

RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND INDIAN FREEDOM MOVEMENT

DHARMANANDA PAL

Research Scholar, Department of English, SunRise University, Alwar, Rajasthan (India)

Email: dharmanandapal85@gmail.com

Abstract: Rabindranath Tagore was well known as a poet, philosopher, an artist, writer, an actor, socio-cultural reformer. His philosophy of life manifests itself in his activities. He performed as a national leader. The social and political agitation of his time engaged his attention as this mind of thinkers of the world. Being a humanist to the core, he could leave a word of advice to the communities composing the country which-ever he visited. We find him as one of the great leader of the Indian People in politics. This paper tries to explore the concept of political freedom of Rabindranath Tagore. It is a descriptive paper to explain the freedom of all types of narrowness and evils along with freedom from foreign rule according to Rabindranath Tagore.

[Pal, D. **RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND INDIAN FREEDOM MOVEMENT**. *The International Journal of Interpretation, Observation and Analysis*, 2025; Volume 4, Issue 1:31-34 (October-December). ISSN 2349-0713, Peer-reviewed (online/offline), Refereed, Indexed and International Journal (Since 2013), Global Impact Factor: 6.205

Keywords: Freedom, reformist, nationalism, humanism, myriad.

Introduction: Rabindranath Tagore was well known as a poet, philosopher, an artist, writer, an actor, sociocultural reformer. His philosophy of life manifests itself in his activities. He performed as a national leader. The social and political agitation of his time engaged his attention as this mind of thinkers of the world. Being a humanist to the core, he could leave a word of advice to the communities composing the country which-ever he visited. We find him as one of the great leader of the Indian People in politics. This paper tries to explore the concept of political freedom of Rabindranath Tagore. It is a descriptive paper to explain the freedom of all types of narrowness and evils along with freedom from foreign rule according to Rabindranath Tagore. Rabindranath Tagore, a cosmopolitan philosopher, had a unique perspective on nationalism that was not limited to India but had worldwide appeal. He opposed the exclusionary features and self-aggrandizing character found in contemporary discourses on nationalism, such as chauvinism, aggression, and false pride. Tagore believed that these features were not in the interest of humanity at large. Despite his criticisms, Tagore considered nationalism beneficial as long as it served the interests of the poor and deprived people. He opposed the British authority for causing inhuman exploitation and impoverishment and opposed any racial or undemocratic behaviours of Englishmen towards Indians. He believed that the schema of nationalism should not be merely self-determination from British authorities just because they are not Indian. Tagore argued that nationalism was a manifestation of Western capitalism and mechanization, contradicting Indian spiritual ideals and contrasting with India's goals. He emphasized the importance of Indian society as a natural

regulation of human relationships, fostering cooperation and ideals of life. Tagore aimed to convey the humanist conception of nationalism away from mechanistic and commercial purposes. Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, two key figures in the Indian Independence Struggle, held differing views on nationalism. Gandhi believed imperialism was an external manifestation of nationalism, while Tagore viewed internationalism as a more inclusive concept. Tagore and Gandhi had a notable dialogue on various themes, disagreeing with Mahatma on numerous counts. Tagore found Gandhi's use of 'Swadeshi' irrational and argued that the concept of nationalism should not be based on self-determination. This paper will underline Tagore's ideas on nationalism and critically analyse the debate between Gandhi and Tagore.

Rabindranath Tagore and Nationalism

Rabindranath Tagore is often referred to as a 'nationalist poet' or a 'nationalist leader'. This presents problems both historical and historiographical, since by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century Tagore had explicitly rejected nationalism. At the same time, Tagore's legacy is further complicated by certain trends in Indian postcolonial historiography. Work emerging from the Subaltern Studies Collective has often put forward a more complex historical analysis, moving beyond a straightforward dichotomy between nationalism and anti-nationalism. In this version of Tagore's place in India's past, he is simultaneously both inside and outside: a Bengali intellectual deeply marked by his 'cosmopolitanism', 'modernism' and other derivative tropes of western bourgeois intellectual and cultural life. But in this mode of analysis, Tagore too often suffers from simplistic application of various Western classifications, for

example as a 'romantic modernist' or 'liberal humanist'. In fact Tagore, like Hegel, Tagore saw World History as the steady unfolding of an idea. The marked distinction was that, unlike Hegel, he placed India at the centre of that process. In this regard, Tagore developed an alternative conception of modernity which saw the ideas, politics and technology of the West as only one aspect of a developing historical process, rather than its core movement. This not only challenges the spatial dimensions of modernity but also challenges us to think more critically about 'modernities' and the kinds of categories we deploy to make sense of the 'modern' and 'counter-modern'. In this respect, the Tagore-Gandhi debates become a crucial historical and textual source for an interpretation of Tagore's thinking on nationalism. These debates centred on the freedom struggle and India's stance towards the West; and towards Britain as the colonial power. They point towards a complicated engagement with the West, its position in the world, its relationship to India and the political and intellectual influences that it had in India.

