

ANANDA COOMARASWAMY'S EXCLUSIVE VIEWS ON CULTURAL NATIONALISM IN HIS *ESSAYS IN NATIONAL IDEALISM* (1909)

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Abstract

Coomaraswamy's concept of 'Nationalism' is ethnic or cultural in nature. In the preface to the book *Essays in National Idealism* he notes that "Nationalism is a duty and not a right." As a member of any nation group one should observe in him as a duty to respect and honor one's nation. True nationalism does not mean only to ask for rights but to give an individual contribution to the progress of the nation. According to his viewpoints, the true nationalist is an idealist and for him that deeper cause of the unrest is the longing for self-realization. He firmly believes that nations are made by artists and by poets not by traders and politicians as the contribution of them is long-lasting and ever inspiring for the generations to come. The traders and politicians generally contribute to the nation but it is temporal. The creations of artists and the poets are permanent motivating factors for the generations to come. The same can be the source for the growth of cultural nationalism.

Key Words: *Coomaraswamy, Exclusive, Cultural, Nationalism*

Introduction:

Coomaraswamy's *Essays in National Idealism* (1909)

Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy was born on 22 August 1887 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. His *Essays in National Idealism* (1909) is a book which is a collection of 15 various philosophical essays of which the first Indian edition was published in 1981 by Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi. In the words of Coomaraswamy himself, it is an endeavor towards an explanation of the significance of the national movement in India. Actually Coomaraswamy wrote this book with a view to inspiring the freedom fighters to keep their attempt continue for their goal and to attempt a counter argument to those who have wrong notion about Indian Nationalism.

Critical Analysis of Coomaraswamy's Views on Cultural Nationalism

Coomaraswamy's concept of 'Nationalism' is ethnic or cultural in nature. In the preface to the book *Essays in National Idealism* he notes that "Nationalism is a duty and not a right." As a

member of any nation group one should observe in him as a duty to respect and honor one's nation. True nationalism does not mean only to ask for rights but to give an individual contribution to the progress of the nation. The duty of upholding the national 'dharma' is incompatible with intellectual slavery and therefore he seeks to free himself and his country. According to his view, the true nationalist is an idealist and for him that deeper cause of the unrest is the longing for self-realization. He firmly believes that nations are made by artists and by poets not by traders and politicians as the contribution of them is long-lasting and ever inspiring for the generations to come. The traders and politicians generally contribute to the nation but it is temporal. The creations of artists and the poets are permanent motivating factors for the generations to come. The same can be the source for the growth of cultural nationalism. He believes that Art contains in itself the deepest principal of life, the true life. The ideal of Indian culture is itself a unity and an art because of its inspiration by one ruling passion, the desire to realize a spiritual heritage. All things in his opinion in India have been valued in the light of this desire. No other ideal can ever ultimately shape or determine the Indian character. As per his understanding in the immediate future this passion for self-sacrifice and self-realization could be found expressed in nationalism, which would be essentially religious in its sanction. Thus once more by the inspiration of a ruling passion –the religious and national ideal in one-the art of life will be realized again, only by thus becoming artist and poets, we can again understand our own art and poetry and thereby attain the highest ideal of nationality. By understanding properly our own art and poetry we would be able to understand the highest ideal of nationality.

Coomaraswamy says, "We should endeavor more to be great than to possess great things" because ultimately no great things but the greatness in us that will help us in crucial time of our life. Through mere collection of great things one cannot collect greatness in him, so also as one keeps on collecting great things he becomes self-centric the one who hardly bothers for his nation. All honor to those who have spent their lives in the political struggle; yet he strongly believes that it is not through politics that revolutions are made and that national unity needs a deeper foundation than the perception of political wrongs. It is possible to find in true art not merely the spiritual but a source for the material regeneration of India. He expresses his pain that the educated Indian of today is behind the rest of the world in artistic understanding. The westernization of Indian education has cut off new generation from the deep roots of glorious and gracious culture of ancient incredible India. So this younger generation is directionless as the modern education has become more bread oriented rather than value oriented. One can observe complete relevance of the above said thing even in the present context of Indian society.

