

NATIONALISM AS A CONTEMPORARY MENACE: READING TAGORE'S *THE HOME AND THE WORLD* AS A COSMOPOLITAN TEXT

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Abstract

As the calls for global peace and peaceful coexistence grow louder, nationalism, often tearing apart the oldest and largest democracies, emerges as one of the formidable menaces to mankind today. It is a resurgent force in major democracies across continents. In Asia and particularly in the Indian subcontinent, it emerges in response to the colonial hegemony and the emulation of Western values. But it soon assumes a religious dimension. Tagore, in its rise as a global phenomenon, sees a threat to global peace and fraternity, an onslaught on human dignity, and calls it a 'destructive enthusiasm,' an 'epidemic of evil,' an edifice of illusions, and moral annihilation. Against the background of fragile peace and shattered human existence. This study investigates how nationalism dehumanizes people, kills a human character, distorts perceptions, divests them of moral ideals, reduces a man's life to a mechanical existence, and releases a demon of ethnonationalist violence by using text analysis as its research method. The study shows how the author's cosmopolitan vision is capable of guiding mankind in these troubled times. Besides, it shows how his vision can help people overcome this mass delusion and foster global understanding and peaceful coexistence.

Keywords: *cosmopolitanism; cultural supremacy; dehumanization; destructive enthusiasm; hindu nationalism*

1. Introduction

One of the formidable menaces threatening the peaceful coexistence of mankind today is the rise of nationalism. Even countries known for their values of pluralism, democratic ethos, and culture of tolerance are threatened by the ugly rise of nationalism. The US and India, the oldest and largest democracies, respectively, witnessed in the last decade a sudden departure in the pursuit of their cherished values. The US made a return to its core values after the white supremacists lost power in the last presidential election. However, India continues to witness the consolidation of the nationalist forces, with

democratic institutions often looking the other way in the wake of these forces making claims to power and encroaching on spaces for freedom and individual liberty.

The concept of nationalism is closely linked to the emergence of the concept of the nation-state in Europe. In the 19th century, Europe witnessed certain developments that encouraged and promoted an urge for shared and collective existence. As industrial production increased and trade accelerated, new classes of professionals, industrialists, and businessmen emerged. Among these working classes, the idea of national unity took root and gained popularity. The change in social foundations and the epochal shift from an agricultural economy to that of industry gave further impetus to this slowly developing national consciousness (Gellner, 1983). However, with time, the idea began to develop a certain kind of exclusivity, prioritization, and local self-sufficiency. It came to embody the aspirations of an ethnically uniform territory. Over time, the idea of a common language, religion, cultural values, folklore, and mythology became the mainstay of nationalism. Though many theorists prophesied that nationalism would eventually give way to globalization, it instead began to personify hegemony, aggression, and cultural onslaught. The two world wars further strengthened this cultural divide, as "ethnicity and nationalism have grown in political importance in the world, particularly since the Second World War" (Smith, 1996).

Unlike Europe, nationalism in the Indian subcontinent emerged both in response to colonial encounters and in emulation of Western culture. However, the 19th-century religious reforms in the Indian subcontinent gave a religious dimension to this purely secular concept of Western nationalism. By the middle of the 19th century, a certain kind of religious and cultural identity had begun to assert itself (Sengupta, 1993). The religious reformers Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, and Rammohan Roy sought to build India's cultural unity around religious texts –the Upanishads and the Vedas. The writers, like Bankim Chandra and B. Upadhyay, took it further and gave it a militant religious dimension. Bankim Chandra's *Anandamath*, often thought of as the bible of Hindu nationalism, denigrates Muslims, iconizes India as a mother, imagines a Hindu nation, and talks of a religious crusade against Muslims. The partition of Bengal, the Swadeshi movement, and increasing religious aggression by the Hindu right to shape India into a Hindu imagination left Tagore extremely disillusioned and disenchanted. Finding that things were taking a violent turn, he disengaged and dissociated himself from the movement but chose to continue guiding the nation and the world through his art and writings.

