

Genesis of Tagore's Jana Gana Mana Adhinayak and nemesis of related controversies

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Firstly, I would like to congratulate Mukto-Mona for completing its five years of very successful existence. To the best of my knowledge it has become one of the greatest sites providing us valuable debates and information on several issues critical to our parts of world.

I express my deepest gratitude to Avijit and his team for their selfless and hard work to keep this e-forum going from strength to strength. The importance of free and rational thinking is important for the building of better world, as this idea was embodied (as a prayer song) in the following poem of Tagore.

*Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high,
Where knowledge is free,
Where the world has not broken up into fragments by narrow dogmatic walls,
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
into the dreary desert sand of dead habit,
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake!*

I noticed that Tagore was quite a debating issue in this website for different reasons. We have recently seen debates on both the national anthems of India and Bangladesh Tagore wrote. These two songs were adopted as their national anthems by the respective country's sovereign parliaments. Recently we have seen lot of blogs on the national anthem of Bangladesh, therefore here I will concentrate on controversies on *Janagano mano*, information provided here on this issue are referenced below.

The frequently perpetuated debate that Tagore wrote the song *Jana Gana Mana* for the British monarch was addressed by several people, please see also past blogs in Mukto-Mona.. I have searched lot of materials to find the genesis of Janagana mono and Tagore's own view on this issue. I have found the followings,

"The poem was composed in December 1911, precisely at the time of the Coronation Durbar of George V, and is a paean in praise of "the overlord of India's destiny". The composition was first sung during a convention of the then loyalist Indian National Congress in Calcutta on Dec. 27, 1911 [1]. It was sung on the second day of the convention, and the agenda of that day devoted itself to a loyal welcome of George V on his visit to India. The event was reported thus in the Indian press:

"The Bengali poet Babu Rabindranath Tagore sang a song composed by him specially to welcome the Emperor." (Statesman, Dec. 28, 1911)

"The proceedings began with the singing by Babu Rabindranath Tagore of a song specially composed by him in honour of the Emperor." (Englishman, Dec. 28, 1911)

"When the proceedings of the Indian National Congress began on Wednesday 27th December 1911, a Bengali song in welcome of the Emperor was sung. A resolution welcoming the Emperor and Empress was also adopted unanimously." (Indian, Dec. 29, 1911)

Unsurprisingly, the belief gained ground that the poem had been written in honour of the visiting monarch. Tagore already enjoyed much fame in India, and newspaper reports are both consistent and categorical on the point of Tagore having himself sung his composition on the occasion. Although there was no record of Tagore singing this song in the Congress party conference as we find in the case of his singing of Vanemataram at Calcutta Congress party conference in some occasion.

Nevertheless, other explanations for the motivations that informed the creation of the poem have been proposed. On a visit to India, The poet Yeats received a visit from an Indian admirer who was also, in Yeats' words, "an Indian devotee" of Tagore. In a letter to a lady friend, Yeats quoted this unnamed devotee as giving him a 'strictly off the records' version of events dealing with the writing of Jana Gana Mana. That version, as presented in 1968 by the Indian Express newspaper, was this:.

"He (Tagore) got up very early in the morning and wrote a very beautiful poem.... When he came down, he said to one of us, 'Here is a poem which I have written. It is addressed to God, but give it to Congress people. It will please them.' [2].

Thus, Tagore wrote the poem in honour of God. In fairness, the last word on the affair should really be given to the poet himself. In a letter to Pulin Behari Sen in 1937, Tagore himself wrote this:

“””Answering a friend's query about the origins of the *Jana Gana Mana* in 1937, Tagore said that a loyalist friend had requested him to write a song in praise of the King. He had felt anger at his friends presumption about his loyalism. It was this anger that led him to compose *Jana Gana Mana*. He had written a song to a superior authority, the "Dispenser of India's destiny". Tagore concluded. "That great Charioteer of man's destiny in age after age could not by any means be George V or George VI or any George. Even my 'loyal' friend realized this; because, however powerful his loyalty to the King, he was not wanting in intelligence."

If you read the whole song (5 verses) then the song is no doubt is a prayer song praising the eternal Lord. If you read the 4th verse of the song, here Bharat Bhagya bidhata is depicted as female (Tumi Mata). King George could not be female, however someone now may argue it means British queen).

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Ghoro Timiro Ghono Nibiro
Nishithay Pirito Murchhito Deshe
Jagrata Chhilo Tabo Abichalo Mangalo
Nato Nayanay Animeshe
Duhswapnay Atanke
Rakkha Karilay onke
Snehamoyee Tumi Mata
Jano Gano Dukho Trayaka
Jaya Hey Bharata Bhagya Bidhata
Jaya Hey, Jaya Hey, Jaya Hey,
Jaya Jaya Jaya, Jaya Hey

Janagano mano is a prayer song, which uniquely describes the geography of then India (in the first verse), and quite logically was adopted as the National Anthem for secular India.

Finally, the great poem **Where the mind is without fear** of Tagore as quoted at the beginning was also blamed that Tagore meant “Father” as the British king. There is no dearth of perpetual criticism of Tagore.
Let me finish this article with a quote from Tagore.

“To be outspoken is easy when you do not wait to speak the complete truth”- Tagore

References

1. Dutta, K & Robinson, A (1995), *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man*, St. Martin's Press,
2. <http://www.sacw.net/DC/CommunalismCollection/ArticlesArchive/pkDatta092004.html>