

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Key themes :

- Nationalism
- Cosmopolitanism
- Idea of man



CRITIQUE OF TAGORE'S NATIONALISM

- Rabindranath's idea of nationalism faced numerous criticism on various grounds.
- It was Tagore's strong opposition to nationalism that prompted several Western intellectuals, notably Marxist critic, Georg Lukacs, and the English novelist, D.H. Lawrence, to criticize him severely.
- Lukacs condemned Tagore as a 'wholly insignificant figure who survives by sticking scraps of the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita into his works amid the sluggish flow of his tediousness'.
- Lawrence on the other hand criticized Tagore for creating binary of east/west.

- Tagore's views on nationalism was also criticized by many Indians who completely believed in the liberating potentials of nationalism. They viewed Tagore's views as being hopelessly romantic and even illogical.
- Many of his contemporaries like C.R.Das pointed out the contradictions in the poet's thinking. He pointed out that true assimilation of people's culture could not occur without achieving national independence as suggested by Tagore.
- A nation might find its proper place in the family of nations only when it had achieved an identity. Therefore it is irrational to think of gaining international unity without attaining national identity.

- He was too poetic in his analysis of nationalism. He did not take into account the various historical forces, especially new forms of nationalist imaginaries like newspapers, novels, and textbooks in the age of print capitalism.
- He was too engaged in the issue of east – west encounter and collective progress of mankind to seriously take the issue of nationalism; and thought of it as contrary to the universal cooperation, his cherished ideal.
- His alternative programmes to nationalism like cooperatives and 'Swadesh samaj' failed to energise the masses and its success were also very limited.

ON COSMOPOLITANISM

- “He who sees all beings in his self, and his self in all the beings does not hate any one, and knows the truth” –Tagore.
- Rabindranath Tagore offers a new cosmopolitan imaginary in the 21st century. His cosmopolitan modernity is a radical departure from many of his contemporaries.
- Tagore advocated a form of cosmopolitanism-the idea that all human being are world citizens and owe primary allegiance to the world community.

- He saw the need for going beyond nationalism to a global cosmopolitanism. Transcending the cultural boundaries is needed for the 'Universal Human'.
- “Neither the colourless vagueness of cosmopolitanism, nor the fierce self-idolatry of nation-worship is the goal of human history. And India has been trying to accomplish her task through social regulation of differences, on the one hand, and the spiritual recognition of unity, on the other.” - Tagore

- “ I have come to feel that the mind, which has been matured in the atmosphere of a profound knowledge of its own country and of the perfect thoughts that have been produced in that land, is ready to accept and assimilate the cultures that come from other countries”

- ‘The Way to Unity,’ English Writings 467

- He spoke of the intellectual union of the east and the west. He wanted that the best of each culture should compensate for inadequacies in other cultures.
- Tagore emphasized the contribution of non-western cultural histories to an international cause.

- He assumes that knowledge of particular cultural traditions can provide the basis for understanding others and it can help in relating others morally.
- For Tagore, cosmopolitanism does not derive its justification through the theoretical contemplation of abstractions. Rather, the motivation to be a cosmopolitan is ultimately grounded in an existential orientation, a way of being in the world.
- His faith in the essential unity of mankind influenced his vision about the historic battle of the nationalism of the East against the imperialism of the west.

- Tagore's cosmopolitanism is also in part a consequence of his philosophical and historiographical conviction that social life cannot be reductively captured by statist conceptions of history.
- Tagore's peerless thinking on the philosophical underpinnings of cosmopolitanism at the level of the *Pratyahik* [everydayness] resonates with great force in a world that is simultaneously wrapped by the contrary attitudes of globalization and various forms of particularism. Indeed, the future of the planet rests upon how well we can mediate between these two opposing polarities.

- Some scholars called Tagore's as 'rooted' or 'realistic' cosmopolitans, which means those who respect the variety of traditions and nationalities, but also believe in universal values that all people in all countries should accept and that is the way to understand Tagore's cosmopolitan universality.
- Finally, and most importantly, for Tagore, underpinning the cosmopolitan sensibility rests a poetics of humility flagging the limits of the human when faced with the world's seemingly limitless diversity. The recognition of limits causes the cosmopolitan desire to emerge.

Bibliography

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