He expresses his view that there can be no true realization of political unity until Indian life is again inspired by the unity of the national culture. What is more necessary, according to him is the national education. One should not rest satisfied until the entire control of Indian education is in Indian hands. Every government and missionary college and school must be replaced, according to him, by the colleges and school of our own where young men and women are taught to be a true Indian first and then anything else. He strongly believes that the vital forces associated with the national movement in India are not merely political but moral, literary, and artistic and their significance lies in the fact that India henceforth should be, in the main, a judge all things by her own standards and form her own point of view and that should not be the outcome of the external interference. Let's not say that the national movement came to an end on the very day of the freedom from the colonial rule. The flame of nationalism in India should be kept burning for years to come. But the two sides of the national movement, the material and the

spiritual, are inseparable and must attain success or fail together. Political freedom and full responsibility are essential to self-respect and self-development. In the words of one of our leaders, India should learn thorough her own struggle all her lessons of a free and self-regulated and self-sustained national life. Really, according to his point of view, it was not only out of hatred for England that Indian demanded the freedom; it was partly for England's sake. He strongly believes that no nation can serve faithfully to ideals without hypocrisy. Replacing the word 'Irishmen' by the word 'Indians' in the first passage from a pamphlet issued by the Gaelic League, he adds,

Indians we all are and therefore our possible perfection consists in the development of the Indian nature, we have inherited from our forefathers. Centuries of real development, of civilization, of noble fidelity to all the highest ideals men can worship, have fixed forever the national character of India and if we can never be perfect men full and strong men, able to do a true man's part for god and mother land. Our fore fathers are our best models and patterns; they alone can show us what our common Indian nature can and ought to be. We must copy there great ness and their goodness; truly worthy are they off affectionate and reverent imitation for were they not men of renown in their day men of highest saintliness of Indian genius and learning and love of learning, of might and velour or the dread field of battle saints, scholars, heroes etc. (A.K. Essays Preface vii).

He further adds,

Look to your fore fathers, read of them, speak of them; not in unworthy mendicant eloquence, nor yet in vulgar boasting our ancient glories while we squat down in disgraceful content with our present degeneracy nor least of all in miserable patty controversy with the hireling liars who culminate our dear India. No, but to learn from them what you ought to be what god destined Indians to be (A.K. Essays Preface viii).

He puts emphasis on the fact that our forefathers are a very good source of inspiration for the us, the present and the coming generation as well as they have left for us very good set of experiences and everything in order that we can directly take advantage of it. India possesses her own way of life she does not require any outsider's interference in the internal matters as Indian culture is rich enough to guide the coming generations. Our *Rishis* and other great people of the time have left for us the best illustrations of what common Indian culture should be.

He opines that the inspiration of nationalism must not be hatred or self-seeking; but love first of India and secondly of any other. Here the stress is put on the fact that every responsible Indian should be inspired by the sense of patriotism that should be the outcome not of the hatred for other neighboring countries but it should be an outcome of our true love and respect for a culturally prosperous motherland. Blind patriotism can be fatal for both the person and the nation. Merely by hating other nations we cannot prove ourselves true nationalists. To be a true nationalist one should be an idealist first.

Coomaraswamy believes that our Freedom struggle was part of a wider one. The conflict between the ideals of imperialism and the ideals of nationalism as imperialism involved the subordination of many nationalities to one, a subordination not merely political and economic, but also moral and intellectual. He firmly believes that loyalty for Indians consists in the loyalty to the idea of an Indian nation politically, economically and intellectually free that is Indians believe in India for the Indians, but if do so it is not merely because we want our own India for ourselves because he adds,

Every nation has its own part to play in the long tale of human progress and that nations which are not free to develop their own individually and own character are also unable to make the contribution to the sum of human culture which the world has right to expect of them (A.K. Essays 2).

For that any nation should be free politically, economically and also intellectually. The world has progressed from the idea of individual slavery to that of individual freedom; it has become an instinct to believe that men are equal at least to their degree that every man must be regarded as an end in himself; but progress is only now being made from the idea of national slavery to that of national freedom that is inter-nationalism. He suggests that one should not forget that in setting the idea of nationalism, we are not merely striving for a right but accepting a duty that is binding on us that a self-realization to the utmost for the sake of others.

He believes 'wisdom is greater than knowledge' by collecting information from the classroom teaching we think ourselves highly educated and highly knowledgeable intellectuals. The same education carts us away from actual wisdom of life and we are sometimes strangers in our own land. This kind of information collecting diverts us from our own duties towards our motherland. It is his individual thinking that it can profit nothing to a man if he gains the whole world and lose his own soul. The love of freedom beholds a people who can be imprisoned or deported for indefinite periods without trial and too divided amongst themselves to offer adequate resistance to this loneliness. In a word every man seeking to widen his own outlook sees but his own face distorted in an Indian mirror. It is from the inhospitableness, this cowardice that the call of the mother land must waken us. We are conscious that the best in us is sleeping still; but when the sleeper wakes, who know what, shall come out of it? One thing at least we are certain of that the awakening must be not waking in a prison cell but that of a free man, full of good hope, of steady purpose, perfect strength. It is for this we are straddled, for this that we shall suffer' and this is the deeper meaning of the great Indian struggle for freedom.

