

## **TAGORE'S CONCEPT OF NATIONALISM**

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### **Abstract**

Tagore had roused the wave of nationalism at the commencement of the twentieth century by composing the national anthem: Jan gunman, He stood against the strict form of nationalism, but his outlook was understood as a different point of view and was comprehended Anti-nationalism unfortunately. Tagore emphasized the “classes and casteless” in the place of rigid social formation. He was very aptly well-thought-out that the patriotism that has the right to give up the happiness and human rights, would positively invite the adversity instead of making the base of a great civilization. He had profound faith in comprehensive humanity and he wished to have freedom of heart not as a nationalist but as an internationalist poem “Where the Mind is Without Fear” from Gitanjali is certainly Tagore’s famous poem bringing out his desire for freedom.

**Key Words:** nationalism, patriotism, civilization, humanity, freedom.

According to him, the term nationalism was originated from the term nation-state which was nothing but the epithet of Western ideas of capitalism and modernization. He thought that these notions were basically against the Indian tradition of self- autonomy, pluralism and religious tolerance. Tagore describes the nation as the political and economic union of people and this union is the one that an entire population dons when systematized for a mechanical drive. Commerce and science are used by nationalism instrumentally to achieve their ever-expanding power objects.

Tagore’s comprehending definition of patriotism is an answer to distortions of the term which was chiefly the work of Hindu nationalists of the time, his definition is rooted with values of cooperation and cohabitation that exceeds boundaries and is meant for humanity at large. Tagore was conscious of the dangers of patriotism that was rooted in the western concept of the nation-state. He had observed European forms of nationalism and clinched that the West had turned Chauvinistic. In Europe, nationalism was a sentiment that was being promoted in order for a nation to become more powerful, especially commercially. Tagore’s brand of nationalism was rooted not in the power that commerce could bring to Western political civilizations but in human agency and its traditions that highlighted tolerance that Indian civilization used to be characterized by.

Tagore was a holistic philosopher, who believed in the multi-layered nature of the human being. “To me, humanity is rich and large and mercy sided.” He wrote in a letter dated 14 January 1921 from New York. To work efficaciously, and the ideal would have to take into account this variety in the human individual and bring healthy nourishment for the whole being. This multiplicity counted in both mind and soul, and for Rabindranath Tagore, a perfect had to minister to each of these characteristics so that each is brought to roundness.

Only then the individuals would be in new harmony and creative pledge of wholeness to be strengthened, steering to the world towards a “great harmony of all human races.”

Tagore’s ‘Where the Mind is Without Fear’ poem 35th in the Gitanjali is a prayer by the poet for his country. The poet desires that his nation may upsurge above the slender notions of progress. He prays to God to offer an atmosphere of equivalence and freedom, which is grounded on truth and fearless perception. It is his wish that the country should upsurge above the thin notions of nationalism, progress and unbending domestic walls of social order. The poet desires that the whole world should stand united and it should not be smashed into diverse rubbles under the name of caste, creed and religion. Everyone should have dignity and self-respect as a perfect citizen of this nation.

According to him knowledge should not be limited to a particular class or caste but should be permitted to all without any bias. He seems to request that people of this nation should struggle tirelessly towards excellence and their mind should be led into broadening thought and action forever. The poet sees arising of the country to have all such abilities to fulfil his dream of an ideal nation.

In ‘The Sunset of the Century’, one of his various poems Tagore muses upon his views of nationalism. Tagore wrote ‘Nationalism in India’ in the year 1917 and still, it replicates our time. This verse was initially inscribed in Bengali by Rabindranath Tagore.

A lot of people look very within inconsistent. To a lot of people, it will seem an inner illogicality, as if Tagore did not know his mind because there are thousands of people who went to jail or marched in protests singing Tagore’s songs. He has also recorded Vande Mataram, as one can see the difference between nationalism and patriotism. Tagore was a patriot which means love for one’s country- a sense of territoriality. This not only common to humankind, we see it in many species other than Homo sapiens. At one time we used birds to send a message, which is territoriality. Some scholars, who wanted to trace the evolution of Tagore’s notion of nationalism and internationalism, jagged out certain shifts in his thought according to time. In this regard, one can acquiesce the following points.

First, Tagore did not very openly spell his notion of nationalism till the close of the nineteenth century even though he was continually involved with numerous problems/factors of nationalism which can be seen through his essays, letters, songs and poems.

Second, during the very important (in terms of fame, writings and activities as a public figure) last four decades of his career the basic challenging of his major writings, lectures and actions were a kind of dialogue with nationalism. In these years he also thrived his concept of internationalism ensuing his evaluation of nationalism.

Third, despite some moves and discrepancies in his thought, some of the basic sites of his concept of nationalism persisted almost unchanged. For further mention that these shifts or changes took place mainly in the light of numerous experiences e.g. fiasco of Swadeshi Movement, World War I, the upsurge of Gandhi and movements etc.

During the first phase, we perceive an oscillation in Tagore’s writings about the question of East and West. Born in one of the founding families that led the Bengali enlightenment of the nineteenth century, he bore all the illogicalities of his age and class on the question of civilization.

He was brought up in an atmosphere almost charged extra with the essence of nationalism of the Bengali Hindu intelligentsia. His elderly family members and friends were full of various successful and unsuccessful tests in the formation of open as well as secret societies for national liberty, highly striving trade practices and inventions of new technology. They were editors, playwrights and organizers. Although they stemmed their ideals from the West, they sought to recuperate India, particularly, in the light of her past glories. Many of them began to nurture Bengali language and literature with changed enthusiasm, which in course of time became one of the most important points of national identity. But it was never a hostile pan-Indian anti-English nationalism. Even Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, the originator of modern Bengali prose and Hindu nationalism declared “We are not the enemies of English language or race... among other benefits which the people of this country gained from the Englishmen – English education is the most valuable one... These are certain things that must be communicated to government officials.

