

ruled barely a hundred years, but within that time the Mongols, who had followed their rulers in the eastern conquests had given up the heathenism of their native land and had become Buddhists. In Western Persia and in the countries round about Persia, the Mongols had become Muslims..." (p. 47).

It is worth mentioning here that for the Mongols the concept of religious beliefs was rather diluted but remained tolerant and open to the "other". That's why while adopting Christianity (Nestorian), they still remain half-shamanists (what was witnessed by Rubruck depicting Mongu Great Khan). Or being Christian, the mother of Great Khans Mongu and Qubilai, "she would bestow alms and presents upon *imams* and *sheikhs* and strove also to revive the sacred observances of the faith of Muhammad. And the token and proof of this statement is that she gave 1000 silver *balish* that a college (madrassa) might be built in Bokhara..." (as Gulati cites Juvaini's account, p. 127).

It could be summarized here that the history of Central Asia under the Mongols should not be analyzed through the prism of ferocious invasions only. Rather it had multi-faceted character reflecting the powerful interlinks between cultures, religions, regions. The attempt made by Gulati gives a good background for understanding these processes. The issues raised in the book could enlarge our scope on the role the Mongols played in the history in general, and in Central Asia in particular. For readers it would prove useful to comprehend the history of different regions, like Central Asia and India, not as a distorted but as interconnected with each other.

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Gangeya Mukherji, *An Alternative Idea of India: Tagore and Vivekananda*, New Delhi: Routledge, 2011, pp. 240, Rs. 695.

The challenge of Gangeya Mukherji's erudite book resides, in a way, in its title, *An Alternative Idea of India: Tagore and Vivekananda*. 'Alternative' to what, or to whom? The 'idea of India' is a hugely contested notion of which one wise exponent has been Sunil Khilnani who said, in a book of that name, published in India's 50<sup>th</sup> year celebrations: 'The democratic idea has penetrated the Indian political imagination and has begun to corrode the authority of the social order and of a paternalist state. Democracy as a manner of seeing and acting upon the world is changing the relation of Indians to themselves.' The 'idea of India' constructed early in the imagination

of Europe is usefully recalled by Mukherji through Alex Aronson's *Europe looks at India* (1946) which takes us back to Voltaire and Abbe Dubois, and tracks opinions for the next many decades. India's own articulation of identity comes with the nationalist discourse, about which Ashis Nandy and others have written magnificently. It would appear that the 'idea' was an imaginative construct linked to the contemporary conditions and intellectual climate surrounding the authors, the architects of the 'idea,' that subsequently served as a beacon to chart the chronology of dominant political discourse.

Mukherji's exposition is a timely reminder of this long process. Both Tagore and Vivekananda, who belong to pre-independence India, have been subjected to voluminous commentary. It is their present relevance to the emergence of a modern, global India that the reader would seek in a book published recently. The title, however, may compel one to ask if these two thinkers were 'alternate' to each other, or jointly offered an oppositional view to a prevailing ideology. The book, thoughtfully and painstakingly answers all these questions. The style is ponderous but deeply engaging, the research is most impressive, and if one is patient with the gradually evolving argument, the rewards are substantial. It is a book that should appear on every library shelf, and be discussed, especially among young and 'global' Indians.

What are the compelling issues? Rabindranath Tagore was born merely two years before Vivekananda but lived much longer than him, and consequently, witnessed the emerging debates on Nationalism. Conventional academia has assumed that Tagore and Vivekananda were mutually antagonistic, specially on the interpretation of godhead and religion. Countering this, Mukherji binds them astutely to the common thread of *sadhana*: "They engaged with deeper human themes that serve as the bedrock for ideas not merely of resistance, but of understanding of the human possibility, an understanding that proceeds to a heightened awareness of insensitivity and exploitation of all kinds and to a commitment to a more compassionate and harmonious world order" (203). This citation is from the last chapter of the book, which I think should have been moved editorially to the beginning. It is here that Mukherji stakes his claim that the two thinkers spoke up against divisive Nationalism, that 'they were not doctrinaire' (205) nor overtly 'political', yet they were breaking through the 'paradigm of violence' (217). This is crucial and apt. Tagore returned his Knighthood in protest against the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre; Vivekananda in the Chicago address called for 'the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all

persecutions with the sword or with the pen.' The book's importance lies in its assertion that Tagore and Vivekananda looked beyond sectarian divides to a humanitarian image of India: 'Theirs is not an Islamic or a Hindu, an Asian or a western identity' (219).

