

De-familiarising Nationalist Discourses: Performative Ironies of the Normative Indian Episteme

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Abstract

The present excursus attempts a deconstructive reading of the foundational texts of normative Indian nationalism and problematises them and their epistemic plexus through the critical trajectories of Homi K. Bhabha and Partha Chatterjee. Nationalism still remains a primary signifier in academic debates and in works like *The Nation and its Fragments* and *Nationalist Thoughts and the Colonial World*, Chatterjee challenges the assumption that nationalism in Asia and Africa is a derivative version of pre-given European nationalist *a priori*s. For Chatterjee, Asian and African nationalism was based on difference and not on derivation and the present essay addresses this differentiability, this dynamics of performative operativity of Indian nationalism with specific references to textual episteme of foundational thinkers such as Tagore, Gandhi, Vivekananda and Jawaharlal Nehru. We interrogate the normative cognitivities of these foundational thinkers by pitting them against the radical conceptualisation of DissemiNation of Homi K. Bhabha. We argue that while the foundational texts of Indian nationalism did not imitate the epistemic structures of the West they ended up in offering only mythic abstractions and religious normativities that surely fail to betray any proud deliberative encounter with “the historic and objective realities” of India.

Keywords

Normative, nationalism, derivative, dissemination, foundational texts, deconstruction

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.

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The hungry self of the Nation shall burst in a violence of
fury from its own shameless feeding.
For it has made the world its food,
And licking it, crunching it, and swallowing it in big morsels
(Tagore, qtd. in Quayum 20)

Proper to every appearing thing of each perceptual phase is
a new empty horizon, a new system of determinable
indeterminacy, a new system of progressive tendencies with
corresponding possibilities of entering into determinately
ordered systems of possible appearances. (Hughes 12)

The present article seeks to engage with the foundational texts of normative Indian nationalism only to problematise them and their resultant theoretic trajectories through critical interventions as exemplified by Bhabha and Partha Chatterjee. Nationalism continues to haunt academic imagination or academic debates and in *The Nation and its Fragments* which is a fitting sequel to his *Nationalist Thoughts and the Colonial World*, Chatterjee argues not with Benedict Anderson's basic premise about the essentially invented nature of national identities but with the very assumption that nationalism in Asia and Africa does nothing more than follow forms which were earlier established in Europe. If, Chatterjee asks, the rest of the world had no choice but to follow Europe, what was left for it to imagine? If this were the case then "even our imaginations remain forever colonised" (Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* 5) – a proposition Chatterjee wholeheartedly rejects. In Chatterjee's view Asian and African nationalism was based on difference and not on derivation and the present essay addresses this differentiability, this dynamics of performative operativity of Indian nationalism with specific references to textual epistemes of foundational thinkers such as Gandhi, Tagore, Vivekananda and Jawaharlal Nehru. We have in the course of the essay attempted a deconstructive intervention into the normative cognitivities of these foundational thinkers by pitting them against the radical conceptualisation of DissemiNation of Homi K. Bhabha. We argue that while the foundational texts of Indian nationalism as represented by the likes of Tagore, Gandhi, Vivekananda and Nehru did not imitate the epistemic structures of the West they ended up in offering only mythic abstractions and religious normativities that surely fail to betray any proud deliberative encounter with "the historic and objective realities" (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* 172) of India. Such a concrete deliberation or theorisation was a vision that the people of a postcolonial nation like India needed in order to make their struggle seem more grounded and concrete rather than mythical and abstruse.

Nation as the Oppressive Desiring Machine and Tagore's Messianicity

Among the texts enabling us to collectively view India as a “natural unified whole,” it is firstly Tagore’s texts that have invited maximum ironical re-readings. What becomes arrestingly evident while one is posing a critico-deliberative encounter with Tagore’s writings or just reading them for getting an “unproblematic aesthetic pleasure” is the realisation that it is not the collectively shared view of the nation as a “politically gained,” “tangentially arrested” “extensity” (Hughes 25) in space and time – faintly matching the unified shape that the euphoria of historic post-colonisation had thrust on it – that Tagore’s writing ends up offering. If on the one hand, instead of lending aesthetic touches to unified images of India that political rhetoric stands fraught with, it is the “natural cosmopolitanity” of India that Tagore ends up offering in his “Bharat Tirtha,”⁴ on the other, it is the “apocalyptic world-devouring potencies” of nation that clearly stand out in his “Last Sun of the Century,” the poem quoted at the beginning of the essay. It was an expression of the apprehension of nation being an oppressive “desiring machine” (Buchanan 38) intent upon pushing the world to the brink of disaster. Moreover, it is not what we may call an admirable degree of respite from the unbridled nation “negating aestheticism” (Mundt 36) of his previous works that Tagore’s oft-quoted definition⁴ of nation, as articulated in the quoted lines from his poem “The Sunset of the Century,” offers. Neither does it betray any “contextualized urgency” – we cannot forget that he was writing when the whole Indian nation was about to rise collectively for effecting both historic and epistemic rupture with the colonial times in which it was situated – on Tagore’s part to have his nation negating philosophy overtaken by, and get tamely assimilated within the popular paradigms of rabid nationalism. The popular understanding viewed nation as a manifestation of some divine ordination. Rather in all its deceptive clarity, Tagore’s definition generates unremitting ambivalence. It is not merely that “political and economic unity of people” (Das 421), the stuff that nations are made up of, that stands de-naturalised and drained of its potentialities in Tagore’s definition of nation; rather such collectivities, necessary for imposing some kind of cartographic certainty on the “fluidic indeterminacy” and “nomadic elusivity” of hinterlands comes across as posing an ominous threat to what Tagore puts forward as putative for both the creation and sustenance of a nation and also for its relegation to the background while one chooses to stage an encounter with alterity, “the spirit of transnational cosmopolitanism”:

