

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**TAGORE AND THE NOTION OF NATIONALISM IN POST- INDEPENDENCE INDIA:
RESHAPING THE NATION STATE**

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Abstract

Tagore, being the product of the Bengal Renaissance, was himself quite aware of the critical plight of the people around him. He was already engulfed with a clear understanding that India as a nation had ceased to be politically and culturally vigilant about the waning of her freedom. 'Brahmo Samaj', nevertheless, was propagated as a defense mechanism to reassert the heritage cultures. Tagore was duly credited for supporting the movement whereby also being assigned with an important role to play within. In his own words, "love of the country was not the characteristic of that time and the educated men then kept at arm's length both the language and thought of their native land". The sequence of actions led Tagore to introspect and validate for the true national identity which always remained his quest throughout his life.

Keywords: Nationalism, identity, nation spaces, ethics.

Brief Bio note: Dr. Nidhi Sharma is a BA, Gold Medalist; MA, Gold Medalist and a Ph.D in English Literature. She has published various research papers in national and international journals and also has presented papers in international and national conferences. She has to her credit the publication of a book entitled "Technical communication". Currently she is designated on the post of an associate professor in the department of English at SKIT, Jaipur.

"Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic Walls...

Into that heaven of freedom, my father, let my country awake." (Tagore, 1912)

Born in the uneasy times of conflicts amongst the powerful states of Europe and the ever-growing nationalistic spirit of nationhood in India, Tagore once wrote"

"The last sun of the century sets amidst the blood red clouds of the west and the whirlwind of hatred.....The naked passion of self-love of nations, in its drunken delirium of greed.....is dancing to the clash of steel and the howling verses of vengeance...The hungry self of the nation shall burst in a violence of fury from its own shameless feeding....fir it has made

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the world its food, and licking it, crunching it and swallowing it in big morsels, it swells and swells...till in the midst of its unholy feast, descends the sudden heaven piercing its heart of grossness.”

One can quite evidently trace anti-nationalistic sketches from these words. Nationalism, as the core sentiment, remains the root cause of war, aggression and death in the teachings of Rabindranath Tagore. Yet he is extensively regarded as a pivotal nationalistic figure of Bengali renaissance. Tagore straightforwardly opposed the concept of nationalism in its military or aggressive sense, popularly understood as hyper nationalism and ardently believed in the interactive dialogue prevalent amongst civilizations and societies. He incessantly promoted an inter civilization alliance of the east and the west leading to the symbiosis of the world civilization in its broader understanding of the rudimentary meaning of the word. . What irked him as an ethical humanist was the ‘moral cannibalization’ that the colonial powers resorted to on their colonies for their personal political and economic profits. It is this legacy of his, which, lies in the fact that all the three nation states namely India, Bangladesh and Srilanka owe their national anthem to him.

- In one of his letters addressed to Foss Westcott, he wrote, “Believe me, nothing would give me greater happiness than to see the people of the West and the East march in a common crusade against all that robs the human spirit of its significance. Benedict Anderson aptly defines a nation as an “imagined community”. In the similar vein, most of the social scientists also maintain that the notion of a nation is definitely” notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyze”.Admist these complexities of definitions leading to the understanding of the idea of a nation in the literature of political studies, Tagore was undoubtedly stream clear in his perspective of a nation. In his words, “A nation is a political and an economic union of people” and “ is that aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for a mechanical purpose”.For him, the “mechanical purpose” of the nation state essentially implied an instrumental rationality in its political form.

Partha Chaterjee in one of his articles titled ‘Rabindrik Nation ki’ translated as “What is Tagore’s Nation?” points out that Tagore has envisioned the ephemeral state of the nations, as creations of history nations would come and go. Tagore’s idea of nationalism emanates from his vivid portrayal of the institute of nation state. In his erudite opinion, nationalism was only “an organization of politics and commerce” that brings “harvests of wealth” by “spreading tentacles of greed, selfishness, power and prosperity”. Nationalism, as Tagore propounds further is “ not a spontaneous self expression of man as social being but rather

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a political and commercial union of a group of people in which they congregate to maximize their profit, progress and power".According to him it is "the organized self interest of people where it is least human and least spiritual". He saw nationalism as a recurrent threat to humanity because with its escalation it dampens the human morality and emotions, "obscuring his human side under the shadow of soulless organization". Hence nationalism as elaborated by him "is a great menace, it is the particular thing for years had been at the bottom of India's troubles".

Tagore also dissuaded the conception of a nation state in the following lines:

We in India, must make up our minds that we cannot borrow
other people's history and that if we stifle our own we are
committing suicide. When you borrow things that don't belong
To your life....I believe that it does India no good to compete with
Western civilization in its own field...India is no beggar of the West.

The most vivid instance of Tagore's idea of nationalism can be derived from his participation in Bengal's Swadeshi Movement. Despite his apolitical inclinations, he saw nothing wrong in the propelling of the Swadeshi Movement. Infact this movement flagged off right away from the threshold of Tagore's house with Tagore reciting the song, "Ogo maa tomaji dekhe dekhe ankhi na fire". Tagore's extensive and elaborate discourses on nation and nationalism coupled with his critique of the nation state eloquently underlines his conscious attempt to propose a societal fabric that weaves within the Indian milieu. According to him the construction of a 'samaj' (society) has no "ulterior purpose" as he elucidates:

It is a spontaneous self expression of man as a social being.
It is a natural regulation of human relationships, so that men
can develop ideals of life in cooperation with one another. It
also has a political side, but this is only for a special purpose.
It is for self preservation. (Tagore, Macmillan, 1917)

Thus the above mentioned lines clearly reflect Tagore's submission for a natural form of society for India which is completely devoid of the western hierarchies of nation and state of political nationalism. For an ideal Indian society to progress and fare better the foremost prerequisite lies in ensuring the absence of extremist identity based nationalism. Tagore as a litterateur, persistently emphasizes on the racial and religious unity of all the Indians across the races, classes and religions by shedding their narrow differences and stand above the whirlwind

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of dusty politics to unite in the constructive progress of our motherland. The following lines entitled 'Bharat Tirtha' is the testimony of this secular spirit of Rabindranath Tagore:

Come, O Aryans, come, non Aryans, Hindus and
Mussulmans-come today, O Englishmen, come, Oh come
Christians!
Come, Oh Brahmin, cleansing your
Mind join hands with all-
Come, O Downtrodden, let the
Burden of every insult be forever
Dispelled.
Make haste and come to Mother's coronation, the vessel
Auspicious is yet to be filled. (Tagore, The Indian Pilgrimage)

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