CHAPTER VI

THE CONCEPT OF NATIONALISM IN TAGORE AND BENDRE

Where the world has not been broken into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

-Tagore

Radhakrishnan says, "Nationalism is a political religion that stirs the hearts and wills of men and encourages them to service and self-sacrifice in a way that no purely religious movements have done in recent times" (Bhuyan, p. 199)

Nationalism today is the pervasive force that dominates all spheres of thought and action world over. It has assumed the status of a universally accepted faith. People presume it to be most natural and also presuppose that it has always existed. However it is a phenomenon of last two centuries that arose out of rather vexed and complicated social and religious conditions in the West. The path of its evolution was long and winding, criss-crossed by numerous factors.

During the medieval period people were not conscious of nationalism or nation state. Loyalties did not go beyond the frontiers of locality. The reigning feudal system and the Christian Church that
emerged as a symbol of authority, hindered the development of centralised system of government.

It was only with the rise of Renaissance, the Reformation and geographical discoveries marking the end of medieval period and the decline of Church supremacy, that strong national monarchies were established. People learnt to question and reject any 'blind' acceptance. The arbitrary papal authority was overthrown. Strong monarchies gave rise to the spirit of national unity. With the advent of industrialisation, the rising middle-class with its commercial and intellectual acumen encouraged the development of nationalism to maintain its power and influence.

The rise of nation-states led to the development of different languages, of different people promoting a kinship among similar people. Common language served as an important unifying force. Further, gradual development of particularities of a certain nation-state differentiated those people from other states. Strangely enough, language, race and religion played at times a cohesive and at times a divisive role in the development of nationalism. Religion became one of the most powerful forces to raise a sense of nationality in the West. Paradoxically, national identity rose as a protest against religion.

The French Revolution was the most significant landmark in the history of development of nationalism. Putting an end to feudalism, it established a strong national government in France.
After the First World War the principle of 'one nationality one state' assumed high priority and the theory of self-determination came to the forefront of European politics.

Thus having evolved through different phases and ages, nationalism became by far the greatest dynamic force in the history of the world to shape the course of history.

In spite of two World Wars the strong hold of nationalism has not ebbed.

**Indian Nationalism**

The divided states and innumerable kingdoms of India in the 17th century had helped the British to get a foothold on the Indian soil. Gradually under the military force of British imperialism, major portions of India came under the possession of East India Company. It was a lucrative colony for the British, who exhausted it for the development of England.

Under the British rule, the social, political and economic life of India reached its lowest ebb. The progress of England and the digression of India were interdependent in terms of cause and effect. Agriculture, industry and trade were in utter ruins under the British Imperial policy. With decline in all spheres of social life and bogged down by meaningless rituals, superstitions and dogmas people became inert and fatalistic. It was an age of decay and dissolution.

Strangely enough, education in English and consequent exposure to the Western thoughts were fortunate to India. Reaching out to Western ideas and benefits of science led to an introspection of
Indian culture and religion. Thus in the late 18th century due to the vision of some great men who made India aware of her rich heritage and identity by ushering in the Renaissance, India moved to a revival.

Naturally in a spiritual country like India, Renaissance began with religious reformers. Some of the prominent figures were Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who stirred the people to a full consciousness of their own cultural personality; Dayanand Saraswati who regenerated pride in the Vedas and Hinduism and Swami Vivekananda amongst others. Most of them were products of both Eastern and Western cultures. With Renaissance, a vision of a united, free and liberated nation rose on the horizon. With an aroused pride in one's heritage and an awakened self-identity, a nationalistic urge knit the people together, who until then were unaware of a whole cohesive country. Influenced by western ideas of nationalism, there emerged a vehement demand for Swaraj.

The prime reason for the rise of nationalism in India was the goal to throw off the yoke of British rule. To Vivekananda, Tilak, Aurobindo and Gandhi, Swaraj was the birthright of every individual and nation. Swaraj was obligatory for proliferation of national energy and fulfillment of national ideal. It was the life force of every race and nation. To these leaders political freedom was the sole aim and objective. They sought to invoke this sentiment and vigor in their countrymen. They wanted India to be free of foreign power and foreign culture. An independent Indian Nation would rescue its people from decline, decadence, poverty and exploitation and bring a better world
to its people. Hence national liberty was the precondition for individual liberty and the liberty of the whole world.

Thus, a study of the rise of Nationalism reveals that Nationalism influenced the West and India in distinct ways. While in the West, the idea of Nationalism formed many nation-states, in India the idea of Nationalism helped consolidate a fractured country. Race, religion and language had given different identities and consequently different nation-states in the West; but in India these factors helped to strengthen a common identity and led to the establishment of one country.² (Bhuyan)

THE CONCEPT OF NATIONALISM IN TAGORE

Tagore pioneered thoughts on nationalism in India; Tagore's thoughts on nationalism in the context of India's struggle for independence, and the alternative he tendered to India and the world, are unsurprisingly based on empathy for humanism and universalism. Tagore's feeling of humanism runs persistently in all his works, so too in his critique of modern civilization, with its twin pillars of materialism and nationalism. His ideas on nationalism are found most explicitly in lectures and addresses including 'My Life,' 'My Religion,' 'Civilization and Progress,' 'Construction v/s Creation,' 'Nationalism in the West,' 'Nationalism in Japan,' 'Nationalism in India,' 'International Relation,' 'The Voices of Humanity,' 'The Realization of the Infinite' as well as in his novels - 'The Home and the World, Four Chapters, Gora' and his poems, especially 'The Sunset of the Century.'
By the end of the first decade of 20th century Tagore had totally rejected nationalism. However, he recognized the need for an anti-colonial movement.

