



A Study of Rabindranath Tagore's Perception of Indian Nationalism

Mr. Khoje Sharad Khandu

Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
MSS Arts, Science & Commerce College,
Ambad, Dist. Jalna (MS)

Introduction:

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) was a prolific and accomplished poet, novelist, and playwright and is perhaps best known for his literary output, a massive corpus comprising superb writing in both Bengali and English. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 for his *Gitanjali*, a cycle of prose poems. Tagore was also a prominent educator, founding Visva Bharati University at Shantiniketan, a university noted for its internationalism and strength in the arts, now a leading university in India. Tagore is less well known as a philosopher but indeed contributed importantly to the development of Indian philosophy in the early 20th century. Tagore was concerned with the development of Indian national identity.

Analysis :

Tagore was not only a poet. He had expressed his thoughts on various subjects through his writings. He was an excellent thinker and philosopher. He reflected his philosophy through his poems. He did not write his philosophy in an academic manner. His philosophical thoughts are scattered in his literature. He was also a painter and musician. Tagore had expressed his views on various socio-cultural and political issues that are still pertinent to the present time. For example, he wrote on women's oppression and empowerment, the importance of education, human dignity, environmental awareness, reason and freedom, the need for scientific and technological development, modernization, equal rights for all citizens, cultivation of fellowship and



respect across race and religion, egalitarian relations among cultures and countries, the horror of violence and war and the necessity for establishing world peace.

Nationalism, according to Tagore, is not a spontaneous self-expression of man as a social being. He sees it as a political and commercial union of a group of people, in which they congregate to maximize their profit, progress and power. He wanted Indians to uplift their downtrodden people first and believed that freedom would follow automatically. He longed for a divine kingdom. Tagore was not only opposed to the idea of the nation; he was even more fiercely opposed to India joining the bandwagon of nationalism. This would compromise India's history and identity as a culture and bring it under the shadow of the West.

Tagore's perception of nationalism has mainly relied on ancient Indian philosophy, where the world was accepted as a single nest. In this way, Tagore was striving to dissociate himself from the general belief of nationalism and trying to associate it with ideas such as peace, harmony and welfare. He argues further that if anyway India decides to contribute the world; it should be only in the form of humanity.

Humanity, world over does not require a narrow but broad sense of nationalism. Therefore, it should be formulated through various means of life. Tagore's idea of humanism goes beyond any boundaries or barriers and seeks at large a common place where humanity comes before any other kind of identity. He adds further that the saints such as Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya ignited the flame of humanism in Indian minds. But unfortunately, it was faded over time with an aggressive rise of racism and caste-based disintegration of our society.

The spread of fanatic nationalism during the First World War might have forced him to interpret and blame it as an evil epidemic. He was trying to subvert the popular idea of nationalism which was more a political justification that encouraged grabbing other nations and their resources.



In his speech, Tagore express that, during the evolution of the Nation the moral culture of brotherhood was limited by geographical boundaries, because at that time those boundaries were true. Now they have become imaginary lines of tradition divested of the qualities of real obstacles. So the time has come when man's moral nature must deal with this great fact with all seriousness or perish. The first impulse of this change of circumstance has been the churning up of man's baser passions of greed and cruel hatred. If this persists indefinitely and armaments go on exaggerating themselves to unimaginable absurdities, and machines and store-houses envelop this fair earth with their dirt and smoke and ugliness, then it will end in a conflagration of suicide.

Therefore man will have to exert all his power of love and clarity of vision to make another great moral adjustment which will comprehend the whole world of men and not merely the fractional groups of nationality. The call has come to every individual in the present age to prepare himself and his surroundings for this dawn of a new era when man shall discover his soul in the spiritual unity of all human beings.

According to Tagore, the real problem in India was not political but social. It was a condition that he says prevails not only in India but among all the nations, i.e. called the problem of race as we can find commonly in America. India has acknowledged the real differences between races but, yet, seek for some basis of unity through our saints like Nanak, Kabir, etc.

Tagore fiercely expressed that we should follow our Upanishads and our saints who taught us the idea of fraternity, brotherhood and equality, which can make any country strong. It was really important for our divided society. He highlighted the part how we Indian's get intimidated by the idea of westernisation and stated that forgetting our roots had become the major reason why we get confused with the true essence of national self-consciousness. He says that there is a need to prove our humanity by solving the internal differences through mutual help and finding some true basis for reconciliation.



Tagore considered the ideals of nationalism inherently problematic because it leads to moral corruption, moral degenerations and mistreatment and contrary to simple living or moral ideals of individuals. He utterly said that nationalism was something that serves nations self-interest; it doesn't serve the individual self-interest, which is not at all acceptable.

He was patriotic, but he knew the limit of that patriotism. In many of his works, he expressed that nationalism, i.e. love for the nation, can't be equated with love for God because to improve society one needs to understand such challenges for improvement or empowerment.

The part on nationalism in the West gives us the system which Tagore embraced composing on patriotism. Patriotism is, as he guarantees, made by the idea of the "Country", "in the feeling of the political and monetary association of a people, is that perspective which an entire populace expect when composed for a mechanical purpose". This working definition doesn't wander from conventional definitions that show up in sociology. He anyway calls attention to that the "Country" has an automated and flippant viewpoint that channels man of soul and profound quality.

It is a very jingoistic or xenophobic response to the explanation of the nationalism that perpetuates violence and stress between communities and the state or the nations.

Conclusion:

Tagore's thoughts on nationalism are scattered in his literature. Tagore's broad discourse on nationalism and his evaluate of the nation-state underlines an endeavor to propose a societal texture that is most appropriate to the Indian situation. While describing the nationalism, Tagore emphasis and give importance to universal humanism, spiritual universalism, cooperation, and coexistence.



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