

Tagore's Idea of Nationalism

For Tagore India was not territorial but ideational. He said that I love India but my India is an Idea and not a geographical expression.

He said that the word nation is not in our language. India has never had a real sense of nationalism. Society is in the core of India's civilization and politics is in the core of western civilization and hence the importance which Europe gave to freedom, we gave to the liberation of soul. Tagore said nation ~~for us means society~~ which was relevant to humanity

Tagore said, "form yourself into a nation" means society which was relevant to humanity and "stop the encroachment of nation" means

a nation-state or the nations of the West which has -

- Self destructive tendency,
- which turns violent,
- snatches one's freedom
- spreads a homogenised universalism
- makes one selfish and exclusive

It is his complete apathy towards violence that he was so much against nationalism based on the concept of a nation-state which does not hesitate to kill in the name of sovereignty of a nation and rather goes for universal humanism and cosmopolitanism with a difference.

In fact his nationalistic zeal on one side -

① called for the acceptance of a radical

social programme as described in his essay 'Byadhi o pratikar' (The Disease and its Prevention) against the divisive forces of Caste, creed, poverty and alienation b/w the elite and the masses and thus moving towards a more abiding freedom than what the political movement could attain, and

ii.) on the other side his approach to nation and nationalism was very diff^l. He remained anti-imperialist all through his life but went against any kind of violent or narrow nationalism and spoke about inclusive nationalism which became the basis of Pt. Nehru's vision of India's future as a liberal secular tomorrow democracy

For Tagore India's unity was a social reality, not a political agenda. At the back of his participation in the Hindie Mela at the age of 14 to his renouncing the knighthood after the Jalianwala Massacre, at the age of 58 and even after that his anti-imperialist viewpoints forcefully displayed in his last stirring lecture "The Crisis in Civilization". ~~in which he mentioned the imperialist~~

Tagore undoubtedly was a powerful critic of worshipping the Nation as God and was horrified by the crimes committed by modern nation-states. Yet he loved the land that had nurtured him.

However, he simply did not want Indian patriots to imitate European nationalists. It is not without reason that Mahatma Gandhi ~~in his ob~~ lauded the poet as "an ardent nationalist".

Tagore did not reject nationalism but formed his own understanding off it by studying what was authentic in ~~so~~ his country's history.

He thought -

- i. It was essential for us to fight against social injustice rather than political freedom
- ii. not to accept violent and exclusive patriotism as our final spiritual shelter but seek refuge in humanity and
- iii. hence his motto for Vishwabharati (the University he founded in Shantiniketan) was Yatra Visvam Bhavet Eka Nidam (where the world meets in a nest)

iv. Tagore never wanted the idea of the Indian nation to supersede the idea of Indian civilization. Both Tagore and Gandhi created a moral universe and made it a part of

politics and gave a bigger lofty meaning to nationalism.

Today the new reading of nationalism by Tagore looks so relevant because of disastrous consequences of the prevalent notion of nationalism which we witnessed in the world.

- In the name of nationalism in the ~~new~~ West ethnic nationalism unfolded itself resulting ~~not~~ in two world wars.
- In India nationalism has turned into ethnic politics which is creating all kinds of problems in India.
- Nationalism is spreading terrorism

Now nationalism looks like a dark elemental unpredictable power which Tagore called Bhaugotic opo Devata. Tagore at the same time spoke loudly about:

- Living in freedom and
- Reasoning in freedom

Tagore did not ignore the state but it was not a deciding factor for him. For him state and community were complementary to each other.

Tagore's concept of nation was not nation-state nor he was thinking of a federation nations - turning everything into one homogenized universal whole. On the contrary Tagore was thinking of an alternation, a universalism which grew with its strong basis of particularism or with the help of knowledge and learning of one's own culture.

Tagore never thought that real universalism is contrary to nationalism and that they pull on opposing directions.

It ~~was~~ is a balance b/w universalism, nationalism and the traditional world that Tagore hoped to achieve in his universal nationalism or better said as universal humanism.

But Tagore, as many can think, suffered from some kind of irresoluteness. In his essay "Tatah Kim" he is criticizing the western way of thinking and using nature as a political metaphor to raise the voice of resistance against the western civilisational values but at the same time saying in his novel "Home and the World", "I do not think that it is the spirit of India to reject anything, any race and

any culture. The spirit of India has always proclaimed the
ideal of unity"