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Cosmopolitanism V/s Patriotism: A View on Martha Nussbaum's Critical Perspective(s) on Tagore's *Ghare Baire*

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Abstract:

In her early treatise on Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism, published in 1994, Martha Nussbaum used Tagore's landmark novel *Ghare Baire* or *The Home and The World* as a metaphor to suggest that cosmopolitanism is preferable to the limiting counterpart of patriotism. Yet in a later work, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (2013), she uses the same novel to discard the cosmopolitanism represented by the character of Nikhil. This paper interrogates whether this change in her reading of the novel as well as her perception of Tagore's body of work in general is also matched by a corresponding shift in her ideological position.

In addition to this, the paper looks at the pedagogical model offered by Nussbaum to create world citizens through what she calls "Cosmopolitan Education". In this context, the paper will look into two of her other works which were published subsequently, "Cosmopolitan Emotions" (2002) and another, more recent work, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (2013) in addition to the essay "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism" (1994) and try to problematize the values of humanitarian love and justice that are at the core of the model of pedagogy that she proposes in the essay.

Keywords: Cosmopolitanism, Patriotism, pedagogical, values, humanitarian love, justice.

Martha Nussbaum's early work on world citizenship in the essay "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism" (1994) has been considered to be landmark in the larger understanding of cosmopolitanism. She begins her essay by referring to Tagore's 1916 novel *Ghare Baire*. The "moral ideas of justice and equality" she goes on to suggest, would be better served by an ideal of the cosmopolitan, that is "more adequate" to the contemporary world. The cosmopolitan, she defines is "the person whose primary allegiance is to the community of human beings in the

entire world”(1). She hails the character of Nikhil, and considers him as the archetypal representation of cosmopolitanism. The essay goes on to propose Tagore's ideal of cosmopolitanism as the answer to the question of ethics of patriotism and national pride. Yet this work can easily be pitted against the larger body of her later work wherein she does not offer as positive a picture of cosmopolitanism. In her 2013 work *Political Emotions : Why Love Matters for Justice*, the two characters of Nikhil and Sandip, representing Cosmopolitanism and patriotism respectively, are once again pitted against each other. This time however, Nussbaum does not choose Nikhil over Sandip. Even though she highlights the pitfalls of Sandip's “uncritical love”(85) for the nation, she nevertheless finds Nikhil strangely bland, and humourless, unlike Sandip and Bimala. But the change in Nussbaum's reading of the novel over two decades is also marked by a shift in her larger stance on cosmopolitanism in general. In order to understand the corresponding change in her politics, we may have to delve deep into the 1994 treatise and the related work published thereafter, specifically related with cosmopolitanism and pedagogy.

The first section of the paper will briefly highlight the various critical responses that the 1994 essay evokes, and the problems it poses in relation to debates about cosmopolitanism and pedagogy. Thereafter I discuss one of the issues raised in these emerging critiques of Nussbaum's view of cosmopolitanism, namely the possibility of connecting modern philosophy and politics with psychology and emotions. In the second section I critically evaluate Nussbaum's project of pedagogy she proposes to create world citizens.

World Citizenship and Cosmopolitanism

Nussbaum's stance about cosmopolitanism is a goal oriented task of creating world citizens through education and such values as humanity and justice. She neatly proposes four arguments to defend this project of civic education for not only the US citizen (who she is predominantly addressing) but any individual living in the globalised interconnected modern world. Cosmopolitan education for her not only ensures self-knowledge but also “international cooperation” and “moral obligations.” This cosmopolitan education is based upon the Socratic model of self-questioning, which believes in all human beings as part of a single community “of dialogue and concern”(8). Since she almost goes on to propose a methodology to create world citizens, her approach is more practical and committed compared to other inward looking models

of cosmopolitanism which for instance is exemplified by Ulf Hannerz in “Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture” (1990). For Hannerz, the cosmopolitan individual stands apart not by virtue of his ideas but a combination of various experiences and value concepts. The application of these concepts developed overtime is not something he can share with the other. This self-knowledge can neither be taught nor be learned, rather it is a “a mode of managing meaning”(238). Compared to this inward looking, introverted state of consciousness, Nussbaum’s definition of cosmopolitanism is at least more outward looking and goal oriented. She proposes a set of signifiers that are necessary for creating a cosmopolitan individual, by proposing a model based on pedagogy. This model of pedagogy however may need some evaluation.

