and since vocabulary is a good tool to analyse this aspect in the text. Other tools can be used for the study but for this study, the researcher would like to use the vocabulary tool due to the limitation of time as well. Therefore, the researcher uses Paul Gee's vocabulary tool for the analysis of Tagore's letters in this study.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.0. Introduction

This chapter introduces and discusses the methodological approach used to analyze Rabindranath Tagore's selected letters to explore the significant theme of local culture features and depict the culture of Bengal. The researcher has chosen Gee's 'vocabulary' tool to explore the local culture as represented in the selected personal letters of Tagore.

For the analysis, the researcher has chosen Tagore's letters from the book entitled "*Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*", edited by Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson. The researcher has chosen published letters from this book because of the availability. There are other publications as well but the researcher was not able to get hold of them despite making

several efforts. There are 346 published letters written by Tagore and selected by the authors in the “*Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*”. Since the researcher is interested in analyzing local culture, the letters from the early adulthood of Tagore have been selected for analysis. These are all personal letters written to close family members and friends and the mention of culture becomes part of the narrative.

This is a qualitative kind of research that tries to examine the selected letters of Tagore. For this study, as mentioned earlier, the researcher collected data from the edited book entitled “*Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*” by Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson. Paul Gee's Discourse analysis ‘vocabulary’ tool is used for analyzing the textual data in this qualitative study. The researcher has made a study of the vocabulary of the selected letters, and the vocabulary that represents various aspects of local culture is analyzed through the vocabulary tool and through the lens of the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture framework.

3.1. Paul Gee

For the study, James Paul Gee’s discourse analysis framework has been used for analysing the data. James Paul Gee is one of the central figures in the study of discourse. In his book *How to do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit*, Paul Gee addresses the term, ‘Discourses’. He said that language should be analyzed as a social practice through the lens of discourse in both spoken and written texts.

3.1.1 Paul Gee's Discourse tools

The work *How to do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit* is a follow-up to Gee's seminal work, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (1st ed. 1999, 2nd ed. 2005, 3rd ed. 2010 & 4th ed. 2014). Gee has formulated a new approach according to which Discourse Analysis is the study of language-in-use, based on integrating the concepts of applied linguistics, education, anthropology, psychology, and communication. It also says that language is used not only to tell things but also to do things in the physical, cultural and political realms. He talks about a total of 28 discourse analysis tools to unfold the discourse. These tools are categorized into four different sections, namely, 'Language and Context', 'Saying, Doing, and Designing', 'Building Things in the World', and 'Theoretical Tools' in the book.

For this study, 'the vocabulary tool' has been chosen which is the part of the second section, 'Saying, Doing, and Designing' in the book *How to do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit*. The following section describes more about this section.

3.1.1.2 Saying, Doing, and Designing

This unit looks at how language can perform various functions and construct structures/meanings in the world. Gee provides a 'building/designing view' in contrast to the container/conduit view of language. This section includes a total of six tools namely, the Doing and not just Saying tool, the Why this Way and not that Way tool, the Integration tool, the Topic and Theme tool, the Stanza tool, and the Vocabulary tool. In the following section, all these tools are described in detail.

The Doing and Not Just Saying Tool

The tool asks the question not only about what the speaker means but what he/she is trying to do in any interaction. As Gee (2014) rightly pointed out that “ask not just what the speakers say for any communication, but what they try to do, remembering they may try to do more than one thing, for any communication.” (p.52)

The Why This Way and Not That Way

It asks what kinds of grammatical constructs for any communication and why speakers/writers design their messages in this manner, but not in any other way. Gee (2014) rightly points out that “always ask how it would say otherwise, what the speaker tried to say, and how he did so, and not in another way.” (p.63)

The Integration Tool

It asks how the clauses integrate into utterances or sentences for some interaction. Gee (2014) mentions that “What was left behind and what was included in terms of optional arguments? What has been left out and used by translating the clauses into phrases? How were information being expressed in the primary, subordinate, and embedded clauses and phrases encompassing a

clause's value of information? What are the perspectives?" (p.68). Throughout this tool, the above-mentioned questions answers could be found.

The Topic and Theme Tool

For any conversation, inquire what the subject and theme for each clause are. Ask if such a choice makes the theme as the subject or not. Gee (2014) mentions some questions such as "Why were these choices made? If the theme is not the subject/theme and therefore deviates from the normal (unmarked) preference, what is it and why was it chosen?" (p.74). The tool covers various aspects of the theme of the utterances of the speaker and each aspect of the text.

The Stanza Tool

It looks for clusters of thoughts and how they cluster into more significant blocks of knowledge for each conversation (which is long enough). It is not easily found but very important for organizing the interpretation of data and it also shows that how one display that interpretation.

The Vocabulary Tool

This tool asks what kinds of terms are used and the purposes behind those uses in the text. Vocabulary is an essential aspect of language to construct social meaning, expression, emotion, and ideology in any language. As Gee (2014) pointed out that "for any communication, ask what sorts of words are being used for the communication. How is the word functioning to mark the

communication in terms of style (register, social language)? How does it contribute to the purposes for communicating?”(p.61). Paul Gee’s vocabulary tool looks at two categories of vocabulary: formal vocabulary and informal vocabulary. Adding to the point, it can also be studied from three different perspectives: the basic everyday words, more formal words and technical words in narrow domains.

3.2. Descriptions of the parameters of analysis

The vocabulary tool is used for analyzing the text. The researcher has chosen this tool because of its flexibility and versatility in analyzing different vocabulary items including local words and other vocabulary choices made by Tagore in the text. For clear distinction of the local culture, the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture has chosen in the study. The vocabulary tool and the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’, which are adapted for the study, are discussed in detail.

3.2.1. The Vocabulary Tool

For any communication, the vocabulary tool asks what kind of terms is used and the purposes behind those uses. Vocabulary is an essential aspect of language in constructing meaning, expression, emotion, and ideology in any language. Paul Gee’s vocabulary tool looks at two categories of vocabulary: formal vocabulary and informal vocabulary. Additionally, it can also

be studied from three different perspectives: the basic everyday words, more formal words and technical words in narrow domains.

After all, there would also be some questions that can be asked about the use of vocabulary. What kind of specific vocabulary is used in a specific context and what does it signify? What kinds of word clusters are used? What are the collocations used in the text? How do words in the text represent the culture? The discourse analysis will answer such questions by considering the writer's geographical location, social, cultural, and ideological representation (context) in the text.

By taking the help of the vocabulary tool, this study would attempt to look at how socio-cultural aspects of Tagore's homeland are projected and generalized in the letters. By the consideration of synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms, and other vocabulary choices, the researcher draws socio-cultural aspects and the ideology of the writer in the letters. Therefore, the vocabulary tool gives us the meaning of the various local aspects and elements of the language, particularly in Tagore's selected letters.

The vocabulary used in the letters is both formal and informal because all the letters are personal and written to the respective family members, especially to his friends, wife and relatives. In the letters, there is a lot of information regarding the socio-cultural features of the contemporary time. It is also found that Tagore has mentioned the everyday lifestyle of the people, their activities, attire, religion, culture, behaviour, attitude, economic, social, political aspects in the letters. For representing the local cultural aspects, both formal and informal vocabularies have been employed significantly in the letters. Therefore, through formal and informal vocabulary (as part of the vocabulary tool), the researcher is going to explore the local culture in this study.

3.2.2. Culture and its types ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture

Culture is the way of lifestyle of a particular group of people in a specific region. Culture includes various aspects of life activities such as language, attitude, attire, behaviour, system, customs, ritual, values, ethnic, social and religious groups etc. As the term culture is a very broad term, so there are two types of culture are being identified from the study of Brook (1968), Hall (1976), Chen (2004), Peterson (2004) & Lee (2009) for a clear and prominent distinction of each cultural aspects in the text. The two types of culture are ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture. The ‘Big C’ culture refers to the visible, can be touched, easily accessible and noticeable cultural aspects to the people for instance any kind of households’ elements or existed elements such as food, gaming activities, natural aspects etc. On the other hand, ‘small c’ culture refers to the invisible, and inaccessible cultural aspects to the people for example emotion, ideology, feelings etc.

The cultural aspects are different in various parts of the world as people belong to different regions, belief systems, values etc. Therefore, the elements of ‘Big C’ culture and ‘small c’ culture also differ in subtle ways from culture to culture. Thus the researcher has proposed the categorization of ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture by categorizing different elements into these two broad categories based on accessibility or visibility and invisibility. The ‘Big C’ culture is the culture that is easily visible, accessible to the people. On the other hand, ‘small c’ culture is invisible and inaccessible to the people. Although the researcher made the distinction of culture and its table in the introduction chapter (p.18-19) of the dissertation, still the researcher would like to mention the table of cultural elements in the parameter of analysis section for bringing the

clarity in the research methodology chapter. The proposed categorization of themes under ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ is as follows.

Table1: The proposed categorization of themes under ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture

No./ Section	Big C	Small c
1.	Religious Rituals	Non-verbal communication
2.	Festivals	Manners and Mannerisms
3.	Clothing and appearance	Leisure activities
4.	Art, literature, Music	Daily routines
5.	Geography	Role of gender
6.	Sports	Values and belief systems
7.	Environment	Attitudes and Feelings

8.	Food	
9.	Science and Technology	
10.	Socio-economic conditions	
11.	Historical monuments	
12.	Social customs	
13.	Names of people and places	

The above-proposed categorization of the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture plays a significant role to distinguish each theme in the analysis chapter and helps in understanding the significance of the themes. So, this study will look for the local culture through the two cultural lenses namely ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture in the text.

3.3. Data collection procedure:

The researcher collected the data from the book entitled “*Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*”, edited by Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson. The data consist of 23 letters which are written in the first 20 years of early adulthood in his literary career. The researcher manually analysed the data from each letter using the vocabulary tool. After reading the letters, the researcher studied the vocabulary carefully and then analyzed it through the local culture perspective (namely: ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture) in the analysis chapter. So, the researcher has highlighted the local culture as represented in the letters of Tagore, with the help of the vocabulary tool.

3.4. Overview of the letters

The study looks at twenty-three published letters of Tagore written from the year 1879 to the year 1898. The letters are written to his family members namely Kadambari Tagore (sister-in-law of Rabindranath Tagore), Mrinalini Tagore (wife), Priyanath Sen (friend), and Indira Devi Chaudhurani (aunt). Tagore wrote letters to all the above-mentioned people who were close to him.

All these letters are written in different contexts according to the time and situation of the particular event. Sometimes Tagore wrote letters appreciating nature and its beauty and he even mentions that he was a great admirer of William Wordsworth. Tagore’s love for nature is being tracked through the descriptions of the name of birds and flowers (namely ‘*Zobedia*’, ‘*Amina*’, and ‘*Sofia*’) in the letters. Tagore shows his love, feelings, and emotion towards the animal world

by mentioning different animal names viz. deer and hen. He says that calm and peacefulness is the primary concern of life. After all, Tagore's letters are presenting full of love, emotion and a magical way of life in a very prominent and distinctive way.

It is found in the letters, that Tagore has a disinterest in city life in comparison to rural rustic life. That's why he tries to keep a distance from the grimy and dull things of city life even in one of his letters he is talking about Devon city which is grimy. He shows his disinterest in Calcutta city and shows his love for rural areas. It is also found that the Calcutta city has no sentiment but becomes more extensive and more prolonged in terms of its ages. He compares the life of Calcutta, which is congested and social time-bound to the life of Tagore's estate of rural life, which is spacious, solitary, peaceful, happy and quiet. Therefore, Tagore's attitude towards city life and village life has been clearly mentioned in the letters and sharpened his life between objectivity and subjectivity.

Tagore describes the Bengali culture, eastern music, and rituals in the letters very beautifully. He presented the local culture through local music (piano), different local household elements, attires, the role of both gender, marriage events (Swayamvara), etc. in the letters. From the description, it is found that he has a soft heart for his rural local culture which is represented in the text. Therefore, the letters are evidence of different cultural elements which is very beautifully portrayed in the text.

He said that the situation and position of the Indian people are not good in comparison to the English people because they have superiority over Indians in terms of spirituality, politics and social life in the letters. The writer talks about the differences between Bengali and English people lifestyles. After all, he is representing the Bengali identity very beautifully in the letters.

Tagore covers various themes in his letters and focuses on different issues of society. He talks about naturalism, socialism, political system, economic system, religion, rituals, cultures, localization, globalization, social life, the attitude of the people, etc in the letters. After all, the letters show his futuristic vision and his dilemma which becomes more acute. The researcher has chosen these selected letters for the study, and attempt to draw the connection to the local culture of that particular period. This chapter includes the type of research, the method of analysis, discourse tools and an overview of the letters.

Chapter Four

Analysis Chapter

4.0. Introduction

This chapter analyses Rabindranath Tagore's selected personal letters which are written from the year 1879 to the year 1898. There are twenty-three letters which are selected from the collection of Tagore's early adulthood letters as published in the book entitled "*Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*" edited by Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson (1997). The letters deal with the themes of local culture and related aspects such as love from home, Indo-British connection, naturalism, socialism, political system, economic system, religious, ritual, culture, localization, globalization, social life, and attitude of the people in the letters. As staunch as he was an internationalist, his love for his countryside and the local people, environment, activities and events prove his love for his locality as expressed in his personal letters.

The analysis covered broad themes of the local culture which includes all aspects of Local culture in Tagore's letters-local identity, ritual, home, local names, and local culture in terms of nature and Bengali vs. English culture in the letters. The reason for analyzing this is because of the predominance in his letters and all the different aspects of local culture fit into these sub-sections. Each cultural theme is explored through two cultural lenses of 'Big C' and 'small c' culture as per the proposed categorization in table 1 in the research methodology chapter of this dissertation.

This chapter analyses the letters through Paul Gee's vocabulary tool which will explore the local culture by two cultural lenses namely the 'Big C' and 'small c' culture for a prominent distinction of each cultural theme in the text. The main goal of such analysis is to find out the local features in the text and try to understand how Tagore infuses various aspects of local culture into his letters. As discussed, this chapter has talked about the Local culture in Tagore's letters.

4.1. Local culture in Tagore's letters

Localization is an expression that has had some emotional attachment with the people, nature, and objects of the world around them in a particular geographical location. It includes various social, political, historical, cultural, and economic systems of that place. Local identities and the lifestyle of the people determine the position of the local culture. Tagore has expressed his feelings, ideas, and attitudes through various local words in his letters. One reason for this could

be that these letters were personal, and the author uses several terms which are very familiar and carry a specific meaning in the local language. For instance, he used the reduplicative term '*ingabanga*', which consists of two words, '*inga*' and '*banga*', which have much significance. The word '*ingabanga*' may signify some of the following meanings such as '*how to use the fork*', '*England worshipping Bengali*', and '*the relationship between the friends*' from two different cultures.

The local culture would explore various themes like local regional identity, religions and its ritual, home, society, family relationships names, the theme of nature and Bengali vs. English culture in this chapter.

4.1.1 Local regional Identity

Local identity is one of the important aspects of culture which covers usual tradition, beliefs, value and understanding of the particular place and the population of its area. The culture is attributed to constructing a sense of local identity, and here, in the case of Tagore's letters, it is about the regional identity of the Bengali people. Tagore describes, in one of his letters, the arrival of Bengali people in England with the line, "By and by the ship arrives and docks at Southampton. The *Bengali passengers* have reached the shores of England. They set off for London." In the first line of the text itself, the local regional Bengali identity has been described. A few Bengali people have travelled to England for some work. Bengali identity has been shown by the phrase '*Bengali passenger*', and the word '*Bengali*' is repeatedly used in the text as follows.

- “*Bengali passengers* have reached the shores of England” (Dutta and Robinson, p.8) L. No. 1
- “For the first few days, ‘*Bengalis*’ find themselves embarrassed to sit on a chair or stool...” (Dutta and Robinson, p.8) L. No. 1
- “Spent a few days making fun of ‘*Bengali*’ ignorance...” (Dutta and Robinson, p.9) L. No. 1

Tagore is generally trying to portray the Bengalis as ordinary people travelling to London. Those passengers were identified as people from Bengal. The writer does not address the passengers by their names. The phrase ‘*Bengali passenger*’ refers to the particular Bengali identity. So, a sense of belongingness has been attached to the people of Bengal, and that could happen with any other community of people as well. So, the Bengali who arrived in England, feel embarrassed and ignorant because of their contemporary situation, position and their lifestyle in comparison with English people.

By addressing passengers as ‘they’ and ‘*Bengali passengers*’ (third person), the writer maintains a distance from them and distinctly separates his identity from them. It probably reflects his elitist cosmopolitan culture as opposed to the typical ‘Bengali people’. Tagore points out the status of the Bengali people and how other people view them. The Bengali people’s identity is portrayed very clearly. It can be assumed that the writer gave the Bengalis a commonplace.

The use of the word ‘Bihari babu’ (repeated four times in the letters) indicates the identity of the people from Bihar, indicating specific identity of a certain place. In another letter also, he constantly used the term ‘Bihari babu’ which talks about his good friendship with some Bihari

people at Puri, Orissa. In the letters, Bihari Babu is presented as a very enthusiastic, livid, and sometimes embarrassing person. After all, from the following description quotes, it is evident how the regional people are treated which has been shown in the letters.

- “When *Bihari babu* and ... magistrate of Puri...their evident keenness” (Dutta and Robinson, p.34) L. No. 17
- “*Bihari babu* and Mrs Gupta were flabbergasted” (Dutta and Robinson, p.34) L. No. 17
- “*Bihari babu* and wife were now livid” (Dutta and Robinson, p.34) L. No. 17
- “... memsahib had not been delivered to her by the bearer” (Dutta and Robinson, p.34) L. No. 17
- “In addition to mortifying *Bihari babu*” (Dutta and Robinson, p.35) L. No. 17

However, addressing people by their regional affiliations rather than their names shows the power and dominant politics over specific geographical locations and their people. They are only referred to by their regional identity. This shows Tagore’s identification to regional identities despite being a humanist and an internationalist.

In the letters, there is a reiteration of some vocabulary which indicates respectable position. In his letters, Tagore refers to the English men in India with respect as ‘sahib’, a term which expresses respect.

- “I ... ‘sahib’, to go out pig-sticking in this weather will not work” (Dutta and Robinson p.16) L. No. 5
- “Even though you are a strapping sahiblet” (Dutta and Robinson p.16) L. No. 5

- “I shake the sahib's hand” (Dutta and Robinson p.16) L. No. 5

The letters of Rabindranath Tagore lead us towards his beliefs and concerns. None of his other works presents his range of interest in different local aspects so avowedly with such naturalistic wit, humour, and irony. He can poke fun at himself and a young sahib officer who arrives in a storm for a visit that neither host nor guest had intended but that neither could be eliminated. However, the Bengali identity has been shown through the ‘Big C’ culture and ‘small c’ culture in terms of the passion or hobbies of the people.

After studying a section of local regional identity, the ‘Big C’ culture is being identified through the visibility and accessibility of the people from a particular region to the other region. Here the Bengali and Bihari Babu have been taken as ‘Big C’ culture because of the visibility of people and how they are treated in the society that’s reflected in the letters very beautifully. The contemporary position and situation of the people is visible through the letters. In this section, there is ‘small c’ culture also found in terms of the passion, hobbies and manner of the people. There are some people who have a passion for ‘*shikar*’ (hunting) of animals and manners (people give respect to the English people as *sahib* or *sahiblet*) as mentioned in the letters. Therefore, the ‘Big C’ culture is found through the identical position (which is visible) of Bengali and Bihari people, and ‘small c’ culture is found through the passion of sahib (shikar) in the letters.

After distinction of ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture in this section, there are some cultural elements which comes under both the culture and overlap each other likes the regional identity of ‘Bengali’ and ‘Bihari babu’ comes under ‘Big C’ culture, but it also comes under ‘small c’

culture because it shares manner and behaviour of the people (which is the part of ‘small c’ culture) and we can see the overlap between the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture in the letters.