... here is India, of about fifty centuries at least, who tried to live peacefully and think deeply, the India devoid of all politics, the India of no

⁴ See Tagore’s *Sanchiyata* 506.

nations, whose one ambition has been to know this world as of soul, to live here every moment of her life in the meek spirit of adoration, in the glad consciousness of an eternal and personal relationship with it. (Qtd. in Das 420)

Interestingly, it is the unprovoked “messianicity” (Sanders 2002) of Tagore’s writing that works as an ally of his cosmopolitanism. It, in fact, deprecatingly marginalises the normative role that politics and history – in particular the history made up of dialectical encounters – plays in nation formation. In other words, if on the one hand, Tagore’s messianicity enables him to view nation as an embodiment of, or metaphoric complementation of, the “Hegelian absolute” (Kujman 2009, 21), where innate contradictions and dualisms stand reconciled, on the other it holds him back from posing a deliberative encounter with that committed cartographic intent. One may view this intent as inscribed within, and reflected by, the quasi-epistemological and strategic dualisms of the erudite “mimic men” (Naipaul 2001). These dualisms both enforced the geo-political boundaries and enabled the nation to come to terms with its limits while prompting it to stage an encounter with the “alterity” or “otherness” of the civilisations lying outside its self-imposed boundaries:

For when there is duality, then one smells *another*, one sees *another*, one hears *another*, one speaks to *another*, one thinks of *another*, one knows *another*. But when everything has become the Self, then what should one smell and through what, what should one see and through what, what should one hear and through what, what should one speak and through what, what should one think and through what, what should one know and through what? Through what should One know That owing to which all this is known – through what, my dear, should one know the Knower? (Nikhilananda 131)

Nikhilananda here addresses all of us or rather all concerned minds. What, one teases out from the phrase often used by Tagore, “piercing the veil” (Chakrabarty 163) is Tagore’s messianicity. This happens to be the phrase that Tagore copiously used to indicate his commitment to transcendental concerns and the non-negotiable distance he maintained from the “ontic-ontology” (Heidegger 194) of his nation. In other words, we argue, it was Tagore’s messianicity that perhaps stood simultaneously with the distinct performativity of nation’s daily existence and the possibilities that it went on to rather randomly trigger off. The possibilities were those that enabled the nation to realise that its daily unfolding was in fact historically mediated to doggedly pursue a differential, “rhizomic” (Deleuze 14) post-colonial trajectory. It was, indeed, those that made the people of the nation sense that these differentialities had some kind of “unproblematized alliance” with the geo-

political locales from which they grew and in which they were embedded. If on the one hand, this recurrent thematic used by Tagore in his writings about nation as well as those wanting to stress the problematic relationship he had with his nation's ontopology, communicated the stance of "condescending dislike" he maintained towards "economic and political realities of nation" – given that one had to first pierce the veil, "the substratal disguises of the eco-political sphere," the banal everyday matters of nation, to arrive at that "Tagoresque transcendental alterity" that nation as per Tagore was meant to both embody and reflect – on the other, it conveyed what he thought nation to be apart from being a metaphor for the final stage of the dialectical march (Das 37). Nation for Tagore stood as a void, with a kernel that the commentators of Tagore's work sometime referred to as the "inner sanctum," a vapory, misty and ethereal complementary unit of Tagore's verses. Perhaps this attention to praxis at the cost of empty mythologisation of nationalism makes Tagore such a pioneering thinker, different from other conventional scholars of India.

