Diaspora Poetics in South Asian English Writings
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Edited by
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Part I: Reminiscence, Identity and Gender

The Hero’s Walk       Turtle Nest

Fasting Feasting       Meatless Days
Part II: Democracy and Border Politics

Part III: Estrangement and Disarticulation

*Brick Lane*

*Half a Life*

*The Mistress of Spices*
This volume brings together various discussions on various South Asian diaspora writers of diverse socio-political backgrounds. It provides perspectives drawn from border studies, philosophical studies, and regional issues of South Asia. Each chapter discusses its topic meticulously and assesses its importance in our contemporary society. Most of the chapters talk about those social problems which developed in the Indian subcontinent. Does South Asian writings only mean the writings of English? No. It also means other writings written in other indigenous languages. More accurately speaking, the literature written in regional languages has its own long and sophisticated status like English literary pieces.

We are really grateful to all the contributors who have written entries for this volume. The chapters contributed by them may help us enrich our knowledge in the field of South Asian writings. The advice and suggestions of the contributors have made this piece of writing a wonderful one. So, without their intimation and help, we could not have published this book.

We also feel privileged and great pleasure in writing the introduction of this book. We are quite sure that this book will be very helpful for readers, researchers and academicians if they want to gain knowledge or more prominence in the field of South Asian diaspora studies.

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INTRODUCTION
SOUTH ASIAN DIASPORA
DR. MD. RAKIBUL ISLAM & EESHAN ALI

Diaspora

The word 'diaspora', a highly debated and complex term used in academia, has its roots in the Greek word 'diaspeirein' which is etymologically constituted of two separate morphemes: 'dia' (through) and 'speirein' (to scatter). According to the Unique Oxford Dictionary, 'diaspora' means "scattered Jewish settlement after Roman Conquest of Palestine" (Majumder 2007, 318), but diaspora, in general, means "the dispersion or spread of any people from their original homeland" (English Oxford Living Dictionaries). The study of the diaspora not only talks about the dispersion of Jewish people from their original homeland but it also reveals the violence and collective exile which they experienced during such expulsions. In this context we can link the historical dispersion and collective exile of Jews from Germany during the Nazi regime of Adolf Hitler. Furthermore, people of the diaspora move from homeland to host-land either by force or by choice, but the role of sociopolitical factors for such migrations cannot be denied here. Dispersed people reside with their experiences of two places at the same time: one is of their original homeland and another is of their adopted host-land. Due to such reasons, they remain in a state of flux, belonging neither to homeland nor to host-land.

The term 'diaspora', having a close affinity to 'exile', 'alienation', and 'expatriation', was used in a limited sense at its outset, but recently it has been used in a wider sense with a broader meaning. Besides the African diaspora, Chinese diaspora, European diaspora, Canadian diaspora, internal diaspora, etc., the South Asian diaspora is one of the most important diasporas in today's world. The countries which comprise South Asia are India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar,
Tibet, and the Maldives. South Asian diaspora writers are those writers who migrate from South Asian countries to other regions like Canada, Britain, Australia and Africa, and settle down there. The migration takes place mainly due to social, political, and economic reasons while wishes for higher education, business, marriage, and better prospects also cannot be denied here. Though migrants easily adopt the host-land, their past experiences of their homeland do not escape them as its culture, language and people chase them and make them nostalgic. In their new alien land, they always fight to secure their place and position as they suffer from homesickness or nostalgia which they always try to posit through their writings. So, their literary pieces become nothing but true reflectors of their inner souls and thoughts. Though they try to eliminate their own culture, language and food habits in their contact with the host-land, they fail to completely eradicate their past history and experiences. South Asian diaspora writing not only means literary writings written in English but also refers to other literary writings written in other national or regional languages.

Indian Diaspora

The South Asian diaspora writers who have occupied an important position in today's English language literature, particularly in the world of fiction, achieved massive popularity and momentum only after the departure of the British from South Asia, particularly from India in 1947. The South Asian diaspora consistently provides high quality English writings as it has the same artistic value, validity and quality as other English writings. Due to this reason, South Asian English writing occupies an unprecedented position in the marketplace of today's English literature and presents tough opposition to other stereotypical writings.