After all, the identical position of the Bengali and Bihari people has been given focus in context of the contemporary situation before independence of India. Through the above mentioned vocabulary like *Bengali and Bihari*, the writer also contextualized the contemporary social position of the both cultural identical people. It is also observed that the British people are enjoying different social position which can be tracked through the use of the words such as *sahib, memsahib etc.* in the text. The British people, even those who were living in India, were also enjoying a different kind of social position. Tagore also implies that indentifying Bengali and Bihari people by their regional affiliation rather than a title could be considered inferior to the words that represent British by their social position and class distinction. After all, in terms of discourse, the individuality of local regional identity of Bengali and Bihari people can be tracked. Tagore also presented the Bihari babu as very enthusiastic and livid while at the same time in comparison they feel inferior in terms of social position, so there is some kind of identity difference in the way of representation of the Bihari people.

Adding to the point, Tagore simplistically designates and positions the Bengali people and Bihari people by using the informal vocabulary of identification that’s part of the local culture and words like *sahib* which are used usually by Indians overemphasizing and representing the local culture, the writer used these words in his letters which make them more local centric. It can also be said that Tagore is influenced by the local culture. Therefore, the regional social-affiliation of the Bengali and Bihari people and the social positioning of the British is clearly represented through the vocabulary choices made by Tagore in the letters.

4.1.2. Local culture through Hindu religious rituals

The local culture is expressed through the Hindu religion and ritual of the people in certain areas; rituals are the most essential aspects for the people of a particular religion. This section analyses a few cultural features related to religious rituals. The importance of local culture has been represented by Tagore in the letters very beautifully. This section looks at Tagore's references to Hindu Gods from the following vocabulary, as mentioned in the letters such as '*Lord Krishna*', '*Kali*', '*Radhe-Krishna*', '*Madan*', and '*Saraswati*'.

- “...the Munshif has all of a sudden perceived *Lord Krishna* ...” (Dutta and Robinson, p.32) L.No.16
- “On...*Lord Shiva*, on the next day *Kali*...*Radhe-Krishna*-...Shahzadpur banyan tree” (Dutta and Robinson, p.32) L.No.16
- “..., I used to think that if '*Madan*' (*god of love*) were to appear...” (Dutta and Robinson, p.11) L.No.2
- “..., sounds like dictum personally dictated to him by the lips of the goddess '*Saraswati*'” (Dutta and Robinson, p.10) L.No.1
- “*The Vaishnava poets* have sung ravishingly of *Radha* going calmly to her tryst with *Krishna* through a stormy night” (Dutta and Robinson, p.30) L.No.16

Tagore mentions names of different Hindu gods in the letters such as '*Lord Shiva*', '*Kali*', and '*Radhe-Krishna*', influenced by the narration of '*Munship*' (a priest in the temple who makes the fictional story) who has deep faith in Hindu religion. The social features expressed by Tagore reinforce his religious and moral influence. In the Hindu religion, there is a different kind of ritual and system as depicted in the letters. From the Munship saga, Tagore told the tale that there were three gods under the banyan tree: '*Lord Shiva*', '*Kali*', and '*Radhe-Krishna*'. Munship made up various fictional stories and legends on Hindu Gods and deities. Munship seems to have influenced the prolific writer Rabindranath Tagore greatly, as Tagore knit stitch different pieces of these stories in his literary works. Once, Munship started to perform puja, and he kept sundry sorts of snacks and foods like sweet kshir, jackfruit, etc., in front of God to please Him as mentioned in the letter as "On days when offerings of sweet kshir and jackfruit are made to the goddess..."(Dutta and Robinson, 1997:32). Since then, the local people started to follow this system, and they made it a practice. Tagore comments on the local people's blind faith in religious practices through the narration of Munship story. Thus, Rabindranath Tagore brought out explicit socio-cultural events and people's faith in his letters.

Some other vocabulary concerning Hindu rituals, specifically, post-death rituals such as '*bone ashes*', '*Holy Ganga*', '*blessed water*' and '*offering of betel*' are mentioned in the letters.

- “If someone dies... *ashes to the Ganges*, they powder a *piece of bone* from the funeral pyre and keep...the water of the sacred river” (Dutta and Robinson p.22) L.No.8
- “To... an offering of betel, ...made his pilgrimage to the *blessed water*” (Dutta and Robinson p.22) L.No.8
- “I read about a bit about the ‘*Swayamvara of Indumati*’” (Dutta and Robinson, p.33) L.No.16

There is a specific ritual, in a narrower sense in Bengal but in a larger sense in India, which Hindus follow as the last rites performed after someone's death. The dead body is burnt and the ashes are submerged in the sacred Ganges. The river Ganga is considered a Holy river in India. Therefore, people want to leave the funeral ashes in the Holy River. Irrespective of gender and economic status, the Hindu people wholeheartedly practice these funeral rituals. There is another important socio-cultural event like the ‘Swayamvara’ which is generally used for ‘marriage related ceremonies’. Tagore has shown how each cultural event plays a vital role in constructing the culture by describing the after-death ceremonies using the phrases mentioned above. He pinpointed various aspects of the Hindu culture through these rituals in his letters. It is also interesting to note that Tagore uses a third-person narrative when representing certain cultural aspects. By doing so, Tagore keeps himself detached while representing the prevalent social reality in the letters.

Throughout the text, Tagore used some Bengali vocabulary that may reflect the manner, behaviour, and attitude of the people of local culture, for example ‘*Namashkar*’, and ‘*Pranam*’.

- “Then she is introduced by Sunanada to the princes one by one, and to each of them Indumati makes a courteous ‘*namashkar*’, and pass on” (Dutta and Robinson, p.33) L.No.16
- “Had she not wiped away the stain of that fact with the humility of ‘*pranam*’, the scene would have lost its grace” (Dutta and Robinson, p.33) L.No.16

The word ‘*namashkar*’ stands for ‘*saluation*’ and ‘*pranam*’ for ‘*respect*’. The words ‘*courteous*’ and ‘*humility*’ which describe the greetings bring out the attitude of the local people. One thing very evident in Tagore’s letters is that he loves all kinds of people and has a very deep knowledge of every aspect of society. Therefore, the belief and value system of the society inspired the writer to mention these societal cultural events in the letters. Tagore highlights the social events by mentioning courtesy (‘*Namashkar*’ and ‘*Pranam*’) of the people in the culture of Bengal. Therefore, Tagore has beautifully expressed the idea of local culture through the attitude and the courtesy of the people in the letters.

In the section ‘local culture in religion and ritual’, the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture has been tracked as per the proposed categorization of the culture in table 1. The ‘Big C’ culture is being tracked through the theme of the Hindu religious rituals visible in a society. The vocabularies such as ‘*Lord Shiva*’, ‘*Kali*’, ‘*Radha-Krishna*’, ‘*Madan*’ and ‘*Saraswati*’ have ‘Big C’ cultural significance because of their visibility in the form of idols. There are some Hindu religious rituals that also come under ‘Big C’ culture, such as ‘*bone ashes*’, ‘*Holy Ganga*’, ‘*blessed water*’, ‘*offering of betel*’, and ‘*Swayamvara*’ in the letters. On the other hand, throughout the text, Tagore mentioned some of the Bengali words that may reflect the manner, behaviour, and

attitude of the people of everyday Bengali culture, which can be considered as the ‘small c’ culture for example ‘courtesy’ and ‘humility’ (*‘Namashkar’* and *‘Pranam’*). After all, local culture in religious ritual is being identified through the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ cultural aspects very distinctively and prominently in the letters.

After distinction of ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture in this section, there are some cultural elements which comes under both the culture and overlap each other through the names of Gods (*‘Lord Shiva’*, *‘Kali’*, *‘Radhe Krishna’*, *‘Madan’* and *‘Saraswati’*) is a part of the ‘Big C’ culture because of the visibility of idols of gods but still it also represents the belief or faith (which is ‘small c’ culture) of the people. Here too we can find an overlap between the ‘Big C’ and the ‘small c’ culture in the letters.

The post death rituals of Hindu people have been given focus in some of the letters. The vocabulary like *‘bone ashes’*, *‘Holy Ganga’*, *‘blessed water’* and *‘offering of betel’* is chosen by Tagore; this enriches the representation of Bengali culture in particular and Indian culture in general. After all, the scenarios of local rituals have been focused in his letters. The writer also makes it more local centric by using the formal marriage related cultural practices of the day in the letters through vocabulary such as *‘Swayamvara’*. By mentioning the names of different Hindu Gods, the writer also contextualized the whole social event in terms of belief or faith of the people of the contemporary Bengal before the Independence of India. The discourses of the socio-religious aspects are given more priority by Tagore while he represents the locality of Bengal by mentioning the names of different Hindu Gods in the letters. The writer also builds the connection between the God and the local Bengali rituals of worship through vocabulary like *‘sweet kshir’* and *‘jackfruit’* which are offered for pleasing the God.

It is also found that Tagore has used formal words like '*pranam*' and '*namashkar*' which are used to respectfully greet people. So by representing these respectful greetings, Tagore adds to the cultural image of India to the world. Such formal vocabulary carries a very significant meaning for representing local culture and unity of the Indian people.

4.1.3. Local culture through Rustic Household Representations

Local culture is explored through different rustic household elements in the letters. Home is one of the central parts of the local culture and through the household elements we can comprehend the nature of the local culture. Tagore has portrayed the household entities through the following vocabulary or phrases: '*wicker mat*', '*hookah*', '*board games*', and '*cows lying in the courtyard*', '*cow dung cake*', and '*Verandah*'.

- “Bengalis... *damp*, ...*hookahs*... their...*a cow lies* tethered in the courtyard that has walls plastered in *cow-dung cake* and wet washing hangs drying over a *verandah*” (Dutta and Robinson, p.9) L.No.1
- “The magistrate was sitting in the '*verandah*' of his tent dispensing justice, flanked by a constable” (Dutta and Robinson, p.16) L.No.5

The descriptions of the different households could be representing the local features of Bengal in general in the letters. The writer reflects the socio-economic situation of Bengal through the use of various kinds of contemporary societal household areas and elements such as '*board games*', '*cows lying in the courtyard*', '*walls plastered with cow dung cake*', '*Verandah of his tent*', '*wicker mat*', and '*hookah*'. All these descriptions evoke the local scene of a typical household in Bengal. The board games probably were a common form of recreation. 'Courtyard' and 'verandah' depict the common areas of a house in those times. The courtyard in front of the home also denotes the economic class of the people. The 'cow-dung cake' represents the culture prevalent in Bengal households. The cow-dung cakes on the wall were another typical scene of a rural household. Adding to the point, the cakes of *cow dung* molded by bare hands and were traditionally used as fuel in India for making food in a domestic hearth. While the elderly men smoke *hookah* in the evening, and this seems to be a borrowed pastime from the Persian culture. Overall, the recreational activities (board games), the courtyard, and the cows show a wealthy rustic family home. This is how the rustic features of a local village have been reflected in the letters. By giving vivid descriptions through using a few Bengali local words, Tagore could be seen as a person who had an emotional connection with his homeland. Therefore, the narration details of the writer on the household elements show that he has associated with the rural households in Bengal.

Apart from these, there are some other words or phrases through which Tagore describes the household elements and brings out the typical Bengali local culture in the letters. From the following excerpts, the simplistic life of the people and the imagery of a very rural local culture

can be identified. There are some words through which local culture is identified, such as ‘*quilt*’, ‘*oil-smeared pillow*’, ‘*a grimy mat*’, ‘*a bit of hessian*’, ‘*a layer of dirt*’, ‘*old zinc pot*’, ‘*old glasses*’, ‘*an oil lamp*’ and ‘*a sooty lamp stand*’.

- “Littering...*quilt, oil-smeared pillow, a grimy mat, a bit of hessian...a layer of dirt...old zinc pot, some bottles and old glasses, bits of glass... an oil lamp, a sooty lamp stand.*”
(Dutta and Robinson, p.16) L.No.5

The vocabulary related to the households like quilt, pillow, mat, and oil lamp are significant here and carry the meaning of contemporary rural local culture. Bengali local culture has been expressed in another way here. For instance, there are mentions of the socio-economic condition in the descriptive words used in the above example to represent the dirty condition of the house in the village. In this context, the use of words like ‘*littering*’, ‘*oil-smeared*’, ‘*grimy*’, ‘*a layer of dirt*’ and ‘*sooty*’ are also significant in expressing the socio-economic condition of the people. Tagore's vivid descriptions of the local elements make his letters more endearing to the reader. Tagore has depicted the Bengali cultural aspects in a way that is crystal clear to any reader. Therefore, Tagore emphasizes socio-cultural elements very beautifully through households belonging to various economic statuses in the society. It is also found that Tagore tries to bring out the rustic Bengali local culture through words such as ‘*littering*’, ‘*grimy*’, ‘*old zinc pot*’, ‘*old glasses*’, ‘*an oil lamp*’ and ‘*sooty*’.

It is significant that the writer's love for home and homeland is expressed in the letters. During his travels, Tagore felt nostalgic and wrote letters to his family members. He mentioned two words such as, '*homesick*' and '*seasick*' which are quoted below.

- “I cannot tell you how '*seasick*' I have been this time” (Dutta and Robinson, p.19)
L.No.6
- “...I distinctly felt myself leave my body and go to '*Jorasanko*'” (Dutta and Robinson p.19) L.No.6
- “Nowadays I felt that there is '*no place like 'home*'-” (Dutta and Robinson p.19)
L.No.6
- “... '*the sea*' is pretty calm, the ship hardly rolls...” (Dutta and Robinson p.19) L.No.6

There is a kind of contradiction when the writer expresses his emotional attitude through the vocabulary '*homesick*' and '*seasick*' during his journey to England. The writer's attachment with his home (town) is clearly expressed as he feels '*homesick*'; he misses Jorasanko, family members, and freshwater as mentioned in the letters. He feels '*seasick*' on the ship. He also praises the beauty of the sea and says that it is '*pretty calm*'. So, a kind of contradiction is found in the way he talks about the sea in the letters. He is '*seasick*' on the one hand, and yet he appreciates the calm sea that lets the ship sail effortlessly. After all, he feels nostalgic and lonely and longs to return home, which also represents his love and emotional attachment to his homeland. Therefore, the many household expressions used in his letters show his love for the typical Bengali households in the letters.

The feature of the rustic household is being presented through two cultural aspects such as ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture. The ‘Big C’ culture includes household cultural aspects such as ‘*wicker mat*’, ‘*hookah*’, ‘*board games*’, and ‘*cows lying in the courtyard*’, ‘*cow dung cake*’, ‘*verandah*’, ‘*littering*’, ‘*oil-smeared*’, ‘*grimy*’, and ‘*a layer of dirt*’ because of the visibility of all these aspects of culture in the letters.

On the other hand, the theme of love for home comes under ‘small c’ culture because it shares feelings, emotions, and passion of the writer throughout the letters. Some vocabulary that is part of ‘small c’ culture like ‘*homesick*’, ‘*seasick*’, ‘*pretty calm*’ and ‘*hookah*’. The vocabulary ‘*hookah*’ comes under ‘small c’ culture because it is significant that the hookah in several households was a ‘*sign of trust*’ and withholding it to someone could be taken as an insult. Even though the word hookah is considered ‘Big C’ culture, it is also part of ‘small c’ culture because of the significance of this leisure activity. Therefore, the ‘Big C’ culture and ‘small c’ culture have been pointed out through the rustic household elements in the letters.

After distinction of ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture in this section, there are some cultural elements which comes under both the culture and overlap each other through the words ‘*hookah*’ and ‘*board games*’ are considered ‘Big C’ culture when we think of them as household articles, but it is also part of ‘small c’ culture because they represent leisure activities which may not be easily inferred by the non-locals. So in this section, we can find an overlap between the ‘Big C’ and the ‘small c’ culture in the letters.

There are several instances in the letters where the writer highlights the various household areas and different elements of home. It can also be said that the words or phrases such as ‘*board*

games, *'cows lying in the courtyard'*, *'walls plastered with cow dung cake'*, *'Verandah of his tent'*, *'wicker mat'*, and *'hookah'* which are not only represent the Bengali culture but also make a big picture in Indian cultural context of the contemporary period. The use of the term *'verandah'* in the sentence "the magistrate was sitting in the *'verandah'* of his tent dispensing justice, flanked by a constable" (p.16), suggests the contemporary culture and perhaps the writer has made the letters more local centric and gave the local color of Bengal. One of the interesting points is that Tagore is representing the local culture by combining of different household elements with the regular activities and lifestyle of the people through the vocabulary like *'hookah'* and *'board games'*.

The overall scenario of local homeland is found by mentioning different formal and informal vocabulary in the letters. One significant point is that Tagore could have mentioned his own mansion, his residence as he is from an aristocratic family but he chose to represent the culture of the people of Bengal. Over all, by using different vocabulary representing local culture in the letters, Tagore's discourse displays his association with the people of his land. Adding to the point, Tagore's use of typical Bengali expressions like *'Jal Khabo'* or *'Pani Pan Korbo'* which show the influence of the Bengali language and culture in his letters.

4.1.4. Local culture in terms of names

The local culture is represented through the local names of foods, local seasons, places, Bengali relationship terms, etc. All the following words have some connection with the social life, such as *'Agrahayen'*, *'Magh'*, *'Shelidah'*, *'Jorasanko'*, *'Meja dada'*, *'didimani'*, *'Beli'*, *'Khoka'*, and

'little wife'. The occurrence of the above-mentioned vocabulary is found in the following sentences.

- “Next Sunday, on the 24th of 'Agrahayan', at the auspicious hour, my closest relative Shriman Rabindranath Thakur is engaged to be married” (Dutta and Robinson, p.13) L. No. 3
- “After this comes '11 Magh' ...” (Dutta and Robinson, p.14) L. No. 4
- “Number 6 'Jorasanko', ...” (Dutta and Robinson, p.13) L. No. 3
- “... 'Meja dada' has come” (Dutta and Robinson, p.14) L. No. 4
- “Little wife ...—when I returned from Europe, I shall ask you if you saw me” (Dutta and Robinson, p.19) L. No. 6
- “Then kissed *Beli and Khoka*” (Dutta and Robinson, p.19) L. No. 6
- “Perhaps she has just lost a darling '*didimani*' who joined her in playing football” (Dutta and Robinson, p.24) L. No. 10

The words 'Agrahayan' and 'Magh' are the names of Bengali months; 'Shelidah' and 'Jorasanko' are places in Bengal, 'Meja dada' is the second brother in the family, and '*didimani*' signifies grandmother or eldest sister who is so much respected by the family members in the Bengali culture. Then he also took the names of *Beli* and *Khoka* (Tagore's daughter and son, respectively). Tagore had a good relationship with his family members, especially with his sister-in-law and his 'little wife', as mentioned in the letters. Tagore very lovingly refers to his wife as 'little wife' and Bela calls her brother 'toothless' which represents the loving and affectionate feelings for each other for example in the mentioned line “Khoka said that: Bela, I am feeling hungry for water. 'Bela said that: oh toothless, you don't say hungry for water, it's thirsty for

water.” Tagore also loved his daughter very much, which is evident in the sentence ‘last night I dreamt of Beli’. By describing Bengali local places and names, Tagore adds authenticity and brings emotional feelings which are sincere and affectionate as found in the letters. Therefore, through the use of the Bengali words, Tagore expressed the local culture in a very personal and sensitive way in the letters.

Tagore lends a local ambience in bringing out the socio-cultural features of Bengal through the use of different kinds of local elements and relationship names in typical Bengali. For instance, using the Bengali names of the month instead of the English names shows his positive attitude and deep-rooted culture. The local consciousness is visible in the way he refers to the everyday aspects shows Tagore's love for his culture. Above all, Tagore's own psychological and ideological perspectives have been portrayed while describing the society and the familial relationship names.

He also focuses on Bengali words to represent the culture by encountering English words and subverts the Westernization of culture, system, and language in the letters. Therefore, Tagore has expressed several aspects of the local culture through the descriptions of Bengali societal elements in the letters.

In the letters, we observe some local places and local activities that are typical in Bengal. The following vocabulary is used in the letters: ‘*ghat*’, ‘*the crowd of the village women*’.

- “There is a boat moored at our *ghat*” (*Dutta and Robinson, p.24*) L. No. 10
- “And on the bank in front is a crowd of village women” (*Dutta and Robinson, p.24*) L.