Tagore's Concept of Freedom

Tagore's earliest rendezvous with freedom came from the compulsory learning and subsequent selfunderstanding of the Upanishads that preached the ways to attain freedom (mukti) and he deciphered that a man's soul born in a world of freedom, must retain its freedom invariably. Thus, knowingly or unknowingly, freedom became a personal philosophy for Tagore from its genesis till denouement. Arnold A. Blake writes, "his whole life-work is imbued with (an) appeal to freedom and simplicity, to the spontaneous and youthful élan which no conventions can bind." (Blake) A myriad-minded man, Tagore's exposition about the concept of freedom is manifold., Freedom as a notion was always present in his works, but Tagore never discreetly defined what it meant to him .Tagore's freedom is not only multi-layered but also colossal because it is a curious amalgam of tradition and modernity. It was the fundamental belief of Tagore that a nation reposed its progress on the shoulders of education and man's all round development for gaining true freedom was based only on quality education. So the spread of education among the masses was according to Tagore, "the keynote of progress," (Dasgupta, T. 99). Tagore's characters are educated and enlightened, whether it is 'the parrot's training' for Ashalata by her husband Mahendra in Chokher Bali, or Bimla's coaching by Miss Gilby in Ghare Baire.. In Chokher Bali Mahendra, marries an innocent young girl Asha and decides to educate her .He is so happy with his own accomplishment to educate his wife that he completely forgets to ask her if she too wanted such

a rigorous grounding. It was Tagore's firm belief that the essence of education lay in the complete development of an individual's personality and therefore the primary task of education was to develop the intellect and character of a person. Tagore desired his country to develop on the lines of Western liberalism and favored social progress through quality education rather than revolution because he knew that there was propinquity between education and the economic life of the people. Translating his theory, he established Sriniketan in 1912, for he believed that the mind realized its true freedom through service to mankind. Describing Tagore's innovation in the field of education, Cenknner observes that: "Tagore... sought a synthesis of East and West in both ideals and methods. His theory is marked by a synthetic, naturalistic, aesthetic and international character. "(Cenkner, 45)

Reflections of Freedom

Ghare Baire set against the backdrop of the Swadeshi (indigenous) movement in Bengal has all its characters educated as they directly communicate to the readers by writing their part of the story. It is Bimla's fate that she is married to a man who wanted her to trudge out of her home to understand the world. There is Miss Gilby, an English lady, to instill the knowledge of English language that Bimla lacked. While describing her story, Bimla writes: "My husband...used to write to me almost every day, a few lines only, and simple words, but his bold, round handwriting would look up into my face.... Since then, I have been educated, and introduced to the modern age (G.B-P-4). Tagore was an unmatched crusader against the social ills as he has analyzed problems of education, caste, gender and also tried to bridge gap between the 'East and the West' in his writings. Uma dasgupta writes: "Tagore [was] convinced that if India were to become free and independent, and recover self-respect, work must begin to overcome the weaknesses of poverty and division from within society... [for which he] chose education." (Dasgupta, U.). We find vivid descriptions of Tagore's admiration for nature in his literary as well as artistic works because he firmly believed in imparting education through nature for nurturing individual talent, creativity and an "openness of mind." (Gora, p. 27) Tagore encouraged education through the medium of one's mother tongue but simultaneously he was also not opposed to the use of foreign language in India, as he was aware of its importance in the field of science, research, thinking, and creativity. The Nobel laureate, who received the award for the English version of Gitanjali (originally written in Bangla), was of the view that one could remain a staunch patriot despite the learning of the English language.

