Mohammad A. Quayum (Ed). *Tagore, Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism: Perceptions, Contestations and Contemporary Relevance*. New Delhi: Routledge India, 2020. 300pp. ISBN: 978-0367218720.

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Rabindranath Tagore has stood out prominently in world literature for more than a hundred years. Although his literary works are primarily in Bengali ─ one of India's many languages which is also the world's seventh most widely spoken language ─ his output in English too is plentiful. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913 for his English *Gitanjali* (1912), a collection of reworked versions of mostly devotional and spiritual poems written in Bengali, and became the first non-European to receive this accolade. Tagore's own English translations of his original Bengali work consolidated his literary acclaim. His literary and non-literary writings have been extensively read and assessed. This latest edited anthology of essays by Mohammad A. Quayum is a welcome addition to this scholarship.

With four volumes of books on Tagore, including criticism and translations, to his credit, Quayum is a knowledgeable hand at Tagore. In a comprehensive Introduction to this collection of fourteen essays, including his own, the editor declares that Tagore was a fierce opponent of nationalism because of its proclivity for sectarianism and chauvinism, and a passionate advocate of ecumenical humanism. In embracing the cause of the syncretic togetherness of nations, Tagore was a futuristic thinker as well as an advanced apostle of global peace.

Quayum delves more deeply into this issue in his essay "Imagining 'One World': Rabindranath Tagore's critique of nationalism". Exclusive nationalist identity has its limits in that it militates against the idea of a humanist universalism. In *Nationalism* (1917), Tagore postulated that the imperialistic urge of the Western powers was embedded in their aggressive, narrow-minded nationalism and that the remedy for the scourge of colonial depredations was not an international or cosmopolitan order but an active inter-civilizational alliance based on the commingling of nations. Essentially a greed-driven ideology propelled by utilitarian motives, nationalism espouses the interests of fractional nations with a hierarchical skew. Quayum asserts, however, that Tagore did not mean a wholesale denunciation of the West while indicting its pursuit of nationalism for plunder and predation. In a large body of his literary and discursive writings, speeches, and letters, Tagore emphasised

creative engagement between the East and the West for the promotion of an enlightened social order, though he was also accused of being impractical and far too visionary in his writings.

Tagore's impassioned plea against the pursuit of nationalism conducive to building a cosmopolitan ethos is further analysed here. In his essay, "Antinomies of nationalism and Rabindranath Tagore", Sabyasachi Bhattacharya notes that Tagore resolved the conflicts in the inferences about his assertions on nationalism by his message of universal humanism in his Hibbert Lectures delivered at Oxford in 1930 (*The Religion of Man*, 1931), in his political essays in Bengali in the late 1920s and 1930s (*Kalantar*, 1934), and his last public statement at Santiniketan in 1941, "Crisis in Civilization", wherein he dismantles the us/them, West/East hierarchical binary underpinning nationalism's reductive political ideology. He cautions against "generalizing too far on the basis of one or two texts like *Nationalism*" (17–18). In his closely argued and concise essay, Bhattacharya outlines Tagore's exposition of the nexus between Europe's moral decline and the Western concept of nationalism. Tagore was denounced by his detractors in Japan and America when he chastised these countries for their unabashed nationalism. Yet his condemnation of the nation as a political and economic union for the utilitarian purpose of promoting its gains by abandoning humanist values has influenced opinion-makers in the current debate on this issue. Tagore does not even spare dedicated Indian nationalists for their uncritical nativism and parochial outlook.

Christine Marsh points to the prescience of Tagore's stand against nationalism and to its contemporary relevance and resonance. Well ahead of other thinkers and philosophers, Tagore, Marsh argues, realized that nationalism's frenzy would devitalize the world and its systems. He foresaw the spectre of truncated communal life and the increasing loss of empathy between nations and peoples. The First World War betrayed the horrendous outcome of aggressive nationalism. Tagore's emphasis on ecological security and rural reconstruction for grassroots development has proved prophetic in the face of the globalised world's growing inequalities. Nation-states vie for political dominance, economic strength, and military power, ignoring the welfare of human society. Tagore's ambitious educational experiment at Santiniketan, begun in 1901 in a remote area of Bengal, was animated by his passion for rural outreach as well as his idea of promoting a universal humanism unimpeded by national barriers. Kathleen M. O'Connell argues that Viswa-Bharati is a miniature exemplar of Tagore's inclusive vision of the world and human society at large. In 1918, Visva-Bharati, a university to provide the link between India and the world, informally replaced the school in Santiniketan. O'Connell observes that Tagore conceived this institution as an "international centre of humanistic studies", signalling the global scope of its mission.

In an essay of note, Srimati Mukherjee expounds on the representations of the "nationalist patriot" in two cinematic adaptations of Tagore's novels: Satyajit Ray's *Ghare Baire / At Home and in the World* (1984), based on Tagore's 1915 novel of the same name, and Bappaditya Bandopadhyay's *Elar Char Adhyay* (2012) based on

Tagore's last completed novel, *Char Adhyay* (*Four Chapters*, 1934). Both novels are germane to Tagore's critique of militant nationalism. The film versions capture and underscore the denunciation of shallow and belligerent nationalism in the literary texts by deploying telling images. Mukherjee makes clear that Tagore was opposed not to the idea of Indian nationhood based on the collective memory of the past, but to political violence, jingoism, and ethnonationalism.

While most of the contributors to this anthology endorse Tagore's investment in a locally rooted globalism emanating from his literary and discursive writings, Narasingha P. Sil argues that "Tagore misreads both Indian and English history in his nationalist critique" and that his "readings of the rise and growth of nation-state and nationalism appear skewed at best and biased at worst". Sil's cogent point is that Tagore's vision of a cosmopolitan world is unlikely to materialize given the transactional nature of the nation-state. Although the Tagorean ideal of humanitarian universalism points to a valuable direction in renouncing nationalist bigotry, it remains a utopian cosmopolitanism without a viable practical framework, the chapter argues.

Nonetheless, Tagore's ideas and utopian ideals continue to attract fresh explication and re-evaluation. In responding to this call, Quayum's volume extracts a salient strand from Tagore's literary and non-literary works for a focused and in-depth critical inquiry from multiple perspectives. Its well-researched discussions dovetail contemporary concerns about nationalism and cosmopolitanism, and add significantly to the corpus of Tagore studies.