No. 10

- “Girl stands on the ghat following it with her gaze” (*Dutta and Robinson, p.24*) L. No. 10

The Bengali word ‘*ghat*’ stands for the bank of a river. The people use ‘*ghat*’ for transportation and as a meeting place, while ‘*crowd of the village women*’ implies a gathering of the women for discussing some issue (the people usually gather to discuss various issues, be it men, women or even school students at the ghat). These words and phrases represent the rustic ambience in the letters. For describing the localization features of Bengal, Tagore uses several Bengali words and brings out the nuances of the local culture of Bengal. Therefore, the social engagement of Tagore is evident in the way he paints the society's rustic scene through the letters; it can be said that he is like an artist representing the local culture of Bengal.

There are different types of local foods mentioned which gives us the feel of the local culture. The foods mentioned are ‘*dal*’, ‘*tea*’, ‘*fish curry*’ and ‘*country sweets*’ which can be illustrated with the help of the following quotes.

- “Now the memsahib likes *tea*, and I had none to give her; she has an aversion for ‘*dal*’ formed in childhood ...She has not touched *fish*, ... gave her *fish curry*” (*Dutta and Robinson, p.26*) L. No. 11
- “Luckily she likes ‘*country sweets*’ and consumed an old and dried piece of ‘*Sandesh*’ with great determination by using a fork to break it” (*Dutta and Robinson, p.26*) L. No.

It is noted that most of the food items mentioned are traditional. Tagore described Bengal local foods such as '*Sandesh*', '*country sweets*', and '*fish curry*' in the letters. Tagore seems to contrast the '*tea*' preferred by the Westerners to the traditional Bengali foods. It also represents the elite class attitude of the Western ladies. Tagore humorously made the point that the western people do not like the fish curry but they like the old and dried sandesh (take the sweet with great interest with the help of fork) which represents the attitude of western people towards the Indian traditional food in the letters. Therefore, Tagore's descriptions of the foods represent his attitude towards the elite Westerners and Bengali people and the differences in terms of choice of food in the letters.

The local culture is also tracked through local slang in the letters and makes the letters more local-centric. It shows the writer's positive attitude towards his language. Another implication is that it shows the influence of the local accent on Tagore. The phrases like '*hungry for water*' and '*thirsty for water*' are the very quintessential examples in this respect. Here the following lines can be cited from the letters.

- “Khoka said that: Bela, I am feeling hungry for water. ‘Bela said that: oh toothless, you don’t say hungry for water, it’s thirsty for water.” (Dutta and Robinson, p.28) L. No. 13

Bengali local slang is being tracked through the conversation of Bela and Khoka in the letters. This conversation of Bela and Khoka makes it very clear that language influences people (it could be any geographical location of people and, in this case, Bengali language) and they use literal translation of '*Jal khabo*' in English. Khoka says that he is '*hungry for water*' while Bela corrects him that he should say '*thirsty for water*' instead of '*hungry for water*'. Bela suddenly uses the word '*toothless*'. This is related to the social construction and influence of Bengali language, especially through the child speech in the letters. The slight differences in collocation help to add to the local cultural features in the letters. Thus Tagore has portrayed finer details of the local language influence through the conversation of Khoka and Bela in the letters.

The local culture is also identified through the description of a girl, during Tagore's journey on deck; the writer met a girl who was only ten years old. The beauty of child is defined in the letters as follows:

- "Half boyish, half-girlish look is singularly appealing" (Dutta and Robinson, p.24) L. No. 10
- "Her face is fine-very dark yet pretty and her hair cropped like a boy's" (Dutta and Robinson, p.24) L. No. 10

Tagore describes a ten-year-old girl and her physical appearance, eyes and complexion realistically in his letters. She possesses a half-boyish and half-girlish look. It is interesting to note that he describes the girl's complexion as '*very dark yet pretty*'. The usual assumption of being fair as a sign

of beauty is something he must have been aware of and expresses subtly, but he overcomes it by stating that she was pretty. If we read the letters from the feminist point of view, we would notice that Tagore does not discriminate anyone based on gender but he has equal respect for all. Thus, Tagore beautifully expresses his view about the ten year old girl and her looks in the letters.

After studying the different aspects of local culture in terms of names, the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture have been analyzed in this section. The ‘Big C’ culture is represented through different names of relationship, months, places, foods, etc. as all these are visible and easily accessible to the people. The ‘Big C’ culture is being identified through the name of months (*‘Agrahayen’*, & *‘Magh’*), places (*‘Shelidah’*, *‘Jorasanko’* and *‘ghat’*), foods (*‘dal’*, *‘fish curry’*, *‘sandesh’*, and *‘tea’*), relationship names (*‘Meja dada’*, *‘didimani’*, *‘Beli’* and *‘Khoka’*) etc. as all these are visible and accessible in a society. On the other hand, the ‘small c’ culture includes the following words/phrases like *‘Jal khabo’*, *‘hungry for water’*, and *‘eating of water’* and *‘very dark yet pretty’*, *‘little wife’* and *‘toothless’* are expressions of language which are not easily understood by people who are new to the local culture. Although *‘Sandesh’* as the name of a local sweet and *‘wife’* come under the ‘Big C’ culture, the additional description given by Tagore is significant in terms of the ‘small c’ culture because these aspects are not easy to comprehend by a person unfamiliar to the culture. So sometimes, the ‘Big C’ cultural elements overlap the ‘small c’ cultural elements. After all, both the ‘Big C’ culture and the ‘small c’ culture are tracked in terms of names used by Tagore in the letters.

By the above mentioned local and cultural vocabulary, the writer is signifying the importance of Bengali language and its culture in the society. He chooses Bengali words over English words which

signify his attempt to represent the idea of locality in a broader sense. It can also be said that as all these letters are personal narratives, the writer mostly used Bengali vocabulary which is common to him and his readers. The Bengali vocabulary brings in the element of personalization since the writer used local Bengali words instead of English words. The writer used the Bengali words as personal expression. It is also found that Tagore has used Bengali relationship vocabulary like '*Didimani*', '*Meja dada*' and '*Jorasanko*' showing enriching Bengali culture and the personal relationship he shared with the recipients of the letters. After all, through the theme 'Bengali culture in terms of names', the personal social position of relationships in Bengali culture has been reflected.

4.1.5. Local culture through Natural Beauty

The local culture of natural beauty has been portrayed very beautifully in Tagore's personal letters. Tagore has deep attachment with nature as he closely observes each of the natural surroundings as he explores the local natural beauty realistically in his letters. The writer describes the beautiful scenes of the Bengal countryside through the descriptions of flowers, rivers, local birds, and trees in the letters. He observes the moon's movement and some other events such as titi bird's call and the movement of the trees. The writer also speaks about '*the palm trees*', '*the Kopai River*', and '*the Kadamba flowers*' etc in the letters. In this way, Tagore beautifully portrayed the beauty of nature.

- “Though the *moon is full*, a *slight haze* gives it the look of a *sleepy eye held open*”
(Dutta and Robinson, p.27) L.No.12

- “So, intimate does nature become in strange and solitary places that for days I have actually been worrying myself with the thought that from now on I shall see less and less of *the moon*” (Dutta and Robinson, p.27) L.No.12
- “But for the moment the moon is the full-the first *full moon* of spring” (Dutta and Robinson, p.27) L.No.12
- “Just imagine, if my lady love had made her home on the banks of our own *river Kopai*-...” (Dutta and Robinson, p.30) L.No.14
- “...silent *river Gorai* in a beautiful corner of Bengal ...” (Dutta and Robinson, p.36) L.No.18

From the above descriptions in the letters, it is found that Tagore observes and enjoys his time spent noticing the beauty of the moon. He enjoys the moon in every form in the sky at night and proves his love for natural beauty. The writer is sensitive to the beauty of nature since he observes all elements very carefully, the full moon and moon covered with haze etc. The observation is personal, and Tagore inscribes the night overview of the sky, moon, star, soft breeze, and soft grass from a jolly-boat on the river of *Gorai*. He also seems to be infatuated by nature from the use of personal pronouns 'I' and 'my' in the letter no. 19. Therefore, Tagore highlights the Bengali local culture by presenting various natural, social, and cultural words in the letters.

Tagore has mentioned some of the elements of natural description in terms of birds and various trees in the letters. In the following there are some Bengali words/phrases through the local culture that have been tracked in the letters.

- “One-day something...*titi bird*... the thread of the river brushed by the umbra trees ...” (Dutta and Robinson, p.27) L.No.12
- “We walked about a mile until we came to a dam with *palmyra trees* beside it...” (Dutta and Robinson, p.29) L.No.14
- “Instead we conjure a picture of a lovely woman, passing beneath sheltering *Kadamba blossoms*...in the month of *Shraban* towards the bank of the *Yamuna*” (Dutta and Robinson, p.30) L.No.14

Tagore has enjoyed the beauty of nature and mentioned various aspects of nature and here he talked about the bird, rivers, flowers and the Bengali month, ‘*Shraban*’. Tagore said that the sound of the ‘*titi bird*’ is brushing through the river and by the umbra trees in the letters. He mentioned the beauty of ‘*the palmyra trees*’ and ‘*Kadamba blossoms*’ in the letters. Tagore also contextualized the seasonal event of Bengali month ‘*Shraban*’ in which the flower ‘*Kadamba*’ blooms. Therefore, Tagore expresses the beauty of nature with the descriptions of the rivers, trees and flowers in the letters.

Tagore reflects a positive attitude to nature and its beauty. He seems to be attached to nature which is evident in his letters. Therefore, his descriptions of natural beauty give a clear image of the Bengal local culture. After all, Tagore has portrayed the local culture very beautifully through the natural beauty and socio-cultural conditions in his personal letters.

In this section, local culture through Natural beauty, the ‘Big C’ culture is being identified through the vivid description of the natural countryside beauty or natural environment of Bengal

in his letters. The theme of environment comes under ‘Big C’ culture as it is visible or can be seen and touched through the cultural elements. These are some vocabularies or phrases used in the letters like ‘*titi bird's call*’, ‘*umbra trees*’, ‘*the palmyra trees*’, ‘*the Kadamba flowers*’, and ‘*the Kopai River*’, ‘*Gorai*’ and ‘*Yamuna River*’. On the other hand, the ‘small c’ culture includes the leisure activities of Tagore enjoying the *moon* and breeze at night. Although ‘*Shraban*’ as the name of a local month come under the ‘Big C’ culture, the additional description given by Tagore is significant in terms of the ‘small c’ culture because this aspect is also significant because in the month of ‘*Shraban*’, the flowers bloom and nature is resplendent with new colour which can be felt, seen and enjoyed. So sometimes, the ‘Big C’ cultural elements overlap the ‘small c’ cultural elements. Therefore, Tagore’s representation of local culture through the natural beauty is very beautifully portrayed in the letters.

Tagore presented the natural beauty of Bengal countryside in the letters with the context of local color. Tagore’s infatuation and association with nature is pointed out through the use of the personal pronoun like ‘I’ and ‘me’. By giving the minute details of different natural elements of Bengali countryside, the writer carries different social meaning and showing that how much he loves his homeland Bengal. Another important concern is that Tagore’s artistic literary quality helps him to keep associated with the nature which he enjoyed thoroughly. Even through the description of the local countryside proves Tagore’s love for national identity in the letters.

4.1.6. Bengali vs. English culture

In this section, the connection or disconnection between the eastern and western cultures as expressed by Tagore in his letters has been shown. Western lifestyle is represented by Tagore

through different terms or phrases and many times it also helps us to understand the local culture which is different from the West in the letters. He had some connections with England, and seems to have travelled there quite often. Therefore, he was well versed with the English and the Bengali attitude towards the English.

Tagore several times uses the reduplicative term '*ingabanga*' in the letters which can be interpreted as English-Bengali connection. The term '*ingabanga*' has been mentioned in many instances where Tagore presents the culture of Bengal, and the cultural influence of English on Bengalis. The term '*ingabanga*' is used in different contexts, as seen in the following quotations:

- “The weight of courtesy in his words is like a burden making his shoulders droop; in debate he is the meekest and mildest of men; and if he is compelled to disagree, he will do so with expression of extreme regret and with a thousand apologies. An *ingabanga* sitting with an Englishman, whether he be talking or listening, will appear in his every gesture and facial movement to the acme of humility” (Dutta and Robinson, p.10) L. No 1
- “No doubt there are many *ingabanga* Bengalis” (Dutta and Robinson, p.10) L. No

1

From the above quotes, it can be understood that by '*ingabanga*', Tagore meant Bengalis who had some English connection-mostly they seem to live in England and were always in awe of the English. Notice the use of the vocabulary used to describe the attitude of the '*ingabanga*' towards the English: '*the weight of courtesy*', '*meekest and mildest*', '*thousand apologies*' and

'the acme of humility'. All these words help us to understand how the English were put on a pedestal by most of the Bengalis in England.

Tagore goes on to elaborate on the *'ingabanga'* in other parts of his letters which helps us understand the relationship between them and the English. Describing their interactions with the landlady, here's what Tagore portrays:

- “When my Bengali friends first stepped into their rooms, she quickly appeared, an Englishwoman waiting to greet them with the politest ‘good morning’. Hurriedly they returned the greeting in the most proper manner, and then stood struck dumb. And when they saw their various ingabanga friends strike up an easy conversation with the lady in question, their awkwardness turned to absolute awe. To think of it: they are talking to a real live memsahib, complete in shoes, hat and dress! Here was a sight to stir real respect in a Bengali heart. Would they ever acquire this courage shown by their *ingabanga* friends? Surely it was beyond the bounds of possibility” (Dutta and Robinson, p.9) L. No 1

As described, the awe for the English continues and they feel awkward in interacting with a *'real live Mem sahib'*. But Tagore describes other *ingabanga* friends conversing with ease. This shows that the *ingabanga* gradually get to a place where they become comfortable talking to a Mem sahib. The *ingabanga* not only are in awe of the English but also are in awe of the other *ingabanga* people who can converse easily with the English. It also contrasts the politeness of

the English in greetings which is not so much a part of the local culture and so the *ingabanga* have to take care even as they return the greeting '*in the most polite manner*'.

We notice a realistic presentation by the writer when he represents the Bengali and English people in the letters. In the letters, Bengali people are represented as simple and humble, while at the same time Tagore presented English people as superior and extremely well mannered, which we can see in the following lines.

- “To know the *ingabanga*-the England worshipping Bengali- truly, one must observe him in three situations. One must see how he behaves with Englishmen; how he behaves with '*ordinary Bengalis*'; and how he behaves with fellow *ingabanga*... An *ingabanga* sitting with an Englishmen, whether he be talking or listening, will appear in his every gesture and facial movement to be '*the acme of humility*'. But catch him with his own countrymen in his own sphere, and he will display genuine temper. One who has lived three years in England will regard himself as '*infinitely superior*' to one who has spent one year here” (Dutta and Robinson, p.10) L. No. 1

The position of the *ingabanga* Bengali people is highlighted in the letters. Tagore talks about the *ingabanga* as 'England worshipping Bengali' in the letters. The Bengali people position themselves in three different ways: the socially inferior position of Bengali people to the English, and socially superior position to other Bengalis in India. The more years they live in England the

more superior they think of themselves. In the letters, we observe the superiority of white people over Bengali people. Therefore, the prevailing attitude of Bengali people towards different people has been found in the letters. The context of pre-independent India is reflected here.

Tagore is not only talking about the local culture in Bengal but also describes very vividly the culture of the Bengalis living in England. He juxtaposes their attitudes with that of English and adds a new dimension to the local culture. The subservient attitude of '*ingabanga*' to the polite behaviour of the English, the *humility* of *ingabanga* to the English and the *temper* they show towards their fellow Bengalis in India is brought out clearly. By mentioning all these features, Tagore brings out the socio-cultural situation, position and behaviour of the Bengali people of both geographical locations.

The 'Big C' and 'small c' cultures are pointed out to distinguish the local cultural aspects in the Bengali vs. English section. The 'Big C' culture is being identified through geographical place (Bengal & England), '*ordinary Bengalis*', '*English lady's dress and hat*' whereas the 'small c' culture includes behaviour or manner ('*ingabanga*', '*the acme of humility*' and '*infinitely superior*'), courtesy ('*landlady*' and '*memsahib*') of the people in the Tagore's letters. Therefore, the 'Big C' and 'small c' culture is tracked through various aspects of the local culture.

However, there are cultural elements which come under both the cultures ('Big C' and 'small c') and overlap each other through the word '*ordinary Bengalis*', and '*real live memsahib, complete in shoes, hat and dress*' because it also signifies the lifestyle, tradition and manner of the people in the letters. The word '*memsahib*' comes under 'Big C' culture but it also represents the

superiority given to the white people because of her being part of the ruling class. Therefore, sometimes, the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture overlap each other.

The connection and disconnection of Bengali and English people has been tracked in the letters. Tagore represents the idea of national identity which he loves rather than any other thing and that’s why the writer gives minute details of Indian local elements in the letters. There is a comparison between the lifestyles of Bengali and English people in India and England and also represents the reality of pre-independence days when the Bengali people considered themselves as inferior to the English which shows the social position and socio-economic status of Bengali people during those days. It is also found that before independence of India, not all the people were educated and Tagore realistically presented the contemporary scenario of Bengal. Therefore, by representing the social and economic position of the both geographical location and its people, Tagore represented the rustic and downtrodden economic system, national identity of Bengal and India in the socio-political discourse. Adding to the point, Tagore also reflected upon the conflict of different lifestyles of the Bengalis and the English in the letters.

The ‘local culture in Tagore’s letters’, the researcher has tracked a range of essential cultural elements and themes about the local culture and its different aspects from the selected letters of Tagore. Some of the essential aspects of culture are local-cultural terms, attachment to the homeland, local names (events, months, places, dresses, and foods), Hindu religious rituals, household elements, and natural descriptions. Therefore, the ‘Big C’ cultural elements have been identified through different aspects like household elements, religious rituals, places, foods, months, animals, birds, and natural beauty very beautifully. Whereas the ‘small c’ culture is

being identified through passion and '*shikar*' (hunting of animals) and manners of people ('*sahib*' or '*sahiblet*'), the 'courtesy' and 'humility' ('*namashkar*' and '*pranam*'), nostalgic moments ('*homesick*', '*seasick*' and '*pretty calm*'), the local expression ('*Jal khabo*', '*hungry for water*', and '*eating of water*', '*little wife*', '*toothless*' and '*very dark yet pretty*') and the leisure activities (of Tagore's enjoying moon beauty and '*breeze at night*' and '*hookah*') of the people in the letters. Therefore, Tagore has portrayed the Bengali local culture very beautifully with the description of different cultural elements in the letters.

After all in the analysis chapter, there are some cultural elements which come under both the culture such as 'Big C' and 'small c' culture. There are some cultural aspects which describes in the following like the regional identity of Bengali and Bihari babu comes under 'Big C' culture, but it also comes under 'small c' culture because it shares manner and behaviour of the people (which is the part of 'small c' culture) and we can see the overlap between the 'Big C' and 'small c' culture. There is a mention of names of Gods which is a part of the 'Big C' culture because of the visibility of idols of gods but still it also represents the belief or faith (which is 'small c' culture) of the people. There are some words like '*hookah*' and '*board games*' that are considered 'Big C' culture when we think of them as household articles, but it is also part of 'small c' culture because they represent leisure activities which may not be easily inferred by the non-locals.

Tagore also refers to his wife fondly as '*little wife*'; as a nickname, it can be seen as 'Big C' culture, but the love and affection with which a nickname is used in the local context is significant in terms of the 'small c' culture. These aspects are not easy to comprehend by a

person unfamiliar to the culture. So often, the vocabulary related to ‘Big C’ cultural elements overlap with the ‘small c’ cultural elements as well.

Finally, in the last section ‘*Bengali vs. English*’ culture, there are some cultural aspects which describes in the following, ‘*Bengali Babu*’ and ‘*English*’ man comes under ‘Big C’ culture, but it also comes under ‘small c’ culture because it shares manner and behaviour of the people (which is the part of ‘small c’ culture) and we can see the overlap between the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture. Therefore, the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture is being presented in the analysis chapter in a distinctive and prominent way. Since every word brings several connotations to the mind of the reader, it is not always possible to keep the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ cultures as independent silos but as loosely framed categories which are intermeshed with each other. Although the researcher made the distinction between the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture in the analysis section, still in several instances found that the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ cultures overlap each other throughout the letters.