The antagonism of Tagore towards the British has its roots in the anti-British attitude of his father Devendranath and the activities of the Hindu Mela. The members of Hindu Mela realized that a revolution was necessary to free India. For this purpose, a secret society called ‘Sanjibani Sabha’ was organized. Tagore was a member of this society. They secretly manufactured ‘Swadeshi’ matchsticks and improved power looms. Jyotirindranath (Tagore’s brother) established a steamer service and began an intense rivalry with a British company. It was at the tenth anniversary of Hindu Mela that Tagore read a fiery poem criticizing British rule in India. The new viceroy Lord Lytton, held Durbar in Delhi where Queen Victoria was declared ‘The Empress of India’. At that time the country was passing through a crisis because of famine. Young Tagore’s poem was a bitter attack on the celebrations. This was his first act of denouncing the British Raj. But this poem could not be published due to the press act.³ (Mukherji, p.27).

Tagore’s political participation came to the fore with the launching of the ‘Swadeshi Movement’. The Swadeshi movement was triggered in 1903 by the proposed partition of the province of the Bengal into western and eastern portions. Tagore participated in the movement giving lectures and writing patriotic songs with such fervor that Ezra Pound quipped. “Tagore has sung Bengal into nation”.⁴
He nourished the 'Swadeshi' movement with stirring national songs. He also proposed that nobody would cook food on the day of partition and that all men should have a dip in the holy Ganga and tie bands (rakhi) on the forearm as a symbol of friendship. Tagore himself took part in the processions that went around the city and tied 'rakhi' bands on all irrespective of status, caste or religion. These activities not only nurtured the Swadeshi movement but also reinforced social and cultural ties among Indians that the alien rule was trying to destroy.\(^5\)\(^{(Mukherji 87-89)}\)

Later however, Tagore saw the movement turning violent with the agitations of the nationalists. It was extremely difficult for Tagore to accept the actions of the nationalists like burning of foreign clothes as a mark of non-cooperation. He argued that Indians should utilize their energy in constructive efforts such as spreading education and social reforms rather than in destructive activities such as burning foreign cloth. Boycott of British goods also meant rejecting everything Western. Tagore urged the Indian people not to totally disregard everything Western, but to assimilate the best of the West so as to create a self-reliant country that would ultimately be able to dispense with alien rule.\(^6\)\(^{(Dutta and Robinson, p.62)}\)

He was further dismayed to 'see many youths turning to the 'cult of bomb'. Finally Tagore withdrew from the movement in 1907 disheartened by the violent and extremist nature the movement had acquired. Many nationalists saw this sudden withdrawal of Tagore as an act of betrayal. But nothing could change his decision. Even though Tagore had withdrawn from
active politics, he continued to resent British colonization of India. He empathized with the suffering of the Indian people and their struggle for independence. Every critical juncture of the national struggle moved him. In 1919 it was Tagore who first raised the voice denouncing the brutal massacre at Jallianwallah Bagh and in protest renounced his knighthood.

Though Tagore expressed anti-imperialist sentiments, his admonition of non-cooperation reveals his disagreement over the strategy adopted by Indian National Congress and Gandhi to fight Imperialism. Tagore publicly criticized Gandhi's ideas of non-cooperation against everything Western. He called Gandhi's attitude of non-cooperation as a form of violence.

From the above discussion of Tagore's role and ideas during the early national movement, it can be seen that Tagore recognized the need for an anti-colonial movement but did not approve of the methods used by nationalist leaders. He strongly resented the violent form the movement had taken and that stoically refrained him from taking active part in contemporary politics.

**Nation and Nationalism**

According to Tagore the word 'nation' does not occur in our indigenous languages for it is a word coined in Europe. In 'Prachya-O-Paschatta Savyata' (The Civilization of the East and West) he writes, "The word 'nation' does not occur in our language, nor did it exist in our country. Of late by virtue of European education we have learnt to esteem national greatness. But its ideal is not rooted in our mind."
Our history, our religion, our society do not recognize the supremacy of the cult of nation. The place that the West gives to political independence, we give it to spiritual liberation. We do not give importance to any freedom save freedom of the soul". 7 (qtd in Kedarnath Mukherjee, p.255.)

Tagore is of the opinion that India is a country of divergent races, religions and languages. She has never sought for a nation in the Western concept of the term. Her mission has been to provide proper accommodation for numerous guests. The political history of India records invasion, conquest and subjugation of India by the foreigners, but the social history of India was not concerned with those invasions and conquests but on the contrary embraced everyone into her social fold. They came, lived and ultimately merged into the main stream. This assimilative potentiality of the old Indian civilization and social system was so overwhelming that the earlier invaders like the Greeks, the Sakas and the Huns were absorbed within the fold of her population and completely fused their identity with the indigenous people. Therefore, social history of India was more concerned with man, be he a Greek, a Saka, a Hun, a Mughal or a Pathan. According to Tagore, “To India has been given her problem from the beginning of history – it is the race problem. Races ethnologically different have come in this country in close contact. This fact has been and still continues to be the most important one in our history”.8 (Tagore, p.419) The social history of India thus puts emphasis on man instead of rulers. The British came to India as
a ruling body of men, as warriors and with the concept of 'nation'.
They maintained their separate identity. All these concepts were alien
to our social history in general and people in particular.

"We had known the hordes of Moghals and Pathans who
invaded India, but we had known them as human races, with their
own religions and customs, likes and dislikes, - we had never known
them as a nation. We loved and hated them as occasions arose; we
fought for them and against them, talked with them in a language
which was theirs as well as our own, and guided the destiny of the
Empire in which we had our active share. But this time we had to
deal, not with kings, not with human races, but with a nation - we,
who are no nation ourselves".9 (Tagore, p.421)

Tagore's main objections came from the very nature and
purpose of nation as an institution. Tagore opines thus "A nation, in
the sense of the political and economic union of a people, is that
aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for
a mechanical purpose". 10 (Tagore, p.421). Tagore objected the
utilitarian purpose of the nation. His view is that since nationalism
emerged in the post-religious laboratory of industrial capitalism, it
was an "organization of politics and commerce".11 (Tagore, p.420).