We hear about Europeans who came to India with the feelings of devotion toward her, having been attracted by our scriptures or by the character or the words of some of our holy men... but they returned empty-handed... their sense of devotion waning over time and discarded in the end. They could not pierce the veil of poverty and incompleteness in the country as a whole to see what they had read about the scriptures or what they had seen in the characters of holy men. (Chakrabarty 150)

In this sense, it was Tagore's messianicity that stood as an accomplice of Western biases. In other words, it betrayed mysterious concomitance with the limitations that the Westerners displayed while staging an encounter with India. If the Western gaze stood arrested by the surface reality of this nation, the duplicitous sights of poverty and incompleteness that shrouded what is often claimed to be its "scriptural core," it was Tagore's messianicity that endorsed and enabled the "act of seeing that transcended the objective and historical vision" (Chakrabarty 172). In fact, it was this transcending, messianic stance of Tagore that prompted him to avert his gaze from what had a paralyzing effect on Westerners, the pitiable sights of poverty and incompleteness that India offered to its visitors. A quasi-conscious act of Tagore as it was, it announced its presence in the form of a cloying fascination for what stood for him as "channels of release" from the unrelenting poverty and gloom of his surroundings. These were the images of the goddesses *Laxmi* and *Durga* that had the ironic potency to make the deplorable political and economic realities of India both inconsequential and redundant. The next section will address the Gandhian perspective of the Indian nation which though a little different from

the Tagorean taxonomy of nationalist ideas, yet shares many of its essentialist standpoints.

Gandhi and the Mythification of Nation

It was Tagore's "act of seeing" that received what may seem to be a prominent yet to an extent both implicit and unintentionally ironic endorsement when G.N. Devy in his book *After Amnesia* attempted to convey that if there was anything that could be held accountable for the "mis-representation" of nation in texts in general it was our collective inclination – or more precisely that of the writers of these texts – to work with cultural amnesia:

The term India may be valid in the pages of an atlas, but as a cultural label it is hopelessly inadequate and simplistic. A product of colonial historiography, the term brings with it a politically colored self image and the suggestion of cultural amnesia. (Devy 4)

Though it was not really Tagore's version of "transnational cosmopolitanism" that Gandhian prose ended up yielding while persuading us to partake of what it had admirably whipped up, the vision of India as "a single unified whole eliding disruption" (Das 89), it too betrayed a clear affinity for religio-spiritual imageries. These imageries withdrew one from what the objective vision was meant to fish out with a therapeutic and ameliorative intent, the sights of pain and suffering, that stultifying gloominess of colonised existence, which Conrad had poignantly captured in his *Heart of Darkness* – he was almost objective when it came to displaying the sufferings of the Africans – regardless that some critics had accused the former of nurturing Eurocentric biases. No doubt, the uncompromising rhetoricity of Gandhian writings as it stirred dormant nationalist sensibilities stood in sharp contrast with the kind of heightened intellectual grappling with nation that Tagore had exhibited in his texts. But then, it also betrayed its willingness to bring about a "mythic unification" of India:

Friends have repeatedly challenged me to define independence. At the risk of repetition, I must say that independence of my dream means *Ramrajya* i.e., the kingdom of God on earth. I do not know it will be like in Heaven ... I have no desire to know the distant scene. If the present is attractive enough, the future cannot be very unlike. (Gandhi, *Political and National Life and Affairs* 70)

While Tagore, with his cloying adherence to the images of the goddesses *Laxmi* and *Durga*, was able to "home" his intellect within what we sometimes quite imaginatively foreground as the profoundly sacral, almost hymnic, "inner core" of our nation, and check his liberatory transnational cosmopolitan drive from

getting out of the bounds of what stood then as the “recognizable indigenous contextualized episteme” (Das 113) of his times, it was Gandhi’s venerable reiteration of the image of *Ramrajya* that enabled him to fashion what prevailed then as his distinctive brand of “political asceticism” that the colonisers had found hard to refute. Moreover, it was the image of *Ramrajya* (mythical utopia) that Gandhi had seemingly chosen to supplement what his rhetorical outburst on nation brought forth. It was a reminder that nation was a void that needed to be filled up with a vertiginous brigade of metaphors, the carriers of people’s emotion during crucial historic moments of decolonisation, an idea which is also corroborated by someone like Aurobindo who subscribed to a different political philosophy compared to Gandhi:

If nation were an artificial product which could be made, then it might be possible for one nation to make another. But a nation cannot be made – it is an organism, which grows under the stress of a principle of life within... A nation is, indeed, the outward expression of a community of sentiment, whether it be the sentiment of a common blood or the sentiment of a common religion or the sentiment of common interest or any or all of these sentiments combined. (Aurobindo 367)