The book, unfortunately, begins not with these valuable observations but with a treatise on 'The National, the Regional, and the Universal.' The paraphernalia of academic research is shown to its fullest. Even as one applauds and learns, the writer's delay in reaching the avowed subject is disturbing. I am not sure that readers need to be told that 'broadly defined nationalism is the assumption of identity by a group of people...' (3), or taken through the tracts of Napoleon, Goethe, Milton, Dostoevsky, Coleridge and many others, as a lengthy preface to the 'Indian Renaissance'. The 'four voices,' Rammohan Roy, Dayananda, Jotirao Phule and Pandita Ramabai, aptly cited by Mukherji, would have been ample for detailing the context.

The chapter 'Tagore in the context of Postcolonialism' is a brilliant exposition on the culture of resistance and the rhetoric of political imagination. Rabindranath who grew up in a multilingual and cross-cultural environment had to sift through a complex matrix to arrive at his amazing innovations in poetry, music, theatre, fiction and art. His roots in the Brahmo Samaj led to the possibility of East-West amalgamations. Tagore brought a new aesthetics, a balance, and a dazzling creativity into his idea of India. Mukherji's section called 'Tagore as Trenchant Social Critic' appeals enormously, perhaps because of my own leanings. He says, 'Tagore's position on the role of women is located within his overall vision of the development of history.' Further, 'Tagore did not support aggression on the part of the proponents of women's rights, perhaps because he did not support any kind of violent assertion (81).' It is true that Tagore's interest in the feminine is a part of his idea of the civilisational process and the humanistic impulses that must guide it. These ideals transcend all castes and creeds. Mukherji's endorsement of Gurudev's stance, a 'non acceptance of extremes' carries passion and conviction. In conclusion Mukherji says, 'Tagore's alternative idea of India detailed in *The Call of Truth* subverts the prevalent idea of nation and identity' (97). This leads to a scintillating discussion of Tagore and Gandhi's relationship.

The next long essay is titled 'Vivekananda: Man-Making and Universal Toleration'. Though it is not quite the same virtuoso performance as the chapter on Tagore, the material is impressive. The idea of the '*Math*' (monastery) with its socio-religious implications is to be

analysed. Muslim boys were welcomed into the institution but could they take *diksha*? Could secular principles be inculcated within Vedantism? Vivekananda debated many such problems. In the section called 'Religion and Social Reform', Mukherji says, 'Vivekananda sought to usher in new thinking and feeling by educating the people. The diction, rhythm and syntax of his prose vibrate with the passion of his engagement against exploitation and injustice, and with the pain of compassion' (182). This is well said. Moreover, Vivekananda was a strong critic of orthodox brahminism as well as any anglicisation of India. He rebuked western commentaries as a 'railway view of India' and spoke against the people who renounced their Indian heritage. One of the famous controversies centred on Pandita Rambai who had converted to Christianity and had also alleged that the state of Hindu women was pathetic. Vivekananda argued that the Vedantic view on women was far from derogatory; the pathetic condition was to be blamed upon society, not heritage. With regard to this controversy, feminist scholars have tended to see Vivekananda as subscribing to a patriarchal belief. However, Gangeya Mukherji goes fairly deep into the history and places Vivekananda in far better light showing how his overall sympathies were with women and that he saw man and woman as equal partners, not as one subordinate to the other.

In summary, Gangeya Mukherji's book uses postcolonialism rather attractively to look over the colonial past and extend to a global future. The larger goal for Tagore as well as Vivekananda was to integrate the underprivileged into the emerging fabric of the nation. Tagore devised ways of balancing the western and the Indian paradigms he respected. Vivekananda delved into Vedantic practices but pushed out the caste interpolations to create a democratic framework. Mukherji concludes, 'Tagore and Vivekananda believed in a greater and subtler reality that transcends violence...pain of oppression, like any other pain, should not serve only to dull the sufferers into insensitivity and parochialism; rather, it serves its purpose by creating awareness of the futility of violence' (218).

As we tuck ourselves nightly, watching television coverage of terrorist acts and listening to the political rhetoric about counter-terrorism, we might recall the two seers whose 'alternate' view spoke against violence and reminded humans to be humane.

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