2. Literature Review

Tagore's cosmopolitanism is primarily rooted in what it means to be human. He is a man who is deeply rooted in his local cultures and traditions. Mukherjee (2020) says that Tagore's vehement opposition to nationalism and belief in the ideals of harmonious existence are rooted in his idea of what it means to be a human being. The study reveals that he had his first experience of the havoc wrought by nationalism in the early decades of the twentieth century. Dasgupta (2020) asserts that, in Tagore's works, there is a conscious effort to look beyond geographical territories to create an international order. The study presents him as a great champion of cosmopolitan existence. But it must be clear, the study asserts, that his idea of cosmopolitan never meant an exclusion of the local cultures and diversity. Datta (2018) elaborates on how Tagore describes nationalism as an ethnonationalist and territorial demon posing a threat to peaceful existence. Aikant (2010) says that Tagore viewed nationalism as a constant threat to mankind, and its dangers had

become clear to him in the wake of the First World War, which threatened global peace in the first decade of the 20th century. The diatribe against nationalism is a recurrent theme in his works, which offer an alternative vision for global peace, harmony, and a sense of brotherhood among fellow human beings.

Ahmed (2020) notes that "his conception of internationalism—located in the interactions between colonial and postcolonial, East and West, tradition and modernity—contains the seeds of cosmopolitanism, as he perceives colonialism as a two-way process" (2). The idea is to regard all people worldwide as belonging to one family, overriding manufactured divisions. Rao (2010) notes that Tagore "presents universalism as a way of life that can harmoniously (and non-coercively) hold together diverse cultures, traditions, and identities in terms of a cohesive vision of human community". Despite being rooted in local customs and traditions, people share many more things than they differ. The concept, thus, denounces and aims to bridge the divide between people and the gulf between cultures and nationalities. Quayum (2016) notes that the author seeks unity and fellowship among people to promote peace and harmony. He repudiates uniformity as it robs a man of his inherent nature and uniqueness. The author respects people's local traditions and cultural values as they manifest bewildering human diversity. His cosmopolitanism embodies much-needed virtues that preach respect for fellow human beings, resistance against prejudice, and hospitality toward strangers. This, in turn, acts as a classical virtue to fortify the citizens against the dividing tendencies and the virus of ethnonationalism sharing human existence. Tagore (2008) notes that cosmopolitanism, for the author, does not draw its legitimacy from mere abstract thinking but is motivated and primarily rooted in being in traditions and the world. His essay, entitled *The Call of Truth*, published in *Modern Review*, illustrates his cosmopolitan vision and love for humanity. It describes the isolated view of a country or people as a departure from universal principles. This becomes clearer from his comparison of India's awakening with that of the world in his letters to Gandhi, which demonstrates his immense faith in people's spiritual unity.

3. Research Method

As this study seeks to offer a fresh understanding of the text under study and contextualize it with recent developments, textual analysis has been employed. A critical reading unpacks the layered themes underlying the text. A close examination of the characters and their dialogue demonstrates how Nikhil represents the author's cosmopolitan vision and love for mankind, and Sandip embodies the destructive and dehumanizing nationalism it stands for. Similarly, Bimala's degeneration and metamorphosis from an ideal wife into a ruthless woman who commits a theft in her own house illustrate how nationalism has a brutalizing effect on people and countries and takes away from them their love for humanity. The sources used for analysis include the text, research articles, and other secondary sources. These sources were read, interpreted, and analysed.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Tagore's Cosmopolitan Worldview and Denunciation of Nationalism

Tagore's cosmopolitan vision and the ideals of humanism developed in response to the emergence of this mass delusion as a formidable force around the middle of the 19th century. In his understanding, the rise of nationalism posed a threat to mankind and to its ideals. When India began to show an eagerness toward Hindu nationalism, he became disillusioned. He denounced the efforts of Hindu nationalists to shape India into

a Hindu imagination. Instead, he proposed to define India's identity around medieval mystics, poets, and philosophers who preached moral ideas and human dignity. Nandy (2017) says that he looked to the human teachings, moral ideals, and messages of love of these medieval mystics and poets to construct India's national character. For him, what it means to be human reigned supreme. This conceptualization of nationalism by him brought him into direct conflict with his own upbringing and the environment in which he was brought up. Nandy (2006) notes that his understanding of nationalism was "against the entrenched belief of a large proportion of India's modern elite, influenced by the three major 19th-century reform movements in Hinduism" (1). His cosmopolitan vision and his description of India as a country of communities and civilizations aimed to discourage the idea of India being linked to religious nationalism, which had begun to reverberate and resonate with large sections of the Indian masses. His literary works, particularly the three novels, seek to make the Indian masses aware of the dangers and devastations brought to Europe by this blind pursuit of nationalism. Tagore reflects:

The truth is that the spirit of conflict and conquest is at the origin and in the center of Western nationalism; its basis is not social cooperation. It has evolved a perfect organization of power, but not spiritual idealism. It is like the pack of predatory creatures that must have its victims. With all its heart, it cannot bear to see its-grounds converted into cultivated fields (1917: 13).

Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy of cosmopolitanism must be seen in the context of nationalism emerging as a mass delusion in general and Hindu nationalism as a formidable force in the Indian subcontinent. His idea of cosmopolitanism envisions a global community and is guided by what it means to be human. The term appeals to universal reason and treats people as belonging to similar units irrespective of differences in culture, language, and nationality. It presupposes that we owe certain responsibilities and obligations to our fellow human beings as a global family. De Beukelaer, C. (2019: 801) describes cosmopolitanism as a philosophy that "provides a framework to think of fellow humans as those with whom we are sharing and negotiating our terms of identity". Tagore (2008) asserts that the author's ideas of cosmopolitanism, universalism, and the principles of humanism do not draw their legitimacy from mere abstract conceptual thoughts but from a stimulus rooted in existential familiarization. The author's philosophy of education is a further explanation of his cosmopolitan worldview. Quayum (2016) says that Tagore condemned knowledge that places too much emphasis on merely nurturing the mind. Instead, he encourages and promotes the concept that illuminates the human soul and elevates the spirit. He seeks the "inculcation of a spirit of sympathy, service, and self-sacrifice in the individual so that s/he could rise above egocentrism and ethnocentrism to a state of global consciousness, or world centrism". Rao (2010) says that the text uses the love triangle to explore the conflict between nationalism and cosmopolitanism represented by Sandip and Nikhil. The author espoused the cause of cross-cultural understanding and emphasized that universal truth can be achieved only through a parallel study of different civilizations and cultures.

Thus, for Tagore, the only way to enter a more meaningful existence of collective human aspiration is by transcendence over the socio-political restrictions of class and caste in society and through reconnection with the marginalized local and regional cultures of India (Roy 2015: 184).

Tagore's cosmopolitanism developed in the wake of the devastation ravaging human existence in the early years of the 20th century. But the immediate context is the sustained efforts of the Hindu right to mold India into the line of Hindu imagination. He had deep apprehensions about their nationalist agenda. He foresaw the dangers, denounced these efforts, and described India as a country of communities. He espoused the cause of preserving and celebrating India's bewildering religious diversity and cultural plurality. Deeply influenced by the Upanishads and Buddhist texts, he preached cosmopolitanism and harmonious, peaceful coexistence. His description of a university as a meeting square throws further light on his global vision. He thought that the education that preached these universal principles and promoted global understanding could act as a powerful panacea to an existence ravaged by hatred and fanaticism. His dissociation from the nationalist movement and his differences with Gandhi speak of his cosmopolitan vision. His series of lectures, published as *Nationalism* in 1917 and *The Home and the World* in 1916, can be read as illustrations of his cosmopolitan conceptualization of the world. The following excerpt from his essay *Nationalism* speaks of his cosmopolitan vision and universal humanism.

Even though from childhood I had been taught that idolatry of the Nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity, I believe I have outgrown that teaching, and it is my conviction that my countrymen will truly gain their India by fighting against the education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity (Tagore 1917: 53).

4.2 *The Home and the World* as a Cosmopolitan and Universal Text

The text is an illustration of the tussle between cosmopolitanism and nationalism. It describes the rising tide of nationalism as a potential menace, denounces the pursuit of materialism at the cost of the soul, preaches moral ideals that illuminate the human heart, seeks to reinstate human dignity, and embodies timeless values. Festino (2011:70) correctly observes that the author "condemns this concept of nationalism through the extended metaphor of greed and consequent robbery that pervades the whole novella and leads to its climax". The local and global contexts go side by side in the text. Though it has a cosmopolitan perspective, it also deals with a common man's life and problems in his immediate surroundings. Atkinson (1993: 98) finds that the novel describes national pride as incongruous with and incompatible with the vision of human existence as a family. The immediate context is the resurgent Hindu nationalism towards which India has started showing eagerness. Mukherjee (2007: 619) notes that the text elucidates the dangers of nationalism becoming popular as a way for posterity to survive.