Though Tagore’s writing seemed well fed with poetic embellishments and Gandhian prose was lean and straight cut to an extent that it seemed to convey his religio-spiritual asceticism while rendering himself both as an unyielding enigma, and a visible counterpoint of the material exploits that colonialism stood tantamount to, they collectively strove to express their similar viewpoints imbued in religio-spiritual imageries. Surprisingly, it was the Tagorean religio-spiritual sentiments that Gandhian prose re-iterated. However, it was not a kind of “reiteration” (Hobson and Hobson 106) that betrayed the extent to which Gandhian prose was haunted by Tagore’s: “My patriotism is subservient to my religion... I believe in human nature... We must conquer freedom for all humanity... I am convinced that God will one day ask us only what we are and what we do, and not the names of our being and doing.” For Gandhi, country or nation was in fact secondary. But then, the impact that religion had on Gandhi’s writing was in a sense paradoxically transformative and to an extent ambivalent as in the case of Tagore. In fact, it was religion that stood for Gandhi as the seat of that moral and spiritual impetus, which he ended up displaying while combating the hegemonic West with concepts like *satyagraha* and *ahimsa*. These were the concepts that stood symbolic of the differential engagement that Gandhi ended up having with what stood for him as the forces enabling his unique brand of agency. In fact, Gandhi had some sort of overtly serene and gentle dialogic relationship with religion. He attempted not to problematise the dominant religious doxas of his time. It was a relationship that

subsequently fructified into a kind of transformatory politics that Gandhi had both preached and practiced.

It will be interesting to observe at this stage that according to Gandhi “*Mahabharata* had demonstrated the futility of violence” (Srinivas 56). This not only seemed intriguing in the view of the “strenuous efforts made by *Krishna* to persuade *Arjuna* to pick up the forsaken *Gandiva*, and go into battle against his cousins, the Kaurava” (Srinivas 56), but was equally indicative of that reducto-positivist treatment that Gandhi had subjected an elusive text like *Mahabharata* to. In this sense, it also spoke of that relatively tranquil engagement which Gandhi had with religion, though Gandhi had revealed himself to be a heterodox when it came to addressing issues of untouchability. It was indeed Gandhian politics then that, while reconfiguring the diverse populace of India into a tight-fisted collectivity against the hegemonic West, stood symbolic of the degree to which Gandhi’s complimentary engagement with religion had granted his political vision the serenity of those *ashrams* that Gandhi had gone on to establish in different corners of the world. But then, the engagement that Gandhi had with religion did not enable him to radically vary from the way Tagore had used religion. Though Tagore had subjected religion to a paradoxical treatment, it did figure in his writing to an extent as an “ultimate category of subsumption” (Das 36). It was a point of culmination for all sorts of struggles and conflicts, including the ones directed at achieving freedom from colonial rule. No doubt, it was Tagore’s urgency to meet the demands of the context he was situated in alongside his cognisance of being interpellated by his colonised positionality that made him at times come to terms with theology and spirituality as a cornucopia of reconciliatory potencies, as a site containing answers for everything. But then, this also made him compromise with what people of India wanted to cull from quasi-philosophical literary narratives during their struggle against the colonial powers. What they wished to cull was indeed an “objective and historical vision” (Chakrabarty 172) of nation alongside liberal doses of exhortation to gain freedom from colonial rule and allegorical legitimisation of the ongoing collective struggle for keeping those “pedagogic socio-cultural differentialities” (Deleuze 119) constitutive of a nation’s ontology.

It was a vision that the people of the nation needed in order to make their struggle seem grounded and concrete rather than mythical and abstruse. It was in fact this compromise which in its manifold *avatars* tainted or – as one reluctant to speak for the purity of writings in general might say – became “performatively agile” (Deleuze 78) in the writings of Gandhi, as it went on to describe the nation not in terms of what we may call “geo-political and historical solidities” (Srinivas 37), but in terms of those mythic abstractions that Tagore’s imagination of nation was concomitant with. Though Gandhi did not mimic Tagore’s transnational cosmopolitanism, in the former’s writings one

rarely got the view of nation as an “extensity” pinned to the objective wall of geo-political specificities or rooted to those historical solidities and Marxian concerns that the struggle for independence sought to both foreground and legitimise. Though Gandhi’s work did not scatter religious imageries in his writing as intently as Tagore’s did, it was the religious spirit of Tagore’s writing that the former went on to capture while providing India with a divine touch which ensured that it no longer remains tangible to ideas that the colonial enterprise was based upon:

What do you think could have been the intention of those farseeing ancestors of ours who established *Setubandha* (Rameshwar) [mythological incident of bridging the ocean as depicted in the Indian epic, *Ramayana*, a text which Gandhi used to hold religiously normative] in the South, Jagannath in the East and Hardwar in the North as places of pilgrimage? You will admit they were no fools. They knew that worship of God could have been performed just as well at home. They taught us that those whose hearts were aglow with righteousness had the Ganges in their own homes. But they saw that India was one undivided land so made by nature. They, therefore, argued that it must be one nation. Arguing thus, they established holy places in various parts of India, and fired the people with an idea of nationality in a manner unknown in other parts of the world. (Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* 35)