Tagore's main objective behind the creation of a school like Santiniketan, its unorthodox and futuristic system of instruction prove that he was more inclined towards making education secular. Summing up Tagore's vision on education, his friend E.J. Thompson very aptly noted that "...all through his Santiniketan experiment, he has insisted on one thing, first and second, and all along the line — on freedom, more freedom, always freedom." (Thompson, p. 96) Gora (1910) as a novel projects the difference of opinion between the orthodox Hindus on the one hand and the liberal Brahmos on the other. Tagore born as a Brahmin, took up the leadership of the Adi Brahma Samaj in 1911, choosing to bring the best out of the two. Reflecting his own self in the novel, he writes: "...Pareshbabu did not care for the boundaries between the Brahma and non-Brahmo in his studies as well as in many small daily matters..." (Gora, p. 94). All the characters in this novel are knowledgeable: Gora and Binoy are educated in English language, Paresh Babu and Anandamoyee are experienced intellectuals, Sucharita and Lalita, "known far and wide that Paresh babu's daughters were well-educated." (Gora, p. 278) It was Lalita's revolutionary idea to open an all girls' school irrespective of caste discrimination because she was aware that women were oppressed due to their limited outlook. In his school, Tagore taught his disciples that man's true happiness was not in gaining but in giving himself up to the larger than life concepts of humanity, country and God. In the presidential address to the Indian Philosophical Congress established by Tagore and Radhakrishnan in 1925, the former asserted that the lack of freedom in man was the result of his dim consciousness and narrow perspective of his own self.

Discussion:

Tagore argued that nationalism was a manifestation of Western capitalism and mechanization, contradicting Indian spiritual ideals and contrasting with India's goals. He emphasized the importance of Indian society as a natural regulation of human relationships, fostering cooperation and ideals of life. Tagore aimed to convey the humanist conception of nationalism away from mechanistic and commercial purposes.

The West's commerce and politics have transformed humans into mechanistic tools, bound in iron hoops and labelled towards compressed bales. Indians have witnessed the true value nations hold for humanity, as foreign invaders were treated as human races with their own religion and customs. In the West, Indians had to deal with a nation in the situation of not being a nation themselves.

Tagore's concept of power is defined as a scientific product that dissolving personal humanity in the

laboratory of a nation can led to the dissolution of higher social life and harm humanity. He emphasizes that the nation has more to do with the history of man than with India's, and that the transition from a moral man to a political man can upset moral balance and obscure the human side under the shadow of soulless organization. Tagore argued that India's real problem is not political but social, a condition prevalent among all nations. He criticized the West's dominant political arena, arguing that India has been trying to imitate it to adopt a materialist approach, leading to a civilization that has become "political and commercial aggressive."

In ancient times, geographical boundaries allowed people to maintain unity within their areas of segregation, based on moral cooperation and fostering art, science, and religion. He opposed the education system that taught nationalism and nation over humanity, arguing that moral cooperation was the true basis for greatness. The author criticizes India's submissive role in education compared to Western countries, stating that they are encouraged and trained to fit themselves for global commerce and industry movements, while India receives only minimal assistance. He also criticizes Western civilization as the civilization of power, as it is exclusive and unwilling to open its sources of power to those it has selected for exploitation. The author highlights the nation's jeering at India for lagging behind in education. The narrowness of moral freedom is a radical issue, not due to its quantity but its nature. The West's spirit of freedom is paradoxical, as the Nation of the West forms relentless and unbreakable chains of organization. Man is not powerful but perfect, and to gain power, he must curtail his soul to avoid harming others. His instincts and humanistic ideals hinder his ability to harm others, making moral freedom a more radical issue. Japan, a nation based on higher human ideals, remained independent from the West and its neighbours, focusing on its own humanitarian ideals as its religion. He emphasized the importance of developing from within, as Western civilization's weapons will only be available when the inheritance is exhausted. He compared India to European nations, arguing that India could not borrow from other people's history, as it had its own civilization to follow. Tagore's writings on nationalism emphasized world unity and cooperation, transcending political boundaries and material pursuits. Drawing on the Indian philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, his ideas offer a framework for rethinking nationalism in a world facing globalization and cultural conflicts, aligning with universal human values. Tagore was influenced by the cultural and intellectual revival in Bengal during the 19th and 20th centuries. His

thoughts were shaped by Indian philosophical traditions, such as Vedanta and Upanishads. He engaged with Western ideas, including nationalism, humanism, and liberalism.

CONCLUSION:-

Rabindranath was truly optimistic about the spiritual regeneration of man kind . He hoped that India could become free in one day by her own effort. He is the great sentinel and Guru of Indian culture. Rabindranath believed that the realization of Divinity of self is the secret of man’s development both in

individual and collective life. So, he preached the worship of Divinity in a nation.

References:

- [1]. TAGORE R.N, Towards Universal Man, Asia Publishing House 1969
- [2]. Tagore R N Religion of an Artist
- [3]. TAGORE R.N, Gitanjalee
- [4]. S.N Dasgupta, Rabindranath Tagore
- [5]. Bondopadhyaya Sanghamitra Rabindra Sahityar Adiparva, S. Gupta Bro. Culcatta -6
- [6]. A Centenary Volumes, Rabindranath Tagore 1861-1961. Sahitya Academy. Volume-I



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
INTERPRETATION
OBSERVATION & ANALYSIS