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TAGORE ON COMMUNALISM: A RESUME

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Abstract

India since the Vedic age started to tootle the tune of peace for the rest of the world on the ground of the unity in diversity. Diversity in physical features, in religion, in culture as well in language makes India not only unique but also broadminded i.e., free from any type of biasness. That is why only a few Indians used to dream the world as one Nation based on humanity. The World Poet Rabindranath Tagore is one of them. This paper aims to resume how Tagore used to inculcate the notion of communalism in India in order to be free India from the British rule through the Royal Road of unity in diversity and thereby to establish the world as one Nation grounded on humanity.

Keywords: Communalism, Religion, Unity, Poverty, Education, Exchange.

Introduction

India is unique among the other countries in the world not because of the natural divertive physical features, but because of the inheritance of the divertive cultures, religions, languages and so on due to the advent of different migrated races in the course of time. That is why India since the Vedic period always pave the path of 'Unity in diversity' and thus tootle the tune of Peace for the rest of the world through the Supreme and Holy Road of Ahimsa. But ups and downs being the part of the nature itself, India, in the middle age, especially after the advent of the Britishers faced the dark period. In this dark period, India was badly infected by some incurable diseases amongst which communalism based on the rift between two major religions—the Hindu and Muslim is one of them. But following the Newton's law—'Every action has its equal and opposite reaction.' a few of the Indian thinkers, at that time i.e., in the Twentieth Century showed their tremendous courage to dream one and only one World Nation as a whole and the World Poet Rabindranath Tagore was seemed to be the transparent pioneer who lively used to dream for one and only one World Nation as a whole. This paper will focus how Tagore analysed the root cause of the communalism in India in Section—I and the possible solution—how to get rid of from the conflict of communism in Section—II.

Section—I

Tagore, although, in his famous poem—'Bharat Tirtha', published in 1910, gave a clarion call to all for building a great Indian Nation through the utterance of the following famous lines, ' Esho he Arya Esho Anarya, Hindu-Musalman – Esho Esho aaj tumi Ingraj, Esho Esho Khristan' that is 'Come the Arians, non-Arians, the Hindus, the Muslims—you the English, the Christians, for this time, come come', it would be wrong if it is assumed that he was not at all conscious about the rift between the two major religions of India, namely, the Hindus and Muslims; rather this awareness deepened day by day and in many of his articles and speeches, side by side, he warned the people about the danger and disaster because such a rift brings the permanent blockage into the heart of the Indian Nation unless this deep-rooted feeling of distrust is wiped out permanently through an open heart surgery. He gave serious consideration to this problem and expressed the ways and means how to eradicate the evils of communalism. In fact, Tagore had the foresight that India would have to suffer a lot as a result of the poisonous seeds sowed in the bone marrows of the two neighbouring communities in India which was documented when he, in a letter, written to Amiya Chakrabarty expressed his doubt whether it would ever be possible to come out of this danger which would one day bring disaster to the Nation.

Tagore was conscious that even in the pre-British era there was social and religious difference between these two communities. But there was no outburst of conflict and they lived peacefully, side by side, since a long back. It is a historical truth that communalism came out simultaneously with the birth of political consciousness when people started thinking in terms of their group interests. The worst happened when two-Nation theory was advocated by some of the leaders of the two communities. Even before the movement against the partition of Bengal during the time of 'Sadhana', Tagore had written a few articles and delivered various speeches where he used to delve the problems of communalism. It is true that at that time he did not go very deep into it. Like other nationalist leaders of that time he hinted at the provocation by the British rulers as the hidden cause of it.

But it was in 1905, during Lord Curzon's partition of Bengal, he realised that the problem was extremely deep rooted. Throughout the movement against partition, the entire Bengal became extremely emotional and there was a startling awakening of the Nation and only a few of the Muslims joined the mainstream i.e., the movement against partition. He started to ponder about this



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higher significant aloofness of the Muslim community. He found out that the age-long hatred in our everyday social dealings had driven the minorities far from the Hindus who were victims of superiority complex. They would not respond to the call of any movement and would never extend their cooperation to the community they did not trust. From that day, he in his articles and speeches, tried to explain that the rift was there for a long time and the foreign rulers had just utilised and unified this feeling for their benefit to rule the country.

Section—II

Tagore through his vast unique intellectual ability comprehended that there was no point in blaming anyone in particular and the remedy lied in changing the entire mentality by introducing a healthy social and cultural exchange. That is why he, in his article ‘Kalantar’ written in 1925, observed that the two communities were not separated due to religion only. There was a great difference in the internal social customs of the Hindus and Muslims. Internally the Hindus had many divisions, caste barriers and lack of equality which was deterrent to the unity in the Hindu religion itself. So, this social difference was the reason of weakness of the Hindus. Whereas there was no such discrimination in the Muslims and naturally they were socially stronger. Tagore opined that by forsaking the social disunity, the Hindus would have to be equally strong which would bring respect to each other’s strength. In a letter to Kalidas Nag in 1922, he again stressed this point and observed that both these communities would have to come out of the religious mental barriers and thus there would be no further conflict.