Nussbaum’s ideas of cosmopolitan citizenship are largely indebted to the Stoic philosophy of *Kosmopolites* where the allegiance of the individual is not the local but the larger human community “For it recognizes in persons what is especially fundamental about them, most worthy of respect and acknowledgment: their aspirations to justice and goodness and their capacities for reasoning in this connection.”(3). The project for pedagogy too, is embedded in a system of values of humanity and a global community which she calls, “world community of justice and reason”. The suitability of this model proposed by her may have its limitations, but what appeals in this vision is the commitment to social justice. This idea of justice, which finds its way in various articulations of the cosmopolitanism vision, like Ulrich Beck, Tariq Jazeel and others, is at the heart of the many critical perspectives on Cosmopolitanism too. For instance, the need for justice and democracy as “connectors” for cosmopolitanism is also voiced by defenders of critical and dialogic cosmopolitanisms like Walter Mignolo, (as long as the idea of justice be detached from its “ ‘fundamental’ European heritage”). What remains contentious however is her proposition of “teaching” values like love and humanity which are not only indispensable in her theory of cosmopolitanism but the other ideas proposed by her about public policy and patriotism. The following sections may throw some light on these ideas.

“World Community of Justice and Reason”: A brief look at Nussbaum’s views on Tagore’s Humanism

Nussbaum ends her 1994 piece on the note that she is optimistic that “Tagore's ideal” of cosmopolitanism, can be “successfully realized in schools and universities in democracies

around the world” (7). She goes back to Tagore in her 2013 writing as well. In *Political Emotions*, Nussbaum builds a strong case for politics rooted in “public emotions” by reconnecting liberal philosophy, with political stability and moral psychology. Liberal philosophy, she says, has for a long time displayed a certain disregard to the presence of emotions in all human beings. Yet, public emotions have an unavoidable bearing on the state and its goals. While emotions can channel positive actions towards key commitments, like equality and inclusiveness, they can also be equally divisive. In this defence of an emotional politics she connects principles of politics to emotional sentiments and calls for the need for such sentiments to be “cultivated”. She says that all political principles, “need emotional support” in order to “ensure their stability over time”, and those societies need to guard against “division and hierarchy” by way of “cultivating appropriate sentiments of sympathy and love.”(2–3)

She then discusses briefly, the theories of humanism of Comte, Mill as well as Tagore. In taking this recourse to Mill's “Religion of humanity” and Tagore's “Religion of Man”, she also exhibits interest in what is called ‘political theology’, or the role of religion (whether theist like Tagore's or atheist like Mill's) as an important cultivator of political emotions. Both, Mill and Tagore she says agree upon the general idea that “Public culture needs something religion-like, they feel, something passionate and idealistic, if human emotions are to sustain projects aimed at lofty goals. They also agree with Comte (and with Mozart) that the new religion must embody a form of love...” (105).

At the heart of Tagore's humanism is his emphasis upon human emotions and morality. For him, “full human existence” differs greatly from mere “biological existence” purely on the basis of the intense relationship of personal recognition and emotion. His emphasis upon love, joy, human sympathy, and shunning of tendencies like, egocentrism and greed are key edicts that she emphasizes and builds upon in her own writings as well. Above all, it is Tagore's reliance upon arts as key vehicles of development which appeals to her and a major section of *Political Emotions* is devoted to the “cultivation” of values through music and literature.

