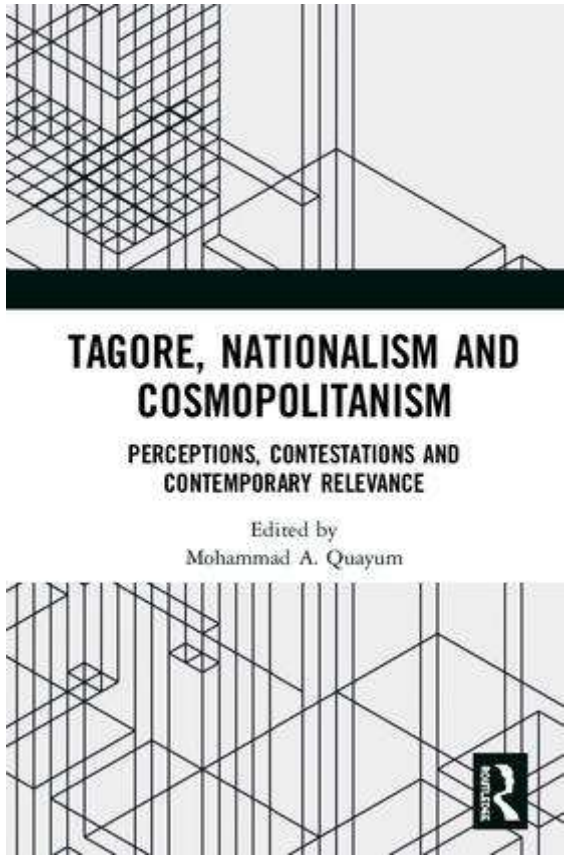
Mohammad A. Quayum, ed. *Tagore, Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism: Perceptions, Contestations and Contemporary Relevance*. London, New York: Routledge, 2020. 288 pp. ISBN 978-0-367-21872-0.



There is never an end to Tagore. The present volume under review, *Tagore, Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism: Perceptions, Contestations and Contemporary Relevance,* clearly testifies to this statement. In his detailed introduction, the editor Mohammad A. Quayum (who already has four volumes of Tagore books to his credit, including criticism and translations) clearly mentions about the aim, scope and structure of the book that it "intends to provide a fresh body of interpretation and new insights into Tagore's vision of the contrasting and yet intersecting ideas of nationalism (*Jatiyotabad*) and cosmopolitanism (*Biswajibon*) and the ambiguities and contestations associated with them" (19). In trying to seek new insights from Tagore scholars from around the world, the fourteen chapters in this anthology

are written both by native and non-native speakers of the Bengali language from countries like Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Canada, UK and the USA, who also hail from different academic disciplines such as literary-cultural studies, history and philosophy.

The primary aim of the book is to analyse different responses to Tagore's three famous lectures on nationalism delivered in Japan and the United States in the early years of the twentieth century and later compiled in the book *Nationalism* (1917), but it also deals with other literary genres such as poetry, short fiction, travel narratives, cinematic adaptations etc. Critics generally agree that Tagore was firmly opposed to nationalism as defined in the Western sense of the term and favoured a cosmopolitan worldview instead. But it is unwise to fall into the trap of such generalised observations. Since Tagore's perspectives on patriotism and cosmopolitanism were always not consistent and often wrought by paradoxes and ambiguities, the subject has been dealt with by the scholars from multifarious perspectives.

Comprising of eight chapters in Section I, the first one entitled "The Antinomies of Nationalism and Rabindranath Tagore" by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya tells us that "we have to recognise three problems that probably hamper the current discourse on the subject" (33). The first is that Tagore's thoughts on nationalism from the 1890s to 1941 evolved and changed considerably. The second problem is that many commentators "have cast Tagore's ideas about nationalism into a stereotype of "internationalism" (33), and thirdly, since only one-tenth of his political writings are available in English, "the textual study of Tagore's political writings proves to be insufficient without familiarity with the context in which he wrote, including obscure journalistic writings in those times" (34). Bhattacharya then discusses in detail the three stages in Tagore's approach to nationalism, first between 1890 and 1904, the second between 1904 to 1907 and the third roughly from 1907 to 1916. He reminds us not to forget that his critique of nationalism in 1917 was one of the several phases of his intellectual life. Mentioning his last public statement in 1941 – "Crisis in Civilization" – he states that perhaps we can surmise that Tagore "postulated the resolution of the antinomies of nationalism in a philosophy of humanist universalism" (35).