Two essentials of nationality, according to Coomaraswamy are geographical unities and a common historic evolution or culture. These two India possesses superabundantly, besides many lesser unities which strengthen the historical tradition. The fact of India's geographical unity is apparent on the map, and is never disputed. The recognition of social unity is at least as evident to the students of Indian culture. The idea has been grasped more than once by individual rulers like Ashoka, Vikramaditya and Akbar. According to Coomaraswamy, in legends too we meet with references to councils or notes of the gods held in the Himalayas, whither they repaired to further common ends. No one can say that such an idea that of federated states of India is all together foreign to the Indian mind. But more than all these there is evidence enough that the founders of Indian cultures and civilization and religion had this unity in view, and the manner in which this idea pervades the whole of Indian culture is the explanation of the possibility of its rapid realization now. It is for nothing that Indian sacred shrines are many and far apart; that one who would visit one or two of these must pass over hundreds of miles of Indians soil?

Banaras is the sacred city of Buddhists and Hindus alike. Samanala in Ceylon is a holy place for Buddhist, Hindus and Muslims. The holy land of Indians is not a far off Palestine but the Indian land itself. All the different parts of India bound together by a common historical tradition and tie of spiritual kinship. Speaking about Hindus and Hindu culture he says that the Hindu form the main part of Indian culture but it would hardly be possible to think of an India in which no great Mughal ruled, not had Taj been built. Few great Indian rulers have displayed the genius for statesmanship which Akbar had and a greater religious toleration than he. For the rich culture of India, we will not consider only the contribution of the Hindu sects, saints or *rishies*

but it is a combined outcome of all the great people of the other cultures which arrived once and settled in India.

Coomaraswamy rightly thinks that Indians feel it their duty to realize their unity and national self-consciousness in concrete form as much for the advantage of others as of themselves; and this without any feeling of bitterness or exclusiveness towards other races, through perhaps for a time such feeling may be inevitable, and to show what spirit moves them, they have such a statement of belief in the unity as the beautiful national song called *VandeMataram* (Hail ! mother land) which expresses the aim and the power of the awakened Indian nation as the Marseilles embodied the ideal of awakened France or as those of Ireland are expressed in the songs of Ethna Carberry. The words of *VandeMataram* express the Indian recognition of the mother land, their quiet but profound assurance of her greatness and beauty; and their consciousness of the high calling which is hers. They voice the hope of the Indian nation which shall not be disappointed.

Conclusion:

The concept of Nationalism, according to Coomaraswamy, is not parochial or sectarian, but all comprehensive and inclusive. He insists on considering it as a great responsibility on the part of any citizen, rather than a matter of false pride and narrow-minded views. A true nationalist is one who honors the image of his nation and engage in it activities that world enhance the prestige of his nation. Nationalism should be conjoined with openness of outlook with constant vigil to protect the interests of the nation without prejudice to the interests of our nation.

The true defenders of nationalism according to Coomaraswamy are the artists, poets and patriotic thinker. A nation's success or progress cannot be measured by the material progress it makes, but by the enlargement of intellectual and artistic horizons. The highest ideal of nationality is self-realization. The nation should live in the minds and hearts of its citizens, enabling them to realize them potentialities in full measure.

Coomaraswamy emphasizes the idea that is not through political action or struggle that a nation can achieve freedom but through concerted efforts to make the people realized their own cultural heritage and destiny. The regeneration of India can be achieved through artistic and spiritual realization. Political unity is to be strengthened through the unity of national culture. The importance national culture can be highlighted through re-orienting the priorities in the education policies of the country.

It is wrong to believe that nationalism in India depends of hatred of anything not India. The foundation should be true love and respect from the motherland, it peace and prosperity. According to him, a true nationalist is an idealist, one who firmly believes in the noble value of patriotism, sacrifice and legitimate pride in the cultural heritage of the nation.

Ananda Coomaraswamy arrived of the cultural artistic scene when India, its culture and traditions were more misunderstood through misinterpretation and misrepresentation. He wished to put things right and to defend Indian art and culture against the western negative attitudes. The national movement in India was looked down upon by the British who considered Indians savages who need to be civilized through their form of education.

Along with the achievement of political freedom, India had to achieve freedom from the alien culture which was being forcefully imposed on the Indian sensibility through the westernized system of education. The art and architecture of India, the rich heritage of which we are proud today, were consciously being set aside and the alien culture forced upon us. Coomaraswamy raised his voice for the spiritual and intellectual freedom and defense of the age

old values of India.

Bibliography:

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