Nikhil's dialogues and acts represent the universal principles of peaceful coexistence and self-realization, whereas those of Sandip embody hypocrisy, duplicity, shamelessness, and a certain degree of Machiavellianism. The moral degradation Bimala undergoes, the oscillation she keeps on moving between, and her final spiritual transformation and rejuvenation symbolize the ultimate victory of true human and moral values. Rao (2010: 189) notes that "the local and particular, realized through the cultures and landscapes of regional Bengal, becomes a way of entering the realm of the universal". For example, Nikhil's love for the poor facing the brunt of the boycott of British products, refusal to worship the country, tolerance, and respect for Sandip's views, encouraging Bimala to step out of home, allowing Sandip to stay at his house, and above all, his sense of perfect justice—all help us understand the author's cosmopolitan understanding of the world. Sandip uses nationalism to accumulate wealth and power, seduce Bimala, demonize Muslims, and consolidate his

support base. Bimala's journey from a domestic woman toward being a 'Shakti', her moral breakdown, and stealing away her husband's money demonstrate how the pursuit of nationalism and materialism dehumanizes people and degrades the human soul. The acts of Nikhil illustrate how the author presents him as a global citizen.

For the novel is a story of education for world citizenship since the entire tragic story is told by the widowed Bimala, who understands, if too late, that Nikhil's morality was vastly superior to Sandip's empty symbol-mongering, that what looked like passion in Sandip was egocentric self-exaltation, and that what looked like lack of passion in Nikhil contained a truly loving perception of her as a person (Nussbaum, 2005:166).

Nikhil, a cosmopolitan figure and the author's mouthpiece, stands in direct contrast to Sandip, an unscrupulous classic rogue who embodies this mass delusion and foreshadows the dangers lying ahead. Festino (2011: 67) rightly observes that the author uses a multi-layered perspective to capture Bengali society at this time of crisis and transition. Most of the research studies view the characters' actions as dramatizing the author's views on nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and universalism. These characters also illustrate how these ideas either illuminate people's hearts, reinstate a man's dignity, or dehumanize and degrade his soul. Atkinson (1993: 98) rightly observes that depriving a man of his essence amounts to denouncing the very fundamental principles of human existence. The text, though, explicitly seeks to denounce the sprouting Hindu consciousness but implicitly embodies how this delusion of nationalism kills the human soul and releases a demon of ethnoreligious violence. Kripalani (1962: 252) describes the novel as a "testament of Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence, love, and truth, of his insistent warning that evil means must vitiate the end, however nobly conceived". People cannot achieve true freedom and self-realization until they follow the greater ideals of humanity. Tagore notes:

Even though from childhood I had been taught that idolatry of the Nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity, I believe I have outgrown that teaching, and it is my conviction that my countrymen will truly gain their India by fighting against the education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity (1917: 53).

Sandip represents the destructive and dehumanizing aspects of this mass delusion. Atkinson notes that "Tagore stresses the dangers of mass action: once started, it is impossible to stop. He does not wish to coerce anyone, for he respects at all costs the value of the individual". However, Sandip uses religious imagery and a nationalistic cloak to accumulate wealth and capture power. Rao (2010: 177) notes that Sandip "uses Hindu religious symbolism in an effort to primordialize the nationalist identity he seeks to construct". Though he claims that he fights for the cause of his motherland, it soon becomes clear that his selfish motives are his overriding concerns. The chief consolations of hatred are as urgently necessary for him as the satisfaction of his appetites" (Tagore 1916: 46). His pursuit of wealth, power, and brazen sexuality foreshadows the doom and disasters Bimala and the country encounter. He so proudly describes himself:

I am covetous. I would have good things for my country. If I am obliged, I would snatch them and filch them. I have anger. I would be angry for my country's sake. If necessary, I would smite and slay to avenge her insults (Tagore, 1916: 38).

The text demonstrates through the actions of Sandip how closely his worldview aligns with Nazi Germany's idolization of the use of brutal force. He seeks to legitimize corrupt practices and mocks Nikhil, who believes in the ideals of humanity. He describes as impotent those who do not subscribe to his ways of thinking. He has no moral sense and derides those who follow higher moral ideals. He says that "those who are deprived by their own diffidence dignify their privation in the name of modesty" (Tagore 1916:51). He legitimizes violence to fulfil his agenda. He is a classic rogue who does not submit himself to any law of morality or decency. He is resistant to objective proof and sees little meaning in things that exist outside his immediate interests. As a typical nationalist, he is quick to trivialize uncomfortable facts and inconvenient truths if they get in his way.

Because you have your greed, you build your walls. Because I have my greed, I break through them. You use your power: I use my craft. These are the realities of life. On these depend kingdoms and empires and all the great enterprises of men (Tagore, 1916: 52).