In fact, it was Gandhi’s desire to render his nation as an intangible site, as a site that would forever elude the “matter-governed political stratagems” (Srinivas 34) of the colonial West that exposed the limits of his social reformist tendencies. It endorsed his ideology of marching backwards to the ancient springs of life that he had fashioned for the nation during the colonial rule instead of dovetailing it with what nations in general were collectively geared to at that point of time, cut-throat industrialisation and mechanisation. Percival Spear observes:

He spun the thread of simplicity and sought to weave it into a garment of national well-being. He failed because, for lack of a machine, he could not weave fast enough. Gandhi won his political battle and lost his cultural campaign. (“Mahatma Gandhi,” *Young India*.)

However, it is interesting to observe at this stage that the religionisation of the freedom struggle that both Gandhi and Tagore had contributed to in varying degrees, and partly triggered off, also at times stood tantamount to a non-manipulative, instrumental utilisation of it. Hence, it was in the Gandhian and Tagorean use of religion – more Gandhian than Tagorean though – that

religion stood translated as a “binding chain” meant to bind the precarious performativity of a dialectically configured heterogeneity – comprised of the subalterns and the compradors – of that pre-independent India into a “knotty” but collectively inclined singularity, doggedly pursuing its dream of setting India free from the hegemonic colonial rule. In addition, the moral impetus that religion was meant to grant the struggle for independence – that had occasionally betrayed the dangerous potency of degenerating into an uninterrupted sequence of mayhem and bloodshed – was contingent upon its being put to the kind of instrumentalised use that Gandhi and Tagore had exemplified. It was in this strategic use, indeed, that the pedagogic and the palindromic complexity of religion(s) stood translated as something tangible, something that could easily slide into the pockets of the subalternised mass, the propellers of the freedom struggle, as the handiest weapon of resistance against the hegemonic colonial rule. On the other hand, religion for Tagore served as a protective girdle, a talisman. His writings wore it at times in order to save itself from becoming exemplar of that epistemic and contextual violation, as figuring something opposed to what the freedom struggle demanded, a Fanonian urge to violently oppose the colonial interpellations.

Vivekananda and the Religious Enframing of Nation

The utilitarian approach to religion that both Gandhi and Tagore had made in their writings becomes stunningly prominent when one juxtaposes them with the writings of Vivekananda. This is because what stood out in the case of Vivekananda was not the dialogic encounter with religion that he was supposedly trained to have, deriving his inspiration as he did partly from the philosophy of Hegel and Kant, but his wholehearted submission to religion that most effectively and emphatically articulated its difference from both Gandhi’s and Tagore’s use of, and submission to, it. Vivekananda’s understanding of religion provided his writings with a unique poetic value, no doubt. It was a writing that came across as having a natural affinity towards elemental symbols that a “Vedic text” is known to be replete with, an affinity that imbued his writing with an almost originary, pristine touch, alongside a feel of being enveloped within a serene, tranquil, temple like ambience and of being willingly staying arrested within the “pre-palimpsestic” and “prelapsarian” (Murray 18) beginnings. But then, it was the apparent virtues of his writings that eventually seemed reluctant to add up to give what both Tagore’s and Gandhi’s writings were devoid of, “an objective and historical vision of nation” (Chakrabarty 172). Though it was a pleasant confluence of Vedantic philosophy and the Western, in particular the Kantian and Hegelian strands of the latter, which Vivekananda’s thinking displayed, his writings ironically did not mirror his thinking. There was, indeed, no attempt on the part of Vivekananda to reorient his religious propensities into a negotiated domain of existence, make them

enter into a deliberative relationship with what the Kantian and Hegelian philosophy stood for, sustained use of reflective reasoning. It was, in fact, the lack of this deliberative relationship between the two – the self-reflexive, almost monologue like *Vedic* utterances and the Hegelian and the Kantian philosophical strands intent upon graduating out of the Western obsession with instrumental reasoning – that created a void in Vivekananda's writing. It is this lack or absence perhaps that made his writing – going by the Heideggerian claim that “it is the language that speaks” (Clark 75) – thoroughly uninclined and even incapable of conjuring up what nation building exercises always demanded, “an objective and historical vision” (Chakrabarty 172).