After analysing the entire chapter, it is found that Tagore uses local culture and local culture within the country and also the culture of local people living outside India as a dominant theme in his letters. To substantiate it, the writer used several Bengali local cultural words in the letters. The local culture is expressed through local-natural ambience with Bengali and English; vocabulary. Interestingly, most of the time, Tagore narrates local cultural aspects and depicts the visible and not so visible aspects of local culture representing the Bengali traditions in contemporary times. Therefore, Tagore highlights the customs, literature, music, attitude and food of the place, i.e., Bengal.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

5.0. Introduction

This chapter presents the key findings of the study, followed by considering some of the implications for teaching and research. The study's limitations are presented, and the chapter concludes with the scope for further research stemming from this study.

5.1. Summary of the findings

The key aim of this research is to explore the local culture through the study of Tagore's selected personal letters. The local culture is represented in a meaningful way by different local features of Bengal which is Tagore's native land. Therefore, Tagore's personal letters are chosen to study the local culture and its various aspects.

Despite being an internationalist, Tagore is also fond of his native land and represents its local culture vividly in his personal letters. Here in this study, the researcher extensively studied the vocabulary of Tagore's personal letters through Gee's 'vocabulary tool'. The letters look at the local culture through two cultural lenses such as 'Big C' and 'small c' culture. Therefore, through the categorization of 'Big C' and 'small c' cultures, each cultural element has been

represented very prominently and distinctively in the study. The researcher looks at the vocabulary very carefully and tries to understand the local culture through six different themes in this study. After all, this qualitative study primarily defines the socio-political situation, economic circumstances, religious and cultural elements in Tagore's personal letters. The researcher tries to answer the two research questions in the following:

- What are the themes used to represent the local culture in Tagore's letters?

In this study, the researcher has identified six major themes through which Tagore represents the local culture in the letters. The themes are as follows: local regional identity, local culture in Hindu religion and ritual, local culture through rustic household representation, local culture in terms of names, local culture in nature and finally Bengali vs. English culture. Each theme covers various aspects of the local culture in the letters.

In the theme, 'local regional identity', the researcher has presented the local regional identity as depicted by Tagore, '*Bengali*' and '*Bihari babu*' and how they are visualized in society. Addressing people by their regional identities rather than their names shows the power and dominant politics over specific geographical locations and their people. This shows Tagore's identification with regional identities despite being known as a humanist and an internationalist. Through the theme of the tradition, belief and value of the Bengali and Bihari babu, the local regional identity has been shown in detail in the analysis chapter. Tagore also implies that indentifying Bengali and Bihari people by their regional affiliation rather than a title could be considered inferior to the words that represent British by their social position and class

distinction. After all, in terms of discourse, the individuality of local regional identity of Bengali and Bihari people can be tracked. Tagore also presented the Bihari babu as very enthusiastic and livid while at the same time in comparison they feel inferior in terms of social position, so there is some kind of identity difference in the way of representation of the Bihari people in the letters.

The researcher also discusses the theme ‘local culture through Hindu religious rituals’ with the mention of the names of different Hindu Gods and ritual aspects associated with religion in the letters. Tagore represents some Hindu Gods like ‘*Lord Shiva*’, ‘*Kali*’, ‘*Radha-Krishna*’, ‘*Madan*’ and ‘*Saraswati*’ through which the writer presents the beliefs of the local people. He also represents some post-death rituals of the Hindu religion through the words like ‘*bone ashes*’, ‘*Holy Ganga*’, ‘*blessed water*’, and ‘*offering of betel*’, in the letters. Tagore also presented the marriage related ceremony of the Hindu people called the ‘*Swayamvara*’, an important socio-cultural event, typical among the elite class. The discourses of the socio-religious aspects are given more priority by Tagore while he represents the locality of Bengal by mentioning the names of different Hindu Gods in the letters. The writer also builds the connection between the God and the local Bengali rituals of worship through vocabulary like ‘*sweet kshir*’ and ‘*jackfruit*’ which are offered for pleasing the God. Therefore, Tagore represents the different religious and cultural rituals realistically in the letters.

The theme ‘local culture through rustic household representation’ discusses the different rustic household elements as narrated by Tagore in his letters. Home is one of the central images in his letters. There are different household objects and descriptions such as ‘*wicker mat*’, ‘*hookah*’,

'board games', and *'cows lying in the courtyard'*, *'cow dung cake'*, *'verandah'*, *'littering'*, *'oil-smearred'*, *'grimy'*, and *'a layer of dirt'* in his letters. It also includes descriptions of him being *'homesick'*, *'seasick'*, signifying the writer's love for home and homeland as expressed in the letters. Tagore's discourse displays his association with the people of his land, by using different vocabulary representing local culture in the letters. Adding to the point, Tagore's use of typical Bengali expressions like *'Jal Khabo'* or *'Pani Pan Korbo'* which show the influence of the Bengali language and culture in his letters. Therefore, Tagore represents the local culture through different local household aspects in the letters.

The theme 'local culture in terms of names' has been identified through different local Bengali names in terms of persons, foods, local seasons, places, months, and related terms in the letters. The local culture in terms of names includes the following words *'Agrahayen'*, *'Magh'*, *'Shelidah'*, *'Jorasanko'*, *'Meja dada'*, *'didimani'*, *'Beli'*, *'Khoka'*, and *'little wife'*. Tagore's descriptions acquire authenticity as he describes local places and relationship names of Bengal; he evokes emotional feelings which are sincere and affectionate as found in the nicknames in his letters. It can also be said that as all these letters are personal narratives, the writer mostly used Bengali vocabulary which is common to him and his readers. It is also found that Tagore has used Bengali relationship vocabulary like *'Didimani'*, *'Meja dada'* and *'Jorasanko'* showing enriching Bengali culture and the personal relationship he shared with the recipients of the letters. Therefore, through the use of the local vocabulary, Tagore expressed the local culture in a very personal and sensitive way in the letters.

The theme 'local culture through natural beauty' has been represented through the natural description of Bengal in the letters. The writer describes the beautiful scenes of the Bengal countryside through the descriptions of flowers, rivers, local birds, and trees in the letters. There are some cultural elements through which the local culture in nature has been pointed out like '*titi bird's call*', '*umbra trees*', '*the palmyra trees*', '*the Kadamba flowers*', and '*the Kopai River*', '*Gorai*' and '*Yamuna River*'. These descriptions reflect Tagore's positive attitude to nature and the beauty of his homeland. His love for nature is evident in his letters. His descriptions of natural beauty paint a clear picture of the local Bengal culture. Tagore's infatuation and association with nature is pointed out through the use of the personal pronoun like 'I' and 'me'. Another important concern is that Tagore's artistic literary quality helps him to keep associated with the nature which he enjoyed thoroughly. Therefore, Tagore's representation of local culture through natural beauty is beautifully portrayed in the letters.

Finally, the theme 'Bengali vs. English' culture represents culture through the connection or disconnection between the eastern and western cultures as expressed by Tagore in his letters. Tagore humorously describes the attitude and behaviour of Bengalis who travel to England. Bengali people's attitude towards the British and their own fellow Bengalis reflects the contemporary social situation through some of the cultural terms as mentioned in the letters. Some cultural and behavioural aspects such as '*ingabanga*', '*the weight of courtesy*', '*meekest and mildest*', '*thousand apologies*' and '*the acme of humility*' through which Tagore represents the attitude and the psychological distance between Bengali and English people in the letters. Tagore also represents the idea of national identity which he loves rather than any other thing and that's why the writer gives minute details of Indian local elements in the letters. There is a

comparison between the lifestyles of Bengali and English people in India and England and also represents the reality of pre-independence days when the Bengali people considered themselves as inferior to the English which shows the social position and socio-economic status of Bengali people during those days.

While the second section would try to answer the second research question in the following part

- How are the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ cultures expressed in Tagore’s letters?

As we can gather from the discussion of the themes, the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ cultural aspects are evident in the analysis of the local culture. The ‘Big C’ culture is identified through the visible and accessible cultural elements in the society. The ‘Big C’ culture has been represented in a prominent and distinctive way through different cultural elements. The ‘Big C’ culture is found through the following local cultural elements such as regional identity (*‘Bengali’* and *‘Bihari babu’*), household elements (*‘wicker mat’*, *‘hookah’*, *‘board games’*, and *‘cows lying in the courtyard’*, *‘cow dung cake’*, and *‘Verandah’*), religious rituals (*‘bone ashes’*, *‘Holy Ganga’*, *‘blessed water’* and *‘offering of betel’*), places (*‘Bengal’*, *‘Shelidah’* and *‘Puri’*), foods (*‘country sweets’*, *‘tea’*, *‘sandesh’* and *‘fish curry’*), months (*‘Agrahayan’*, *‘Magh’*, and *‘Shrabon’*), birds (*‘titi bird’*), natural beauty (*‘the palm trees’*, *‘the Kopai River’*, and *‘the Kadamba flowers’*) and Bengali vs. English culture (*‘ordinary Bengalis’*, *‘English lady’s dress’* and *‘hat’*). Therefore, the ‘Big C’ culture has been prominently displayed in each of the themes of the study.

On the other hand, the ‘small c’ culture is also expressed based on the invisible and not so readily obvious cultural elements of the society. The ‘small c’ cultural elements are part of each

theme of the local culture in the study. The ‘small c’ culture includes some of the following local cultural aspects such as manners of people (*‘sahib’ or ‘sahiblet’*), religious rituals (*‘courtesy’*, *‘humility’*, *‘Namashkar’* and *‘Pranam’*), rustic household representations (nostalgic moments: *‘homesick’*, *‘seasick’* and *‘pretty calm’*), the local expression (like *‘Jal khabo’*, *‘hungry for water’*, and *‘eating of water’* and *‘very dark yet pretty’*, *‘little wife’* and *‘toothless’*), natural beauty and the leisure activities (of Tagore’s enjoying *moon* beauty and *‘breeze at night’*, *‘shikar’* and *‘hookah’*) of the people and Bengali vs. English (*‘ingabanga’* and *‘humility’*) in the letters. The above aspects exhibit ‘small c’ culture in the letters.

Although there is a clear distinction between the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ cultural aspects in the study, there are some cultural elements that come under both cultures. There are some cultural aspects, for example, the regional identity of *‘Bengali’* and *‘Bihari babu’* which usually comes under ‘Big C’ culture, but it also comes under ‘small c’ culture because it also depicts the manner and behaviour of the people (which is the part of ‘small c’ culture) and we can see how there is an overlap between the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ cultures.

There is also mention of names of Gods which is a part of the ‘Big C’ culture because of the visibility of idols of gods but still, it also represents the belief or faith (which is ‘small c’ culture) of the people. There are some words like *‘hookah’* and *‘board games’* that are considered ‘Big C’ culture when we think of them as household articles, but it is also part of ‘small c’ culture because they represent leisure activities that may not be easily inferred by the non-locals. Tagore also refers to his wife fondly as *‘little wife’*; as a nickname, it can be seen as ‘Big C’ culture, but the love and affection with which a nickname is used in the local context are significant in terms

of the ‘small c’ culture. These aspects are not easy to comprehend by a person unfamiliar to the culture. So often, the vocabulary related to ‘Big C’ cultural elements also displays the ‘small c’ cultural elements as well.

There are also some words like ‘*Bengali*’ and ‘*English*’ that comes under ‘Big C’ culture as they refer to people, but it also comes under ‘small c’ culture because it also represents the manner and behaviour of the people (which is the part of ‘small c’ culture) and we can see the overlap between the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture. Therefore, even though the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ cultures are presented in the analysis chapter distinctively, in several instances they come together through the vocabulary used in the letters. Since every word brings several connotations to the mind of the reader, it is not always possible to keep the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ cultures as totally independent silos but as loosely framed categories which are intermeshed with each other. Although the researcher made the distinction between the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ cultures throughout the analysis section, still in several instances found that the ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ cultures overlap each other throughout the letters.

Moreover, after discussing various aspects of local culture, the study answers the research questions and explores the local culture in the letters. The study also analyzed every aspect of the local ambience of Bengal. However, with the local culture, there are some other cultural elements included for the betterment of the study.

5.2. The Implications of the Study

The present study has enormous pedagogical implications for the field of discourse analysis in the Indian cultural context. This study provides the local cultural scenario in the Indian context which is multilingual and multicultural and also gives insights into the view of locality in detail. The findings of the study will benefit the research communities to track the cultural attitudes through studying various texts with local cultural descriptions. Adding to the point, this study will help in teaching socio-cultural aspects in the curriculum. The findings of this study will provide a new cultural point of view through two cultural lenses such as ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ culture to the academic community. After all, the study also provides the following implications.

- To bring awareness to the audience about the local cultural ambience of a particular geographical location and attitude of the people of contemporary time.
- It would help readers to understand the differences between ‘Big C’ and ‘small c’ cultures and also know the way they overlap each other in certain contexts.
- As the study provides the descriptions of local culture scenario of Bengal, it will give a new dimension to the academic community.
- The study provides the details of the political and economic situation of Bengal before independence as all the letters are written from 1878 to 1898.
- If any writers are looking for local culture of Bengal (for creative writings) then this study would help them tremendously.
- This study provides the Hindu religious ritual details in some extent.

- The study also insights the lifestyle of Bengali, Bihari babu and English people through their attire, behaviour and language in contemporary time. It also compares the lifestyle of the Bengali and English people.
- The study provides minute details of Tagore's contribution for the development of the society in every possible way especially when he established Viswa Bharti University in Shantiniketan.

5.3. Limitation of the study

The research focuses primarily on the local features of Bengal. Throughout the analysis, it tries to demonstrate how each aspect is interrelated to contemporary society and how cultural elements play a role in representing the local culture of the community in a specific geographical location. Therefore, the scope of the study is limited and covers only a particular area for the analysis. Some of the limitations of the study are discussed below.

- The study limited itself to focus on letters written within a specific time frame, i.e., from 1879 to 1898, due to time constraints. Analysis of all the letters could have given a more comprehensive view of the local culture.
- The study analyzed the letters through Gee's vocabulary tool, only focusing on the localization features of Bengal.
- The study made use of Paul Gee's vocabulary tool alone. Probably adding more tools might add to the depth of analysis.

5.4. Scope for Further Study

The following are some of the areas where there is a possibility to carry out the research

- This study covers only the local culture of a few personal letters written by Tagore but there is a possibility to research the role of global culture in the letters written to people in other countries. In fact, it would be a good idea to compare the local and global cultures in his letters.
- In these letters, there is an opportunity to explore humanism, nationalism and internationalism as themes for study.
- This study only looked at the letters but a comprehensive study of all the genres used by Tagore can give us a better understanding of local culture.

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[London?, UK]
[1879]⁷

[?]

By and by the ship arrives and docks at Southampton. The Bengali passengers have reached the shores of England. They set off for London. As they disembark from the

train an English porter approaches them. Politely he enquires if he can be of service. As he takes down their luggage and ushers them into a carriage, the Bengali thinks to himself, How extraordinary! How polite the English are! That Englishmen could be so polite, he had no idea. He presses a whole shilling into the porter's hand. Never mind the cost, the newly arrived Bengali youth tells himself; the salaam of a white man was worth every penny of that shilling . . .

Before the Bengalis arrive in England, their friends who are already here have arranged rooms for them. As the Bengali enters his room, he sees a carpet on the floor, pictures hanging on the walls, a large mirror in its proper place, a sofa, stools and chairs, one or two glass flower vases, and to one side a baby piano. Good heavens! The Bengalis summon their friends: 'We aren't here as rich men, you know! My dear fellows, we haven't much cash on us, we can't afford to stay in rooms like these.' Their friends are highly amused, having completely forgotten their own precisely similar behaviour when they first arrived. Treating the new arrivals as throughgoing rice-eating rustics they tell them in voices full of experience, 'All rooms are like this over here.' This reminds the newcoming Bengalis of the rooms in our own country: damp, with a wooden cot covered by a wicker mat, here and there people puffing on hookahs, others lounging around a board game, their bodies bare to the waist, their shoes cast casually aside, while a cow lies tethered in the courtyard that has walls plastered in cow-dung cakes, and wet washing hangs drying over a verandah. For the first few days the Bengalis find themselves terribly embarrassed to sit on a chair or stool, lie on a bed, eat off a table or walk about a carpet. They sit very awkwardly on the sofas, fearful lest they make them dirty or damage them in any way. They imagine that the sofas have been put there for decoration, the owners surely cannot have intended them to be spoilt by use. But if that is their first impression of their rooms, there follows another impression, almost as immediate and even more significant.

In some smaller types of accommodation in England the figure called the 'landlord' still exists; but most Bengali lodgers must deal with a 'landlady'. Settling the rent, sorting out various problems, arranging food, is all down to the landlady. When my Bengali friends first stepped into their rooms, she quickly appeared, an Englishwoman waiting to greet them with the politest of 'good morning's. Hurriedly they returned the greeting in the most proper manner, and then stood struck dumb. And when they saw their various *ingabanga* friends strike up an easy conversation with the lady in question, their awkwardness turned to absolute awe. To think of it: they were talking to a real live memsahib, complete in shoes, hat and dress! Here was a sight to stir real respect in a Bengali heart. Would they ever acquire this courage shown by their *ingabanga* friends? Surely it was beyond the bounds of possibility.

Afterwards, having installed the newcomers, the *ingabanga* friends went off to their respective residences and spent the next few days making fun of Bengali ignorance – while the aforementioned landlady came each day to enquire, most politely, what my newly arrived friends liked to have, and what they did not like to have. My friends soon came to regard these occasions with real pleasure. One of them even told me that when he first ticked off this Englishwoman – ever so slightly – he felt thrilled with himself for the rest of the day. Notwithstanding, the sun did not rise in the West, mountains did not move and fire did not freeze that day . . .

To know the *ingabanga* – the England-worshipping Bengali – truly, one must observe

him in three situations. One must see how he behaves with Englishmen; how he behaves with ordinary Bengalis; and how he behaves with fellow *ingabangas*. To see an *ingabanga* face to face with an Englishman is really a sight to gladden your eyes. The weight of courtesy in his words is like a burden making his shoulders droop; in debate he is the meekest and mildest of men; and if he is compelled to disagree, he will do so with an expression of extreme regret and with a thousand apologies. An *ingabanga* sitting with an Englishman, whether he be talking or listening, will appear in his every gesture and facial movement to be the acme of humility. But catch him with his own countrymen in his own sphere, and he will display genuine temper. One who has lived three years in England will regard himself as infinitely superior to one who has spent a mere one year here. Should the former type of resident happen to argue with the latter type, one may observe the 'three-year' man exert his prowess. Each word he utters, and each inflection he gives it, sounds like a dictum personally dictated to him by the lips of goddess Saraswati.⁸ Anyone who dares to contradict him he will bluntly label 'mistaken', or even 'ignorant' – to his face . . .

Had you seen for yourself the thorough research these people put into which way up a knife or fork should be held when dining, your respect would surely be still further increased. What the currently fashionable cut of a jacket is, whether today's gentleman wears his trousers tight or loose, whether one should dance the waltz, the polka or the mazurka, and whether meat should follow fish or vice versa – these people know all these things with unerring accuracy. Their preoccupation with trivia – what is and is not 'done' – is far greater than that of the natives of this country. If you happen to use the wrong knife to eat fish, an Englishman would not think much of it; he would put it down to your being a foreigner. But if an *ingabanga* Bengali saw you, he would probably have to take smelling salts. Were you to drink champagne out of a sherry glass, he would stare at you aghast, as if your ignorant blunder had totally upset the world's tranquillity. And were you, God forbid, to wear a morning coat in the evening, had he a magistrate's power he would condemn you to solitary confinement . . .

There is one other special feature of the *ingabanga* I must tell you about. The majority of those who come here do not confess if they are married – because married men naturally command less attention from unmarried ladies. By pretending to be bachelors they can mix much more freely in society and have much more fun, otherwise their unmarried companions would never permit such goings on. There is a lot to be gained by declaring oneself unattached.

No doubt there are many *ingabanga* Bengalis who do not fit my description. I have written only of the general characteristics of the species as I have spotted them.

[?]

[Rabi?]

*To Kadambari Tagore (Ganguli [Gangopadhyay])*¹

Considering Rabindranath's great reputation as a poet of nature in Bengali, and his admiration for an English nature poet such as Wordsworth, it is always surprising how little attention he paid in his writings to the beauties of the English rural scene. There are such passages in his works, but they are rare. This letter, again from *Yurop Prabashi Patra*, which was most likely written to his sister-in-law Kadambari Devi (also a worshipper of nature), is probably the most significant; Rabindranath's pleasure in escaping to Devon from grimy, claustrophobic London is almost palpable.