To Tagore nationalism spreads tentacles of greed, selfishness,
power etc. It sacrifices the moral man, the complete man... to make
room for the political and commercial man - the man of limited
purpose.12 (Tagore, p.424). Nationalism, according to Tagore is not
"a spontaneous self-expression of man as a social being, It is a natural
regulation of human relationships, so that men can develop ideals of life in cooperation with one another.\textsuperscript{13} (Tagore, p.421)

As Collins says, "For Tagore a nation cannot be equated with 'ethnic' or straight forwardly with a cultural or linguistic group. It may have been born out of and still comprise such phenomena, but for nation is distinctively modern and exclusively western. Its mechanical purpose implicates an instrumental rationality in its political organizational form. The nation is a force that is greater than such of its parts. It has a purpose and this purposeful element is deified in the form of the state. Therefore, in Tagore's critique, the Nation is always the 'nation state'.\textsuperscript{14} (Collins, p. 6)

An all-embracing definition of Nation is difficult because of its elusive nature and plurality of its signification. Tagore's works "show how a writer of a colonized nation can subvert the western political notion of nation to put forward his own critic of Nation or Nationalism"\textsuperscript{15} (Arnab Baul, p.1)

In his book on nationalism Tagore distinguishes between government by kings and human races and government by nations. He says – "Before the Nation came to rule over us we had other governments which were foreign, and these, like all the governments had some elements of the machine in them. But the difference between them and the government by the Nation is like the difference between the handloom and the power loom. In the products of the handloom the magic of man's living fingers finds its expression, and its hum harmonizes with the music of life. But the power loom is..."
Tagore agrees that India’s former governments were ‘woefully lacking in many advantages of the modern government. However, they were not nation-states – their texture was loosely woven, leaving gaps through which our own life sent its threads and imposed its designs’. (Tagore, pp.426-427)

While framing his idea of Nationalism, Tagore prioritized society over the Western notion of state. The West gives the state an all-powerful position and therefore nationalism of the West centres on the political state. But India, throughout her history, has given the society the priority of position and as such appreciation of western nationalism would do more harm than good to India. Tagore was in favour of awakening national consciousness and was against imitation of Western nationalism in our society-based civilization.

In his essay ‘Prachya – O – Paschatta Savyata’ (The Civilization of the East and the West) the poet clarifies the difference between the civilizations of the East and the West. He writes, “Society is the basis of our Hindu civilization, state is the basis of the civilization of the West. Man can attain greatness both under society and state. But it would be wrong if we think that building up of a nation in the European mould is the only nature of civilization and the only aim of humanity”.

Tagore looks back to what he sees as the real tradition of India, which is to work for an adjustment of races, to acknowledge the
differences between them and yet to seek some basis of unity’ The basis for this tradition has been built in India at the social levels, not politically, but through saints like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya and others. It is this solution – unity through acknowledgement of differences – that India has to offer to the world. As Ashis Nandy says India’s ideals have evolved through her own history.19 (Ashis Nandy, p.6).

Tagore believes that “India has never had a real sense of nationalism. Even though from childhood I had been taught that the idolatry of 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 gain truly their India by fighting against that education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity”.20 (Tagore, p.456).

Tagore says that it would do no good to compete with western civilization in its own field because we cannot borrow other people’s history and that if we stifle our own we are committing suicide. When you borrow things that do not belong to your life, they only serve to crush your life.21 (Tagore, p.457).

Tagore declares directly: “I am not against one nation in particular but against the general idea of all nations.” For to him “Nationalism is a great menace.” 22 (Tagore, p.458)

Tagore recognized the sanctity of the anti-colonial movement but also the futility of the method of begging used by the early Indian National Congress. He says, “They wanted scraps of things, but they
had no constructive ideal”. But he also rejected the ideals of extremists. He says, “We must never forget in the present day that those people who have got their political freedom are not necessarily free, they are merely powerful. The passions which are unbridled in them are creating huge organizations of slavery in the disguise of freedom”. 23 (Tagore, p.462)

An analysis of Tagore’s novels can be made here against the background of his political ideology. His novels act as a medium to make known his concept of nationalism and they have clear ‘political messages’ The novels revolve around the political debates taking place in India, over the methods of the Swadeshi movement and Social reform in general. 24 (Nandy p.9)

When Tagore abruptly withdrew from the Swadeshi movement in 1907 he had to face a lot of flak, as his ideas differed from the national mood of most Indians. His response to his critics was fictionally articulated in both. \textit{The Home and the World} and \textit{Four Chapters}.

In \textit{The Home and the World} Nikhil, Tagore’s alter ego in the novel who is patriotic but will not place nation above truth and conscience, says – “I am willing to serve my country but my worship I reserve for Right which is far greater than country. To worship my country as a God is to bring curse upon it”. However, Nikhil’s friend Sandip, a charismatic but unconscientious nationalist, to whom any action in the name of the nation is right, no matter how far it may be from truth or justice, exclaims, “country’s needs must be made into
a god" and one must "set aside ... conscience ... by putting the
country in its place" 25 (Tagore, pp. 8-9). "Tagore saw this radical view
of Sandip, in which the nation is apotheosized and placed above truth
and conscience, as a recipe for disaster". 26 (Quyum, p. 4). Sandip
believes that God manifests (himself) in one's own country and so the
latter must be worshipped. Nikhil counters that in that case, God
may indeed manifest himself in other countries too, and that leaves
one no scope to hate them. He believes that countries that live by
oppressing others have to answer for it; history has not ended. 27
(Nandy, 13). Ashis Nandy rightly points out that, "The Home and the
World (Ghore-Baire) offers a critique of nationalism but also
a perspective on the form anti-imperialism should take in
a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society where a colonial political
economy encourages the growth of a complex set of dependencies. In
such a society the politically and economically weak and culturally
less westernized might be sometimes more dependent on the colonial
system than the privileged and the cultured. The novel suggests that
a nationalism which stream-rollers society into making a uniform
stand against colonialism, ignoring the unequal sacrifices imposed
thereby on the poorer and the weaker, will tear apart the social fabric
the country, even if it helps to formally de-colonize the
country." 28 (Ashis Nandy, p. 19)

Tagore's Novel Four Chapters recognizes the growing role of
violence in human affairs. Tagore had become sensitive to this issue.
As Ashis Nandy says "This novel, too, grapples with the dual
encounter between East and West, and between politics and ethics, against a colonial background. However, unlike ‘Ghare Baire’, Char Adhyay specifically introduces and deals with the changing nature of violence in contemporary politics. For it was written after World War I, the Nazi take over in Germany, and the growing violence in Indian public life despite the by then predominant presence of Gandhi.”

