A Rethink on Nationalism - Tagore's Perspective

What necessitates a rethink on nationalism?

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- A series of events, in recent years, in India have come to speak for the whatnots of nationalism.
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- They include:
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i. Compelling universities to install statues of leaders in the campuses.
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ii. Directing Central Universities to ‘proudly’ fly the national flag at gigantic heights.
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iii. Making universities adorn the walls of the corridors with portraits of martyr soldiers in the name of ‘Wall of Heroes’ campaign.
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iv. Marching with long stretches of the Indian flag for miles in the name of ‘tiranga rallies’.
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v. Parking retired army battle tank in the university campus.
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Can such actions kindle meaningful nationalism?

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- From an individualistic perspective, patriotism and nationalism are not most often real emotions, sentiments or feelings.
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- They are, in essence, political constructs and political concepts, and their effects are made real only through political action.
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- Thus, these ideas are to be constantly redefined, debated and reinterpreted

as a political community for it to take effect at individual level.
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- It is thus highly uncertain in a knowledgeful society to instil patriotism by a mere show of ‘nationalist’ objects and symbols.
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What are Tagore's views on nationalism?

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- The great poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore had many anxieties and worries about the very idea of nationalism itself.
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- He has put forward several stunning and soul-searching reflections through his lectures rendered in India and abroad in this regard.
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- Tagore ridiculed the idea of taking pride of and basing nationalism on the weaknesses and inefficiencies of a neighbouring country.
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- He called such actions as 'patriotic arrogance' and as ' organized selfishness'.
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- Tagore, instead, wished the young minds to aspire for the ‘higher ideals of humanity’.
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- For Tagore, true nationalism rests on engaging more with India's own deep and troubled history of “social adjustment” and taking pride in it.
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- It calls for realizing and cherishing the civilizational possibilities and potentials.
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How important is freedom of expression in this regard?

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- For realising Tagore's idea of nationalism by celebrating the self-worth of the nation, it is highly essential to make space for critical reflection on the past.
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- This is because nationalism and patriotism are not frozen or dead concepts but ideas that require constant nourishment.
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- In this context, the universities of India should be enabled to function as platforms for exchanging and sharing of ideas and thoughts.
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- They should be given the freedom to examine and deepen the content of nationalism and patriotism in a meaningful way.
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- Logically, freedom of thought and speech and space for political activism within campuses are vital to engage the young minds in this process.
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- All India needs at this juncture are good winning arguments and lots of people to talk, agree and disagree, to make democracy and nationalism more meaningful.
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Source: Indian Express

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