

**INTERROGATING VIGNETTES OF TAGORE'S NATIONALISM IN LITERATURE**

S.M.Basha

(Lecturer in English, Osmania College, Kurnool (AP), India)**ABSTRACT**

The paper attempts to offer insights into the facts such as that Tagore while upholding the invincible spirit of Motherland and nationalistic fervour never succumbed to the weight of narrow ideology and his religious zealotry was ever subservient to his notion of universal citizenship. Further it tries to explore the pragmatic outlook of Tagore which is quintessential to his literary arena regarding nationalism and how it did not act as an impediment to view the multihued spectrum of universal humanism resplendent of all castes, creeds, communities and countries besides questioning whether these defining parameters of pluralism and patriotism are culpable or capable of the exclusive inclusiveness of Tagore's universalism.

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Rabindranath Tagore, the darling of versatility, though acclaimed internationally for his vigorous creative prowess, his nationalistic as well as altruistic concerns are not free from scathing and discerning criticism from home and abroad. The flight of his poetic imagination, interspersed by the trajectories of nationalistic as well as universal appeal, has an undaunted sway on the reasoning faculties of his passionate readers. Tagore's pro-British attitude seeking refuge in the stark criticism that the Indian national anthem indeed is a song of felicitation for Emperor George V needs to be examined in the light of his sacrificial dénouement engulfing various facets of his life in particular anti-partition of Bengal movement and renouncing his knighthood.

During his lifetime Tagore was asked more than once about JGM being written in praise of the emperor. His reply was: "I should only insult myself if I cared to answer those who consider me of such unbounded stupidity as to sing in praise of George IV or George V as the Eternal Charioteer leading the pilgrims on their journey through countless ages of the timeless history of mankind." (Tagore and That Song, The Hindu)

After the partition of Bengal, Tagore was accused of his role and even the British watched him under the tag "Suspect No. 12 Class B." (The Post Office, Tagore, vii) Even on literary front, the purists did not spare his Bengali. To envisage the dream of 'undivided society' or 'Akhand Samaj,' obviously there is the scope for a writer in Tagore to make the nationalistic perspectives and prerogatives remain in remission. Tagore's response to '**Bande Mataram**' as a unifying national anthem and his reaction to the image of 'Durga' as 'Swadeshi-icon' may elude the comprehension of many a zealot who is sternly governed by fundamentalist temperament and narrow patriotic exuberance.

The advent of Swadeshi Movement as well as its ultimate impact was not clear to the people of Bengal as "the new epoch came in like a flood" catching them unawares. It was incomprehensible for they had time constraint even to think of what had happened or what was to happen as perceived by Bimala in Tagore's *The Home and the World*.

My sight and my mind, my hopes and my desires, became red with the passion of this new age. Though, up to this time, the walls of the home-which was the ultimate world to my mind-remained unbroken, yet I stood liking into the distance, and I heard a voice from the far horizon, whose meaning was not perfectly clear to me, but whose call went straight to my heart. (22-23)

Bimala's resolve to burn all her foreign clothes and her firm assertion made to her husband that they should get rid of Miss Gilby, a European, form the crux of her Swadeshi excitement. She even dared not to forget her husband when he sent the young boy out of the house who had insulted Miss Gilby on her way to Church. The young boy Noren was also fired up with 'Swadeshi' as he would ignore his daily bath and food for it. Evidently to Nikhil Bande Mataram, (Hail Mother!) the opening words of a song by Bankim Chatterjee, the famous Bengali novelist, did not sound to be a national cry, the essence of national anthem. However, it is conspicuous that Nikhil failed to approve of the spirit of Bande Mataram and he was not against the 'Swadeshi.'

Sandip Babu's Swadeshi preachings metamorphosed Bimala from 'the lady of the Rajah's house' to the lone representative of Bengal's womanhood. The change was quite perceptible in Bimala who had been sceptical of Sandip Babu's commitment to Swadeshi as she could see him a person, imposing on her husband, with love for comforts and without an ascetic inclination. Nikhil also accused him of his irresistible attraction for foreign medicine as seen from his three shelves of sitting room full of it. However, Sandip Babu's fiery speeches arrested Bimala's attention and her growing fascination for Sandip Babu led her to self-introspection: "Would Sandip Babu find the Shakti of the Motherland manifest in me? Or would he simply take me to be an ordinary, domestic woman?" (31) Further her just wrath for the country's sake in her reply to Sandip Babu on righteousness heralds the beginning of incarnation.