Nussbaum sees a parallel in Mill and Tagore's proposed religions in the fact that they both emphasize upon moral uprightness and values like compassion and sympathy. What she brings home is Mill's insistence on moral emotions to be taught and imbibed through “institutional reform”(71). For Mill, even inequalities in legal privileges can be “leveled”, Mill's

systematic exclusion of the colonies from his purview of universalism, one of the strongest critiques¹ of Mill's philosophy is however not commented upon. Nussbaum focuses almost exclusively on Mill's *The Utility of Religion* (1874) which was intended to scrutinize the role of religion in the functioning of any society. The humanitarian religion he proposes, much like Tagore's is very different from traditional dogmatic religion.

Nussbaum's vision of cosmopolitanism, along with her allusion to morality and humanity in "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism" are informed by Tagore's humanism. On the other hand, her insistence that such values be taught show parallels with Mill's philosophy as well as Tagore's views on education.

Nussbaum's ideas on Civic Education

One of the foremost critiques of Nussbaum's view of cosmopolitanism is that it fails to look beyond the bounds of a Euro-centric world. While her own tendency to exhibit allegiance to "local" markers of community and class has often been critiqued, there is also a very subtle presupposition of the western notion of liberal education as a universal ideal. In other words, the pedagogic model proposed by Nussbaum subsumes a world where democratic, political and liberal education is possible. Ayaz Naseem and Emery Hyslop-Margison in "Nussbaum's Concept of Cosmopolitanism: Practical Possibility or Academic Delusion?"(2006) review her project of civic education in more detail. While noting the "hauntingly colonizing" tone of her proposition of cosmopolitanism "to advance US international and economic interests"(56), they also find a problem in the assumption that a universal liberal education even if it be possible, will have a desired effect in curbing global conflicts. They argue rather that history of global conflicts show that even communities with almost identical cultural systems have often violently competed against each other for territorial control or limited resources (58). Their other, stronger argument against the project of civic education is that such a proposal may not be effective in bringing on board religious societies which may prohibit the system of values grounded in liberal philosophy. Hence, cosmopolitanism based on liberal democratic ideals they suggest, "rather than providing a vehicle for global peace might actually provoke additional tensions or conflicts with cultures unwilling to accept its basic tenets of reason and self-examination as universal goods"(58). While such problems legitimately pose serious questions to Nussbaum's theory of liberal education as a way towards a socially favourable world community, the larger picture

painted by her is nevertheless optimistic. Nussbaum until much later did not alter most of her views on cosmopolitan education. In a later work, "Cosmopolitan Emotions?" (2002) she demonstrates a similar attitude about world citizenship as her 1994 essay. The only significant difference here is that this particular work is written in context of the 2001 terrorist attacks in the USA, which lead to public debates about coexistence of religions and raised more issues of global justice and rights. Nussbaum, not deviating much from her earlier standpoint argues in favour of a sensitization, once again based on a pedagogic model, which is now even more rooted in a value system of politics embedded in emotions. She contends that since compassion contains thought, it can thereby be "educated". The disaster of the 2001 attacks she says, can be either taken as an occasion for narrowing focus and distrusting the rest of the world, and "feeling solidarity with Americans alone". Or, there is also the choice of taking it "as an occasion for expansion of our ethical horizon". She channelizes emotions of compassion, love and pride for her fellow countrymen, and suggests that, seeing how vulnerable their own country is, the citizen of America can learn "something about the vulnerability all human beings share, about what it is like for distant others to lose those they love to a disaster not of their own making, whether it is hunger or flood or ethnic cleansing" (xiii-xiv). Compassion, in this way, can be positively channelized to evoke concern for the rest of the world. In this context, she also makes a call for "consistent and systematic" efforts of "educat(ing) the American public about Islam, about the histories of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and about the situation and attitudes of Arab-Americans(xiv).

Nussbaum's project of education distinctly relies upon the creation of an environment which exhibits openness towards knowing the other. The project of pedagogy given its constraints seems an unlikely path towards creating global citizens. Nevertheless, the recourse to self-reflexivity through Socratic questioning, seems very relevant with the growing debates about world citizenship, especially post the 2001 attacksⁱⁱ.