A crucial element which is very prominent in the diaspora writings is the awakening of upcoming generations about the contemporary sociopolitical crisis and condition of South Asia. Hence, diaspora writers not only produce imaginative pieces of writing but also explore the real present day problems of our society. They show how economic development plays a significant role in the cultural development of our society. The expatriate writers adopt the host-land in order to debunk the hegemonic myth of nationalism, which is also one of the main themes of their writings. The diaspora writers explicitly talk about another important issue, which is 'border conflict'. In this context, we can talk about the fencing problem between China and India and India and Pakistan. This happens due to
South Asian Diaspora

xenophobic attitudes, excessive love for one's own nation and the expansion of territory beyond the nation's official boundary. But such discussions do not stop within the issue of border conflict, and can be extended to the study of food security, water sharing, political gain, etc. For example, the Indian author Anita Desai's *Fasting Feasting* and the Pakistani author Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days*, two well-known novels, are based on the issues of food security and food sharing.

Diaspora writers further show us how different countries are conquering the issues of border conflict and political dilemma in order to maintain security, virtues, brotherhood, and peace with each other. If we keenly analyze the diaspora literature, we can notice certain positive aspects of the host-land as it helps to break the barriers of racial conflict in order to globalize the issue of friendship through such adaptation. Such a friendly relationship, which is always a praiseworthy matter, can give universal peace to us. The diaspora writings also bring peace for us by tearing down the wall of the hegemonic myths of racism, culture and language.

Nowadays, readers, scholars and academicians search for new literary writers besides the classics, such as Jane Austin, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Charles Dickens, etc. They search for unconventional kinds of writings like Indian diaspora writings. Amongst the diasporas, Indian diaspora writers, especially English novelists living abroad, have been dominating and occupying the central position in South Asian literature for the last few decades. India as a country is well-known for its multicultural effect, or more precisely, unity in diversity. So, India stands for varied traditions, cultures, languages, and religions. In this context we can mention a few names who have undoubtedly been enjoyed and adopted by one and all, such as Salman Rushdie, V. S. Naipaul, Rohinton Mistry, Vikram Seth, Bharati Mukherjee, M. G. Vassanji, etc. Not only Indian readers but also people from other countries have readily accepted their writings and have given them a special space in the field of world literature. So, we can say that the writings of the Indian diaspora have enriched the contents of English literature. The prominent features of their writings are suffering, and senses of homelessness and homesickness. Rushdie revisits India in order to recollect and re-create history while Naipaul seeks to fix his previous roots of origin. Rushdie has given a new direction and dimension to diaspora writings. He has viewed issues like the politics of cultural identification and national identity. Naipaul has focused on issues like the sense of belongingness, displacement, homelessness, hybridity, colonial mimicry, 'perpetual exile', and existence in his novels like *A House for Mr. Biswas* The Mimic Men, Half a
Life

Bangladeshi Diaspora
South Asian Diaspora

Omar. Ali, a Bangladeshi-born British author, discusses various diaspora issues like inter-generational conflict, immigration, marriage, etc. in her debut novel Brick Lane, which was undoubtedly well-received by readers as well as literary critics, and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize.

Zaman's debut novel Invisible Lines (2011) talks about the liberation war of Bangladesh, as does Tahmima Anam's A Golden Age, which won the Commonwealth Prize in 2008. Anam's second novel The Good Muslim also cannot be passed over when we talk about Bangladeshi diaspora literature. Imam, a Bangladeshi-Canadian novelist, attracts our attention due to the publication of his historical novel The Black Coat which dramatically shows Prime Minister Mujibur Rahman, father of the present Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed, as the first deadly dictator of the country and the period of his regime as the dark age of Bangladesh. Ali's novel Hope in Technicolor depicts a real picture of Dhaka life. Shrabari Zohra Ahmed's The Ocean of Mrs. Nagai and Farah Ghuznavi's Fragments of River Song have also carried the legacy of Bangladeshi literary writing forward to new heights.