However, we must remember that it was not so much towards the tone, temper, texture and timbre of Hegelian and Kantian writing that Vivekananda was attracted to as much as he was supposed to have felt drawn towards the underlying subject matter of their philosophies, which, not unlike the Vedic Philosophy, was about the progression of self. Thus, it was natural for Vivekananda, trained in both Western and Vedic philosophy, to display in his writings a logocentric shift towards religion that expounded upon what stood as these philosophies' sole concern, salvation of self, if not what we sometime displeasingly think that they were obsessed with, anthropocentrism and arboroscent model of progress. But then, it is this logocentric shift in Vivekananda's writing that withdrew him from what was perhaps needed for relating to immediate concerns, the solidities that Marxist thinking remained forever embedded in, if not feverishly obsessed with, the sphere of the ontic, undermining the Western obsession with ontology. So instead of depicting what we may call a Habermasian performative alliance with politics and everyday existence, Vivekananda's writings effortlessly glided towards making eulogisation of religion both as focal point of his writing and to an extent reminiscent of what Gandhi had referred to as “the eternal ancient springs of life” (Srinivas 34): “Each nation has a main current in life; in India it is religion. Make it strong and the waters on either side must move along with it” (Vivekananda 305).

One also marks in Vivekananda's writings a committed inclination towards devaluating nation, viewing it as a manifestation of material interests that the whole of mankind was bogged down with, a view also shared by. This was pretty much in line with the Hegelian redemptive teleological progression and what religions in general propounded. They propounded that one had to overcome one's material interests in order to graduate to higher ideals. That the cosmopolitan drive in Tagore was not due to his religiosity, but more due to his adherence to his overriding intellect and dogged pursuance of his poetical trajectory is well known to all readers of Tagore. In this sense, what stood out was the mutually complementing overlap between Vivekananda's and Tagore's

viewpoints. Ironically, Vivekananda's religiosity and Tagore's intellect stood at the brink of betraying similar "lines of flight" (Colebrook 129) or similar potency of getting "de-territorialized" (Deleuze 6) from what was meant to be their respective field of operativity. However, there was one subtle difference. If Tagore's writing ended up transgressing the very orbit of dialectical performativity, that which was instrumental in giving us boundaries in the first place, Vivekananda's religiosity went on to redefine nation in terms of its "syntagmatic interconnectedness" (Singh 17) with other nations. In other words, while Vivekananda attempted to dilute the exclusivity of nation by making it contingent upon the community of nations, Tagore seemed desirous to overcome it altogether in his quest for an alternative non space (Connor 176) that would make the very nation yielding dialectics futile. It was the radical transgressive orientation of Tagore's intellect that stood in sharp contrast with the humility of "Vivekananda's religiosity":

I am thoroughly convinced that no individual or nation can live by holding itself apart from the community of others, and whenever such an attempt has been made under false ideas of greatness, policy, or holiness – the result has always been disastrous to the secluding one. (Vivekananda 147)

Moreover, in contrast with the clear transgressive trajectory of Tagore's intellect, Vivekananda's religiosity both shored up, and seemed interspersed with, self-contradictory utterances. No doubt, his utterances clearly betrayed that it was the "singularity" of nation he always wanted to both preserve and protect:

The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth. (Vivekananda 117)

But then, he stood equally oblivious of the fact that it was some sort of "kettle logic" (d'Entreves and Benhabib 126) that his utterances were grounded upon. Since in the case of Vivekananda it was the dialogic encounter between nations that stood for them as the key to maintain their singular identities, it would not be incorrect to claim that instead of nations' "self contained performativity" it was their "othering" that one ended up viewing in Vivekananda's writing.

Nehru and the Mimicry of the West

If on the one hand, one notices a high brow condescending removal from, and an expedient and circumspect avoidance of, the radically transgressive world view of both Tagore and Gandhi, on the other, one marks a "de-familiarizing" reiteration of it in both Nehru's writings and political vision. It was that

intimidating, superbly refined and scientifically inclined, but empirically restrained education that Nehru had received from Harrow and Cambridge that made him stay removed from Vivekananda's singular pursuit of his religion. At the same time, it was both his consciousness of being the architect of the nation and the political expediency of holding back the nation from falling apart – a prerequisite perhaps for positioning it on the path of scientific and economic progress that the West had followed so far – that restrained him from holding any kind of self-enlightening and salutary deliberation with the nation-negating aestheticism of Tagore. However, it was his consciousness of the instrumentalised use of religion that Gandhi had sometime made of religion and – the most famous of them was perhaps that of *Ramrajya* – that made him reiterate them. It would be interesting to note that his was a kind of reiteration that found a place in the futural deconstructive practices. It, indeed, ended up de-contextualising the mythical figures that Gandhi had used, released them from the aura of divine intangibility that had kept them entrapped, brought them into our proximity as the loved ones and filled them up with a kind of raw energy and dynamism that surged through all of us. He even made them stand for the vision of prosperity and economic self-reliance that he had of India. In fact, he did aim to further ground them so they could be instrumental in inspiring the subalterns into realising that they were the main players in the nation building exercise. But then, it was his queer positioning – he was “a queer mixture of the East and the West, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere” (Nehru 353) – that made him look askance. It was towards the West he looked, the site from where impetuses came, while betraying an urgency to galvanise the nation-building exercises, which both his predecessors and contemporaries had found on different occasions redundant and unwholesome. This was because the uncanny confluence of religiosity and intellect in them demanded the erasure of ideas such as nation, which stood indicative of spatio-temporal fixities (Bhabha 29).