Almost half a century later, Tagore's early love of Devon helped to persuade his friend Leonard Elmhirst to found his school in Devon, in the village of Dartington. Elmhirst had already been pondering Dorset or Devon as the place for his institution; then he discussed the school with Tagore, who independently told him:

As we have no right to deprive growing children of direct access to nature and to all the beauty that nature lavishes upon us, the most beautiful place you can find in England will not be too beautiful for your school. Why not look for a site in Devon? I still remember my visit with delight. I was only a boy. It was so beautiful.²

[Torquay, Devon, UK]

[June–August 1879]³

[?]

Summertime. The sun is shining wonderfully. It is two o'clock in the afternoon. A sweet breeze is blowing, similar to the one that blows at noontime in winter in our country. Everything basks in the sunshine. How pleasant it feels and how languid it makes my mind, I just can't tell you.

We are now staying in a town called Torquay in Devonshire.⁴ It is beside the sea. Hills all around. Such a crystal-clear day – no clouds, no fog and no gloom; there are trees everywhere, birds chirping everywhere, flowers blooming everywhere. When I was in Tunbridge Wells, I used to think that if Madan [god of love] were to appear here he would have to grope his way through many thorny thickets and copses to find even a few wild flowers to decorate his bow.⁵ But here in Torquay, even if he invented a weapon

like a Gatling gun which could fling a thousand flower arrows per minute and he kept this rate up twenty-four hours in a day, there would still be no likelihood of his bankrupting his flower stock, so much is here. Wherever you tread there are flowers. Every day we go for walks in the hills. Cows and sheep are grazing; in places the road slopes so much that climbing up or down is hard going. In other places the path is very narrow, the trees close in on both sides and cast dark shadows, there are rough steps for the benefit of climbers, and creepers and shrubs grow in the middle of the path. All around the sun shines mildly. The air is quite warm and reminds you of India. This warmth, though little, seems to make the creatures more lethargic than those in London. Horses move rather slowly, people too do not rush around – everyone loiters.

The seaside here I like very much. When the tide comes in, the huge boulders on the shore are submerged, only their tops show. They look like small islands. There are many cliffs, large and small, rising above the water. The washing of the waves has formed caves beneath these cliffs; when the tide ebbs we sometimes go inside them and sit there. In the interiors pools of clear water collect, there are patches of lichen, the sea smell is invigorating and boulders lie scattered in all directions. Some days we all try to shift these boulders by pushing and shoving, and we pick up various shells such as snail shells and cockles. Certain of the cliffs practically lean over the ocean; from time to time we clamber up them with a lot of effort and sit at the top watching the rise and fall of the waves below. A roaring sound reaches us, small boats float past with raised sails, the sun shines down, and with a parasol shading us we lie back, heads against the rocks, and chat. Where else shall I find such a fine place for idling? Once in a while I go up into the hills, look out for a secret spot enclosed by boulders and covered by vegetation, drop down into it with my book, and sit and read.

[?]

[Rabi?]

3

To Priyanath Sen¹

The marriage of Rabindranath, aged twenty-two, was arranged by his father on 9 December 1883 at his family home in Jorasanko, Calcutta, with the minimum of ceremony. Only a few members of the family and a few friends were present. The bride was a girl of about ten years, the daughter of an official on the Tagore estates in East Bengal, with little education and of no particular beauty, whom Rabindranath had never met. The ambivalent feelings of the bridegroom are suggested by the invitation letters he sent to his friends, such as this one.

[Calcutta, India]²

[December 1883]

,Priya Babu—

Next Sunday, on the 24th of Agrahayan, at the auspicious hour, my closest relative Shriman Rabindranath Thakur is engaged to be married.³ You are requested to oblige me and my family by being present at the occasion on the aforesaid day at the house of Debendranath Thakur, Number 6 Jorasanko, to observe the wedding ceremony.

Anugata

Shri Rabindranath Thakur

To Priyanath Sen

Music was of the first importance to Tagore throughout his life. He was, however, far more responsive to Indian than to western music, though he liked western stringed instruments such as the violin and the cello. Strangely, for someone so intensely musical, he never learnt to play any instrument, Indian or western. But he became a celebrated singer early in his life. In January 1886, at Jorasanko, he sang hymns of his own composition for three thousand Brahmans at their annual festival, Maghotshab (11 Magh). Later he repeated the performance for his father, who was then bedridden. The Maharshi was so impressed that he gave his son a large cheque with the comment, recorded by Rabindranath in his memoirs: 'If the king of the country had known the

language and could appreciate its literature, he would doubtless have rewarded the poet. Since that is not so, I suppose I must do it.¹

[Calcutta, India]
[20 January 1886]

* *Bhai*

Today at 3.30 p.m. there is a violin concert by Reményi.² People who have heard him say that to hear him play the violin is a once-in-a-lifetime experience – they have yet to hear lovelier music. I shall go to hear it today with some of our boys – you really must join us, it is wrong to deprive oneself of such music. So be a good boy, skip your office and turn up at the Corinthian Theatre at the appointed time – that will be jolly nice. We have reserved four-rupee seats – you can choose which ones – but you must be there. If I had a moment's respite to draw breath, I should undoubtedly have come to you myself and compelled you to consent – but you must not take advantage of my lack of time to give me the slip.

After this comes 11 Magh – you are invited to both lunch and supper, and if you can make it in the morning I shall have the pleasure of your company all day. In the meantime there is another event – the joint prayer of the three Brahmo Samajes – that is on 9 Magh, i.e. tomorrow morning, when the leading figures from all three Samajes will gather here.³ Your presence is required – seriously, I will be delighted if you come.

One more news item – *Meja Dada* has come.⁴

I am very busy.

Shri Rabindranath Thakur

Source: MS original at Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan; letter published in *CP*, VIII, pp. 30–1.

¹ *My Rem.*, p. 73/RR, XVII, pp. 317–18.

² Eduard Reményi (1828–98): Hungarian violinist, admired by Brahms and Liszt, who was solo violinist to Queen Victoria in 1854–9; in 1886 he undertook a world tour.

³ In fact, the occasion was mainly attended by members of the Adi Brahmo Samaj, started by Debendranath Tagore; the newspaper of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj ignored it. (See Paul, *Rabijibani*, III (1393 [1986]), pp. 24–5.)

⁴ *Meja Dada*: Satyendranath Tagore; elder brother of RT, second son of Debendranath Tagore. See letter 180.

Zamindar (1890–1897)

Introduction

In 1889, at his father's behest, Rabindranath took over the management of the Tagore *zamindari* (estates) in East Bengal and Orissa from his elder brothers and other family members. He began living on the estates, in his houseboat *Padma* and in the estate buildings at Shelidah and Shahzadpur, two insignificant villages, for a substantial period of the year, but with frequent trips to Calcutta to see his family and friends and report on estate business to his father (and a brief abortive visit to Europe in the second half of 1890).

He did not at first welcome this opportunity, which seemed to offer nothing to a litterateur except the company of poor and illiterate peasants and the discomforts of village life. But in due course he realised that the change would enrich his entire life and work. In the 1890s, while living on the estates, he wrote some of his greatest lyrical poetry, many fine songs and perhaps the most distinctive of his short stories. He also developed a sympathy with the common man and woman, made the Tagore estates a byword for fairness, and took the first steps towards the 'rural reconstruction' programme that eventually took concrete shape around Shantiniketan in the 1920s. In the words of Satyajit Ray, in his documentary film, *Rabindranath Tagore*:

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 own 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. Living mostly in his boat and watching life through the window, a whole new world of sights and sounds and feelings opened up before him.

5

*To Indira Devi Chaudhurani (Tagore)*¹

As a zamindar in the *mofussil*, i.e. up-country, Tagore had periodically to entertain visiting British officials, such as magistrates and engineers. He regarded these visits with trepidation and described them to his niece with a lively mixture of self-mockery and indignation. In the earliest surviving letter to his wife, written in January 1890, he wrote: 'My sahib will come and perhaps bring his men too. They may come and dine

here, or he may say, "Babu, I have no time!" Let me be so fortunate! I pray that his time will be too short.² This amusing letter (to the niece) describes what transpired.

Shahzadpur, [Rajshahi, Bangladesh]
[25 January 1890]

[Bibi/Bob?]

And so at midday this zamindar babu placed his puggree on his head, picked up one of his visiting cards, climbed into his palanquin, and sallied forth. The magistrate was sitting in the verandah of his tent dispensing justice, flanked by constables. A crowd of supplicants waited nearby beneath the shade of a tree. My palanquin was set down under the sahib's nose and he received me cordially on his wooden cot. He was a young fellow with only the beginnings of a moustache. His hair was very fair with darker patches here and there, giving him an odd appearance – one could almost have mistaken him for a white-haired old man but for his extremely youthful face. Hospitality was required of me; I said, 'Do come and eat with me tomorrow night.' He said, 'I am due elsewhere to arrange for a pig sticking.' I (inwardly exultant) said, 'What a shame.' The sahib replied, 'I shall be back again on Monday.' I (now feeling despondent) said, 'Then please come and eat on Monday.' He instantly agreed. Never mind, I sighed to myself – Monday is a fair way off.

As I was returning to the house, terrific clouds rolled up and a tremendous storm began with torrents of rain. I had no desire to pick up a book, and writing was impossible, my mind was too disturbed for it – or to put my mood in more poetic language. I felt someone was missing, if only the person were here instead of being far away. So I took to wandering back and forth from room to room in a distracted frame of mind. It became quite dark. Thunder rumbled constantly, there was flash after flash of lightning, and every now and then gusts of wind got hold of the trunk of the big lychee tree outside the verandah and gave its shaggy top a thorough shaking. The dry pit in front of the house soon filled with water . . .³ As I paced I was suddenly struck by the thought that I should offer shelter to the magistrate. I sent off a note, saying something like 'Sahib, to go out pig sticking in this weather will not work. Even though you are a strapping sahiblet, living in a watery tent can be trying for a land-based species – should you prefer dry land, my refuge awaits you.'

But having despatched the note, when I went to investigate the only spare room I found it a real sight. Two bamboo poles were hanging from the beams, over which were draped dirty old quilts and bolsters. Littering the floor were servants' belongings, tobacco pipes and two wooden chests containing a soiled quilt, a coverless oil-smeared pillow, a grimy mat, a bit of hessian variously stained and a layer of dirt . . . besides sundry packing cases full of broken odds and ends such as a rusty kettle lid, an iron stove without a bottom, a discoloured old zinc teapot, some bottles and old glasses, bits of glass shade from an oil lamp, a sooty lampstand, a couple of filters, a meat safe, a soup plate caked in treacle and dust, some broken and unbroken plates and a pile of soggy and dirty dusters. In a corner was a tub for washing clothes, Gophur Mia's cook's uniform, soiled, and his old velvet skull cap. The furniture and fittings consisted of one rickety, worm-eaten dressing table bearing water stains, oil stains, milk stains, black,

brown and white stains and all kinds of mixed stains, with damaged legs and detached mirror resting against a wall and drawers which were receptacles for dust, toothpicks, napkins, old locks, the bases of broken glasses, wires from soda bottles and bed casters, rods and stuffing; one washhand stand, with broken legs; and four walls, with smelly stains and nails poking out of them.

For a moment I was overwhelmed with dismay, then it was a case of – send for everyone, the manager, the storekeeper, the cashier and all the servants, get hold of extra men, bring a broom, fetch water, put up ladders, unfasten ropes, pull down poles, take away bolsters, quilts and bedding, pick up broken glass bit by little bit, wrench nails from the wall one by one. Why are you people standing there staring? – grab hold of those and try not to break them. Bang, bang, crash! – there go three glass lamp holders – pick them up piece by piece. I myself whisk a wicker basket and mat encrusted with the filth of ages off the floor and out of the window, thereby dislodging a family of cockroaches that scatter in all directions, to whose business I have been unwitting host as they dined off my bread, my treacle and the polish on my shoes.

The magistrate's reply arrives: 'I'm on my way out of real trouble.' Hurry up everyone! You must hurry! Soon there's a shout: 'The sahib has arrived.' In a flurry I brush the dust off my hair, my beard, and the rest of my person, and try to look, as I receive my guest in the drawing room, like a gentleman who has been reposing there comfortably all afternoon. I shake the sahib's hand, converse and laugh without apparent concern; but inside I cannot stop thinking about his sleeping accommodation. When at last I showed him his room, I found it passable; he should have had a night's rest – if the homeless cockroaches did not tickle the soles of his feet. The sahib said, 'Tomorrow morning I shall go for a spot of shikar.' I refrained from making any comment. In the evening a routed footman from the sahib's camp turned up with the news that the storm had torn his sleeping tent to pieces; his office tent too was soaked and in a pretty bad state. And so the sahib had to put off hunting other animals and put up with this zamindar babu.

[Uncle Rabi?]

*To Mrinalini Tagore (Ray Chaudhuri)*¹

Rabindranath's simple affection for his young wife Mrinalini, and her lack of sophistication, are clear from this letter, written on board ship to Europe. Later letters reveal a more complex relationship.

[SS] *Siam* [en route to Europe]
Friday [29 August 1890]

Bhai Chhota Bou

• Today we will reach a place called Aden and touch land again after a long time. But we cannot disembark, in case we pick up some contagious disease. On arrival in Aden we have to change ship, which will be a big bother. I cannot tell you how seasick I have been this time – for three days, whatever I swallowed just came up again, my head felt dizzy and the rest of me was in turmoil – I even wondered whether I would pull through. On Sunday night I distinctly felt my self leave my body and go to Jorasanko. You were lying on one side of the big bed, Beli and Khoka beside you. I caressed you a little and said, 'Little wife, remember this Sunday night when I left my body and came to see you – when I return from Europe I shall ask you if you saw me.' Then I kissed Beli and Khoka and came back.² When I was ill did you ever think of me? I became restless thinking of seeing you again. Nowadays I feel constantly that there is no place like home – this time when I get back I shall not stir out anymore. Today I had my first bath for a week. But baths here are not a pleasure: the salt in the seawater makes the whole body sticky and my hair becomes matted and horribly glued together – it is an odd sensation. I think I shall avoid bathing until I leave the ship. It will be another week before we reach Europe – when we get there, I shall be glad to set foot on land. I have had enough of the ocean day and night. But at present the sea is pretty calm, the ship hardly rolls, and I am no longer sick. All day I lie on deck in a long chair and either chat with Loken, ponder, or read a book.³ At night too, we make our beds on deck and avoid entering our cabins if possible. Going inside the cabin makes you feel queasy. Last night, though, it suddenly rained – we had to drag our bedding to a place where the rain could not get at us. Since then it has not stopped raining, after being fine and sunny yesterday. On board there are some little girls, whose mother has died and whose father is taking them to England. When I look at them I feel pity. Their father goes everywhere with them, but he does not know how to dress them properly or how to look after them. When they go out in the rain and he warns them not to, they tell him 'we like going out in the rain' – which makes him laugh a bit; seeing them happily playing in the rain he cannot bring himself to stop them. To look at them reminds me of my own babies. Last night I dreamt of Beli – she had come on board the steamer, and she looked lovelier than I can say. You must tell me what sort of thing I should bring them when I return home. If you answer this letter immediately, I might receive your reply while I am in England. Remember that Tuesday is the day for mailing to England. Give the children lots of kisses from me – and have some yourself too.

Shri Rabindranath Thakur

To Indira Devi Chaudhurani (Tagore)

Rabindranath was known to his tenants as an unusually conscientious, generous and innovative zamindar. His son wrote of this in his memoirs:

Every morning [Father] would go through the accounts, hear reports from the staff, and dispose of important correspondence. But the most interesting function for him was to meet the tenants, hear their complaints and settle disputes. He did not treat them in the traditional manner. He talked with them freely and they too felt so much at ease with him that they would tell him about their land, their families, and their personal affairs. Father had made known that any tenant who wanted to see him could go straight to him; no officer was to interfere with this inherent right of the tenant. Thus was established a bond of love and respect between the landlord and the tenants, a tradition that lasted in our estates till the end.¹

This letter shows how this 'bond' worked in practice, and also, incidentally, how Rabindranath collected material for his short stories.

Kaligram, [Rajshahi, Bangladesh]

[19? January 1891]

[Bibi/Bob?]

As I began to write to you, one of our clerks here came and chattered away about his sad state of poverty, the need for an increase in his wages and the necessity of a man getting married – he went on talking and I went on writing, until finally I paused and briefly tried to get him to understand the idea that when a sensible person grants someone's petition it is because the petition is reasonable, not because it has been repeated five times instead of once only. I had imagined that such a wise and wonderful remark would render the fellow speechless, but I saw that in fact it had the opposite effect. Instead of falling silent he asked me a question – if a child does not open its mind to its own parents, who will he talk to? This left me stumped for a satisfactory reply. So once again he started chattering and I for my part continued to write. To be nominated a parent out of the blue and for nothing is quite a trial.

Yesterday, while I was listening to the petitions of my tenants, five or six boys appeared and formed a disciplined line in front of me. Before I could open my mouth their spokesman launched into a high-flown speech: 'Sire! The grace of the Almighty and the good fortune of your benighted children have once more brought about your lordship's auspicious arrival in this locality.' He went on like this for nearly half an hour, pausing from time to time to stare at the sky when he forgot his lines, correct himself, and then continue. His subject was the shortage of school benches and stools. 'For want of these wooden supports,' as he put it, 'we know not where to seat ourselves, where to seat our revered teachers, or what to offer our most respected inspector when he pays a visit.' Such a torrent of eloquence from such a small boy made it hard for me to hide a smile. Particularly in a place like this, where the unlettered ryots normally voice their humble needs and sorrows in the plain and direct vernacular. The talk is usually of floods, famines, cows, calves and ploughs – in other words the unavoidable

facts of life – and even those words get twisted out of shape. So a speech about stools and benches in such refined language sounded really out of place! The clerks and ryots, however, were duly impressed by the boy's mastery of words – they seemed to be lamenting to themselves, 'Our parents failed to educate us properly, or we too could appear before the zamindar and make appeals in equally grand language.' One of them nudged another and said enviously, 'He must have been coached.'

In due course I interrupted and said, 'Well, boys, I shall arrange for the required benches and stools.' Undaunted, the boy took up where he had left off and, despite my having spoken, finished to the last word, bowed low in order to touch my feet with a *pranam*, and then took himself and the others home. He had lavished such pains over his learning by heart. Had I refused to supply the seats he probably would not have minded, but had I deprived him of his speech – that would have struck him as intolerable. Therefore, though it kept more important matters waiting, I gravely heard him out. If someone with the right sense of humour had been about, probably I would have jumped up and run next door to share the joke. But a *zamindari* is simply not the place for a humourmonger – here we display only solemnity and high learning.²

[Uncle Rabi?]

Source: MS copy at Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan; letter published in *CPB*, pp. 32–3.

- 1 Rathindranath Tagore, *On the Edges of Time*, 2nd edn (Calcutta, 1981), p. 28. See also Annada Sankar Ray, 'Tagore as a zamindar', *Statesman* (Tagore Centenary Supplement), 8 May 1961, in which Ray gives examples of how RT's tenants loved him, drawn from the author's personal experience as a district official in East Bengal in the 1930s.
- 2 RT inspected the school on 20 Jan. 1890 and noted in its inspection book: 'I did not try to frighten the boys out of their wits by cursory examination, which I find they have often enough. I have every reason to believe that the headmaster is doing his duty conscientiously and I dare say the school is as good as any other of its kind' (Paul, *Rabijibani*, III, p. 130).

8

To Indira Devi Chaudhurani (Tagore)

As a prolific letter writer, Tagore was naturally concerned with the workings of the postal service. Needless to say, in the 1890s it was far more efficient than its equivalent a century later: letters posted on the Tagore estates would often reach Calcutta the following day; Shelidah was then less than half a day's journey from Calcutta by train and boat.

The postmaster of Shahzadpur, who is mentioned in this letter, reappears in letters 16 and 21. He is one of the few individuals in Tagore's letters whom he specifically links with a character in his short stories.

Shahzadpur, [Rajshahi, Bangladesh]
[9? February 1891]

[Bibi/Bob?]

