

# Rabindra Nath Tagore: Critique of Nationalism

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## ABSTRACT

“Patriotism cannot be our final spiritual shelter; my refuse is humanity. I will not buy glass for the price of diamonds, and I will never allow patriotism to triumph over humanities as long as, I live.” Post-independence how India would be as a Nation, was a topic for debate among various scholars and political leaders. The Indians who were deeply intoxicated in the wave of patriotism were blindly imitating western idea of nationalism. Among all these waves of Nationalism Rabindra Nath Tagore emerged as a critique of Nationalism. His ideas on Nationalism was criticized and misunderstood by many Nationalists. The present paper deals with Tagore’s views on his famous book titled “Nationalism in India” The book was criticized by many as Tagore opposed the National movement, run by Indians against Britishers. This paper is try to re-examine Tagore’s idea on Nationalism and its relevance in the contemporary times.

**Keywords:** Nation, Nationalism, critique, India

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## INTRODUCTION

Ravindra Nath Tagore a prolific and eminent novelist, poet, and playwright, who is known for his literary work both in English and Bengali .He was awarded noble prize for his renowned poem Geetanjali., in 1913.Tagore contributed for the development of India in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mahatma Gandhi, who is known as political father of India , Tagore was known as philosophical father of India. Tagore was much concerned for the development of India as a Nation. According to Tagore, India should develop its self consciousness and it should be based on Indian culture and traditions. Tagore’s views on nationalism were criticized.

### Why he is known as critique of Nationalism?

Nationalism , Nation are some debatable topics of present time .Scholars, believed that the beginning of Nationalism was around late 18<sup>th</sup> century or the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many philosophers are associated with the idea of nationalism. They defined nationalism in one way or the another way. For instance, Ernest Renan defines a nation as an entity which is based on general will of individuals but to form a cooperative identity. Anderson defines nation as “imagined community”. Tagore did a sharp comparison between European and Indian nationalism. Tagore was against the narrow idea of nationalism. Therefore, he is considered as critique of nationalism.

Tagore, a all rounder scholar was a great visionary and had high spiritual orientation He took part in national movement in his initially age but later he criticized the notion of nationalism prevalent in India at that time. He criticized idea of nationalism at that time when Indians were highly intoxicated in the feeling of patriotism. His ideas were misunderstood by his contemporary nationalists. India cannot be a nation due to its heterogenic nature whereas European society is homorganic, they have homorganic race, culture, and sentiments. He believed the freedom which, India wants is only the transfer of power from Britishers to few privileged Indians. Tagore believed that Indian problem is not political as it was in European countries, but here problem is social so that Nationalism should be followed in different way. According to Tagore, western world have their own ideas of politics and these western thoughts are not applicable to Indian as well as most of the countries. He contributed massively for the development of nationalism. He stated:

If India can offer its humanism and spiritual thought to the world, it will be a help to the whole of humanity and it will decrease contours of division around nationality.

He points out a discrimination difference between European and Indian nationalism. European nationalism rest on exploitation of others, while in India it believes in the assimilation of all religions. European nations nationalism relies on the exploitation of others. According to Rabindranath Tagore he had outgrown the idolatry of nationalism that he had been taught as a kid according to him the ideals of humanity were always greater than Nationality. He had conviction that his countrymen made India in such a way line where they will give more importance to idea of humanity rather than nationality. (-Collins, Michael. 2008) .

### **Race problem in India:**

India is suffering from social evils rather than political issues. These social evils are like obstacles in the progress of science. As the western nations had two distinguishing features, they had racial unity and were surrounded by strong neighbors. Rabindranath argues that India tries to imitate western ideas which are not suitable in Indian context as Indian society is full of diversity. (Tuteja K. L., Chakraborty Kaustav 2017 ) The western nations like Germany, Japan and Italy tried to colonize African and Asian continents for their own interest and plundered there resources for the solution of their scarcity of resources. In ancient times they invaded and attacked their neighboring countries, whereas India never invaded their neighbors for fulfilling the needs of their citizen. Question of race problem in India is often ridiculed by western people. Rabindranath Tagore was derided by Americans on the race problem in India. Rabindranath's rebuttal was that the caste problem in India is same as the Red Indian and blacks' problem in America.

Though the severity of race problem is a challenge for India but due to spiritual current which is the strength of India provides solution to this racial problem. Our saints like Kabir, Guru Nanak Dev all preached that there is one God in all the human beings and they gave utmost importance to the humanity. In spite of this racial difficulty our country seeks some basic unity among all the human beings. India's spirit of tolerance is a result of her caste system.

### **Current scenario of the world:**

According to Rabindranath Tagore in the present age people belonging to different races have come

closer and this closeness created two outcomes competition or cooperation. A true unity is like a round globe, it rolls on it springs from moral power of love and vision of spiritual unity. On the other hand, if the ideals are not high and no moral basis then the coming closer of different nations can be a massive organization of hurting others. However, when analyzing nationalism, one must remember that it differs from country to country. German and British nationalism during the 19th century is a good example of two very different forms of nationalism. Every true freedom that we may attain in any direction broadens our path of self-realization.... The unimaginative repetition of life within a safe restriction imposed by Nature may be good for the animal, but never for Man.- Rabindranath Tagore (The Religion of Man) Gaba O.P 2015.

### Conclusion:

For Tagore attainment of nationalism is the keynote of Tagore's humanism. His idea of humanism was enshrined in his principles of synthetic universalism the principle seeks to extend the reach of human personality beyond national frontiers, towards universal dimension Tagore argued that when people evolve their political organization into different nation tends to obstruct their mental and moral development in order to obviate this destructive tendency each individual should strive to develop his/her talents by rising above narrow nationalism and entering into creative relationship with the whole humanity. (OP Gaba; 2015). For Tagore the road to freedom lay in spiritual existence and not through physical existence.

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