However, it was that typical “Promethean urge” of Nehru to “steal” (Baxi) what was considered then to be truly the West's that distinguished his political and social activism. This was the Hegelian idea of dialectical progression, operational in everything that the West did. This, on the one hand, made him affirm Western superiority, and on the other, made one view his kind of stealing the beginning of what Bhabha celebrated as “mimicry.” His distinctive promethean urge was directed, on the one hand, towards displaying to the West that the nations it had colonised were the ones which eventually ended up mimicking their structures, both cognitive and material, into a state of perfection. And on the other it carried a message for the futural postcolonial space. This message, rather inconspicuously, ended up establishing that oft quoted postcolonial doxa that perfecting the Western structures or mastering

their codes was perhaps the best way to subvert them. But then, it was the void upon which Nehru's mimicry was grounded. In other words, while it mimicked the structures of the West it surely did not betray any proud deliberative encounter with "the historic and objective realities" of India. Moreover, it was this mimicry of Nehru that came across as something that was thoroughly in need of a deliberative encounter with the structures of the west which it mimicked. As a result, Nehruvian mimicking worked towards warping the objective and historical realities of India so that the structures of the West could be easily erected upon them. In this sense, his mimicry had scant regard for the fact that both colonial and early post-colonial situation were unprepared for extending invitation to those structures. Moreover, his urge to remove things from their contexts became even more prominent when he seemed poised to translate the leitmotif of Gandhi's political speeches, the mythical *Ramrajya*, into what then stood acceptable to him rather than the untutored and unpretentious common mass. It was not the *Khadi* clad Gandhian *Bharat Mata* he seemed to be very comfortable with. Rather, he covertly wished to have an image that could cater to his sensibilities which were more Western than Indian. Moreover, it was the ideas he held dear and admired that he always wanted his countrymen to both mimic and revere. One may find Toynbee's observation quite interesting at this stage. "It is more blessed, to be imprisoned for the sake of one's ideals than to imprison other people, incongruously, in the name of the same ideals. Nehru lived to have both experiences" (Needham and Rajan 100). However, it was this desire of his to have his ideas mimicked by everyone, including the wealthy comprador class and the deprived hoi-polloi that exposed what he indeed wished his ideas on nation and its progress to become, a hermeneutical play-arresting hermetical domain.

Conclusion: Bhabha's Non-abstraction and the Radical Realistic Model

Thus, where does "the pure performance" (Wilson 5) of the writings of the makers of Indian episteme lead us? It was a performance that is supposed to be at variance with the controlling agency of a writer and it does not lead towards that which Bhabha termed as dissemiNation, nor towards what the popular misconception of this term makes it stand for. No doubt, Bhabha's dissemiNation perpetuated a radical way of coming to terms with nation. But then, it refused to operate the way some of us think it did, as some sort of nation destabilising subversive tool or concept. A brief comparison between Bhabha and Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru at this point is necessary. This is because one needs to indicate that the ironic undercurrents, which the successive forceful critique of the writings of the latter teased out, and which perhaps accounted for their uniqueness was not what Bhabha explicitly reiterated while opening up the established idea of nation, exulting in the contrapuntal agency, the paradoxes and ambivalences that the epistemical

writings of the latter on nation were reluctant to acknowledge as theirs, let alone externalise as a potent site demanding cognisance from its readers.

Bhabha's *DissemiNation*, unlike Tagore's writing, did not betray an urge to demonise the nation. Neither did it betray an urge to be treated as a modern rendition of that Gandhian urge to mythicize the nation to an extent where it stood "de-familiarized." As far as betraying that Nehruvite urge to make a nation building exercise was concerned, Bhabha's *dissemiNation* stood as a mocking reminder of the tragic flaw that the Nehruvian urge embodied. Though Nehru's was a sort of mimicry that to an extent resembled what Bhabha meant by it – given that working with Western structures was the prerequisite for making it indigenous – it failed to operate the way Bhabha wished his postcolonial mimicry to operate. In fact, it was not that dull imitation or the kind of hasty replication that Nehru displayed while feverishly planting Western structures on the Indian soil that Bhabha seemed to be in favour of. Rather, Bhabha's postcoloniality ended up offering what we may call a "non-absolutist absolute" (Wilson 4) credo. According to Bhabha, it was a kind of appropriative, transformatory, deliberational, "life like logic" that one needed to operate with while staging an encounter with structures that had colonised us. If on the one hand, it was Bhabha's strong conviction that it was not some sort of violent subversion or a kind of reiteration of the iconoclastic binaric reversal that the current postcoloniality needed to bring into play in order to move towards "post-colonial futural space," on the other, what the writings of Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru delivered to their critical readers was what these thinkers never wanted to publicise or what, as the anti-humanist would say, perhaps never gained consciousness. It was indeed their pre-discursive radicality, their unspoken conviction that for the betterment of human race it was the obsession for, and the fanatic pursuit of, territorial ambition that needed to be dispensed with.