Tagore's concept of nationalism is remarkable as he spoke like a mature well-reasoned moderate of the day and criticized, of writing as a contemporary trend in Bengali literature: additional empty slogans and petty views in order to arouse national spirit.

Tagore criticized this additional nationalist sentiment as they do not signify strength but the weakness of the local people. So, he rejected on one hand the bare hyperbolic sayings of the then nationalist leaders, authors and the weakness of the moderate leaders and their politics on the other. As an alternative, he welcomed the emergence of an intellectually and morally solid native people who would not agree to take the tyrannical foreign rule for granted. He opposed the same problem a few years later, after his first sojourn in England. This time too, he strongly pleaded in favour of accepting a bold and upright attitude.

He compared the subjugated state of timid Indian people with the turbulent Afghans and Zulus whose determined resistance to the British domination caused the British much distress and worry. Consequently, he ended with some un-Tagore like words: “according to scriptures: the mother earth is built by flesh. Victory to the flesh –in this fleshy world.” Though, it would be a blunder if we accept the above words in their face value and contemplate that Tagore was campaigning his virtue of violence. The above-mentioned lines are written in a satirical tone to criticize the inhuman face of the colonial government than glorifying violence itself. Secondly, even if we agree to that here Tagore advocated the ‘principle of protest’ we must observe that this bold uprightness must be based on moral bravery than physical barbarism. Throughout his life, he described bravery and courage as spiritual assets.

It appears apt to analyse the text for which Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. “Gitanjali” or song offerings, is certainly Tagore's most famous work. The most prevalent reference to nationalism in Gitanjali is certainly Tagore's renowned poem “Where the Mind is Without Fear”. Though written as a prayer, it is a display of the idealist in Tagore, bringing out his yearning for true freedom. He centres on liberation through education. This introduces cognitive honesty and wisdom. Nonetheless most of all he envisions a truly global society that is not mentioned by any petty division of narrow-mindedness, domesticity or tradition.

Next poem that reflects Tagore's response to nationalism is one that accounts a conversation between a prisoner and his master. The prisoner grieves, "I thought my invincible power would hold the world captive leaving me in a freedom undisturbed." Hitherto another exhibition of this attitude is Tagore's statement, "On the seashore of endless worlds the children meet. The infinity sky is motionless overhead and the restless water is boisterous. On the seashore of endless worlds, the children meet with shouts and dances." What comes through is a perceptive of the world as one, where nationalism hampers rather than inspires human agency and freedom.

He identifies the main difficulty in India as being a racial divide and a desensitizing classification of society that believes some are inferior to others. It has dealt with this warning compassionately and humanely for centuries, up until the time the West spurt in and executed the ideas and institutions on the Indians. Tagore's observation of the patriotism in the West is one of scientific accuracy and mechanization that marks in "neatly compressed bales of humanity which have their use and high market value". He describes it in terms of an orderly union of the population accepts when prepared for a mechanical drive.

Tagore argues, "True modernism is freedom of mind, not the slavery of taste." Tagore was of the opinion that nationalism is only an association of politics and commerce that brings fruitage of wealth by scattering tentacles of greed, self-centeredness, power and affluence. Nationalism according to Tagore is not spontaneous self-expression of man as a social being, where human associations are naturally regulated, so that man can pick up ideals of life in cooperation with one another, but somewhat a political and commercial union of a group of people, in which they assemble to maximize their profit, growth and power. It is the ordered self-interest of people, where it is slightest of being human and least spiritual. Tagore saw nationalism as a frequent threat to humanity because with its inclination for the material and the rational, it has trodden over the human spirit, human ethics and human sentiments. Tagore orates that all the problems in colonial India as ingrained in one single fact that is the English nation is ruling India. He stresses that individuals belonging to the nation should bear moral and spiritual authority and should not be bound by some ulterior motives.

To sum up, Tagore's concept of nationalism was something critical for the development of a nation of his dream. Rabindranath Tagore is an eminent literary figure who has influenced the entire world not only via his writings but also by his effective participation in different events to promote the well-being of the common humanity. He has written various plays, poetry, novels and short stories. His creative writings are immersed in the colours of nationalism.

The spirit of nationalism demands each nationality as an independent government. The people who feel that they have their own unique social heritage, their own art literature, they form a corporate entity. Identifying their resemblance to one another and their differences from other men, they gather together and object at an independent state of their own. This togetherness we find in Tagore and the people who were known to him. However, his family members and his close friends belonged to different occupations and fields but the eventual aim of all of them was to dedicate their life in the wellbeing of society and prosperity of the nation. And such an environment surcharged him with the spirit of nationalism. Although he wanted to spread English education so that people would come up with unrestricted and new



thinking. But this does not mean his love for the nation was not there. Tagore, one of the leading thinkers in the country at that time spent in building educational structure. A man of true aptitude, his role to the freedom movement is substantial. He wrote most of his fragments in his mother tongue, Bengali to be later translated to accommodate his vast audience. He utilized his literature as deployment for political and social reform, henceforth permitting other nations to be aware and extend international pressure to Britain to be responsible for its actions. He recorded everything that would expose Britain's true intents in India. He displays his irritation against the social customs and unbending caste system which has damaged the self- respect and made us dependent. According to Tagore's philosophy. We must reserve our faith in humanity. Tagore's philosophy also seems pertinent in reviling situation as we notice the variety of social and political issues unresolved even after achieving the freedom from British Hegemony.

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