

Tagore on Nationalism

Serajul Islam Choudhury

(Abstract)

Rabindranath Tagore, who was perhaps the greatest lyrical poet known to the world, had to engage himself with many socio-political questions of which nationalism was one.

The Bengalis, who considered themselves to be a nation, found in him one of the most dependable promoters of national unity. Tagore himself, however, has spoken of his detestation of nationalism of the West which had taken on a capitalist-imperialist character during the First World War. He was unfailing in his criticism of the British occupation of India, but was not particularly appreciative of the violent anti-British nationalist movement of his time. To his liberal-humanist way of thinking, the real problem of India was social and not political. It is well-known that Tagore took pride in his Indian identity which he believed was spiritual and not political. Broadly speaking, this very claim to spirituality of Indianness had opened up the way for political use of religion, leading, eventually, to the disastrous partition of India. Tagore was alive to the role of class in dividing the nation and regretted his own inability to reach the working classes.

Altogether, his views on nationalism are not linear and are, at the same time, indicative of his ideological position. They demand a close study for knowing him fully and also for an understanding of the reasons why the expected social revolution did not happen in the sub-continent.