Pakistan Diaspora

Early Pakistani literature is well-known for its poetry while novel writing obtained popularity only in the later part of the 20th century. Pakistani writers created very magical images of home in their writings. Besides early generation writers like Bapsi Sidhwa and Ahmed Ali, present day Pakistani writers like Hanif Kureishi, Nadeem Aslam, Mohsin Hamid, Sara Suleri, Roopa Farooki and Kamila Shamsie have also been prolific in the area of South Asian literature. The worthiness of Hanif Kureishi's debut novel The Buddha of Suburbia cannot be denied as well as Sara Suleri's Meatless Days and Mohsin Hamid's Moth Smoke and The Reluctant Fundamentalist. The latter was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. The contributions of 21st century diaspora writers like Kamila Shamsi's Kartography and Broken Verses, Uzma Aslam's Trespassing, Nadeem Aslam's Maps for Lost Lovers, and Mohammad Hanif's A Case of Exploding Mangoes are also notable.

Sri Lankan Diaspora

In this context we cannot deny the contribution of Sri Lankan diaspora writers who have highlighted the issues of immigrants and ethnic problems as diasporic subjects. As we know, the largest part of Sri Lankan literature is written in the Sinhalese language, but we cannot deny the literature

Brick Lane

Invisible Lines

A Golden Age

The Good Muslim

The Black Coat

Hope in Technicolor

The Ocean of Mrs. Nagai

Fragments of River Song

Pakistani Diaspora

The Buddha of Suburbia

Meatless Days

Moth Smoke

Reluctant Fundamentalist

Kartography

Broken Verses

Trespassing

Maps for Lost Lovers

A Case of Exploding Mangoes

Sri Lankan Diaspora
written in other languages like English and Tamil either. The period post-1948 was not a very soothing or comfortable one for the Sri Lankan people as the dominance of the Sinhalese ethnic group created a kind of fear and terror for the other minor ethnic groups, who were endangered and forced to leave for various other countries like Australia, Canada, Britain, etc. Another reason behind such migration was the political unrest between the LTTE and the government forces. Such diaspora writings provide glimpses of memory of the homeland and identity reformation in the host-land, besides the physical as well as emotional journey from homeland to host-land. Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, a Booker Prize-winning work of fiction, and *Anil's Ghost* talk about racial and ethnic problems respectively. *The English Patient* debunks the hegemonic myth of nationalism while *Anil's Ghost* is about the ethnic tension between the government forces and the LTTE in Sri Lanka. Such conflicts have taken thousands and thousands of innocent lives as well as dispersed many people from Sri Lanka to other countries. Another diaspora writer, Romesh Gunesekera, is better known for his short story collection *Monkfish Moon* and *Reef*. The latter was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Like Ondaatje, his short story collection *Monkfish Moon* and novel *Reef* both reveal the issues of ethnic conflict and tension in Sri Lanka. The list of Sri Lankan diaspora writers is very long, like those of the Indian and Pakistani diaspora. The other Sri Lankan diaspora writers include Yasmine Gooneratne, Nira Wickramasinghe, Chandani Lokuge, SJ Sindhu, Nayomimunaweera, David Blacker, Sunil Yapa, Shym Selvadurai, Jayadeva Uyangoda, Regi Siriwardena, and Punyakante Wijenaike. Selvadurai's notable works are *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea*, *Hungry Ghosts*, and *Funny Boy*. Sindhu's *Marriage of a Thousand Lies* is a story based on two South Asian gay boys, while the list of works of fiction written by Rajiva Wijesina is very long, and he has also written a non-fictional work *The Androgynous Trollope: Women in the Victorian Novel* (1982). Wijesina's notable novels *Acts of Faith*, *Days of Despair*, and *The Terrorist Trilogy* and Ry Freeman's *A Disobedient Girl: A Novel* also cannot be neglected.