29 (Nandy, p.21).

Four Chapters is the story of a group of Bengali revolutionaries who are under pressure from the colonial police. Right at the beginning readers are told that informers have begun to take an unusual interest in some members of the group who outwardly lead a conventional, apolitical life. As the pressure mounts the group begins to disintegrate, and so do its members. Under stress, the psychological and moral costs of living the life of a terrorist are bared and the cultural rootlessness of the movement is underscored. So that what begins as a struggle for freedom becomes, by the end of the story, an invitation to a new form of bondage. 30 (Nandy, p.22)

In the novel Atin says to Ela:

“The patriotism of those who have no faith in that which is above patriotism is like a crocodile’s back used as a ferry to cross the river... That the life of the country can be saved by killing its soul, is the monstrously false doctrine that nationalists all over the world are bellowing forth stridently. My heart groans to give it effective contradictions.”31 (Tagoe, p.234)
Gora was written during the period of the Swadeshi movement but the story is set at the end of the 1870s. The chief protagonist believes that the humiliation of being colonized can only be overcome by a tough protectiveness towards everything indigenous. Gora’s patriotism is attacked through a series of events, leading to a search for more authentic forms of patriotism. Gora says – "If we have the mistaken notion that because the English are strong we can never become strong unless we become exactly like them, then that impossibility will never be achieved, for by mere imitation we shall eventually be neither one thing nor the other" 32(Tagore, 102).

Tagore was bestowed with the rare gift of being a prolific writer of novels and dramas, and an equally gifted poet. As in his novels, his firm opinions about nationalism, violence, patriotism etc find expression in his poems too.

In a poem entitled “The Sunset of the Century”, written on the last day of 19th century, Tagore condemned the aggressive form of nationalism, which for him was nothing other than ‘jingoism’. This poem puts across explicitly his contempt for nationalism. He writes –

The last sun of the century sets amidst the blood red cloudfsof the West and the whirlwind of hatred.

The naked passion of the self-love of Nations, in its Drunken delirium of greed, is dancing to the clash of steel and the howling verses of vengeance.

The hungry self of the Nation shall burst in a violenceof 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, It swells and swells.

Till in the midst of its unholy feast descends the sudden heaven
piercing its heart of grossness.33

(Tagore, pp.466)

The poet believes that the cult of a nation built on the
organization of power can never be permanent; and will be defeated by
the freedom of the soul. He asks the down- trodden and the
oppressed to cultivate the freedom of the soul for real salvation and
spiritual and moral unity. Tagore remains optimistic all through.
Nations decay and die when they betray their trust but man lives
longer. He continued,

Be not ashamed, my brothers, to stand before the
proud and powerful.

With your white robe of simple ness,
Let your crown be of humility,
your freedom the freedom of the soul.

Build God's throne daily upon the ample bareness of
your poverty.

And know that what is huge is not real and pride is
not everlasting.

Tagore condemns war and imperialism. He had witnessed
two world wars in his lifetime and their devastating consequences
upon humanity had shocked him. He had seen how in the name of
nationalism, nations were trying to divide the world for their own
self-interest. His anti-imperialist attitude finds expression in the following poem.

When my mind was released
from the black cavern of oblivion
and woke up into an intolerable surprise
it found itself at the creator of a volcanic hell-fire
that spouted forth a stifling fume of insult to Man;
it witnessed the long-drawn suicidal agony of the Time-spirit
passing through convulsions of a monstrous deformity worse than death.34

(Tagore, Poem No.107, p.381)

Tagore condemns the attitude of those people who glorify racialism and imperialism. In his poem “Sarvanther Sampati Apaghathe”(End of interest in accidental death) he writes –

In the name of nationalism,
the states are running after death
towards the hidden path of self-interest.35

(qtd in Kedarnath, p.278)

Tagore asks God for the power to stop the march of imperialism and save humanity from wars.

At the old nation’s council-chambers
plans and protests are pressed flat between the tight-shut-prudent lips.

In the meanwhile across the sky rush with their blazing blasphemy
the soulless swarms of vulture-machines
carrying their missiles of ravenous passion for human entails.

Give me power, O awful judge,
sitting on the throne of Eternity,
give me a voice of thunder,
that I may hurl imprecation
upon his cannibal whose gruesome hunger
spares neither women nor children..." 36

(Tagore, Poems, No. 107, pp. 381-382)

Tagore's condemnation of Hitler and Nazism is echoed in a poem
"Prayaschitta" (Atonement) which he sent to Prof. Lesney of
Czechoslovakia after signing the Munich Pact wherein Sudetenland
(former Bohemia) was given as a gift to Germany to satisfy Hitler's
longing for Pan-German movement.

In the upper sky, lamped by science,
the night forgets itself,
while in the underground gloom
lean hunger and bloated voracity
crash against each other
till the earth begins to tremble
and the pillars of triumph
are perilously cracked
swaying on the brink of gaping-gulfs....

When the victims of a carnivorous rage
are dragged by the competition of ravenous fangs,
let the hideousness of the blood soaked blasphemy
arouse divine anger heralding a heroic peace
out of an awful retribution 37
(Tagore, Poems, No.110, pp.385-386)

In another of his poems, “Recovery” Tagore reveals the antagonistic realities in the world – the dance of human life and the constant shocks and injuries to that dame – by associating the former with ordinary people through the ages and the later with the rulers – states and powers. He sees this distinctly in Indian society where common people carry on with their ancient way of life little caring about who is in power and who is not.