*Some evenings the postmaster comes upstairs to have a chat with me. His office is on the ground floor of our building – very convenient, for we get our letters as soon as

they arrive. I enjoy our talks. He tells of the most improbable things in the gravest possible fashion. Yesterday he informed me of the reverence towards the Ganges shown by the people of the locality. If someone dies, he said, and the relatives do not have the means to take his ashes to the Ganges, they powder a piece of bone from the funeral pyre and keep it until they come across a person who at some time or other has drunk the water of the sacred river. To him they administer some of this powder, hidden in a courteous offering of betel, and so are content to think that their deceased relative has finally made his pilgrimage to the blessed waters – or at least a portion of him has. I smiled as I remarked, 'This must be a yarn.' He pondered for quite a while and then admitted, 'Sir, it probably is.'

[Uncle Rabi?]

Source: MS copy at Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan; letter published in *CPB*, p. 41.

9

To Indira Devi Chaudhurani (Tagore)

Though he was born and brought up in Calcutta, and earned his initial celebrity there, Rabindranath never liked the city. As he grew older, and Calcutta itself became larger and more commercial, his antipathy turned to detestation and he spent less and less time there. In the early 1920s, he wrote:

Calcutta is an upstart town with no depth of sentiment in her face and in her manners. It may truly be said about her genesis: In the beginning was the spirit of the Shop, which uttered through its megaphone, 'Let there be the Office!' and there was Calcutta. She brought with her no dower of distinction, no majesty of noble or romantic origin; she never gathered around her any great historical associations, any annals of brave sufferings, or memory of mighty deeds.¹

This letter shows Tagore's dislike of Calcutta in an amusing and novel form, a dream, but incorporating a favourite preoccupation of his: education. He had a low opinion of all the educational institutions of Calcutta – and indeed Bengal as a whole – having himself attended several of them, including St Xavier's College.²

Shahzadpur, [Rajshahi, Bangladesh]

[June 1891]

[Bibi/Bob?]

Last night I had an extraordinary dream. The whole of Calcutta was enveloped by some formidable but peculiar power, the houses rendered only dimly visible by a dense dark mist, through which strange doings could be glimpsed. I was on my way down Park Street in a hackney carriage, and as I passed St Xavier's College I found it to be growing rapidly with its top fast vanishing into darkness and fog. I came to know that a band of men had come to town who could, if properly paid, perform many such magical tricks. When I reached our house at Jorasanko, I found the magicians had got there too. They were ugly-looking fellows, Mongolian in features, with wispy mous-

taches and a few long hairs sticking out of their chins. They had the power to make people, as well as houses, grow. All the ladies in our house were keen to become taller, and the magicians sprinkled some powder on their heads and they promptly shot up. I could only mutter: 'This is most extraordinary – just like a dream!' Then someone proposed that our house should be made to expand. Our visitors agreed, and as preparation they quickly demolished some portions. Dismantling done, they demanded money, or else they would not go on. Kunja Sarkar [the cashier] was aghast; how could payment be made before the job was completed? The magicians became wild. They twisted the building into a stupendous tangle, so that half of some occupants was set into the brickwork and the other half was left sticking out. It was a diabolical business. I said to my eldest brother: 'Just look at the mess we're in. We'd better start praying to God for help!' I went into the corridor and concentrated on praying. When I had finished I thought I would go and reprimand these creatures in the name of the God – but though my heart was bursting, no words came out of my throat. Then I woke up – I am not sure when. A curious dream, wasn't it? Calcutta entirely under the control of Satan: everything in it inflating tremendously in size and prosperity with his help, while enveloped in an infernal fog. One aspect was rather funny: with the whole city to choose from, why single out the Jesuit college for special satanic attention? . . .

The schoolmasters of the English school in Shahzadpur paid me a courtesy call yesterday. They showed no sign of leaving, even though I could not find a word to say. Every five minutes or so I managed a question, to which they offered the briefest of replies; and then I sat like a dunce, twirling my pen and scratching my head. At last I ventured a query about the crops, but being schoolmasters they knew nothing of this subject whatsoever. About their pupils I had already asked everything I could think of, so I had to start over again: 'How many boys had they in the school?' One said eighty, another a hundred and seventy-five. I hoped that this might provoke an argument, but no, they settled their difference. Why, an hour and a half later, they should have decided to take their leave, is hard to know. They might just as well have gone an hour earlier or, for that matter, twelve hours later. They seemed not to follow any rule but to rely on blind fate.

[Uncle Rabi?]

Source: MS copy at Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan; letter published in *CPB*, pp. 51–3.

1 *Creative Unity* (London, 1922), p. 116.

2 RT attended St Xavier's for two-and-a-half months in 1875, an experience he describes in *My Rem.*, pp. 84–6/RR, XVII, pp. 328–9.

To Indira Devi Chaudhurani (Tagore)

As a short-story writer (and indeed as a painter), Tagore has a particular gift for portraying women. One of his most touching stories, 'Shamapti' ('The Conclusion'), was based on the village girl he describes in this letter. As he reminisced to an Indian interviewer in 1936:

She was quite wild and extraordinary. There was nobody to restrain her freedom. She used to watch me every day from a distance and sometimes she brought a child with her and with finger pointed towards me she used to show me to the child. Day after day she came. Then one day she didn't come. That day I overheard the talk of the village women who had come to fetch water from the river. They were discussing with anxiety about the fate of that girl, who was now to go to her mother-in-law's house. 'She is quite wild. She doesn't know how to behave. What will happen to her!' they said. The next day I saw a small boat on the river. The poor girl was forced to go aboard. The whole scene was full of sadness and pathos. One of her girl companions was shedding tears stealthily, while others were persuading and encouraging her not to be afraid. The boat disappeared. It gave me the setting for a story named 'The End'.¹

Shahzadpur, [Rajshahi, Bangladesh]

4 July 1891

[Bibi/Bob?]

There is a boat moored at our ghat, and on the bank in front of it is a crowd of village women . . . It looks as if someone is going to embark and the others have come to see her off. Infants, veiled faces and grey hairs are all present together in large number. One girl attracts my attention more than the rest. She must be twelve or so, but the fullness of her figure could let her pass for fourteen or fifteen. Her face is fine – very dark, yet very pretty – and her hair is cropped like a boy's; it goes well with her simple, frank and alert expression. She holds a child in her arms and stands staring at me with unabashed curiosity and certainly no lack of candour or intelligence in her eyes . . . In fact her entire face and body are pleasing to look at, as if they contained not a hint of silliness, crookedness or imperfection. Her half-boyish, half-girlish look is singularly appealing: a novel blend that combines an air of unconscious independence with feminine sweetness. That such women existed in the villages of Bengal I had never imagined. Apparently none of her family is much troubled by bashfulness. One of them has let her hair down and stands in the sun combing out the knots with her fingers while conversing with another on board at the top of her voice. I learn that she has only this daughter, no son, and that the girl is a dimwit who doesn't know how to behave or talk, or even the difference between family and strangers . . . I learn, too, that because her husband Gopal's son-in-law has turned out badly, now this daughter doesn't want to go to him.

At last, when it is time to start, I see my short-cropped, plump-bodied, gold-bangled damsel with the guileless radiant face being led towards the boat with much commotion; but she refuses to get on board. With a great deal of effort, they eventually cajole her into the boat. I grasp that she is being returned from her parents' to her husband's home. As the boat casts off, each woman and girl stands on the ghat following it with her gaze, one or two slowly wiping their eyes with the loose end of their saris. A small girl with her hair tightly knotted clings to the neck of an older woman and quietly weeps on her shoulder. Perhaps she has just lost a darling didimani who joined her in playing with dolls and also cuffed her when she was naughty.² The morning sun and the riverbank seem deeply melancholic. The whole morning feels bereft of hope like the sound of a mournful ragini, and the world, for all its beauty, seems full of pain to me . . . The life history of this unknown girl has become intimately familiar.

The floating away of a boat on a stream adds pathos to the moment of farewell – it is so like death. Those who watch wipe their eyes and return to their lives, while the one who floats away becomes invisible. True, the grief wears off, perhaps sooner than we expect, the feeling is transitory, while the forgetting is permanent. But if we pause for an instant, we can see that it is the pain that is real, and not the oblivion. Separation and death remind man clearly from time to time that grief is terribly true. They make us aware that we can remain untroubled only by remaining ignorant; that anxiety and grief are the world's true realities. No one lives on, nothing survives – so stark is this truth that we humans suppress our realisation of it, along with our grief – and if and when we do call it to mind, it deeply perplexes us that not only do we ourselves not live on, neither do we live on in the minds of others. We are totally obliterated from both the outer and the inner world. There cannot be any music suitable for man's condition, whether now or eternally, except the mournful raginis of our country.

[Uncle Rabi?]

Source: MS copy at Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan; letter published in *CPB*, pp. 53–5.

- 1 'Discourse on short stories', *Forward*, Calcutta, 23 Feb. 1936 (interview in Shantiniketan with a group of visiting writers). According to Naresh Chandra Chakravarty of Shahzadpur, the girl was the daughter of a well-known local businessman, Gopal Shaha (Paul, *Rabijibani*, III, p. 279). 'Shamapti' ('The Conclusion') was published some two years after this letter in *Sadhana*, Ashwin–Kartik 1300 [Oct.–Dec. 1893]; a recent translation appears in *Selected Short Stories* (Krishna Dutta and Mary Lago trans.; London, 1991), pp. 80–102. Satyajit Ray filmed the story in 1961, with Aparna Das Gupta (later Aparna Sen), as the tomboy Mrinmayi, acting in her first film role.
- 2 *didimani*: literally, 'jewel of an elder sister'.

11

To Indira Devi Chaudhurani (Tagore)

Rabindranath lived frugally at Shelidah, especially when he was living there alone, which was most of the time between 1890 and 1898, when his family joined him. Visitors, particularly sahibs rather than Bengalis, posed a problem in terms of providing hospitality; provisions for looking after them, including supplies of champagne, had to be brought from Calcutta. Indeed most of Tagore's own food, simple though it was, came from Calcutta, because the quality and variety of local food was poor. This letter describes what happened when stocks ran low.

Shelidah, [Khulna, Bangladesh]
4 January [1892]

[Bibi/Bob?]

A few days ago the engineer sahib arrived from Pabna with his wife and children. You know, Bob, that looking after guests does not come easily to me – I become soft in the head – moreover I had no idea he would turn up with a couple of children. I had planned to be alone this time, so I was especially low on edibles. Somehow, by ignoring my creature comforts, I had been getting by on scraps. Now the memsahib likes tea, and I had

none to give her; she has an aversion for dal formed in childhood, and I offered her dal for lack of any other food; she has not touched fish for years and years and I, little suspecting, gave her fish curry. Luckily she likes 'country sweets' and consumed an old and dried-up piece of *shandesh* with great determination by using a fork to break it.¹ Last year's biscuit box, whatever might be the state of its contents, is going to come in handy.

I have committed another major blunder. I told the sahib that though his wife drinks tea, most regrettably I lack tea and have only cocoa. He replied, the lady loves cocoa even more than tea. Well, I've raided my cupboard – no cocoa! It's all been sent back to Calcutta. So now I have to tell him there's no tea and no cocoa either – Padma water only, and a teapot. I wonder how he will react.

The two children are really unruly and mischievous, I must say. The memsahib, with her cropped hair, is not as bad looking as I had thought – she is moderately pretty. Periodic rows break out between husband and wife which I can hear from my boat. The combination of children squabbling, servants loudly chattering, and this couple bickering is bothersome. I can't see much writing getting done today. The memsahib has just shouted at her offspring: 'What a little pig you are!' What have I done to deserve this! What's more, this evening she wants to come ashore for a stroll and has asked me to keep her company – as though I haven't enough afflictions already. If you could see me now you would be itching to laugh – I myself, as I write these words, am having a sad laugh. I had never imagined I would go walking around my *zamindari* with a mem on my arm. My ryots will doubtless be astonished. If I can only bid them all farewell tomorrow morning, I will survive; but if they say they will be staying another day, I will be dead, Bob.

[Uncle Rabi?]

Source: MS copy at Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan; letter published in *CPB*, pp. 68–9.

¹ *shandesh*: traditional Bengali sweetmeat made of posset; when freshly made it is soft.

12

To Indira Devi Chaudhurani (Tagore)

Tagore's tendency to anthropomorphise nature is fundamental to his life and works, though it varies greatly in intensity. And the same may of course be said of Indian classical literature. Whatever its origin in Tagore's case, the years he spent on the rivers of Bengal undoubtedly accentuated the tendency. Sometimes (as in letters 22 and 23), he seems to regard nature as detached and indifferent; at other times, as in letter 18 and in this letter, she becomes his close confidante.¹

Shelidah, [Khulna, Bangladesh]

9 January [1892]

[Bibi/Bob?]

For some days the weather here has been wavering between winter and spring. In the morning, land and water may be shivering at the touch of the north wind, while in the

evening we quiver under the caresses of a southern breeze wafting through the bright moonlight. The fact that spring is well on its way is not in doubt. After a long interval the *papiya* once more calls from the groves on the opposite bank. The hearts of men too are stirred; when evening falls, the villages near the groves emit sounds of singing, which suggests that people are no longer in a hurry to close their doors and windows and cover up snugly for the night.

Tonight is a full moon. Its great disc observes me closely through the open window on my left, as if trying to make out whether I am criticising it in my letter; it suspects, perhaps, that we earthlings are more intrigued by its dark side than by its light. From the silent sand spit in the river a *titi* bird makes the cry that matches its name. The water is quite still, rendered even stiller by an unmoving band of shadow cast upon it by the thick fringe of trees on the bank. Though the moon is full, a slight haze gives it the look of a sleepy eye held open. From tonight onwards, darkness will gradually descend. Tomorrow when I come to cross the river on return from my office, the favourite consort of my exile will be slightly estranged from me, as if beginning to have doubts about having revealed the secret recesses of her heart so fully the previous night, and hence covering herself up once more little by little. So intimate does nature become in strange and solitary places that for days I have actually been worrying myself with the thought that from now on I shall see less and less of the moon. I shall feel my exile much more keenly when her familiar tranquil radiance is gone, leaving me to float back in darkness . . . But for the moment the moon is full – the first full moon of spring – and I simply record the fact. One day something may remind me of this night, with its cry of a *titi* bird, its glimmer of light from a boat on the far shore, its dazzling thread of river brushed by the umbra of the trees along its edge, and its hazy sky overhead, pale and aloof.

[Uncle Rabi?]

Source: MS copy at Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan; letter published in *CPB*, pp. 70–1.

- 1 The oscillation between these two extremes of attitude to nature in RT is perhaps best seen in his 1930 conversation with Einstein on the 'nature of reality' and in his exchange with Gandhi concerning the great Bihar earthquake of 1934. See the appendixes.

13

To Indira Devi Chaudhurani (Tagore)

Rabindranath's family did not join him on the Tagore estates until 1898, though he often saw them in Calcutta and Shantiniketan. He was an affectionate father to all his children, but he was fondest of his eldest born, Bela – his 'favourite child', according to his son Rathindranath ('Khoka'). She inspired a well-known poem, 'Jete Nahi Dibo' (I'm Not Letting You Go), and a well-known short story, 'Kabulioala' ('The Kabuliwallah'), both of which he wrote during the latter half of 1892.¹ This letter describes Bela's sensitivity, which contrasts with the more conventional behaviour of her mother, Rabindranath's wife, known here as *Chhota Bou*.

Bolpur, [West Bengal, India]
6 Jaishtha 1299 [18 May 1892]

[Bibi/Bob?]

The other evening Khoka and Bela had an argument which is worth recounting to you. Khoka said: 'Bela, I'm feeling hungry for water.' Bela said: 'Oh Toothless, you don't say hungry for water. It's thirsty for water.' But Khoka was firm: 'No, hungry for water.' Bela: 'Khoka! I'm three years older than you, you are two years younger than me, you know! I know so much more than you do!' Khoka was suspicious: 'You are so old?' Bela: 'Alright, ask Father.' Khoka suddenly became excited: 'But I drink milk and you don't!' Bela was full of scorn: 'So what! Mother doesn't drink milk, and you can't say Mother isn't older than you!' Khoka went completely quiet, put his head on a pillow and was lost in thought. Then Bela began to chatter, 'O Father, there's someone I have ever such a close friendship with! She's really crazy and ever so lovely! Oh I can eat her up!' And then she ran over to Renu and gave her such an enormous shower of kisses that Renu began to cry.²

Yesterday Bela came to me feeling very sad. What happened was that Swayam Prabha and others were cooking fish curry in the small bungalow. A mad chap had taken refuge in there with some mangoes – *Chhota Bou*, Swayam Prabha and the rest were scared of him and so they shooed him out.³ I was having a rest in my first-floor room, when Bela came back from the small bungalow and said to me in a distressed voice, 'Father, that man is very poor, poor man is hungry, so he went to the bungalow with some mangoes, and they pushed him out with sticks.' She kept on saying, 'Poor man is poor, he has nothing, he has almost nothing on, perhaps in winter he will have nothing to wear, so he'll be cold. He didn't do anything wrong. I asked him his name and he told me. He said he lives in heaven. They drove him away, poor man, and he said nothing. He just went away.' How sweetly she said all this to me! Bela is really full of kindness. She spoke with such genuine sympathy – cruelty of this kind seemed so needless to her. As I listened to her I was very touched. Bela will grow up to be an affectionate, honest and good-natured woman. Khoka too is very affectionate. He really adores Renu. He cuddles her so gently and puts up with all her antics more patiently than many a mother would.

[Uncle Rabi?]

Source: MS copy at Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan; letter published in *CPB*, pp. 79–80.

1 'Jete Nahi Dibo' was written in Calcutta on 29 Oct. 1892 and is clearly about Bela. 'Kabulioala' was published in *Sadhana*, Agra-hayan 1299 (Nov.–Dec. 1892) and is much more loosely based on Bela: RT once told C. F. Andrews that the five-year-old girl Mini was Bela, but in 1936, long after Bela's death, when asked about the origin of the story, he mentioned a real Kabuliwallah but did not mention Bela – perhaps the subject was too painful for him (Andrews to RT, 20 Oct. 1917 [RB]; 'Discourse on short stories', *Forward*, Calcutta, 23 Feb. 1936).

2 Madhurilata (Bela), born 25 Oct. 1886, was then four and a half; Rathindranath (Khoka), born 27 Nov. 1888, was three and a half; and Renuka (Renu), born 23 Jan. 1891, was not yet one and a half.

3 *Chhota Bou*: Mrinalini Devi, wife of RT; Swayam Prabha: wife of Shatya Prashad Ganguli [Gangopadhyay], a nephew of RT.

To Indira Devi Chaudhurani (Tagore)

Rabindranath often visited the ashram at Shantiniketan and stayed for some time in the years before he finally moved there for good in 1901. He was deeply attracted to both the arid plain around the ashram and the riverine landscape of the Tagore estates. 'But there is no doubt', according to his son Rathindranath,

that [Father's] first and deepest love was for the country of mellow green fields with their clusters of bamboo shoots swaying gently in the south breeze and hiding villages in their midst, of majestic rivers with their stretches of gleaming white sand – the haunts of myriads of wild ducks . . . Such associations had entered deeper into his life than the parched and barren wastes that surrounded him at Santiniketan, the choice of his later years.¹

This letter describes a storm at Shantiniketan, which makes an interesting comparison with the storm at Shahzadpur described in letter 5. The Shantiniketan storm strikes Rabindranath, significantly, as more fanatical than the storm at Shahzadpur.²

Bolpur, [West Bengal, India]
12 Jaishtha [1299] [24 May 1892]

[Bibi/Bob?]

As I wrote to you earlier, in the late afternoon I like to pace my roof terrace with only myself for company. Yesterday about this time it occurred to me that I ought to show the beauties of the area to two guests staying here, and so I strolled out with them, taking Aghore as guide.³ At the horizon, where a blue fringe of trees met the sky, a line of dark-blue cloud had risen, magnificent to see. It prompted me to be poetical and say that it was like kohl on the lashes of a beautiful blue eye. One of my companions failed to catch the remark, another did not follow it, while the third dismissed it with the comment: 'Yes, very pretty.' I was not encouraged to attempt a second flight of fancy. We walked about a mile until we came to a dam with palmyra trees beside it, from which flows a natural spring. While we stood looking at this, we realised that the line of cloud we had seen in the north had swollen and darkened and was making for us with regular flashes of lightning.