**Other Diasporas**

*Other diaspora writers who should be mentioned are Manjushree Thapa, Prajwal Parajury, and Rajan Thapalia from Nepal. To Thapa's name we can attach *Tutor of History* (2001), *Tilled Earth* (2007), *Seasons of Flight* (2010), and *All of Us in Our Own Lives* (2016). Two famous diaspora writers from Bhutan are D. S. Acharya and Kunzeng Choden. Choden's...*
The first literary piece was *The Circle of Karma* (2005), which deals with a Bhutanese woman’s life. In this novel, the writer truly depicted the traditional gender roles of pre-modern Bhutan.

Besides its theme, the settings of South Asian diaspora novels are also varied: Salman Rushdie’s novel *Shame* is set in Pakistan, particularly in the imaginary town ‘Q’, which actually stands for Quetta of Pakistan. Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* has a very different and unconventional kind of setting as it is set in the Libyan Desert in Africa. V. S. Naipaul, in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, denied regional boundaries. Hanif Kureishi’s novels are set in Britain, mainly in London. *The Buddha of Suburbia* is set in London as well as New York, while the *Kite Runner* has multiple settings like Afghanistan, Pakistan and California. Jhumpa Lahiri is well-known for her short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* and her first novel *Namesake*. In *Interpreter of Maladies*, she set the stories in America and India, while *Namesake* moves from West Bengal to Boston and New York City.

Broadly speaking, each and every chapter brings the diverse experiences of the South Asian diaspora to the fore. Part I,* Reminiscence, Identity and Gender*, attempts to give us a true understanding of nostalgia, identity and the role of gender in our lives. Part I further deals with the migrants’ quest for a new identity in the host-land and how their past experiences of homeland chase them and make them nostalgic. They always fight to secure their place as they suffer from homesickness or nostalgia. Part II, *Democracy and Border Politics*, deals with the problems that lie in the Indian subcontinent. It reflects how political affairs leave an impact on the social, political, and economic positions of Indians. It also reflects how autocracy can destroy democracy. Part III, *Estrangement and Disarticulation*, truly reveals how dislocation creates a kind of crisis among the migratees. All eleven chapters in the book show a new path or create scope for further research. W e  c a n  c o n c l u d e  w i t h  t h e  w o r d s o f Gopinath Pillai and Hema Kiruppalini: “It serves to direct future research on diaspora to draw new conceptual maps to better understand the nuances that have developed in the diaspora-homeland nexus” (2013, 6).
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South Asian Literature in English: An Encyclopedia
PART I:

REMINISCENCE, IDENTITY AND GENDER
CHAPTER I

THE POET LOST IN THE MYSTIC:

REVISITING RABINDRANATH TAGORE’S VISITS TO THE UNITED STATES

NAHID KAISER

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was a poet dear to all the muses and men who have attempted to replicate his poetic mastery in whatever creative art they tried. In his native land, he is honored as a great poet, educationist, lyricist, dramatist, novelist, thinker and maestro of short stories, and even painter. But nowhere in the Indian subcontinent was he known to be a messianic figure, saint or religious guru. However, it is a fact that a mystic, prophetic image of Tagore has come to be built in Europe and America which overshadows his identity as a poet. Usually, the term mystic refers to someone spiritual, other-worldly, and non-rational. The image was created partly because of Song Offerings (1912), his English translations of some devotional poems from Gitanjali (1910) and other books. The poems are all about one’s spiritual revelation, which were attractive in the West on the verge of the Great War that would break out in 1914. Another reason was Tagore’s sage-like appearance.

This mystery of mysticism originated in England. The historian E.P. Thompson informs us that “Tagore had a huge bubble reputation in England, first built up on his visit to London in 1912. This was due, to some extent, to his majestic and beautiful presence and the mystery of an impenetrable alien culture” (Thompson 1993, 30). This mystic image having been set in England in 1912, Tagore stepped into the USA and did the same thing. Amardeep Singh rightly puts it as follows: In his early visits to the U.S., Tagore presented himself as a mystic poet and a philosopher, and was received by rapt audiences at packed lectures, standing-room only, at dozens of U.S. universities. But it’s tricky: in his lectures in the U.S. (especially in the second go-round, in 1916-17),

Song Offerings
Gitanjali
Chapter I

Tagore did present a kind of mysticism, mainly as a response to modern political repression. (Singh 2005)

Therefore, it was more through a thoughtful act of affectation than natural that Tagore became a saint to such a large extent that his poetic identity would be lost in the majestic maze of mysticism. The purpose of the present paper is to provide an overview of the five visits Tagore made to the USA to examine whether he was far more a man of the world than the Americans thought him to be. It challenges the view that Tagore was a mystic to the extent that the Americans took him to be.