Continuing in an almost similar line of argument, Serajul Islam Choudhury succinctly begins his chapter by telling us that though Tagore "detested Nationalism… yet it is not untrue that he himself was, in his own characteristic way, an eminent nationalist" (50). This is because he was "not speaking of nationalism per se but of Nationalism written with a capital N – and also of the Nation – spelt in the same manner" (50). Mentioning several Bengali essays where Tagore expresses his trust in religion as the unifying agent in the diversity of India, Choudhury also points out how Tagore lend unequivocal support to the nationalist cause when he spoke in two public meetings of condemnation and

protest. Citing instances from his much-discussed novel *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World), he opines that "Tagore's presentation of the nationalist non-cooperation movement is incomplete insofar as the other side of the picture, namely, British brutality, remains unrepresented" (55). He also mentions that one of the weaknesses of his nationalism lectures lies in their failure to "give proper attention to the anti-imperialist struggle in India and other colonised countries" (58). The author also draws our attention to the fact that though Tagore differed from Gandhi in his political views, both of them believed that India was a single nation and the bond of its unity was spiritual.

Differing from Professor Choudhury's viewpoint, Mohammad A. Quayum argues that Tagore was opposed to the idea of the nation and he was "even more fiercely opposed to India joining the bandwagon of nationalism" as it would "compromise India's history and identity as a culture and bring it under the shadow of the West" (74). In his chapter he further compares Tagore's vision of nationalism not only with Mahatma Gandhi but with several postcolonial critics including Ernst Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Tom Nairn and Leela Gandhi. He concludes how Tagore's point of view is equally applicable today in the growing violence and political turbulence in many countries across the world. In Chapter Four, "Visva-Bharati: Tagore's Response to Aggressive Nationalism?," Kathleen M. O'Connell explores the ways in which Tagore's educational theory and practice in Santiniketan and Sriniketan were shaped by his maturing ideas of nationalism over a period of time, especially during the *Swadeshi* movement between 1903 and 1908, and Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement of the 1920s. She concludes by stating that "as Tagore broadened his own political, cultural and aesthetic outlook through his European and Asian travels along with the experience of World War I, he also broadened his paradigm of Visva-Bharati to counter a paradigm of aggressive nationalism, constructing an open-ended educational idiom that would provide the students with a creative identity that was Indian yet had sufficient scope and resilience to connect with other races and cultures on a global level" (98).

Dividing her essay into several sections, Christine Marsh examines different issues regarding Tagore's ideas of social reform especially via rural reconstruction and progressive education based on the idea of self-reliance. She writes about Tagore's interactions with Mahatma Gandhi, Patrick Geddes, Leonard Elmhirst and how the ideas inculcated by these three people can be useful even today in the "diverse network of local economies" (122) or in other words, the contemporary world. In quite a different tone, Narasingha P. Sil begins his chapter by stating that "Rabindranath Tagore's genuine patriotic and cosmopolitan sentiments, somewhat mutually incompatible, conflict with his personal views on modernism, industrialism, and, above all, nationalism" (126). According to him, Tagore believes that the nation-state is "coercive at home and predatory in the world" (130). Believing that Tagore misreads both Indian and

English history in his nationalist critique, Sil states that he "appears to be oblivious to the characteristic features of the nation-state" (135). However, this drawback of his imagination does not devalue his cosmopolitan outlook.

The following two chapters focus primarily on cosmopolitanism. Satish C. Aikant believes that Tagore's cosmopolitanism shapes itself from the vision of human unity enshrined in the ancient Indian texts, the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. He "never advocated cultural exclusivity and cautioned that rejection of the West in favour of an indigenous Indian tradition was not only limiting in itself, but it could also easily turn into hostility to other influences from abroad" (147). After briefly discussing the two novels *Ghare Baire* and *Gora*, Aikant likens Tagore's worldview of syncretism as found in Kabir and the Bauls, the mystic minstrels of Bengal. On a totally different trajectory, Bindu Puri in "For Love of Country: Debating Martha Nussbaum on Cosmopolitanism in Tagore" argues that Tagore's primary allegiance lay in individual freedom and this led him to reject all kinds of organised collectives. Beginning her argument she feels that Nussbaum's conclusion (derived largely from the reading of *Ghare Baire* to the exclusion of all else written by Tagore) that Tagore rejects nationalism and ethnocentricism might seem justified, but she categorically states that "the idea that Tagore embraces a cosmopolitanism derived from ideas of universal reason seems philosophically misguided" (157). Puri develops her argument in three sections. The first looks at *Ghare Baire* as an expression of Tagore's position on the relationship between pre-modern India and the world. The second discusses Tagore's arguments against nationalism in several of his works, and the third evaluates "the merits of Nussbaum's selective appropriation of Tagore's writing" (158).