Sandip's actions exemplify how the pursuit of this mass delusion wreaks havoc. His vaulting lust and actions, rooted in the pursuit of wealth and power, corrupt and brutalize him. Though he earlier represented a nationalist vision for Bimala, it soon becomes clear to her that his "devotional nationalism is grounded in his politics of desire" (Datta 2005:12). He uses these high-sounding slogans and badges of nationalism to fulfil his own personal agenda. His calculated deviation from his mission towards seducing Bimala and his wish to embrace her in his arms reveal his real motives. Though they both claim to fight against British oppression, higher ideals guide Nikhil's actions, whereas those of Sandip are rooted in his base and lower instincts. He says that "whenever an individual or nation becomes incapable of perpetrating injustice, it is swept into the dustbin of the world" (Tagore 1916:79). He uses these slogans and nationalism to seduce Bimala. He gives her a book of sex problems and thus reduces their relationship to brazen sexuality. He feels no sense of shame in pursuing his friend's wife. He castigates himself for letting an opportunity slip away to take Bimala into his arms. He decries Ravan for merely keeping Sita in his captivity instead of taking her into his arms. He says that "this weak spot in his otherwise grand character made the whole of the abduction episode futile" (Tagore, 1916: 117). He has an utter sense of contempt for moral values.

That is the kind of stuff I have read in books, but in the real world, I have seen that man's chief business is the accumulation of outside material. Those who are masters in the art, advertise the biggest lies in their business, enter false accounts in their political ledgers with their broadest-pointed pens, launch their newspapers daily laden with untruths, and send preachers abroad to disseminate falsehood like flies carrying pestilential germs (Tagore, 1916: 157).

Sandip worships force, idealizes cruelty, and celebrates violence. He describes himself and his followers as "flesh-eaters of the world" who had "teeth and nails" and knew how to "pursue, grab, and tear" (Tagore 1916: 54). Material success, as an overriding concern, drives him through all these situations. He says that "nature surrenders herself, but only to the robber. For she delights in this forceful desire, this forceful abduction. And so she does not put the garland of her acceptance around the lean, scraggy neck of the ascetic"

(Tagore 1916:51). He presents cruelty and injustice as the only legitimate means to fulfill one's goals and achieve greatness. He offers Western militarism as a way for India to rid itself of the ills plaguing it. He consistently believes and preaches that "successful injustice and genuine cruelty have been the only forces by which individuals or nations have become millionaires or monarchs" (Tagore 1916:109). Once he sets his agenda, he is determined to achieve it by hook or by crook. He decries all ideas of decency and morality. He not only allows his instinctive side to guide him but also mocks those who preach these timeless values.

Each individual has his self-love. Therefore, his brute instinct leads him to fight with others in the sole pursuit of his self-interest. But man has also his higher instincts of sympathy and mutual help. The people who are lacking in this higher moral power and who therefore cannot combine in fellowship with one another must perish or live in a state of degradation (Tagore, 1917: 99).

Thus, nationalism divests an individual of his true human soul and reduces him to a mechanical entity. Deprived of his true human spirit, man is guided by the thought that greed is a natural desire that must be fulfilled. As someone representing nationalism, Sandip is at war with everything that creates a barrier in his pursuit of power and wealth. This is what makes him bulldoze things built around moral philosophy to create a new order. The crisis and moral depravity Bimala undergo immensely demonstrate the rule of the moral universe. As he believes that nature surrenders herself only to the robber, he is not ashamed to ask for what he wants, and sometimes he feels no need even for permission before taking anything. Bimala steals her husband's money from her own house. He says:

Let moral ideals remain merely for those poor anaemic creatures of starved desires whose grasp is weak. Those who can desire with all their soul and enjoy with all their heart, those who have no hesitation or scruple, it is they are the anointed of Providence. Nature spreads out her richest and loveliest treasures for their benefit (Tagore, 1916: 50).

4.3 Bimala's Degeneration Illustrates the Brutalizing Aspect of Nationalism

Bimala undergoes a metamorphosis from an ideal wife into a ruthless woman who commits a theft in her own house. Her degradation effectively demonstrates how the deviation from moral ideals and the pursuit of this delusion dehumanize and contaminate both an individual and society. She acts as a link between selfish motives and the ideals of morality represented by Sandip and Nikhil, respectively. Her husband describes her as someone who "loves to find in men the turbulent, the angry, the unjust" (Tagore 1916: 44). Encouraged by him, she steps out of her home but soon finds herself oscillating between the conflicting values and utterly different worldviews of these two men. Rao (2010: 177) notes that "her modulating feelings towards the male characters are an allegory for public perceptions of the political efficacy of their competing worldviews". For her, Sandip did not appear merely as an individual but represented "the confluence of millions of minds in the country" (Tagore 1916:59). As her interest deepens in the nationalistic cause, she starts idealizing him, undergoes a metamorphosis, suffers from turmoil, and finds herself detached from her husband. What is important is that she foresees the dangers but finds herself overpowered by her destructive enthusiasm. She exclaims with wonder at 'the joy she finds in this unquestioning surrender' and at the 'supreme bliss she finds 'in the thoroughness of