I have anger. I would be angry for my country's sake. If necessary, I would smite and slay to avenge her insults. I have my



desire to be fascinated, and fascination must be supplied to me in bodily shape by my country. She must have some visible symbol casting its spell upon my mind. I would make my country a Person, and call her Mother, Goddess, Durga, - for whom I would redden the earth with sacrificial offerings. (39)

When Sandip Babu addressed Bimala as the beautiful spirit of fire, Bimala tried to interpret as it might be 'She whom he worshipped with his Bande Mataram' or it might be 'the womanhood of his country' or it might be 'his representative,' herself. Nikhil believed that they lacked in self-government and surely they needed some-body's policing. This further strengthens Bimala's hero worship of Sandip Babu which made her cancel her personal trip to the Hills for the 'country's cause.' However, Sandip's tyrannical attitude in patriotism is evident when he justifies a person's greed in attempting to break through the walls that are built by another person's greed. One uses power and another craft and these are the stark realities of life. He discovered that Bimala too had discovered her own affinity towards him and if he failed to win he would remain a coward. Ultimately he remains successful which may be construed as his realistic failure.

Sandip Babu is worldly while Nikhil's views are based on religion. The conflict between realism and idealism is presented as the theme of the novel and Bimala is seen oscillating between the home and the world. Bimala's adoration for Sandip makes her commit the theft from Nikhil's safe but Nikhil forgives her deception and emerges as a true lover. During Swadeshi riots in Bengal, Sandip Babu runs away from the city true to his colour and strength of character while Nikhil tries to take charge of the situation and ultimately meets his tragic end.

Tagore's undaunted belief in the omnipotent, ultimate, ever inspiring 'arbiter' of life who is also his caring Mother or caressing Father may be construed as the destiny maker as reflected in his entire literary gamut. Similar use of symbolism and imagery is seen in *Gora* which has nationalistic approach as its main thematic concern. The image of Bengal or India is represented in terms of a woman or a Goddess. Anandamoyi is the focal image, embodiment of motherhood, caressing power that

the country enjoys through its breadth and length. Tagore's "passionate cry for the far-away, for the Great Beyond" forming the crux of his writings, reveals a transitory mode of nationalism towards the eternal journey through transcultural and multicultural itineraries. However, his vehement convictions in complete breach with the Indian traditionalism, his notion of the world as a definite variant in terms of integrating and juxtaposing force in the embedded matrix of Eastern and Western aesthetics, are significant.

The fruition of idea of nationalism may be traced back to the upsurging religious and political movements of his days but not without the underlying current of the demand for integration of all the major religions of the world viz. Hinduism, Christianity and Islam into one fold that of his universalism. Sandip Babu's frank confession that 'though Mussulmans are to be proclaimed as our brethren, they would not wholly be brought to our side,' is set aside by Nikhil's objection that 'if the idea of a United India is a true one, Mussulmans are a necessary part of it.' (158) Tagore says, "For men to come near to one another and yet to continue to ignore the claims of humanity is a sure process of suicide. We are waiting for the time then the spirit of the age will be incarnated in a complete human truth and the meeting men will be translated into the unity of man." (The Voice of Humanity, Rabindranath Tagore and Universal Humanism, 34)

The synthesis, setting aside 'sentimental cosmopolitanism,' craving for 'united hearts,' 'deepest bonds of love'- all in the spirit of oneness of human beings-in 'Vasudaika Kutumbam' is symbolic of India's journey towards accommodating numerous races. Tagore's firm belief that "any truth or culture which is wholly dissociated from the universal is not true at all" is a befitting definition of universalism. The clarion call for viewing all people not as mere "fractional groups of nationality" is suggestive that his vision never suffered from "myopic malaise of narrow chauvinism." Saumyendranath Tagore rightly pointed out that during Swadeshi and noncooperation movements, Tagore 'never for once worshipped in the temple of sectarian nationalism,' true to the spirit of internationalism.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. S. M. Basha is an Associate Professor of English at Osmania Degree & P.G. College (Autonomous), Kurnool. He did his MA and PhD at Sri Krishandevaraya University, Anantapur, and PGDTE at CIEFL (now known as EFLU), Hyderabad, and passed his TKT of Cambridge University. He coedited two books "Transculturalism: A Critique," and "Language Teaching and Literary Studies: Approaches and Perspectives." He published several research papers and presented many papers at national and international seminars. He is a research guide.
