

MISSIVE ON THE GHETTOIZATION OF INDIAN ACADEMIA

Nationalism does not necessarily mean the essentialization or totalization of human identities, as is conceived in a number of Western discourses. Crucially, nationalism connotes togetherness or camaraderie, regardless of socio-cultural differences, on the basis of a community's appreciation of a certain set of civilizational values, mores and ethos. Rabindranath Tagore expressed this very insight in his famous 1916 lectures in Japan and the US, immediately following the conclusion of the First World War. Those who commented on these lectures noted unanimously that Tagore condemned nationalism as a phenomenon, hence the widespread misconception that the bard was opposed to the Indian nationalists' project to forge India into a nation. This is not at all true to the views of Tagore, according to S. Radhakrishnan, in *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* (1961), where he writes, 'Rabindranath is a nationalist, but not of the wrong type. While he loves his country, he does not hate others. His patriotism is compatible with universal love. While national independence is a phase of social evolution to be necessarily passed through, it is ultimately one to be transcended in the conception of a world-whole...when Rabindranath wants India to build a great future, it is not on the national basis. He wants India to attain freedom that she might be in a position to fulfill her destiny and carry her message through the world'. This attitude is evinced in Tagore's creative writings, particularly his novels and essays. One of Tagore's most critical texts, *Swadeshi Samaj* (1904), provided a blueprint for independent India, stretching between Kashmir in the north and Kanyakumari in the south. Two of his novels—*Gora* (1910) and *Ghare Baire* (1916)—also merit attention in this regard, for they showcase the evolution of Tagore's idea of freedom, and also illuminate his idea of India as a civilizational whole which links diverse communities together using common socio-cultural moorings. Tagore's idea of the 'nation' was not narrowly conceived, therefore. Rather, it was built with reference to those characteristics which Western ideologues were unable to fathom, presumably because of their very different socio-cultural context(s).

The above rather long signposting paragraph was intended to make the point that the tendency against syncretism in terms of theory-building is detrimental to theoretical projects that attempt to capture India's complexities in a nuanced manner. Tragically, it is this very blinkeredness that characterizes Indian academia today, thanks to the fact that pseudo-Marxists have taken control over a significant number of educational institutions, particularly since the 1970s when the ruling Congress party shifted the responsibility of governing these institutions to these self-styled Marxists. Instead of understanding the core ideational priorities of Marxism, these individuals simply imitate how the Bolshevik Party in Russia and later in the erstwhile Soviet Union conducted itself when it came to articulating a Marxist worldview. Indian Marxists have historically made two

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serious errors: first, they, by not contextualising Marxism with regard to their own socio-cultural milieu, missed one of its canonical principles, and second, they possessed uncritical faith in the "one-size-fits-in-all" theoretical formula that resulted from the first error. In this way, a tendency emerged to explain India's complex socio-cultural reality in monochrome. As a result, their explanations of India's intricacies became highly mechanical, since their entire project, however technically sophisticated it may have been, was constrained by the requirements of their ultimately derivative formula. Class was their sole criterion, and so, the antagonisms among communities were explained straightforwardly in terms of class hierarchy. The pervasive ideational compatibility due to near-universal endorsement of a civilizational ethos hardly figured in these explanatory endeavours, which gradually gained momentum. Despite the obvious conceptual limitations, the pseudo-Marxist theoretical paradigm has gained the status of being axiomatic for two reasons: (a) it made the task of those seeking to explain reality easier because their only task was to apply a formula mechanically; and (b) with the ruling authority's patronage, these pseudo-Marxists were happily taken into India's academic institutions as teachers. The results of this have been disastrous.

India's academic institutions have steadily become a playground for those who proudly declared their affiliation to these pseudo-Marxists, not because they were convinced of the applicability of these rootless ideas, but because it allowed them easy access to professional opportunities. The pedagogical atmosphere in our institutions is similar to that of the titular parrot in Rabindranath Tagore's short story *Tota Kahini*, which ended in the death of the bird. Imitative learning has destroyed the capabilities of not only our pupils, but also our teachers. The scene is similar to colonial India, when Macaulay's Minutes were introduced to impose English education in India, which Indians happily accepted since this was a passport to employment in the British offices and other firms where English was required. In other words, barring a few, the majority of Indians readily embraced the British design of education, as it gave them financial stability and social clout. Soon thereafter, Indians became experts of Western history, literature and philosophy. Intellectual traditions that formed the kernel of the Indian ethos, such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas, Buddhist and Jaina texts, and the offerings of *bhakti* and other folk traditions, were dismissed as obscurantist and thus backward-looking, while a number of derivative ideational visions were touted as progressive, and thus treated as tools for India's socio-economic and cultural transformation. This sorry state of affairs continued after the 1947 transfer of power, given the largely uncritical acceptance of the British system of education by those who mattered most in the world of policy making, despite the withdrawal of British rule. By the 1970s, a similar menace