self-destruction' (Tagore 1916: 90). Nikhil's reasoned understanding, cogent arguments, and humanistic approach matter little in her changing worldview. But Sandip's fiery nationalistic rhetoric casts its magic on her. Festino (2011: 69) finds that her infatuation with Sandip and the subsequent degradation symbolize Bengal's infatuation with Swadeshi and the following disasters and devastations. She falls prey to Sandip's flattering words and undergoes a transition from peace to unhappiness as she stops listening to her conscience. Her debasement and moral deterioration demonstrate how unchecked lust, a penchant to believe flattering words, and a destructive enthusiasm bring about disasters and devastation.

Divine strength had come to me. It was something which I had never felt before, which was beyond myself. I had no time to question it to find out what was its nature. It seemed to belong to me, and yet to transcend me. It comprehended the whole of Bengal (Tagore, 1916: 60).

Sandip's description of her as 'Shakti,' her sexual exploitation, her degeneration, emotional turmoil, spiritual rejuvenation, and ultimate regeneration carry symbolic meaning. The way her pursuit of this 'destructive enthusiasm' corrupts and debases her soul, the same way, the pursuit of nationalism destroys a nation and kills the national soul and spirit, Sandip describes her as someone burning with the fire of life whose "blood and flesh" know how to respond to the call of reality. He tells her that he visualizes in her the shakti of his country and that the "geography of a country is not the whole truth. No one can give up his life for a map harass" (Tagore 1916:99). Thus, he conflates the country's worship with Bimala's to dupe her into submission and exploit her sexually. As a result, she undergoes wonderful changes and realizes that her resplendent womanhood makes her a goddess. Mukherjee (2020: 618) notes that "worshipping the nation as mother and essentializing women as a source of spiritual strength are parallel processes-one perpetuates the bondage of women, the other exalts the abstract notion of the country over the people who actually constitute it". As Sandip finds her ready to submit to his demands, he starts exploiting her. She bows down to his demands and starts ignoring her conscience. This is further made clear from Nikhil's philosophy that giving impulses and phantasies more importance than moral ideals is a sign of slavery. Festino (2011: 72) rightly observes that "Sandip thus leads Bimala and, through her, Bengal to destruction when he urges her to steal for a cause that Tagore sees not as the cause of the nation but as his own personal cause".

As the plot progresses toward the end, Bimala undergoes a spiritual elevation and experiences a moral regeneration. She increasingly becomes aware that Sandip and his high-sounding slogans have robbed her of her soul, created a void in her relationship, and made her commit theft in her own house. She painfully becomes aware of her miserable condition, finds herself being assailed by trains of doubt, undergoes unexpected changes, and finally experiences a change of heart. Her soul wakes up, and her conscience starts guiding her to the path of truth. She starts seeing through Sandip's hypocrisy and selfish motives. She finds Sandip a cruel rogue after discovering the tremendous effect he had on Amulya. She was shocked to learn of Amulya's easy decision to kill the cashier. She feels a demon came to her, disguised as a god, demanding she worship Sandip and the country, and she obeyed by agreeing to obtain the rupees. The world will sway under her feet, and she will plunge to her death, leaving nothing to remain behind. Rao (2010: 178) correctly observes that "Bimala's remorse at the end of the novel is usually read as a vindication of Nikhil's position, shot through with the pessimistic sentiment that Sandip's views are politically more resonant in

the world". Sandip's actions symbolize that nationalism acts as a mass delusion that often appears in the form of falsehood, looks fascinating, assumes different appearances, and casts its magic on people. Like Bimala, people fall prey to this destructive infatuation, but the truth, moral values, and human principles may be suppressed temporarily but emerge victorious ultimately. Nikhil's steadfastness and change of heart toward Bimala effectively demonstrate that truth, moral ideals, and above all, the human soul weigh more when we consider what it means to be a human being. This is what the author seems to convey through the dialogue of the characters in the text.