Purposes and Outcomes of the Visits

Tagore made five visits to the USA (in 1912-13, in 1916-17, in 1920-21, in 1929, and in 1930), staying there for a total of one year and five months—the longest amount of time that he spent in any country outside India apart from England, where he stayed from 1878-1880. His initial reaction to the USA was not very positive, which we have come to know from his first impression of New York from a letter he wrote home: “Though it is too early for me to pronounce any opinion on this country, I must say I do not like it. America, like an unripe fruit, has not got its proper flavor yet. It has sharp and acid taste” (quoted in Sudipta 2011). But later, as he moved westward from New York to Illinois, his impression completely changed: “The country around is flat and open, which has a great attraction for me, reminding of our own scenery” (quoted in Sudipta 2011). It is a well-known fact that he spent some of his most peaceful time in Urbana, Illinois, until the news of his arrival spread and he had to spend many hours lecturing at various venues. During his stay he noticed that “American people have an unhealthy appetite for sugar candy and for lectures on any subject and from anybody… I am afraid they have spotted me – I am being stalked” (quoted in Sudipta 2011). Through this statement, we find a good-humored person, not a dour preacher.

The purpose behind Tagore’s first visit to Urbana was to stay with his son, who was a student at the University of Illinois. Moreover, Tagore went to the USA for better treatment for his piles. The visit is significant because this was the first time he had been invited to deliver a lecture in the USA. He spoke at the Urbana Unitarian Church about Brahmanism, which is very similar to Christianity in being monotheistic, and he was appreciated by the audience, which could be the reason that “Tagore positioned himself as a sage rather than a poet during his subsequent visits to the USA” (Gupta 2013). So, it was more a facade than the real face of Tagore
that attracted the Americans. Moreover, we hardly hear of poetry reading sessions that centered on him in America in the same way as happened in London. Did this happen because the Americans hardly had any patience for poetry? Or was it due to Tagore's given mysticism which overshadowed all his other gifts? We will explore these questions later.

As far as the evidence goes, it is certain that Tagore's first visit to America was due to his need for treatment for the piles he had been suffering from for years, but the impression given by the media and how historians look at the matter are quite different things. Stephen N. Hay, in his research article 'Rabindranath Tagore in America', informs us,

Before the century closed, missionaries from India began to arrive to preach modern interpretation of Hinduism…In 1883 the Brahmo Samaj reader P.C. Mozoomdar lectured in many American cities, and in 1893 both he and the famous Swami Vivekananda earned the applause of the World Parliament of Religion in Chicago…two decades later came…Rabindranath Tagore. (Hay 1962, 443)

Hay thinks that during his stay in Urbana in 1912, the mission of consciousness which had been gestating in Tagore's mind for so many years found its outlet. Therefore, it can be seen that, historically, Tagore was taken as a missionary from India, not as a poet. Moreover, the press in America also had a similar impression. Rathindranath Tagore informed a reporter from a Chicago newspaper that "Mr. Tagore has come out from his work in India because of his belief that he has a mission in bringing a message to the Western world" (quoted in Hay 1962, 442). Tagore's identity as a poet is hardly mentioned or highlighted.