Unanimously we decided that the beauties of nature were better viewed from the safety of the house, but no sooner had we turned homewards than the storm, with giant strides over the open ground, was on us with an angry roar. I had no idea, while I was admiring Nature's gorgeous kohl-rimmed eyes, that she would shortly fly at us like an irate housewife, threatening us with a tremendous slap! Dust made the sky so dark that we could not see beyond a few paces. The fury of the storm continued to increase, and grit driven by the wind stung our bodies like shot, while gusts took us by the scruff of the neck and thrust us along and drops of rain slapped and whipped our faces. Run! Run! But the ground was not level; it was deeply scarred with watercourses, and not easy to cross at any time, much less in a storm. I managed to get entangled in a thorny shrub, and as I was trying to escape, the wind grabbed me and practically threw me to the ground.

We had almost reached the house when a host of servants came hurrying towards us with a hullabaloo and fell upon us like a second storm. Some held our arms, some beat their breasts, some eagerly showed the way, others hung on our backs as if fearing that the storm might carry off their master altogether. We had a job to evade the attention of this retinue and get into the house, panting, hair dishevelled, skin dust-caked and clothing drenched.

Still, I had learnt one thing; never again to write in a poem or story a description of a hero, the image of his lady love imprinted in his mind, passing unruffled through wind and tempest. The idea is quite false. No one could keep any face in mind, however lovely, in such a gale; he would be too busy keeping grit out of his eyes. I was wearing my eye glasses. The wind was blowing so hard, I could hardly keep hold of them. So, clutching my glasses in one hand and the pleats of my dhoti in the other I stumbled along, catching against thorny bushes and falling into holes. Just imagine if my lady love had made her home on the banks of our own River Kopai – could I have been holding her image in my mind rather than my glasses and dhoti! The Vaishnava poets have sung ravishingly of Radha going calmly to her tryst with Krishna through a stormy night. I wonder if they ever paused to consider the state in which she must have reached him? The tangle of hair is easy to imagine; and so is the condition of her ornaments and toilet. Encrusted in dust and splattered all over with mud, she must have gained her bower looking quite a sight! But when we read Vaishnava poems, none of this comes to mind. Instead we conjure a picture of a lovely woman, passing beneath sheltering *kadamba* blossoms in the blackness of a stormy night in the month of Shraban towards the bank of the Yamuna, forgetful of wind or rain, drawn by her surpassing love, as if in a dream.⁴ Lest she be heard, she has tied up her anklets, and lest she be seen she is clad in dark-blue raiment – but she holds no umbrella lest she get wet, she carries no lantern lest she fall. Too bad for such necessities – so essential in living, so redundant in poetry! Poetry strives vainly to free us from the bondage of a thousand practical demands. Umbrellas, shoes and shirts will forever be needed: it is poetry that people say will become obsolete with the march of civilisation, while patent after patent will be taken out on new designs of shoe and umbrella.

[Uncle Rabi?]

Source: MS copy at Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan; letter published in *CPB*, pp. 84–6.

1 Rathindranath Tagore, *Edges of Time*, p. 34.

2 Satyajit Ray wrote of Shantiniketan that it was 'a world apart':

It was a world of vast open spaces, vaulted over with a dustless sky, that on a clear night showed the constellations as no city sky could ever do. The same sky, on a clear day, could summon up in moments an awesome invasion of billowing darkness that seemed to engulf the entire universe. (Quoted in Andrew Robinson, *Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye* (London, 1989), p. 55)

3 Aghorenath Chatterji [Chattopadhyay] (1861–1932): first resident of the Shantiniketan ashram, who described this early period in his memoirs (see bibliography).

4 Shraban: Bengali month corresponding to mid-July–mid-Aug.; monsoon.

To Indira Devi Chaudhurani (Tagore)

In 1930, Tagore told a Jewish interviewer in New York: 'For centuries the Arabs have neglected their land, because spiritually they were above political nationalism. Western civilisation calls this state primitive and uncivilised.'¹ He was being consistent with his famous line, 'Much rather would I be an Arab Bedouin!', in his 1888 poem 'Duranta Asha' (Wild Hopes). There he began to articulate the fierce individualism that throughout his life would be at war with his urge to reform his countrymen and indeed the world. This letter develops the poem's thought, and concludes with a sentence that is peculiarly ironic in today's Bengal, where the songs of Tagore, *Rabindrasangit*, have become a unique source of 'comfort and solace'.

Shelidah, [Khulna, Bangladesh]
31 Jaishtha [1299] [12 June 1892]

[Bibi/Bob?]

I hate all the demands of good manners. Nowadays I keep repeating that line: 'Much rather would I be an Arab Bedouin!'² Oh for a healthy, strong, unfettered barbarity! I want to quit this creeping senility of mind and body, constantly preoccupied with ancient quibbles over custom and convention, and feel the joy of a vigorous incautious life; to hold confident, carefree, generous ideas and aspirations – for better or for worse; to break free of this perpetual friction between custom and reason, reason and desire, desire and action. If I could only escape utterly the bonds of this restricted life, I would storm the four quarters with wave upon wave of excitement, grab a sturdy wild horse and tear away on it to the very heights of ecstasy.

But I am a Bengali, not a Bedouin! I sit in my corner, moping and worrying and arguing. My mind is like a fish being fried – first this way up, now the other – blistered by the boiling oil on one side, and then on the other. Enough of this. Since it is impracticable to be uncivilised, I had better try to be thoroughly civil – why foment a quarrel between the two? . . .

I am by nature unsocial – human intimacy is almost unbearable to me. Unless I have a lot of space around me in all directions I cannot unpack my mind, mentally stretch my arms and legs. Let the human race flourish with my blessings, but let its members not lean on me . . . Let the general public leave me completely aside and most probably it will still find the good counsel it seeks. People will not lack for comfort and solace.

[Uncle Rabi?]

Source: MS copy at Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan; letter published in *CPB*, pp. 89–90.

¹ Quoted in Joseph Brainin, *Jewish Standard*, Toronto, 28 Nov. 1930 (interview with RT).

² *RR*, II, p. 197.

To Indira Devi Chaudhurani

In letter 8, Tagore mentions the postmaster at Shahzadpur who became a basis for his story 'The Postmaster', noting the man's penchant for story-telling and myth-making. In this amusing letter, the postmaster reappears but now seems more sceptical about superstition. The story he tells Rabindranath, though ludicrous, is not as improbable as one might think a century later – especially when one recalls the willingness of some Indians worldwide to believe that images of Ganesh in various countries drank milk during a short period in 1995. It was even suggested at that time by one commentator that Tagore, were he alive, would have been sympathetic to these claims. This letter disproves such an assertion.

Shahzadpur, [Rajshahi, Bangladesh]

28? June [1892]

[Bibi/Bob?]

• Yesterday I wrote to you that the following night at 7 p.m. I had an engagement with Kalidasa the poet. At the appointed hour I lit a lamp, drew up my chair to the table, and sat ready, book in hand – when instead of Kalidasa, the postmaster walked in. A live postmaster cannot but claim precedence over a dead poet. I could not very well say to him: kindly make way for Kalidasa, who is due any minute now – and if I had, he would not have understood me. So I pulled out a stool and quietly said goodbye to old Kalidasa. There is a kind of bond between this postmaster and me. When the post office was on the ground floor of the estate building, I used to meet him every day and in this very room upstairs I wrote my story 'The Postmaster'. When it came out in *Hitabadi* our postmaster touched on it after a series of bashful smiles.¹ I must say I like the man. He has a fund of anecdotes which I dip into and silently enjoy. He also has a nice sense of humour. That is how he catches and holds one's interest. After sitting all day on my own, as I do here, contact with a live human being produces ripples in my calm existence . . .

He was narrating to me the saga of our munsiff. Hearing the whole business told in his special style made me weak with laughter. What has happened is that the munsiff has all of a sudden perceived Lord Shiva in the bole of a tree. On the first day he saw Shiva, on the next day Kali, and on the day after that Radha-Krishna – as if the entire celestial abode of the gods had come down to roost in our Shahzadpur banyan tree. The munsiff grabs everyone and says: 'Look, look, can't you see it! There's his eye, there's her tongue!' Those who are dependent on him, such as his clerks, see these things too, but those who do not rely on him for anything do not see them. Our postmaster belongs to the latter group. On days when offerings of sweet *kshir* and jackfruit are made to the goddess, the postmaster manages to see something in the tree – but as soon as he has lapped up his *kshir*² he asks the munsiff, 'Which part did you say was the eye, sir?' The munsiff replies, 'Don't you see it? It's there, look up there!' Then the postmaster says gravely, 'Oh I see, I thought that was the head.' On one occasion the munsiff said to him, 'Well sir, did you see what happened? During today's worship, just when the bells

and gongs were being struck, something flew into the tree and settled there and a few drops of water fell down.' And the postmaster, wearing his most serious face, replied, 'Of course – yes, certainly the tree moved.' The foot of the tree has now been paved – the munsiff is doing *puja* there twice daily, bells and conch shells are resounding, and a sanyasi is sitting smoking hashish and saying through closed eyes, 'I see Mother Kali here.' One or two local people are also experiencing trances, and speaking divine words while entranced. All sorts of quackery is starting to spring up. The postmaster said to me, 'When the magistrate visits your *zamindari* you call upon him. Now the gods have taken up residence in this banyan tree, you really must pay them a visit.' I am thinking I shall go to watch the fun. What's more, if this rumour persists a while longer, Shahzadpur will become a place of pilgrimage. We shall all gain from that.³

It was quite late when the postmaster left and I got started on [Kalidasa's] *Raghuvamsa*. I read the bit about the *swayamvara* of Indumati.⁴ Seated on rows of thrones in the marriage hall, splendidly attired, striking-looking princes are kept waiting. Suddenly blasts of conch shell and bugle sound, and Indumati, in bridal finery supported by Shunanda, enters and stands between the rows of suitors. What a superb picture! Then she is introduced by Shunanda to the princes one by one, and to each of them Indumati makes a courteous *namashkar*, and passes on. How beautifully she does it! Though she rejects each one she is so respectful that her gesture seems like reverence. This is far superior to the haughty vanity of an English miss. These are all princes and all older than she – for Indumati is a mere girl – and yet she passes them by. Had she not wiped away the stain of that fact with the humility of her *pranam*, the scene would have lost its grace. But before Prince Aja could be garlanded, the night had become far advanced and I had to go to bed – and so Indumati's marriage could not be arranged yesterday, unlike our Priya's.⁵

[Uncle Rabi?]

Source: MS copy at Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan; letter published in *CPB*, pp. 99–101.

1 *Hitabadi* began publishing on 30 May 1891, with RT as its literary editor. He contributed six stories to the magazine, including 'The Postmaster' (exact date of publication unknown).

2 *kshir*: milk condensed and sweetened by boiling.

3 Though RT evidently did not believe in gods roosting in banyan trees, the imagery must have appealed to him: in his (much later) paintings, the branches of trees are sometimes seen to conceal grotesque faces.

4 The *swayamvara* of Indumati is the subject of canto 6 of *Raghuvamsa*, which culminates in Indumati garlanding Prince Aja as her husband-to-be (Kalidasa, *The Dynasty of Raghu* (Robert Antoine trans.; Calcutta, 1972), pp. 67–78). On RT's view of *Raghuvamsa*, see 'The springhead of Indian civilisation', *MR*, Dec. 1912, pp. 566–7/*RR*, XIV, pp. 457–80.

5 Priya: Priyam Bada Devi (1871–1935); niece of Pramatha Chaudhuri; she married on 27 June 1892.

To Indira Devi Chaudhurani (Tagore)

In early 1893, Rabindranath visited Orissa on a tour of the family estates. At Cuttack, staying with a Bengali friend who was the district judge, he came in contact with various British officials and their wives. These encounters provoked him to write several letters to his niece, strongly criticising the British in India, as well as four essays.¹

The irony present in letter 5 concerning the magistrate at Shahzadpur here turns into downright, even blimpish condemnation – of the arrogance of the official class and of the sycophancy of those babus waiting upon British favour. Many of his later stories about the Calcutta elite obviously benefited from such first-hand observation.²

This letter is especially interesting because it deals with the clash of cultures as well as the more superficial and familiar political friction between British and Indian. Rabindranath describes how each side sang to each other and then applauded, and then he asks, 'Can such people ever enjoy what I truly love?' He had been asked, or rather compelled, to sing for a British audience many times since his first visit to England in 1878 – with extremely mixed feelings. In his autobiography, he wrote of how at parties on his first visit, 'everyone clearly anticipated some extraordinary specimen of native music and added their entreaties . . . Afterwards, amidst much suppressed titling, would come a chorus of "Thank you very much!" "How interesting!"' – and he would perspire all over.³ Tagore came to the conclusion, which only deepened with age, that Indian music and European music affected the listener in completely different ways.⁴

Cuttack, [Orissa, India]

[6 March 1893]

[Bibi/Bob?]

‡ You have asked me if I am happy with the applause I received at the magistrate's house in Puri. Your question has been prompted by my not writing to you openly about the whole affair. So let me give you a detailed account. When Bihari Babu and others first requested me to call on the magistrate of Puri, I hesitated, but given their assurances and their evident keenness, I reluctantly consented.⁵ Having written my name on a couple of visiting cards I went along with Bihari Babu and his wife. They did not take their own cards, instead they sent in a note along with my two cards. After about five minutes word came – let us come back the following morning and the sahib will see us. Bihari Babu and Mrs Gupta were flabbergasted. Retreating from this ticklish situation we stepped out of the magistrate's house. Bihari Babu and wife were now livid. That evening a letter came from Mrs Walsh (the magistrate's name is Walsh) expressing deep regret. The message sent in by the judge sahib and his memsahib had not been delivered to her by the bearer. I had already expected this. But the basic fact remained that while the magistrate had not intended to show disrespect to the judge, had it been another 'native' gentleman calling, he would have been asked to come back the next day in order to meet the sahib. Perhaps the very idea of my sending a card had struck Mrs Magistrate as audacity. Of course the magistrate might say that he was short of time, but who is he – this son of a nabob – that I should have to come and pay him my respects at an hour appointed by him! Obviously I accept that our countrymen are to blame here, for the way they hang about the doors of the sahibs, salaam them and solicit their daily bread from them – and the idea that I, a person with a Bengali name, would have the nerve to make a social 'call' on the Magistrate and Mrs Magistrate had never crossed their minds. At the same time I think that to take great offence at the sahib's behaviour is to overreact. Yet I cannot help feeling that the effort to show respect to these people requires a degree of formality that is really bothersome.

However respectable and well born I may be, to them this is of no value. Until such time as I may erase the particular features of my race and put on a counterfeit badge of honour bestowed by the sahibs, they will not regard me as a person. Just look at what happens with our barristers: however much they cultivate English society and the English temperament, they still cannot get on intimate terms with the sahibs living here. Even in the bar library they naturally gravitate into a dark-complexioned circle estranged from the rest like the dark spots on the face of the full moon. So what is the use of trying, why do we force ourselves? Have we become so thoroughly unbearable to our own people! However dark-faced they may be, they cannot be any darker than us. As long as the English show me respect by denying my race, I will treat that respect as an intolerable insult. So you ask, was I happy when the Puri magistrate agreed to meet me the following day and invited me to dine? Don't even give it a thought. But had I rejected the invitation, I would clearly have been making an exhibition of my hurt feelings and also diminishing the importance of the hurt – in addition to mortifying Bihari Babu.

I therefore accepted it, went into dinner arm in arm with the magistrate's sister-in-law and sat at the table with a smile on my face; I agreed with my companion that the beach at Puri was indeed a beautiful one, and I expressed delight in the fact that the sea breeze keeps Puri from ever becoming too hot. After that I listened to some English singing and sang to the sahibs in reply. I applauded and so did they. But does such appreciation show that the heart has been touched? Or is it just the curiosity that has been satisfied? Does it not resemble the conducting of an experiment to see which titbit from our plates will feel tasty to a palate very different from ours? Can such people ever enjoy what I truly love? And if they do not like something, is that thing therefore worthless? Were this really so, what pleasure could their applause afford me? If we begin to rate the applause of Englishmen too highly we shall come to reject much that is good in us, and adopt much that is bad from them. We shall grow ashamed to go about without socks, for instance, and cease to feel shame at the sight of their ball dresses. We shall have no hesitation in throwing overboard our manners, and cheerfully emulating their customary lack of them. Our achkans will be cast aside as unsatisfactory apparel, but we shall replace them on our heads with hats that are hideous. Handshakes and applause from fair-skinned hands are terribly important to us, and they are indeed visible marks of respect – but they undermine our authentic self-respect. Consciously or unconsciously we come to mould our lives according to whether we are clapped or not, and thus we trivialise ourselves.

I therefore solemnly admonish myself as follows,

O Earthen Pot! Keep away from that Metal Pot! Whether it smashes you in anger or merely gives you a patronising tap, you are done for, holed in either case. So pay heed to sage Aesop's counsel – and keep your distance.

Let the Metal Pot serve the wealthy homes; your work is in the homes of the poor. Allow yourself to be broken and you will have no place in either home but will return to the clay from which you came, or at best you will secure yourself a corner of some rich person's drawing room bric-a-brac cabinet, as a curiosity. More glorious by far is to find your true worth beneath the arm of a lowly but virtuous village woman.⁶

[Uncle Rabi?]

Source: MS copy in Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan; letter published in *CPB*, pp. 135–8.

- 1 The letters appear in *CPB*; the essays are collected in *RR*, X. Very little of this scathing criticism has been translated (during RT's lifetime, to avoid giving offence); but there is a letter in *Glimpses of Bengal*, p. 79. See also Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch! India 1921–1952* (London, 1987), pp. 604–6.
- 2 For instance, 'Rajtika' ('The Raj Seal') in Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Noon in Calcutta: Short Stories from Bengal* (London, 1992), pp. 1–12/*RR*, XXI, pp. 237–49.
- 3 *My Rem*, p. 123/*RR*, XVII, pp. 365–6.
- 4 See, for instance, *Glimpses of Bengal*, pp. 105–6/*CPB*, pp. 215–16. Arthur Fox Strangways, music critic and author of *The Music of Hindostan* (Oxford, 1914), wrote to RT on 23 March 1914:

I am deeply conscious how impossible it is for an outsider to see things from the inside . . . I met others in India [besides you] with greater technical knowledge and more ready skill as performers, but none with such a sense of the dignity of music or so well prepared to believe that the likenesses between Indian and European music, though not more numerous, were more important than the differences. There is plenty to like and wonder at in both. ([RB])

- 5 Bihari Lal Gupta (1849–1916): he joined the Indian Civil Service in 1871, became a district and sessions judge in 1888 and eventually a judge in the Calcutta High Court and a member of the legislative council.
- 6 RT has paraphrased Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, *Kathamala*, in *Rachanashambhar* (Pramathanath Bisi, ed.; 1364 [1957]), pp. 463–4. In 1856, Vidyasagar published a version of Aesop's fables based on the version by Revd Thomas James with illustrations by John Tenniel published in London in 1848 (see No. 125, 'The Two Pots'). Vidyasagar's version became popular in Bengal.

18

To Indira Devi Chaudhurani (Tagore)

Letter 15 introduced the conflict in Rabindranath between his need as an artist to be solitary and his urge as a reformer to be part of society. In this letter, on a related theme – the life of the mind versus the life of action – Rabindranath passingly compares his predicament with that of Rammohun Roy. Given that his admiration of Rammohun was already of heroic proportions, this remark would appear to indicate that he had a keen sense of his own future significance, coupled with a feeling that his true *métier*, unlike Rammohun's, might lie in thought more than in action, in art rather than in social reform. With age this Tagorean dilemma would become more acute.

Shelidah, [Khulna, Bangladesh]

16 May [1893]

[Bibi/Bob?]