4.4. Nikhil Represents the Author's Cosmopolitan Vision and Universal Humanism

Most of the research studies on Tagore view cosmopolitanism as being demonstrated through the acts and philosophy of Nikhil. Rao (2010: 177) finds that "progressiveness is manifested in his (Nikhil) views on gender relations, the welfare of his tenants, and, most crucially for the narrative, his views on nationalist agitation". He spurns the use of force and idealizes and celebrates the power of renunciation, for which Sandip describes him as someone 'infatuated with the glory of bankruptcy' (Tagore 1916: 53). He describes people like Nikhil as 'pale creatures' and 'lotus-eaters of idealism' (ibid. 55), as his actions are not guided by any material considerations but by what it means to be a man of true moral character. He is an enlightened man who asserts that truth speaks for itself and cannot be imposed. Atkinson notes that Tagore celebrates the world as it helps one experience the infinite manifestations of the divine, which creates a sense of perfection within us. These are the principles that constitute the cosmopolitan character of Nikhil in the text (Nikhil, 1993: 98). Nikhil is endowed with the transforming power of love, global thinking, and a humane heart to realize the sufferings and hardships of the poor and the less fortunate. This is the message Tagore (1917) conveys when he says that the time has arrived when people should be ready for the dawn of an era wherein they will discover their true existence and experience true self-realization and self-fulfilment not through material interests but through unity of spirit and soul.

As a mouthpiece of the author's cosmopolitan thinking and worldview, Nikhil looks at things from a universal perspective. His actions are steered by what it requires to be a perfect human being. Self-realization through the refinement of the soul, the pursuit of truth, a perfect sense of justice, selfless love, and unconditional care for the welfare of the poor and the less fortunate shapes his worldview and directs his actions. He is a true patriot, but he is against undermining moral values and overriding human dignity. Like Sandeep, he does not believe in narrow divisions based on colour, geography, or language. Instead, his actions are guided and directed by what it means to be just and human. He describes excessive love for his/her country as an infatuation and a kind of madness in which "a higher place than truth is a sign of inherent slavishness" (Tagore 1916: 45). He considers iconizing the place of birth as an assault on human dignity, the worship of country as an evil that he does not allow "being exaggerated into an image of his country" (Tagore 1916: 39). He castigates Sandip's hypocrisy and duplicity. He asks Sandip why he worships one and chooses to hate the other, discriminating between man and man, country and country, when God manifests himself equally in all men and countries. He tells Sandip that he has nothing to say against his (Sandip's) worship but against the hate he had towards other people and countries in which God is equally manifest. As Bimala says, Nikhil was not against the Swadeshi cause but could not fully support it due to its adverse economic effects on the

poor. He was eager to serve his country but viewed the idea of worshipping it as bringing a curse upon her. The same theme is underscored in the following excerpt.

Even though from childhood I had been taught that idolatry of the Nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity, I believe I have outgrown that teaching, and it is my conviction that my countrymen will truly gain their India by fighting against the education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity (Tagore, 1917: 53).

Nikhil denounces the use of force and idealizes the power of renunciation and abandonment. He uses his moral power and the strength of argument to convince people of his ways of thinking. Bimala's madness for nationalistic causes and infatuation with Sandip shatters his existence. Despite undergoing psychological chaos and internal strife, he continues to behave as a good husband and spiritually uplifted man. Festino (2011: 71) finds that he will not "let himself be burnt by the flames that consume Bengal and that come to be represented in the novel by Bimala's red sari as well as by her infatuation with Sandip and the Swadeshi cause". He does not impose on Bimala his own judgment. Instead, he wants her to see that Sandip uses the badge of nationalism to accumulate wealth and aggrandize himself. He encourages her to use her own moral judgment to see how Sandip uses high-sounding words to realize his selfish motives. He feels offended but exhibits immense patience and tolerance for Sandip's despicable views. When they both debate patriotism, Nikhil is outraged that Sandip tries to legitimize injustice as righteousness. When Bimala says she would worship her country as divine, Sandip praises her, but Nikhil looks pained.

It is my feelings that are outraged whenever you try to pass off injustice as a duty and unrighteousness as a moral ideal. The fact, I am incapable of stealing, is not due to my possessing logical faculties but to my having some feeling of respect for myself and love for ideals (Tagore, 1916: 36).