In other words, it was for rendering nation as something with a potency to redeem itself that Tagore made it the equivalent of *Tirtha*, "a sanctimonious non-space" (Das 67). On the other hand, Gandhi ensured that his countrymen remain entrapped in the illusion that he had fashioned for them while partaking of the struggle for independence. It was an illusion that it was not in fact the nation for which these people were intent upon capsizing the colonial power, but for the attainment of *Ramrajya*. That Gandhi could think of reorienting the struggle for achieving freedom from colonial rule from what it was, a struggle for realising nation as a sovereign political entity, into a frantic pursuit to concretise a mythical image, spoke of the kind of radicalism he had demonstrated. It was divested of violence, if not of that tranquil, serene iconoclasm his *Satyagraha* embodied. Similarly it was a kind of *saffronisation* for Vivekananda and Westernisation for Nehru that stood as something normative

while aiming for political sovereignty of the nation. They were tacitly radical in the sense that they ended up severing nation from what the people of the nation thought that they in their varied ways were committed to, the objective and the contextual realities. And above all, they had the courage of thinking that the struggle for nation was nothing but a digression from the linear trajectory of that dialectical progression towards the attainment of political sovereignty.

In contrast, Bhabha's was an exercise in radical realism. It prompts us to view nation not in terms of abstractions, but as a natural "life world" (d'Entreves and Benhabib 87) hinging upon that ceaseless performativity of the deliberational, negotiational "complex of interactions" (Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* 134). The empowering, non-dialectical, "complex of interactions" between his notion of the "pedagogic and the performative" (212) that Bhabha went on to both foreground and promote is a case in point. What did the complex of interactions between the former and the latter indicate? It did not indicate a pure collapse between the former and the latter, reaffirming the Habermasian critique of Derrida's deconstruction. Neither did it expose Bhabha's Pro-Habermasian urge to maintain the deliberational, anti-paralogical consensualised distinction between the two. On the other hand – since reinventing and revisiting "Hegelianism" is back in fashion – to view Bhabha as someone engrossed in negotiating aggressively with deconstructivist thinking, with a hope that he could create a renewed scope for the "updated dialogical encounter" (Bhabha 13) between the two aspects of nations, the pedagogic inner core and those emergent performative undercurrents that it both sheltered and needed in order to be itself, is to view him in terms of the new fascination for the neo-Hegelian attempt to foreground the resilience of dialectics. In fact, he does not end up doing any of these. Rather while rendering the performance of the pedagogic he tries to be true to his version of the complex of interactions, which figures as some sort of poetic performative discourse. Here entities do not collapse into each other; neither do they maintain their distinctions so there could be synthesis yielding dialogic encounter between the two. Bhabha's nation is not a Hegelian nation, nor is it a Derridian nation. It is a life world hinging upon a kind of complex of interactions, gladly showcasing its unity as a performance.

However, it is not the primary purpose of this critical essay to promote Bhabha's way of realising nation's unity, though it does not betray any hesitation to project Bhabha's realisation as integral to the "performance" that life is, unlike those epistemic formulations – the mythicisation, the committed religiosity, the poetic "de-familiarization" and "de-contextualized" replication – of those whom we continue to revere as the architects of our nation. It is not the fundamental aim of this essay, either, to stage a problematical encounter with the epistemic formulations of the revered lot, though it ends up mimicking an encounter of this kind with these formulations without of course hoping to

open up an epistemic space (given that every encounter of this kind runs the risk of being rather intimidatingly overshadowed by what already exists, an exciting range of problematical encounters with the stated formulations).

It is the aim of this critical essay to make a point both to the institution makers and the people at large. It is to tell them that while they go on to integrate the goals of their lives and that of their institutes to the frenzied pursuit of cultural unity that they equate nation building exercise with, and which they think the epistemic formulations of the revered architects of our nation had foregrounded, they must once try to pose a reflective, deliberative and problematical encounter with these formulations. They shall gradually realise that the political, solid and immanent nation in which they live and which they managed to gain at the stroke of the midnight from the colonisers by aggressively pursuing the trajectory of non-violent struggle is the one that always stood compromised in the writings of the architects of our nation.

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