Towards an informed Patriotism

Nussbaum makes significant anecdotal references to Tagore's *GhareBaire*, both, in "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism" as well as in *Political Emotions*. Interestingly though, the references made to the characters of Sandip and Nikhil in both the readings, seem almost antithetical to each other. While in her reading of the novel in her 1994 essay, Nikhil is the

unsung tragic hero, a global citizen who is not affected by “empty symbol mongering” of Sandip, who is passionate but egocentric. In her 2013 interpretation, Nikhil is no more such a cherished hero figure. He is “strangely passive and unerotic. He is easy to approve of, but not so easy to love, and he knows it.”(86)

One can easily see that over time Nussbaum has revised her stance on cosmopolitanism. Marianna Papastephanou’s “Cosmopolitanism discarded: Martha Nussbaum's patriotic education and the inward–outward distinction” (2013) charts out the shift in her allegiances and critiques in detail, both her stance on cosmopolitanism as well as the shift in favour of patriotism. Papastephanou further points out the limitations of Nussbaum’s defence of patriotism. She highlights the inherent issues with and the limits to the idea of patriotism offered by Nussbaum, and contends that “if one limits patriotism to its inward aspect”, and “emphasizes the possessive ‘one’s own’ as Nussbaum does, there comes the risk of extending egoism from the self to the nation-state itself” (174). Nussbaum’s change in perspective about patriotism therefore poses serious questions about the very idea of patriotism and egotism itself. In *Political Emotions* too, her priority towards patriotism is very clear. Nonetheless, the body of her larger work still relies upon values like morality, love, compassion and justice. These ideas are certainly influenced by theories of humanism and politics ranging from Tagore, Mill, Comte to Kant, Aristotle and others. In the light of the larger body of her work, her frequent allusions to ideas of love, humanity and justice become clearer. It is in this larger system of ideas that her project of cosmopolitanism as well as patriotism is based.

Nussbaum’s project of education, whether or not a solution to global conflict, defends the creation of an environment that is open to dialogue and discussion while also being reflexive about issues of identity and community. Moreover, the position of self-reflexivity and openness to dialogue that she defends in “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism” is indispensable to the project of cosmopolitanism at large. While the realizability of Nussbaum’s pedagogical project remains debatable, nevertheless, the method of Socratic self-questioning proposed by her seems relevant today in the light of the challenges posed by global risks of terrorism and the upsurge of hyper patriotism that has become increasingly immune to critical thinking.

Nussbaum’s views on cosmopolitanism and Patriotism have therefore evolved overtime. Her work on Cosmopolitanism has been so formative with respect to critical discourse of

cosmopolitanism that her ideological shift towards a more responsible, “globally sensitive Patriotism” is often overlooked by scholars. One has to however bear in mind that her arguments in favour of a more reformed kind of patriotism is much more compatible with the general idea of cosmopolitanism. Her sustained engagement with the two characters of Nikhil and Sandip highlights the dilemma and the difficulty involved in making a simplistic choice. Her approach to love for the nation, much like Tagore's is conscious about its own pitfalls.

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ⁱUday Singh Mehta in “Strategies: Liberal conventions and imperial exclusions” points out to the exclusionary impulse in writings of universalism in western philosophy (with specific reference to the articulation of colonial exclusions). With his reading of Mill’s body of work, especially *Representative Government* and *On Liberty*. He argues here, that not only did he support colonialism, but also strongly opposed their being internally democratic (71)

ⁱⁱTalking about the changed political climate in the US, Ayaz and Hyslop-Margison also discuss a certain incident about school teachers being reprimanded for identifying American foreign policy as a contributing factor in the 2001 attacks. They say, “Although we share Nussbaum’s commitment to liberal education as an ideal and to critical self-examination, the US, at least in its present form, hardly represents an example of a society genuinely committed to Socratic questioning”(54)