Tagore was not only critical about the attitude of the Hindus towards the Muslims but also expressed his dissatisfaction at the antagonism of Muslim leaders against National Congress. He realised and explained supporting the British rulers by the Muslims was to protect the communal interest of themselves. In 1886, after the constitution of Public Service Commission, Tagore wrote an article ‘Maitry Abhishek’ wherein he made such observations.

After this article, from 1893 he wrote more essays on political situations in the country. The government decided to nominate a few Indian members in the legislative council and preserved some seats for the Muslims and thus very cleverly sowed the seeds of the division among the Indians on the basis of communalism. Tagore was very critical of this policy and compared the British rulers with the great Mughal emperor Akbar. He wrote that Akbar tried to unite the nation through love and indiscrimination while the British policy was designed to increase and to provoke the conflict between the two communities.

Later on, in 1931, Tagore wrote an article ‘Hindu Musalman’. There he cited various examples of his estate at Shantiniketan where imminent rifts between the two communities could be averted in spite of external provocation as because there were social exchanges and each community trusted to the other. He believed that the emancipation would be possible by offering whole hearted respect and trust to each other between these two communities.

At a later stage, Tagore observed the partiality of the government towards the Muslims as because it was designed to keep them away from joining the freedom movements led by the National Congress. He was convinced that the bitterness between two communities was largely due to the active provocation of the British rulers and the same conviction was reflected even in his famous article ‘Sabhyatar Sankat’ written at the far end of his life.

The lifetime literary creation of Tagore is incredibly vast. Comparatively the presence of Muslim characters is not many in his novels and stories. But we always find that those are painted with broad minded non communal love, respect and sympathy. In his first novel, ‘Bau Thakuranir Haat’ the tyrant ruler Pratapaditya sent two Pathans to kill his uncle Basanta Roy who was a good man. However, they were touched by the simplicity and innocence of Basanta Roy and out of humanitarian good sense could not kill him and disobeyed the order of their master. Tagore painted both the characters with a nobler human touch than the Hindu ruler Pratapaditya Roy. In his next novel ‘Rajarshi’, Billan Thakur, a Hindu Brahmin, helped the Muslims of a village at the time of epidemic. Such act from a Hindu Brahmin was unthinkable at that time, but this non communal attitude was portrayed by Tagore because at his heart of heart he did not believe in the division of religion and strongly believed that the identity of a man was above all creed and religion. In the same novel another Muslim character Eshan Khan, the weapon trainer of the princes of Tripura, was also portrayed gloriously.

In many other stories e.g., ‘Dalia’, ‘Shamashyapuran’, ‘Musalmanir Galpa’, ‘Sati’, the broad-mindedness of Tagore and his denial of the excising feeling of religious difference come out vividly.

In his estate at Patisar, Tagore had a very close relation and trust with his Muslim people and they also immensely respected him. Their loyalty towards him was unquestioned.



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Tagore had all along realised that the greatest burning problem which needed total solution for gaining freedom was the disunity between the two major communities. Short cut methods such as introduction of Charkha or participation of Hindus in the Khilafat Movement were only external means which would not eradicate the inborn mistrust and non-acceptance of each other. He alone stood against the above populist policies of Gandhiji and in spite of dislike of common people, did not hesitate to criticise the movements.

In 1925, he wrote an article in 'Sabuj Patra', where he wrote that all these movements would not be able to change the eternal prejudice in the minds of the two communities against each other's. Muslims were untouchable to Hindus who were 'Kafer' to Muslims. The religious habits which controlled our thought processes and behaviour deep-rooted and the possibility of conflict would not disappear unless those were completely erased.

At that time, Tagore was deeply in search of ways and means to bridge the gap and searched for instances which brought about unity between these communities as well as religions. He was inclined towards the teachings of the Middle Ages saints of India like Dadu, Kabir, Tukaram, Ramananda etc. In the introduction of the book 'Dadu' written by Sri Kshitimohan Sen, he observed, 'As because the Indian society has many divisions based on language, religion, caste etc., that is why the ideal message of India was the message of unity. So, the real great men of India always tried to build bridges between the souls of people.' He was also influenced by the simplicity of the Bauls of rural Bengal. He observed that in the Baul songs there was no conflict between 'Quran' and 'Puran'.

In the year 1926, the poet was given a reception by the Dhaka university. There, in his lecture, he raised the topic of communalism also. He said that poverty was also a main reason of division. Affluence, if ever possible in the society, would eradicate the artificial difference.

Again, in the same year, in a speech in Shantiniketan, which was almost immediately after a riot in Calcutta, Tagore had painfully remarked that the real message of religion had not been followed in India and people instead of realising it properly had become the victims of blind needless rituals, false stigmas, narrow sectarianism and they abandoned the true teachings of religion.

After his visit to Russia in 1930, he realised that spreading of education to the entire mass of the nation had wiped out the religious prejudices completely. He was overwhelmed by the success of Russian government to solve this problem and since then he had a firm conviction that this disease of religious fundamentalism would have been cured in India also, had the British government ever tried to introduce the system of mass education in the entire country.

So, from the above it is clear that Tagore was seriously concerned about the possible conflict among the two different communities, but the solution to get rid of this conflict grounded on these two communities are (i) the cultural exchange based on whole hearted respect and trust to each other between these two communities, (ii) eradication of the poverty and (iii) finally, the impart of education among the masses.