The only evidence of Tagore being oriented in America as a poet is the publication of his six poems in the renowned Chicago journal \textit{Poetry}. It has a brief history which is very relevant to the central theme of the present paper. The famous poet and T. S. Eliot's editor Ezra Pound (1885-1972) introduced Tagore to American literature. He wrote to Harriet Monroe, the editor of \textit{Poetry}, "This is THE Scoop. Reserve space in next number for Tagore. He has sung Bengal into a nation, and his English version of his poem is very wonderful" (quoted in Hay 1962, 442). However, Pound's enthusiasm did not last long and he wrote to her six months later, "As a religious teacher he [Tagore] is superfluous" (quoted in Hay 1962, 443). But Pound has bridged Tagore and Miss Munroe, who connected the poet from Bengal to Mrs. Moody, the benevolent wife of a professor at the University of Illinois who would be an unparalleled benefactor to Tagore on his voyage to America as well as in London.
Chapter I

Tagore's friendship with Mrs. Moody was very human and natural. For his part, he approached her very humanly while, for her part, she played the role of a disciple. For instance, her biographer tells us that "The Indian seer had aroused in her an almost idolatrous reverence and in her friendship with Tagore she felt that she had achieved nothing short of a Himalayan summit" (quoted in Hay 1962, 443) in her life. Mrs. Moody's biographer also invokes her way of addressing Tagore, "The poet, prophet, our master" (quoted in Hay 1962, 443). However, Tagore's approach to her is evident in his correspondence with her and her friend Miss Munroe. In 1913, when Tagore was overwhelmed with praise and socializing, he wrote to Miss Munroe, "Where is Mrs. Moody to rescue me from my disaster?" (quoted in Hay 1962, 444). Mrs. Moody is reported to have rushed to London to rescue her prophet and shelter him with her cozy hospitality.

We can also observe in his letter to Mrs. Moody a man craving friendship and care. He wrote, "I cannot tell you how I miss your loving care which has been one of the rarest good fortunes I have met with in the West" (quoted in Hay 1962, 444). Tagore did not know that he would meet an even greater benefactor in Argentina in 1924. In addition, he writes to Mrs. Moody, "The rude touch of the curious world is all over me… why do I not have a word of sympathy from you in my time of distress?" (quoted in Hay 1962, 444). What was ailing Tagore so much is not historically known. It may have been the overpowering surroundings that were taking away all his time and energy and destroying his peace of mind. In this aforesaid letter, a world-weary soul is seeking peace and shelter. What is prophetic in this desire?

Another letter to clarify that Tagore was far from being a mystic or missionary was written to his eldest daughter Madhurilata (1886-1918): "I have been confining myself to this small town called Urbana after coming to America… People love to listen to lectures, so they have really been pressing me to give lectures. I was not responding because I was convinced that it would hurt my self-respect to give lectures in English" (quoted in Dasgupta 2006, 129). So, it is evident that Tagore did not have any missionary drive behind his trip to America in 1912, and that he was an accidental mystic.

Tagore visited the USA for the second time in 1916 to raise money for his dream university, Visva-Bharati, which would be established in 1921 in Santiniketan. The purpose of the Nobel Laureate was declared by himself: "The lectures I am to give in the U.S. are for the purpose nearest to my
The Poet Lost in the Mystic

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heart; to get funds to carry on my school for boys in India ... The Nobel
Prize came just when I needed money for the school. All the royalties from
my books go to keep up the school. That is my great ambition" (quoted in
Sengupta n.d.). Being a Nobel Laureate, he did not find it difficult to
manage a professional lecturing agency that would market his lectures in
twenty five cities, securing an impressively high fee for each lecture. The
reporter from
The Seattle Post Intelligencer
described Tagore as, "Above
six feet tall, the head of a Greek god over which flows a mass of soft iron
gray locks, a full highbrow, soft dark eyes, a Whitman beard, and a figure
as straight as an Indian's of the plains, Sir Rabindranath Tagore is one of
the most notable individuals today in the world" (quoted in Sengupta n.d.),
when covering his visit to Seattle in September 1916. However, it is true
that "He had been infected by the bug of being a sage and presented his
mysticism as a counter to modern business, repression and war" (Gupta
2011). But it amused the critics that, even in a time like that, someone was
being paid to condemn material culture. The
Minneapolis Tribune
called
Tagore "the best business man who ever came to us out of India…to scold
Americans at $700 per scold while pleading with them at $700 per plead" (quoted in Singh 2005). This could be a reason why he became much less
popular than he had been earlier.