Nikhil has a true love for truth and a perfect sense of justice—a universal principle. Despite being aware of Sandip's true character, he does not say anything, fearing his jealousy, distorting the truth, and exaggerating things about him (Tagore 1916: 47). Even Sandip accepts that Nikhil's sense of justice will not allow him to dismiss Nanku despite Bimala's consistent demand for humiliating Sandip on orders from Bara Rani. Following the call of the Swadeshi movement and the boycott of foreign goods, Bimala wanted to fire Miss Gilby, her English tutor. But Nikhil denies accepting this unjust demand from his wife. When a boy in their house humiliates Miss Gilby on her way to church, Nikhil turns the boy out of the house. He believes that one cannot rise to true human dignity without performing just actions and listening to one's conscience. In his opinion, Sandip's pursuit of material gains and hankering after money diminishes the soul; therefore, it diminishes one's ability to perform just actions. He tells Sandip that winning his kind of success is "gained at the cost of the soul: but the soul is greater than success" (ibid: 111).

It is extremely bold of me to say so, but I assert that man's world is a moral world, not because we blindly agree to believe it, but because it is so in truth which would be dangerous for us to ignore. And this moral nature of man cannot be divided into convenient compartments for its preservation (Tagore, 1917: 32).

Like Sandip, he never allows his brute instincts to undermine the soul. Festino (2011: 72) rightly observes that "instead of subjecting his wife to his desires, he frees her when he realizes that she does not love him and that there is a greater good to be pursued rather than one's own desires: that of humanity". When Sandip's followers demanded he issue directives to his tenants to desist from cow slaughtering, he refused to be bullied into submission. Instead, he asks them to stay staunch in their convictions but not to allow their faith and beliefs to take away someone else's right to eat the food of their choice. He looks at this demand as an oppression that has the immense potential to take away human lives. "If fear is to regulate how people are to dress, where they shall trade, or what they must eat, then man's freedom of will is utterly ignored, and manhood is destroyed at the root" (Tagore 1916: 199).

The Swadeshi movement, which started to boycott British products, was reduced to the harassment and hounding of the poor. Though early an active part of the movement, Tagore disengaged himself from it as it grew violent, often resulting in the burning of foreign goods, physical intimidation, and the poor's social ostracism. In the same way, Nikhil is not averse to the idea of promoting indigenous products; he was against the way the poor were being hounded and harassed in the name of nationalism. Bimala herself admits that her husband was not against the cause but was not able "whole-heartedly to accept the spirit of *Bande Matram*" (Tagore 1916: 22). He abhors falsehood and considers that "vain arguments only brush off the fresh bloom of truth" (Tagore 1916: 79). He does not judge a man in terms of material prosperity but in terms of his soul's perfection. True human dignity lies not in the enlargement and multiplication of material prosperity but in the perfection of the soul. In his understanding, a man is higher than what the natural sciences present and estimate him to be.

This political civilization is scientific, not human. It is powerful because it concentrates all its forces upon one purpose, like a millionaire acquiring money at his soul's cost. It betrays its trust, it weaves its meshes of lies without shame, it enshrines gigantic idols of greed in its temples, taking great pride in the costly ceremonials of its worship, calling this patriotism (Tagore, 1917: 60).

5. Conclusion

Since nationalism emerged in Europe, theorists have faced challenges to precisely define and articulate it. No one has ever been able to give a universally accepted definition. But what constitutes the core theme is the idea of exclusion, local self-sufficiency, prioritization of a group of people, and racial or cultural hegemony. However, the idea began to assume a purely political dimension and assert itself as a formidable mass delusion, dehumanizing people, undermining greater ideals of humanity, destroying the universal spirit of brotherhood, and engendering global peace. The large-scale loss of human lives in the earlier decades of the twentieth century was an immediate outcome of this 'epidemic of evil'. It is in this context that the author's ideas of universalism and cosmopolitanism were conceptualized. He derided this perversity and forewarned people of its unprecedented consequences. His lecture series entitled *Nationalism (1917)* and the text under study elaborate on how the spirit of conflict, conquest, and hegemony forms the core theme of the Western idea of nationalism. In the wake of Hindu nationalism threatening India's pluralistic ethos at the turn of the century, Tagore called it destructive enthusiasm. The study shows how the pursuit of this mass delusion kills the human soul, dehumanizes

people, generates perversity, enslaves the poor and weak, reduces human existence to a mechanical purpose, and engenders global peace. The paper demonstrates how the author's cosmopolitan vision and greater ideals of humanity can act as a panacea to this danger, save the world from its catastrophic end, and ensure a peaceful, happy, and prosperous coexistence.

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