The second section comprising six chapters examine the representation of nationalism and cosmopolitanism in different genres of Tagore's writing. In the ninth chapter Shanta Acharya focuses on Tagore's "lectures on Nationalism and his poetry, both shaped by his unique personal experiences" (177). Though exhaustive, the study would have read better if the long quotations from the essays on *Nationalism* and some poems from *Gitanjali* could be shortened and some more critical analysis added instead. The next two chapters focus on Tagore's short stories. In "'Hungry Stone': Colonial Uncanny and the Return of the Repressed," Dipankar Roy reads the short story in a completely different light from the usual gothic narrative it is assumed to be. Beginning with general observations on Tagore's response to "nationalism" (where he in a letter dated 8 March 1921 defined it as a *bhougolik apadevata*, a territorial demon), through discussions of some of his Bengali essays like "Swadeshi Samaj" which makes it clear that Tagore "was trying to formulate his own theories of a nation-building project, the ideal kind of national self and the like"(201), Roy goes on to analyse the story "Hungry Stone" written in 1895. The crux of his argument is that "this story is a literary manifestation of an important evidence of a significant *aporia* of the nationalist discourse – namely, the repression of the country's Muslim past"

(204). By applying Freud's theory of "the uncanny," the story is not just another one of the "fantastic" but "an allegory" of the "silences" in the project of "narrating the nation." It is well and truly about the "silences" of the nationalist historiography and the "forgotten double" of the history of our nation" (204). In the following chapter Lalita Pandit Hogan discusses three short stories, namely, "Ghat's Story"(1884), "Inheritance" (1892) and "Hungry Stone" (1895). She develops her theory of studying nationalism by introducing Tagore's concept of the three birthplaces as articulated by him in his article "Manusher Dharma." Though her introduction of the concepts of *entitlement*, *possibility* and *compassion* which, in her view, forms the basis of the ideologies of nationalism and cosmopolitanism is interesting, the essay suffers from several typographical errors that hinder its smooth reading.

In Chapter Twelve, Anindya Bhattacharya provides a close reading of two of Tagore's travelogues, *Japan-Jatri* (Traveller to Japan, 1919) and *Parasya Jatri* (Traveller to Persia, 1932) along with his English speeches and messages composed during these travels and tries to unfurl the issues of nationalism and cosmopolitanism latent within them. The subjective point of view comes out also from both the titles where it is Tagore as *jatri* (traveller), a *tirthayatri* or a pilgrim. With the help of Hegelian dialectics, Said's Orientalist discourse and Quizano's theoretical views, the scholar shows how Tagore brings forth two different cultural constructs of two ancient civilisations yet both of which could be brought under the rubric of Asian nationalism. He states, "Tagore forces the readers to rethink the categories of nationalism, imperialism, political Islam and, above all, representation of other cultures" (238).

According to Saurav Dasthakur, "Nature was a vital component in Tagore's construct of the *swadeshi samaj* and its "recapture" was a precondition for recovery of the lost Indian subjectivity" (258) and this marked his departure from the dominant Enlightenment epistemology of secular rationality. Thus in the next chapter entitled "On Music and Memory: Rabindranath Tagore's Songs of Nature in the Age of Nationalism" we are shown how Tagore critiques Eurocentric notions of history and provides alternative Indian concepts where both "music and nature, in his scheme of things, awaken in the colonial subject memories of a lost harmony, both historical and supra-historical" (259). Citing examples from several song-texts he tries to show how together they form a single discourse and imaginatively reconstruct an ideal order.

Cinematic adaptations often become problematic as the film director often digresses from the original text and offers his own interpretations of it. In the final chapter Srimati Mukherjee investigates the cinematic adaptations of two of Tagore's novels, namely Satyajit Ray's *Ghare Baire/The Home and the World* (1984) and Bappaditya Bandyopadhyay's *Elar Char Adhyay* (2012), both dramatising Tagore's focus on the charisma of such personalities who espouse nationalism. They also show how Tagore brings forth his beliefs of true nationalism and not

those propounded by the false protagonists in both the texts. In *Ghare Baire*, Satyajit Ray very artistically contrasts and juxtaposes the firebrand Sandip who works for self-interest with Nikhilesh who comments on nationalism to be a *nesha* (addiction) and who as a *zamindar* is more concerned about his impoverished peasants through different kinds of visual shots. Bappaditya Bandyopadhyay also tries to bring out the striking contradictions in the nationalist ideas of Indranath in *Elar Char Adhyay* where Ela refers to him as a "*khub boro biplabi*" – a great revolutionary. Mukherjee also draws our attention to the fact that this latter director's "representation of Indranath as he expands on his 'theory' or 'formula' about love, marriage and nation to Ela is reminiscent of a number of statements in Tagore's essay "Nationalism in India" in his 1917 collection *Nationalism* (274).

This anthology therefore provides refreshing ideas of studying Tagore's notions of nationalism and cosmopolitanism (subjects that changed, evolved and matured right from the 1890s to 1941), more than a century later by academics located all across the globe and the new ways through which they have pondered on their significance even today are interesting. As the editor wishes, these new discourses will "contribute to the promotion of harmony, camaraderie and peace globally" (26) and surely they will.

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