The lectures delivered during Tagore's second visit were later collected
and published as the book
Nationalism
(1917), which critiques
nationalism, capitalism, and Western materialism. Thompson writes, "The
bubble of reputation burst almost as suddenly as it had blown. A reason
often given is the offense given to British patriotism by Tagore's lectures
on nationalism and his rejection of those values which had led to European
war" (Thompson 1993, 31). Thompson is right to point out the reason for
Tagore's fading popularity, which would affect his later trips as well. Here
it seems relevant to note that Tagore wished to dedicate
Nationalism
to
President Wilson but the President's office rejected the offer because of
the intervention of Sir William Wiseman, Britain's special liaison agent in
the United States, who justified the act on the grounds that Tagore had
"got tangled up in some way with the Indian revolutionaries in America
who were conspiring with Germany to overthrow British rule in India"
(Sudipta 2011).The allegation was not a trifling matter; Tagore had to live
with the ignominy for a great part of his life. In fact,
Nationalism
struck
the Americans. The
Detroit Free Press
praised Tagore's lecture on
nationalism, saying "…with
masculine
force he stripped modern
civilization until it stood naked and grotesque" (quoted in Hay 1962, 447).
Tagore, as the effeminate and passive colonized-subject, was greatly
appreciated by the West, but the moment he became vocal with a masculine force his popularity started to wane. What did Tagore say in *Nationalism* that made such a difference to America's attitude towards him? In ‘Nationalism in India’ he declared, “I am not against one nation in particular, but against the general idea of all nations” (Tagore 2011, 67). Tagore critiqued both imperialism and its anti-colonial nationalist derivation, to eventually argue that imperialism and nationalism are two faces of the same monster. In ‘Nationalism in Japan’, the poet stated, “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” (Tagore 2011, 35). The war, he believed, was the outcome of overgrown materialism, of an ideal based on self-interest and not on harmony. With *Nationalism*, Tagore powerfully expressed his belief that until the big and powerful nations, aided by their superiority and vast technological advancement, ceased their desire for territorial expansion and control over the smaller nations, world peace could never be achieved.

A few mishaps took place during the second trip. For instance, some cartoons about him were published. But the most dreadful thing happened on 5 October. Some Indian revolutionaries had been plotting, which caused newspapers to publish news with headlines like ‘Tagore Visitor Hit by Hindus’, or ‘Plot to Slay Sir Rabindranath Tagore Nipped in S. F.’, etc. Subrata Kumar Das informs us of the details in this regard: The activities of those revolutionaries were so deep-rooted that the American Court had to watch a dangerous incident very soon. On 23 April 1918, when the verdict of the Hindu-German conspiracy was announced, Ram Chandra, the editor of the Urdu newspaper Gadar, was shot at the court premises by his fellow revolutionist Ram Sing. During the procedure of the case, the Name of Tagore was also included. As a result, news with a title ‘Tagore Named with Japanese at plot Trial’ was published for which the poet had to pay much. (Das n.d.)

Tagore’s third trip in 1920 focused on New York, the best place to raise money from affluent New Yorkers. However, the trip earned him no money because of a grave reason: the mystic had demonstrated some political leanings by this time. Instead, he realized that it was not the country he had left in 1916 when he had been preaching. He wrote in his book *Sadhana* that “We never can have a true view of man unless we have a love for him. Civilizations must be judged and prized, not by the amount of power it has developed, but by how much it has evolved and given
But when he came back, he found humanity had been defeated by materiality. Apart from criticizing American capitalism, he had already renounced his Knighthood in 1919 which was a highly charged political gesture. So, instead of raising money, Tagore lost his reputation. Another explanation is provided by Dutta and Robinson, who opine, “On 2 November the Republican won, and the Wilsonian era of plain living and high thinking gave way to a new era of plain thinking and high living” (1997, 243). The aforesaid explanation is worth considering.