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emerged, masquerading as Marxism, in what was, yet again, a result of the blind imitation of Western discourses, and which further strengthened our tendency to conform to the dominant paradigm in order to receive exclusive benefits.

The pursuit of degrees from Western universities thus continued unabated, and with degrees from institutions in Europe and the United States, a number of privileged Indians sit at the top of the academic hierarchy in India. Those Indians who study and teach in the West usually concentrate on Indian themes because (a) generally, Indian scholars do not feel competent to deal with Western socio-cultural themes, preferring instead to focus on what they are already familiar with, and (b) even if they are competent with regard to speaking on Western themes, established Western scholars do not often encourage scholars from India to deal with those topics. There are, of course, notable exceptions to these claims. Exceptions notwithstanding, these individuals shamelessly endorse the doings of their fellow so-called Marxist academics, betraying a partisan mentality. Linked with this is the slavish regard for what white academics have to say regarding the state of Indian academia, especially when they speak out in support of the wrongdoings of said pseudo-Marxist academics in India. When academics at Ivy League schools, Ivy Plus schools, or Oxbridge, in support of truant academics in India, condemn, via petition, some state of affairs at an Indian university, and this condemnation receives widespread uptake, I wonder whether the reverse would hold true. In other words, if Indian scholars came together to condemn school and university shootings in the US in writing, suppose, would this condemnation carry any weight at all for their Western counterparts? The answer is a resounding “no”. In India, though, the signature of a white academic on a petition, regardless of the righteousness or factual basis of the petition, is a source of empowerment. The Indian sheeple, whether pseudo-Marxist or not, follow what their white masters in academia say and do, without ascertaining whether or not things are really as these petitioners portray them to be. Associating with renowned white academics, even through the medium of a mere petition, gives Indian academics a chance to be visible in the public domain, which is otherwise not possible, since most leading dailies in India do not give space to academic issues unless they contribute to their TRPs. Indian academics continue to be servile to their Western counterparts, which demonstrates just how well-entrenched the roots of Macaulay’s poison tree, which started spreading its vicious branches in the early part of the nineteenth century, really are.

Ghettoization is the result of the urge to protect partisan interests. Interestingly, in India, academics belonging to the social sciences and humanities are the main soldiers of the

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ghettoizing agenda. The reasons behind this are not difficult to seek. Those belonging to these fields have, at their disposal, plenty of time, in comparison with those who pursue laboratory-based scientific research. The latter presumably don't have much time to spare for such mean activities. An evaluation of the respective citations that a given set of individuals from each set of fields have to their names will speak to this claim. It is true that some of the leading members of these ghettos attain name and fame by being paternalized by their Western intellectual masters; but a majority of them are content to bask in the reflected glory of said Western masters, as their foot soldiers. A study of these foot-soldiers' publications reveals their parasitic growth in academia.

Many leading universities in India are victims of ghettoization. The ghetto members take ample care to safeguard their ilk, just as the British colonizers of India shielded the zamindars, in their own interest, following the 1793 Permanent Settlement of Cornwallis. Facts have no place when it comes to safeguarding the ghetto's own. None of the ghetto members realize that their vicious role harms the entirety of Indian academia, in that it stifles new modes of conceptualizing material reality. Their intellectual bankruptcy and mud-slinging meanness has, so far, been shielded by their association with their Western comrades. In the changed world of academics across the world, however, the instruments that these comprador intellectuals have so far utilized for exclusive gains are no longer as effective as in the past, insofar as they can no longer pull the wool over certain sets of eyes. The ghetto empire that the pseudo-Marxists have so carefully built in India by imitating Western discourses, neglecting indigenous sources of wisdom, and retaining their constituencies in the non-Western world by slinging mud at their competitors, is slowly crumbling. This is one of those battles which history has witnessed many times. Those well-acquainted with how history progresses are also aware that an individual or group can succeed in fooling another individual or group once, but cannot do so permanently.

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Dated- 16/01/2023