^ In the evenings, at about half past six, feeling fresh and clean after my bath, I go for an hour's walk along the riverbank. Then I get into the new jolly-boat, anchor in mid-stream, make up a bed for myself and lie silently in the dark, feeling the breeze on my skin and staring at the heavens. Shailendra sits beside me and talks away.¹ Above us the night becomes more and more thickly studded with stars. Daily I find myself wondering: shall I see this spangled sky again in some future birth? If I do see it, shall I be able to make a bed on a jolly-boat and lie in the peace of an evening on the silent River Gorai in a beautiful corner of Bengal with such an enchanted tranquil mind? Perhaps I shall never recapture such an evening. My new setting will be different; and what kind of mind shall I be given? A similar evening will no doubt come many times more for me, but will she again fall as quietly as tonight, covering my body in her dark tresses and smothering me with love? And would I still be the man I am now! Oddly enough

my greatest fear is of rebirth in Europe. For there one cannot lie out like this and expose oneself body and soul to the universe; loitering of this sort is considered a sin. There I would probably have to hustle my body and soul in some factory or bank, or in parliament. There the roads are stone metalled for the carriages of business, and so must minds be. Soft grass and redundant creepers forbidden! Everything to be right-angled, shipshape, regulated and durable. I am not sure why my indolent, self-absorbed, fancy-filled frame of mind seems to me the more desirable, and certainly not a subject for shame. When I recline in the jolly-boat I feel not a whit inferior to those men of affairs, however busy they are. And I perceive that had I girded my loins for action, I would have looked all too feeble beside those oaken-hearted young achievers. But does that make this jolly-boat-prone, infatuated youth any less important as an individual than Rammohun Roy?

[Uncle Rabi?]

Source: MS copy at Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan; letter published in *CPB*, pp. 151–2.

1 Shailendra Majumdar: officer of Tagore estates, younger brother of RT's friend Shrish Chandra Majumdar.

19

To Indira Devi Chaudhurani (Tagore)

As already mentioned (in letter 11), Rabindranath's diet while living on the estates was generally simple. It included meat but at several times in his life he tried to give up eating meat.¹ In 1916, for instance, while undergoing a gruelling lecture tour in the United States, he came to the conclusion that his weakness was due to his vegetarianism; he began eating meat again, and immediately felt stronger.² This letter explains his fundamental feeling on the subject.

Patisar, [Rajshahi, Bangladesh]

22 March [1894]

[Bibi/Bob?]

Balu sent an essay on 'Love of animals' and I spent my entire morning on it.³ Yesterday I was sitting at the window of the boat when something caught my attention. Some bird was struggling across the river to the opposite bank, pursued by a great commotion. Eventually I saw it was a hen; it must have escaped imminent death in the galley, jumped overboard and tried to swim across. It had almost made the bank when a grim reaper grabbed it by the neck and brought it back to the boat. I called Phatik and told him I would take no meat that night.⁴ Then Balu's essay happened to arrive, and I was struck by the coincidence. I really must break the meat-eating habit [, Bob]. Only because we do not think about its injustice and cruelty can we continue to swallow flesh. There are many misfortunes in the world of which man is the author that are not clear-cut cases of right or wrong, deriving as they do from custom, culture and tradition – but cruelty is not one of them. It is a fundamental sin, admitting of no argument

or nice distinctions, and if our feelings were not numb, our eyes and hearts not deliberately closed, we would hear the call for a ban on cruelty plainly. Instead, we gaily, even joyfully, commit cruelty, in fact those who do not are dubbed cranks.

How peculiar and artificial is our apprehension of sin and virtue. I feel that the highest commandment of all is that of sympathy for all sentient beings. Love is the foundation of all religion. Let me not bring sorrow into this world, let me spread happiness. Let me sympathise with the happiness, sorrow and pain of all creatures so that I hurt none – that is true religion, and we should try to live up to this holy ideal. The other day I read in one of the English-language papers that 50,000 lbs of carcasses had been sent to some army station in Africa, but as the meat had gone bad on the way, the consignment was returned and finally was auctioned off for a few pounds at Portsmouth. What a shocking waste [Bob]! What callous disregard for life! And when we invite guests to dine how many lives are sacrificed in our dishes, and yet how few of these dishes are fully consumed. So long as we are unconscious of partaking in cruelty we do not sin. But if, when our pity is aroused, we throttle it simply to remain part of the carnivorous pack, we insult all that is highest in us. I have decided to try a vegetarian diet once again . . .

I have acquired a close friend in this solitude: a copy of Amiel's *Journal*, borrowed from Loken.⁵ Whenever I have a moment I flick through it and it seems to be in conversation with me. I have rarely felt so intimate with a book. Though many books are better written, and it certainly has its shortcomings, it is after my heart. Often with a book, after glancing at a few pages one feels uncomfortable. It is like when one is ill and unable to find the right position in bed; one turns from side to side, props pillow on pillow or ejects a pillow. If in that state of mind I open Amiel's *Journal*, I immediately relax. My friend Amiel has an entry about cruelty to animals, and so I have included it as a note to Balu's essay. In general, I do not much like this piece by Balu – it seems artificial and overdone. It does not appear to be coming from the heart – it is too elaborate, there are too many made-up words – and so instead of having the ring of truth, it sounds like empty exaggeration . . . In many pieces of writing made-up words are not a weakness; but a subject such as this requires sincere and straightforward handling, or the reader will become irritated and hostile. I have suggested to Balu that he translate some portions of the deer hunting scenes in *Kadambari*.⁶ Birds resemble us to some extent and in one respect there is little difference between them and us – in the way we both show spontaneous tenderness for our offspring. Banbhata was able to feel this similarity in compassion through his imaginative faculty and give expression to it, as in the phrase '[one] touch of nature makes the whole world kin'.⁷

[Uncle Rabi?]

Source: MS copy at Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan; letter published in *CPB*, pp. 176–8.

1 Paul, *Rabijibani*, III, p. 289.

2 As reported from the USA by W. W. Pearson in a letter to Rabindranath Tagore, 9 Nov. 1916 [RB].

3 Balu: Balendranath Tagore (1870–99): art and literary critic; nephew of RT, son of his elder brother Birendranath. See Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India: Occidental Orientations* (Cambridge, 1994), especially pp. 230–3. Balendranath's essay, 'Pashu priti' (Love of animals), extensively revised by RT, was published in *Sadhana*, Chaitra 1300 [March–April 1894].

4 Phatik: RT's cook. On many an evening RT would sit in his boat, watching the river, when 'the venerable

- Phatik would appear and break the silence with his stentorian voice announcing dinner – a ceaseless monotony of chicken cutlets and bread-pudding' (Rathindranath Tagore, *Edges of Time*, p. 36).
- 5 On Loken Palit, see letter 6, n. 3. Henri Frederic Amiel (1821–81): Swiss philosopher and writer, who kept a journal between 1847 and his death. Published in 1883 in French, it was translated into English by Mrs Humphry Ward and published in 1889; RT had her version. The journal remained popular in Bengal in the generation after RT's, according to Nirad C. Chaudhuri (Chaudhuri to authors, 4 Dec. 1995).
- 6 *Kadambari*; a romance written in Sanskrit by the classical author Banbhattacha. In 1900, RT published an essay inspired by a new painting of a scene from *Kadambari*; the story's descriptions of a forest ashram probably influenced his conception of Shantiniketan. 'For all the floweriness of his style [Banabhattacha's] outlook has more in common with that of the 20th century than that of any other early Indian writer' (A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (London, 1954), p. 447).
- 7 Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, III. 3. 175.

20

To Indira Devi Chaudhurani (Tagore)

This wonderful letter is one of Tagore's clearest statements of his view of the nature of reality. When he met Albert Einstein many years later, he expressed similar ideas (see appendix 1). The stark contrast between his congested, social, time-bound milieu in north Calcutta and his spacious, solitary, timeless existence on the Tagore estates – physically only half a day's journey apart but in all other respects a world away – sharpened Rabindranath's sense of the dichotomy between the objective and the subjective. In Shelidah, he says here, 'it seems to me that the subdivisions of time and space are figments of my mind'.

Shelidah, [Khulna, Bangladesh]

24 June [1894]

[Bibi/Bob?]

I have been here just four days but already I have lost track of time. If I were to return to Calcutta immediately I feel I should find much of it transformed . . . It is as if I am now standing in a place outside the current of time, unconscious of the gradually altering set of the world. The fact is that here, away from Calcutta, time is quadrupled because I live in my inner world where time may be stretched or compressed and clocks do not work in the usual way. Duration is measured by intensity of feeling; the emotions of the moment seem endless. Where the outside world with its flow of incident is not constantly employed in checking on my daily activities, moments become hours and hours moments, as in a dream. And then it seems to me that the subdivisions of time and space are figments of my mind. Each atom is immeasurable and each moment infinite.

When I was very small I remember reading a Persian story about this idea of time, which I liked enormously. I think I understood, even then, something of the underlying notion. To show that time cannot be quantified a fakir put some magic water in a bathtub and invited the king to take a dip. No sooner had the king done so than he found himself in a strange country by the sea, where he experienced diverse sensations and encounters – in fact a whole lifetime of happiness and pain. He married and had many children and they died, as did his wife; he lost all his wealth; and then, while he writhed in grief, he suddenly found himself back in his palace room surrounded by his

courtiers. He began to vent his anger on the head of the fakir, but his courtiers all said, 'Maharaj, you have but dipped your head in the water and withdrawn it!'

Our lives, with all their moods, are held too within a moment. They may seem immensely long and intensely felt at the time, but as soon as we finish our dip in the world, the entire experience seems no more than a few moments in a dream. Time itself cannot be short or long – only humans call it that. These thoughts have not been prompted by an attempt to ascertain the likely arrival time of your letter – I often find myself pondering the fact that our keenest happiness and sorrow are not permanent, and each time I conclude sadly that I can give no answer to the riddle. A possible answer is that though the experience of happiness and sorrow is not permanent, its consequence is permanent. But why are we lured with all sorts of false promises to embrace these consequences? Why do we say that 'love's treasure is everlasting'? Who has given mankind the false assurance that love triumphs over death – which has led to the composition of consoling legends about Savitri and Satyavan – and so many others.¹

It was a fine day yesterday. The waterline on my side of the river, the sand spit beyond and the playfully repeating patterns of sun and cloud over the forest on the distant bank of the river struck me as gorgeously beautiful whenever I gazed through my open window. Like a dream! Why do we speak of beauty as being dreamlike? I don't know, unless it is because the sheerness of beauty requires the absence of all touch of reality – in other words that field of grain which provides food, this waterway which carries jute boats, that sandbank which generates revenue for zamindars, and all the hundred thousand other associations of this scene must be barred from consciousness before we can perceive the picture of sheer incalculable, superfluous, unadulterated joy, and call it 'dreamlike'. At other times we focus chiefly on the truth of the world, its reality, and we see beauty of other kinds. But when we concentrate on beauty itself, and neglect to assess whether it is true or not, then we call the scene dreamlike . . . Human beings often try to differentiate truth from beauty – science tends to omit beauty from truth and poetry does not value truth as beautiful. The kind of beauty that can be experienced in science is the beauty that is inseparable from truth, while the truth that is experienced in poetry is the truth that is inseparable from beauty.² For lack of space you are spared a good deal more lecturing on this occasion.

[Uncle Rabi?]

Source: MS copy at Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan; letter published in *CPB*, pp. 184–6.

¹ Savitri and Satyavan: a legend in the *Mahabharata* similar to that of Orpheus and Eurydice. Savitri married Satyavan knowing that he had only a year to live. When he died, she followed Yama, the lord of death, and eventually brought Satyavan back to life by appeasing Yama.

² See RT's exchange with Einstein in appendix I.

To Indira Devi Chaudhurani (Tagore)

Rabindranath's sojourn on the family estates fed his writing in many ways, perhaps most of all through his proximity to nature, both on water and on land. Previous letters

have tended to deal with the awesome and infinite aspects of nature, such as a storm or the night sky; this letter, by contrast, stresses the intoxicating immediacy of nature, especially at noontime.

Shahzadpur, [Rajshahi, Bangladesh]

5 September [1894]

[Bibi/Bob?]

I love it when I move into the Shahzadpur house after living on the boat for a long period. The large doors and windows let in light and air on all sides without hindrance. And when I look out my eye falls on green branches and I hear constant birdsong – the moment I step into the south verandah every pore of my brain is saturated with the fragrance of *kamini* flowers. All of a sudden I realise how hungry for space I have become and so I take my fill of it. I am sole monarch of these four large rooms and so I throw open every door and window. I feel the mood and the will to write here as nowhere else. The living essence of the outside world floats in freely in verdurous waves of light and air and sound and scent that mingle with my bewitched mind and mould it into story after story after story. The intoxication is especially strong in the afternoons. Heat, hush, solitude, birdsong – especially the cawing of crows – and languid, limitless leisure remove me from reality. I believe, though I have no proof, that the *Arabian Nights* came into being upon such sun-baked afternoons in Damascus, Samarkand and Bokhara. I can see the bunches of grapes and the wild gardens of roses, hear the melody of *bulbuls*, taste the wines of Shiraz. In the desert there is only a file of camels, an itinerant horseman or a crystal spring beneath a date palm to be seen. But in the city, below bright canopies overhanging narrow alleys in the bazaar, there sit turbanned loosely attired merchants selling melons and pomegranates, while not far away in a great palace perfumed with incense, on bolsters and kincob-covered divans within balconies, reclines Zobedia or Amina or Sufia, dressed in a gaily decorated jacket, flowing pyjamas and gold-embroidered slippers, her hubble-bubble pipe coiled at her feet and her person guarded by gorgeously liveried Abyssinians. Such a prodigiously grand and mysterious setting in such a faraway country was bound to lead to a thousand tales – credible and incredible – of the deepest hopes and fears of mankind.

Noontime in Shahzadpur is high noon for story writing. It was at this time, at this very table, I recall, that my story 'The Postmaster' took over my thoughts.¹ The light, the breeze and the movement of leaves on all sides combined and entered my writing. There are few kinds of happiness in the world more filling than the happiness of creating something in which the mind is totally immersed in its surroundings. This morning I set about writing a piece on folk literature, and I became so caught up in it that I enjoyed myself greatly.² These folk rhymes belong to an independent realm in which there are no rules and regulations, like cloud cuckoo land. Unfortunately, the mundane world always catches up and dominates this other world. And so all of a sudden, while I was writing away, officialdom irrupted in the form of my clerks, and blew away my fantasy kingdom. Sorting out the business matter took until lunchtime. It is an imbecile thing to eat to bellyful of food at midday, which stupefies one's imagination and other higher faculties. By overfilling themselves with food at midday,

Bengalis fail to drink in the moody intensity of noontime – instead they close their doors, puff away at tobacco, chomp on betel and prepare themselves for a thoroughly torpid siesta. That is how they become glistening and corpulent. But how can anywhere compare with the way in which the exhausted solitude of noontime soundlessly pervades the monotonous fields of the limitless plain of Bengal? Noontime has fascinated me since my early boyhood. In those days the second floor of our house was empty and I used to lie down alone in one of the rooms on a curved couch and feel the hot blast from outside through the open door – I spent whole days there lost in my imagination amid who knows what inarticulate fancies.³

[Uncle Rabi?]

Source: MS copy at Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan; letter published in *CPB*, pp. 224–6.

1 See letter 16. RT's play *Visarjan* (*Sacrifice*) was written on his first visit to Shahzadpur in 1889.

2 'Meyeli chhara' (Women's rhymes), *Sadhana*, Ashwin-Kartik 1301 [Sept.–Nov. 1894]; a revised and renamed version appears in *RR*, VI, p. 577.

3 See various references in *My Rem*, e.g. p. 26/*RR*, XVII, p. 272.

22

To Indira Devi Chaudhurani (Tagore)

There are frequent references to the night sky in Rabindranath's letters to his niece. Its vastness and the brilliance of the stars in the clean air of rural Bengal was certainly a spur to feelings of mysticism; but Tagore had also a lifelong interest in astronomy, dating from the time when he was a boy in the Himalayas, and his father would point out the constellations and treat Rabi to an astronomical discourse. Tagore liked to read most of the popular astronomy books of the time (see letter 41), and himself wrote about the subject a number of times. Poetic feeling and scientific curiosity coalesce in letters such as this one.

Shelidah, [Khulna, Bangladesh]
7 December [1894]

[Bibi/Bob?]

Evenings on the sandbanks these days are so magnificent they are beyond my powers of description. When I go out on the sands alone, before long Shailendra usually comes after me and talks about business matters.¹ He came yesterday. After talking about the rent roll and so on for a while, he paused for a moment – and in a flash I sensed the vastness of the universe in the silent night sky before me. Then I felt astounded to think that one ordinary human voice in my ears could drown such a sky-filling hush – where in all the silence of Creation is there a place for talk of rent rolls and other office matters of our Berahimpur zamindari? I made no response to Shailendra's comments, and he thought I had not understood him. He repeated his question and once again I said nothing, to avoid conversation. He became very puzzled and fell silent. The moment he stopped the peace of the stars descended and transformed me; and I too

found my place at the far edge of that boundless gathering of soundless celestial luminaries. All the stars have their places in infinite space, as I, for my part, have my place on this empty sandbank beside the River Padma; both they and I have our seats at the great reception known as existence.

We stayed out on the sandbanks in the moonlight until very late, then returned to the boat, lit a lamp, closed the doors, stretched ourselves out in chairs and resurrected our discussion about Berahimpur. Then we ate four *luchis* with fresh palm molasses and drank a glass of milk.² After that we had a bit of literary talk and eventually lay down to sleep.

[Uncle Rabi?]

Source: MS copy at Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan; letter published in *CPB*, p. 270.

1 On Shailendra Majumdar, see letter 18, n. 1.

2 *luchi*: a kind of bread prepared from refined flour and water; the dough, rolled flat and circular, is fried in ghee, which makes it blow up like a balloon.

23

To Indira Devi Chaudhurani (Tagore)

Although Rabindranath was fairly well read in western poetry, he was not much attracted to the novel. One looks in vain in his writings for his response to the works of the great nineteenth-century novelists. There are stray references, but there is no sustained analysis. Tolstoy, for instance, got short shrift in a letter to his niece from the estates of August 1894: 'Tried to read *Anna Karenina*. Could not go on, found it so unpleasant. I cannot understand what pleasure can be had out of such a *sickly* [the word is in English] book . . . I cannot stand for long these complicated, bizarre, and perverse goings-on.'¹

His life on the estates, so vastly different from his life in Calcutta, accentuated such feelings of revulsion. Its elemental quality, lived in direct communion with nature and the human heart, had little to do with modern western literary sensibility, though Rabindranath's power to distil it into the songs and poetry of *Gitanjali* could capture (albeit briefly) the attention of modern western readers seeking an alternative to this sensibility. This letter is a foretaste of *Gitanjali*.

Shelidah, [Khulna, Bangladesh]
12 December [1895]

[Bibi/Bob?]

The other evening an insignificant incident startled me. As I mentioned before, of late I have taken to lighting a lamp in the boat and sitting and reading till I feel sleepy. One should not seek to be alone always and everywhere, particularly in the evening, lest one falls prey to that old saw about wanting some aunt to die so that one can wallow in sorrow; and since, in the absence of a suitable aunt, one may be tempted to fall back on oneself, I prefer to take up a book. That evening I was reading a book of

critical essays in English full of contorted disputation about poetry, art, beauty and so forth. As I plodded through these artificial discussions, my weary mind seemed to have strayed into a mirage, a land where things were constructed out of words. A deadening spirit seemed to dance before me like a mocking demon. The night was far advanced, so I shut the book with a snap and flung it on the table, intending to head for bed after blowing out the lamp. But the moment I extinguished the flame, moonlight burst through the open window and flooded the boat. It was like a shock to an infatuated man. The glare from a satanic little lamp had been mocking an infinite radiance. What on earth had I been hoping to find in the empty wordiness of that book? The heavens had been waiting for me soundlessly outside all the time. Had I chanced to miss them and gone off to bed in darkness, they would not have made the slightest protest. Had I never given them a glance during my mortal existence and remained unenlightened even on my deathbed, that lamp would have triumphed. But the moon would always have been there, silent and sweetly smiling, neither concealing nor advertising her presence.²

Since then I have begun doing without the lamp in the evenings.

[Uncle Rabi?]

Source: MS copy at Rabindra Bhavan, Shantiniketan; letter published in *CPB*, pp. 346–7.

1 Quoted in Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand*, p. 603; the original letter appears in *CPB*, p. 217. RT's reaction to *Anna Karenina* was similar to the reaction of most western readers to his only long novel, *Gora*. Nevertheless, RT encouraged his children to read novels by writers such as Dickens and George Eliot.

2 Contrast RT's view of the moon in letter 12.

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