...... The earth when I look at it

\[\text{Makes me aware}
\]
\[\text{of the hubbub of a huge concourse}
\]
\[\text{of ordinary people}
\]
\[\text{Led along many paths and in various groups}
\]
\[\text{By man's common urges,}
\]
\[\text{From age to age, through life and death.}
\]
\[\text{woven by day and by night.}
\]
\[\text{The sonorous rhythm}
\]
\[\text{of life's liturgy in all its pain and elation,}
\]
\[\text{Gloom and night.}
\]
\[\text{over the ruins of hundreds of empires}
\]
\[\text{The people work.}^{38} \text{ (Tr.William Radice, p.122)}
\]

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"Tagore's hatred for conventional Nationalism has its roots here and also simultaneously his projection of continuity of work culture of common people of the country as a 'modular form' which defines an India devoid of all politics".39(Arnab Baul, p.7)

Thus an empathic Tagore wants to awaken the dormant spirit of the working communities and transform their lives. In the poem, 'The conch' he says –

How can we bear to see you conch lying there in the dart?
The tragedy of its cuts of air and blocks out light.
Warriors, rise, brandish your banners!
Singers, get up and sing! Doers,
Charge into action! Do not falter!
How can we let you inspiring conch
Stare up at us from the dart?40

(Tr. William radice, p.77)

In Naibedya (Offering) series of poems one finds Tagore as a frustrated poet. He is disappointed at the state of affairs the country is in, with the rise of extremists. His ideas differed from those of Gandhi. For Tagore, National Independence is worth nothing if it does not bring along with it a social and cultural renewal from within. He prays for the enlightenment of the true national spirit.

Where the mind is without fear and head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretch its arms towards perception;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.41

(Tagore, Geetanjali, No. 35., p. 53)

Tagore wants such freedom...

Freedom from fear is the freedom I claim for you, my motherland! –
fear, the phantom demon, shaped by your own distorted dreams;

Freedom from the burden of ages, bending your head, breaking your back,
blinding your eyes to the beckoning call of the future.42

(Tagore, “Freedom”, p. 320.)

Tagore yearned for freedom from the insult of dwelling in a puppet’s world, where movements are started through brainless wires, repeated through mindless habits, where figures wait with patient obedience for a master of show to be stirred into a moment’s mimicry of life.

Tagore’s poems are, “an attempt to construct a subaltern history of the nation by discovering and re-establishing those who do not find an entry in nation’s colonial historiography”.43 (Arnab Baul p. 8)
Tagore poems can be called, after Frantz Fanon, an example of “a literature of combat in the sense that it has potentiality to mould the national consciousness giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons, it is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space.” 44 (qtd in Arnab, p.9).

Tagore and Gandhi:

Two towering figures of 20th century, Tagore and Gandhi held opposing views on many matters concerning the means used in the struggle for independence. Though Tagore revered Gandhi, he disagreed with him on many issues like nationalism, patriotism, science etc. Both articulated their differences publicly.

As Ashis Nandy says – “Both recognized the need for a ‘national’ ideology of India as a means of cultural survival and both recognized that, for the same reason, India would either have to make a break with the post-medieval Western concept of nationalism or give the concept a new content. As a result, for Tagore, nationalism itself became gradually illegitimate; for Gandhi, nationalism began to include a critique of nationalism.”45 (p.2)

Tagore was of the view that the unity and plurality of consciousness could be achieved only through proper education of the people. To him proper education and not adulation of the charkha (spinning wheel) that Gandhi advocated, was the only means to liberate India from tyranny. When Gandhi rebuked Tagore for his disregard for the Charkha as well as Swaraj saying, “Everyone must
spin, Let Tagore spin like others. Let him burn his foreign clothes; that is his duty today. God will take care of the morrow".46 (qtd in Kriplani, p. 72). Tagore replied, “the charkha does not require any one to think: one simply turns the wheel of the antiquated invention endlessly, using the minimum of judgment or stamina”.47 (qtd in Quyum, p.7) Gandhi advocated the use of Charkha, which he believed, would serve as an important part of self-realization. For Gandhi it was also a means of rural upliftment, whereas, Tagore was skeptical about the Charkha’s productive role, while having serious reservations about (automatic) machines.

Tagore publicly criticized Gandhi’s appeals for non-cooperation with everything Western. Tagore characterized Gandhi’s attitude on non-cooperation as a form of ‘himsa’ or violence. About non-cooperation, Tagore says: “Non-cooperation appears to me to be the progeny of the union of rejection of one party and dejection from the other party and therefore though I try to shed upon it my best smile, I long hesitated to welcome it to my heart.” 48 (qtd in Dutta and Robinson, p.238)

However, Tagore quickly grasped that Gandhi had the potential to lead the country to political freedom, so while he still disagreed with Gandhi’s philosophy of non-cooperation, he encouraged his leadership.

Tagore and Gandhi both believed in social reorganization. They both wanted India to become self-reliant and self-sufficient, so as to ultimately do away with alien rule. However both differed in the methodology adopted to achieve the goal. Tagore preferred developing
the spirit of rational curiosity that he appreciated in the West. For Tagore Western ideas particularly of science were vital to India’s regeneration. He wanted to inculcate the spirit of inquiry in the minds of the Indian people.

**THE CONCEPT OF NATIONALISM IN BENDRE**

Language has been a binding factor and also the strength of the people of a region. Thus, language provided the base for the growing nationalist movement in Karnataka in late 19th and early 20th century. The people, more particularly the intelligentsia, took exception to Kannada being replaced or dominated by other languages, especially the neighbouring regional ones like Marathi, Telugu. The resistance was surprisingly not much against English, the official language of the ruling class.

Kannada had been reduced to a minor status in its own land. In this situation, Kannadigas were experiencing innumerable day to day problems as other languages dominated their life. Economically too, these areas remained underdeveloped, neglected and backward.