Further, to support their point, the authors of Myriad Minded Man also quoted the American scholar Stephen Hay, who believes “Tagore was no longer the exotic novelty he had been in 1916; the fickle public had already turned to new fads, preferring bobbed hair to long grey beards, and short flapper skirts to flowing Oriental robes” (quoted in Dutta and Robinson 1997, 243). The abovementioned observation of Hay demands a lot of attention in this regard to examine the Americans’ changing attitude to Tagore. Dr. Raja Chanda also shed light on this tour in his essay ‘Rabindranath Tagore: Tagore in the United States: A Brief Discussion’. Chanda tells us:

Upon arriving in New York on a tour of the United States in 1920 Tagore observed that the enthusiasm and ebullience with which he had been received during his preceding visit were palpably lacking this time around. He gave a few lectures in New York and at Harvard, no doubt, but there was a clear absence of sincerity and warmth all around him. This time his efforts at fund-raising for Visva-Bharati met with even more dismal results. Not many seemed to be eager to pay much heed to the message of India’s "mystic" poet, nor had any interest to know about Visva-Bharati. Feeling imprisoned within the walls of the sky-hugging luxury hotel, he became quite weary and restless. (Chandra 2003)

In addition, the fourth trip in 1929 was also very brief, and no visible change can be seen in the raising of money or recovery of lost fame. The failure of this visit is often related to the madness of the American press regarding Katherine Mayo’s Mother India, which portrays India as poor, backward and savage.

However, his last trip in 1930 appears to have been a grand success because of many reasons. Critics think that "Gandhiji had catapulted India into America's consciousness, and Tagore's physical appearance had become even more striking" (Gupta 2013). So, Gandhi indirectly and unconsciously played a vital role in changing the minds of the Americans.

Myriad Minded Man

Mother India
regarding Tagore. The change is visible in the way the American press
reported the trip. During the tour, which lasted for more than two months,
Tagore was covered nineteen times by the New York Times and
interviewed twice. Also, a photo of Tagore with Einstein, captioned 'A
mathematician and a mystic meet in Manhattan', was a historical moment.
In addition, during this trip, Tagore met President Hoover privately
following the intervention of the British ambassador. Ruth St. Denis
performed a dance at the Broadway Theater as a benefit for Santiniketan,
and Will Durant welcomed Tagore on stage with due ceremony. Some
exhibitions of Tagore's paintings were held in New York and Boston. A
grand dinner was held in New York, where 500 or so participants gathered
in his honor. The dinner was historically attended by Franklin Roosevelt,
Sinclair Lewis, who was then the latest Nobel Laureate for Literature, and
the Governor of New York. At Carnegie Hall, which has a capacity of
4,000 people, thousands gathered to attend his lecture in which he
expressed "admiration for the West's ideal of liberty but deplored the
West's failure to live up to that ideal in the East, particularly in failing to
respond to India's appeal for freedom" (Gupta 2013). This politically
charged observation of Tagore made most of the Americans cross, as they
were accustomed to listening to spiritual lectures from him.
On this very trip Tagore even castigated the Americans, saying, "The age
belongs to the West, and humanity must be grateful to you for your
science. But you have exploited those who are helpless and humiliated
those who are unfortunate with this gift. A great portion of the world
suffers from your civilization" (Gupta 2013). As a result, the garb of the
mystic was torn off and thrown away, and the empire shouted back.
However, it is true that Tagore confessed on several occasions that he was
not a prophet or a seer. Until the end of his life, he kept saying so. In a
letter to Parul Devi on 29 May 1937, he wrote, "I am neither a family-man
nor a saint" (quoted in Majumdar 2004, 73). Rather, he was a humane
person and a poet singing for humanity.

Conclusion

In fact, there is a cultist reverence and reservation around the poet's name
which resists the full revelation of his true personality, which was poetic,
romantic, humorous, realistic and pragmatic. He himself denied being
considered a saint on a number of occasions. For example, in a letter from
1925 to his 'old age's beloved' Victoria Ocampo, whom he lovingly called
Vijaya, Tagore writes, "They say men should not humor with women but I