During the period of British rule, areas that comprise the present Karnataka State were under as many as 22 different administrative units.⁴⁹ (C. R. Govinda Raju, 22) These were further grouped into five main units like Bombay Presidency, Madras Presidency, the Princely state of Mysore, the Nizam’s Hyderabad and Kodagu. Thus in spite of their large number, the Kannadigas did not have a common administrative patronage. North Karnataka came under the rule of Bombay Presidency where Marathi was the official
language. Those in the Hyderabad Karnataka region came under the Nizam’s rule where Urdu ruled. Kannadigas in South Canara came under Madras Presidency where Tamil was the main language. Under these conditions, a feeling of discontent had started brewing among people. They felt that their interests and their language were being relegated to the background. These state of affairs created a deep urge in the Kannadigas to be united politically, economically, socially, regionally and culturally.

Consequently, a movement that initially started as a protest against linguistic oppression soon morphed into one that demanded a separate state to be created consolidating all Kannada-speaking regions. Thus, making the unification of Karnataka one of the major historical events in India. The Kannadigas challenged the expansionist claims of neighbouring Indian languages and strove for a regional, linguistic and cultural identity. Similar movements dominated by languages to get an independent identity in the neighbouring regions like Orissa, Andhra inspired the movement. The vehement reaction of the Bengalis against the partition of Bengal was a signal for the Kannadigas to unify for the sake of their regional language. Simultaneously, they also shared the all India vision of the larger Indian nationalism. All these aspects have made the study of linguistic movement in Karnataka relevant and interesting today.

Even though the movement had a political urgency, it had a cultural dimension too. Here the writers of modern Kannada literature spearheaded the movement. Thus the success of movement
does not belong to the politicians alone. In the preface to 'Nannadu Ee Kannada Nadu (This Kannada land is Mine) which Bendre edited in 1928, Bendre writes – “Just as Kumarswami united his six bodies into one and became a single deity with six faces, so Vishwa-Karnataka has to rise from its fragments.” 50(qtd in Amur, p.74)

The writers aroused the emotions and ideologies of the people who were politically divided. Their writings helped the people to come out of the amnesia brought about by the colonial rule and made them conscious of their rich past.

“Where the politicians did have some confusion about this regional unity, this confusion did not exist in the writers for they had the vision of a cultural Karnataka”51 (C.R. Govinda Raju, p.4)

The separated Kannadigas had to be brought together and to form an identity of their own based on their language. The people had to associate themselves with the culture and literature of the region. Already the awareness of being an Indian and at the same time of being Kannadiga had been awakened during the fight to oust the British. Thus the consciousness about one’s own regional language had become more acute during this period. Hence, having had a simultaneous growth, there hardly existed any ideological difference between the concept of nationalism and the concept of unification based on regional languages. The latter is the link and part of the former - a small part leading to the greater whole. The process of finding one's identity goes through many stages, and regionalism is one such step of identification in the greater concept of Indianness.

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So the two – regionalism and nationalism- are not contradictory. In fact, they complement each other.

The intensity of the unification movement was seen in Northern Karnataka. The loss of identity was felt more intensely in this region where Marathi was the dominant language. Naturally, the seeds of the Ekikaran movement and all its most important protagonists including Alur Venkat Rao were from Northern Karnataka. Therefore, Dharwad became the centre. One of the earliest and the most important organizations that spearheaded the entire movement, the Karnataka Vidyavardhaka Sangha took birth in Dharwad. So too, the Geleyar Gumpu (the friends’ Association) formed there, led by Bendre was an effective arm of the movement. Thus, the contribution of North Karnataka towards the unification of Karnataka is indeed vital.

Bendre’s writings vehemently echo the need of unity of regional language, unity of local culture and regional history. He became the representative voice of North Karnataka as his ideas about Kannada language and Karnataka and the need for unification were the unspoken, repressed feelings of the people of Northern Karnataka. Bendre’s writings touched the chords of people’s heart. To discern his line of thought an analysis has to be made of his pivotal role in the unification movement and of his works on this movement. These will eventually help to understand his concept of nationalism.

That Bendre played a pivotal role in the unification of Karnataka is unquestionable. His ‘Geleyar Gumpu’ (Friend’s circle) played a vital role in the renaissance movement in Karnataka in
1923.52 (Amur, p.11). The members of this group who were inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo, shared a common goal. This association was dedicated to the cultural awakening of Karnataka and the struggle for national freedom. Its membership consisted primarily of V. K. Gokak, R. S. Mugali Madhurachanna, Betgeri Krishna Sharma, etc. Its major task was to make Kannada literature reach the common man. The group was first to organize Nadahabba (regional festival), which became an important cultural activity. It ran journals like *Swadharm* and *Jaya Karnataka* and launched the ‘Jaya Karnataka Granthamala’, which brought out the first anthology of Kannada folk poetry. Its ideal was to unify Karnataka politically as well as psychologically. It was a Herculean task and was inspired by Aluru Venkata Rao and others.

The rise of Navodaya Kannada literature can be attributed not only to colonialism and the advent of European literature into India but also to the intense personal feelings of hurt, pride and anger against the colonizer. This indented pride led the writers to dig into the past history of India and Indian mythology, so as to develop self-confidence, based on their glorious past. This delving into past made them aware of the rich culture of India. Taking the best out of the prevalent British culture and the ancient Indian culture, these writers came up with a new culture. The assimilation of both the cultures led to a change of attitude e.g. the submissive attitude of the Indians changed to a demanding, aggressive attitude under British influence. The new culture gave strength to fight for a common goal.
It became an instrument for the struggle against the British rule.53
(D.R. Nagaraj, p.372)

This kind of a historical situation can be found in all colonized
countries where the colonies make use of this newly created culture
as a weapon against the colonizer. It needed a tremendous effort on
the part of the colonized to overcome their stamped-in feeling of
inferiority; and only those leaders who empathized with this effort and
consolidated it, were successful in bringing about an uprising against
the colonizers. In other words, the people who become aware of their
own cultural strengths and tradition in order to gain a strong personal
identity are the ones who are able to categorically identify the enemy
to be fought.54 (D. R. Nagraj p.373)

The feeling of patriotism is brought to fore only when the nation
is under attack. Under British rule, this dormant feeling in Indians
became obvious. Nationalism was a new concept that had permeated
the vast Indian sub-continent. Nationalism also meant the advent of
new ideas, of modernity that had entered the Indian culture.

With the advent of nationalism, the people started gaining an
identity based on a common culture, which cascaded into identities
based on religion, caste, region and languages. This also brought
about a change in literature. In the new form of literature, one could
find a sensitivity of expression and a very vigilant secular language.
During the colonial rule, the Western ideas had been absorbed and
assimilated into regional literature. These greatly influenced the
thought process of the people of Navoday period- a period that
coincided with the national freedom and regional unification. Thus, the literature of that time reflected the ideologies of the movement.

In northern Karnataka, Marathi was perceived as a threat to Kannada. The Kannada intelligentsia suspected that their language would be displaced by Marathi as the medium in schools as well as the language in the court and offices. In order to counter the undermining of linguistic and cultural greatness of Karnataka, the intellectuals brought to fore its glorious past to strengthen the regional Kannada identity.

Though the movement's main concern was the regional language and the main resistance was against certain neighbours who were described as 'foreigners'; it was not based on narrow parochialism. To the Kannada intelligentsia taking up the Kannada issue was as natural as identifying with the larger Indian issues. This participation on national level could be seen after the formation of Indian National Congress in 1885, when the local intelligentsia attended its annual sessions and propagated the Congress ideas in Karnataka.

**Bendre as a Kanndiga and a nationalist:**

Against the background of this political and literary setup, Bendre's role is considered pivotal in the movement for unification of Karnataka. To him the development of language was an inseparable component of broader nationalist scheme of nation forming. He was convinced that the larger Indian Nationalism did not pose any threat to the sustenance of the local identity. Indian
Nationalism and other related issues formed integral parts along with the Kannada issues in his scheme of world development and its process.

In Kurtkoti's words, "Bendre loves to talk about the relation of his own individual self with the world around him and proves in various ways, that a poet has certain obligations to the world in which he lives and he ought to fulfill them through his poetry." 55 (p. 1)

Bendre appeared on the Kannada poetic scene when the condition of Kannada language was in bad shape. When he started his poetic career, Karnataka had not yet got a political boundary. The aim of the regional linguistic revival was not to defy the national framework, but only to demand certain internal rearrangements within that system. There was no conflict between nationalism and linguistic regionalism. Neither were there any conflicts at the political and the literary levels. Bendre and his work are a paradigm of this process.56 (K. Raghavendra Rao, p. 5)

Bendre was one of the pioneers of modern Kannada literature. There was a feeling of frustration among the poets as the sources from the older tradition had exhausted and there was hardly anything fresh remaining to base one's work on. There were some sporadic and isolated efforts to mark a new path. Bendre "had a dual responsibility of creating a new kind of poetry capable of absorbing new ideologies and new models of sensitivity and also of preserving its identity as the poetry of Kannada people." 57(Kurtkoti, p. 4) Even though Bendre's mother tongue was Marathi, then a dominant language, he chose to
write in Kannada. He had for option either English or Marathi as his medium of expression, but his choice of Kannada shows his affection and loyalty to the language.

Bendre was instinctively both native and national. Though nationalism was a political phenomenon, it had its literary dimension too. In literature, it meant a need to assert the poet’s links with his indigenous, national past. This explains why Bendre turned towards Tagore for inspiration. He acknowledged Tagore as his Gurudev. Bendre introduced many Indian characteristics like the ideal of renunciation, the mystic yearning to be absorbed with the absolute and the aggressive tone of patriotism concerning the country as a whole or one’s own region as its integral part. 58 (Chennaveera Kanavi and Raghavendra Rao, p. xvii).

“He aligned himself firmly with Kannada culture but he always saw this in the wider Indian and world perspectives. He formulated what he called Saptapadis of the cultural renaissance in India. These were 1) the idea of Swaraj developed by Tilak and Gandhi ii) the recovery of the Vedas by Dayanand Saraswati iii) the clarification of the Ahamsutra by Raman, iv) Tagore’s achievements in art and education. V) The Naranarayandarashana made possible by Ramkrishna and Vivekananda vi) the way shown by Shri Krishnaji to a fruitful life, the ‘Sahajayoga’ vii) the manifestation of the divine in man, the message of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

The universality in Bendre affirms itself in the way he sees himself. “Bendre identified himself as Panchakoshagarbha. These
‘Panchakoshas’ were 1) Ambika who gave birth to him 2) Kannadatayi who taught him to speak iii) Bharatmata who made him a cultivated individual iv) Bhumitayi, enshrined in the heart of humanity and v) Vishwamata, the cosmic mother.” 59(Amur, p.33)

“There is no evidence in Bendre’s writings of a direct response to the colonial experience but his identification of the various elements in India’s cultural renaissance does represent an indirect response.” 60(Amur, p.36)

Bendre deals with regional and national themes in many of his poems. The identity of the nation is most often symbolized by a figure or an image. This helps to create an image with which people can identify the nation. In 20th century with the growth of nationalism, the identity of India came to be visually associated with the image of ‘Bharatmata’. Devotion to this mother figure came to be seen as evidence of one’s nationalism. Bendre’s “Kannada Kandavvan Lali” (Lullaby for Kannada baby) is a song sung by Mother India for her Kannada daughter. Here Karnataka is being lauded as the daughter of Mother India. The bond between mother and daughter is celebrated. This “is indicative of the national perspective wherein the poet visualized regional identity”. 61(Amur, p.27) The mother-daughter bond is highlighted and extended as a representation of bond between the mother and daughters of the nation. Along with the notion of sacredness of the mother - daughter bond emerged the concept of interdependence and the sense of responsibility to defend the sanctity of the nation. He felt that to free India it was necessary that each of
her constituents should be unified and that each one had to be individually strong. Thus, he envisioned a strong group of Marathis, of Telugus, along with a strong group of Kannadigas. All these groups were to him the siblings of the same mother with their own names and identities and together they would forge a strong family bonding.

For example the poem “Keli Nudi” shows the sibling relationship

To the north is Marathi
To the east Telegu
To the south is Malayalam
And to the west Konkani, Coorgi and Tulu
But Kannada is the Jewel in the crown

For Bendre, Dharwad is the microcosm of India. His intense feelings about this place are concentric; they spread out to encompass Karnataka and then widen to encompass the nation too. In his poem “Dharwad Tayi” he expresses his feelings about how Dharwad forms an important, integral part of his motherland’s pride and honour.

Karnataka is mirrored in his image of Dharwad, he saw Karnataka through Dharwad. It was a focal point to invoke the feelings of unification in Kannadigas. Similarly, the glory of Hampi symbolised the prosperous days of the past that were the zenith of an ideal life, as against the gloom that had enveloped the Kannadigas under the colonial rule. The Kannada mirror has been fragmented and strewn about, he writes in “Odanudi”
In order to unify the state he had to make efforts to awaken the people who had gone into a slumber-like condition over a period of a century, having lost their identity, they were completely in disarray and disoriented. He uses his gift of powerful invoking in verse e.g. “Kannadigana Udayavani” to awaken Kannada Mother,

You are the expression of the saint,
the words of the brave,
a source of endless knowledge.
why are you in slumber now,
Awake O Mother Saraswati.

The following forceful lines are also to be found in this poem.

Enter the bosoms of the dead,
Draw the poison that has been spread,
fill again the dry Amrita stream;
sow seeds of strength in plenty.
Pull out the fear from our hearts.62 (Tr. Amur, p.27)

He requests the persistent cuckoo to awaken the people and spread his message for unification of Karnataka in the poem “Kogile”

“Tarun Tapaswi” (Young ascetic) dramatizes the state of the ascetic’s mind. He sees himself as an agonized ascetic in a prison, and who sees a dream in which Mother India appears and fills him with courage and he is revitalized with a new determination and a new understanding of freedom.

The regional impulse can be found in ‘Kanasinolagondu kanasu’ (A Dream within a dream). According to Amur, this was inspired by
"If you are a man, give your life, will you?

"Narabali" which was published in 1930 angered the British and Bendre was sent to jail.

In "Muvattamurukoti" (Thirty-three crore), Mother India bemoans the fate of her children. Here the poet chastises Indians for lack of patriotic feelings. "In two of these, "Narabali" and "Muvattumurukoti," national freedom is shown as an act of religious self-sacrifice, a process by which self-suffering becomes self-strength. Here one can see the articulation of a peculiarly Indian version of nationalism–drawn from the ideas of Gandhiji and Aurobindo."64 (K. Raghavendrarao, p.21)

In '330000000' Bendre sounds frustrated and vents out his feelings vehemently. Here his national fervour ends in anger at the 33 crore Indians who seem to be in slumber.

"Towards the close of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century, an unarticulated feeling of frustration was growing among those who aspired to write Kannada poetry. On the one hand, they could see that the older tradition had exhausted itself, and on the other, they could find no reasonable substitute for it. This was the state of affairs not merely with regard to poetry, but to the whole of literature. In deed, it was not only a problem in Kannada literature, but in Indian literature as well, faced in diverse ways by many regional literatures in India. The causes for this stagnation were complex – partly political but essentially cultural and social. However
a few sporadic and isolated efforts were made to strike a new path."65 (Chennaveera Kanavi, K. Raghavendra Rao, p.xvi).

When Bendre started his poetic career, he had for models only the traditional Kannada and folk poetry. Both resisted experimentation. Bendre incorporated both the modes of expression in his poetry. He assimilated the vigour of the folk poetry and sophistication of the traditional poetry. Thus, carrying forward the tradition of Kannada poetry he infused it with a new spirit.66 (Kirtinath, p.7-9)

Bendre’s poem “Belagu” (The Dawn) published in 1926 occupies a special place in the evolution of modern poetry in Kannada because of the discovery of a new expressive mode and a new expressive form.67 (Amur p. 29)

“In an age dominated by English, the language of the rulers, he had not only the courage to affirm the great capabilities of Kannada but also the ability to demonstrate it." 68 (Amur, p.125)

A look at all his efforts and works shows that Bendre played a crucial role in the revival of Kannada language and also in the unification of Kanndigas. He was the one who brought in a new dawn to modern poetry in northern Karnataka. He established the custom of celebrating ‘Nadahabba’, which glorified the regional linguistic culture. This turned out to be the cultural base of the political movement for the formation of a Karnataka province comprising the entire Kannada-speaking population.69 (K. Raghavendrarao, p.4)
Conclusion

The works of Tagore and Bendre were both a product of and a contributor to national consciousness. Both Tagore and Bendre used religious symbols like deifying the nation to evoke national awakening.

To Bendre nation was never enigmatic. Bendre accepted nation as a valid category like all 'Navodaya' writers. To him the country was 'Bharat Mata' and Karnataka her daughter. Bendre talks of spiritual nationalism. To him nation is a category of people, of different kinds of people. He felt no need to discuss it explicitly. The question of India as a nation was never debatable to him, for him it just existed. It never posed any intellectual problem. Bendre may discuss nationalities but not nation. Nationalities (regions) may combine to form a nation. There was no need to articulate, whereas the notion of nation was a worry for Tagore.

For Tagore nation was a problem, it was always an issue. He was a critic of a rigid nationalism. Initially Tagore participated in the national movement for freedom. However on seeing the violent turn taken by the movement, he withdrew abruptly and no amount of bitter criticism changed his decision. A humanist, he rejected nationalism but recognised the need for anti-colonial movement. As Ashish Nandy calls him 'a dissenter among dissenters', for which he was very much misunderstood and was cause of much distress. However to both of them cultural unity was more important than political unity or gains.
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