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POLITICAL THOUGHT OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE



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Short Profile

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ABSTRACT:

The term 'Nation' symbolized to Tagore a ghastly dehumanizing mechanical organization. It was power play at its nadir. According to Tagore a 'Nation' comes into existence when moral and spiritual freedom of man is replaced by feelings of jealousy, competition and selfishness. Tagore lamented the fact that man used the forces of science to create wealth and satiate his greed. This greed for power multiplied and eventually broke the living bonds of society and gave place to a mechanical organization called 'Nation'. It was political and economic union of people for a mechanical purpose. It consumed the goodness in man and conquered his true self.

KEYWORDS

Nation. Nationalism, Manusher dharma .

I. INTRODUCTION :

Rabindranath Tagore's ideas on nationalism far surpassed the scholars of his time. He espoused ideas that were universal in nature. His writings reflect the eternal quest of search of the soul. He believed in a spiritual world as innermost truth. He realized that a bond of spiritual unity linked the whole of mankind and that it was the purpose of religion to reach down to the fundamental unity of human relationship. Tagore was committed to the ideal of the universal man.

II. VIEWS ON NATIONALISM:

In his childhood Tagore had imbibed the beauty of the literary masterpieces of the western world. The European art, classical literature acquainted him with the new ideals of liberty, justice, and equality. The French revolution for him was a deafening cry of liberation of human spirit. It asserted timeless ideals of liberty, equality, fraternity and rights of man universally. The Continental culture unequivocally put man at the centre of all values. It put the deepest faith in the ability of man. The European culture that placed man at the centre stage promoted the onward march of the western spirit. It inspired the Europeans to exploit the rich potentialities of her people. The western world progressed in science, technology, and art, literature without any ideological baggage or spiritual trappings. They measured the skies, fathomed the oceans and their liberated spirit soared to explore the secrets of existence. They discovered the principle of unity in nature by crossing barriers of diversity.

Therefore Tagore was convinced that in Europe the ideals of human activity are truly of the soul. In his childhood he was influenced by the West's reverence for the divine in man. He thought it was permanent and would help to save the world. He wanted the 'West' to bring that illumination to the 'East' and spread a universal message.

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Tagore traces the growth of nationalism in Europe to the period of foreign exploration and exploitation. As new lands were discovered they were seen as lucrative markets for finished goods and people were subjugated as colonies. Markets thrived as profit motives surged. Blatant avarice made man lose sight of his lofty spiritual ideals. He exploited the colonies with no qualms of conscience perpetuating slavery and robbing people of their freedom. Spirituality in man was brutally crushed by the 'Nation' which was a wealth producing mechanism. He resorted to treachery, kidnapping, murder, crimes unmindful of cannons of morality.

Thus 'Nation' resulted in the process of dehumanizing. It had the conscience of a ghost and callous perfection of automation. Tagore lamented the fact that scientific organizations strengthened man's power but not his humanity. Western people started using science for devastation of the human world. Nationalism was source of war, death, destruction. War was the proof of aggressive western

materialism and science divorced from spirituality. The 'Nation' had dragged the world to the brink of destruction. It was a cruel epidemic of evil which was eating into the moral vitals of mankind. It was brazen power with no consideration for human ideals like freedom and equality. India who lived peacefully was attacked by such a 'Nation' of the west.

Tagore believed in divine dispensation for India. All invaders had contributed to the building up of civilization of India. It was the time for Britishers to write a chapter in India's history after the Mughals. He held that deadly Nationalism was the root of India's troubles. But he regretted that in India we were suffering from conflict between 'Spirit' of the West and 'Nation' of the West. He pleaded to his countrymen not to fall prey to the temptation of wealth. He criticized the caste system based on birth that had segregated people. He considered the absence of human rights for the masses, alienation between educated classes and masses as stumbling blocks in India. He was an advocate of woman's freedom. He warned that if political freedom was pursued excluding social change India's social problems will trouble even after independence. He was an advocate of women's freedom. He had differences of opinion with Mahatma Gandhi. He opposed the idea of charkha, boycott, and non-cooperation and stood for social reconstruction. India had to get rid of social evils to usher in true freedom. He criticized hartals as a spirit of arrogant nationalism.

III. LITERARY WORKS:

Tagore was a renowned poet and a dramatist. His views on the conditions in India and nationalism are echoed in his literary works. His drama "Achalayatan" addressed the obduracy of Hindu orthodoxy. "Ghare Bhaire" became very famous. "Gora" attacked corrupting Hindu influence on Swadeshi politics. The poem 'Sunset of the Century' eloquently describes the poet's anathema to nationalism.

The stanzas ".....and the whirlwind of hatred,

The naked passion of self-love of nations, in its drunken delirium of greed, is dancing to the clash of steel and the howling verses of vengeance" describe how ego and pride swell into self-destruction. Greed, avarice transform into violence bringing the world on the verge of a war. It devours the whole world and eats into the vitals of mankind. In face of such blatant greed and craze for power he implores his countrymen to be simple, humble and remember that pride has a fall. In the poem 'Seashore' Tagore expresses the idea that the world is one. The inhuman institution of nationalism divides the world into narrow fragments. He describes a condition where children of the world residing in different places meet. They play on the sea shore smilingly, build castles, float their boats and collect shells. It reflects purity and a sense of commitment. They transparent innocence is unaware of the vagaries of the world and the swirling tempests. They do not know what lies in store for them. They are pure at heart and miles away from the scheming selfishness and deceit practiced by adults. These naïve children are ignorant of the evil ways of the world. Tagore laments that impending disasters would affect their heart and mind. Tagore wanted young minds to be saturated with the idea that it is born in a human world which is in harmony with the world around. God's arrangements always had harmony of wholeness and unbroken continuity of things. It was his firm belief that God intended children to be taught in the freedom of nature. Man is born in a world that was intensely living and vibrating with

energy. But he loses himself in complexity of things. There is always a discord between his personality and the outer world. His masterpiece "Where the mind is without fear" mirrors his thirst for liberation of the soul. He imagines a global society of boundless love. It is not torn by any discrimination. There is no room for petty thinking, narrow-mindedness. He wants his countrymen to walk with their heads held high and have self-esteem. They should not be bogged down by any customs, conventions and ideological restraints. They should have the quest for knowledge and have a fearless mind. They should be forward looking, progressive, speak the truth and do their best to achieve excellence in life. The use of metaphors is striking as he likens the narrow considerations of caste, creed and religion to 'narrow domestic wall' that divide a house. He likens thinking free from all prejudices to a clear stream and dead customs to a dreary, worthless desert. He emphasized that the purpose of education was the fullest growth and freedom of the soul. Everyone should live for the ultimate truth that emancipates one from bondage. There should be awakening to soul freedom, the freedom of life in God where there is no place for enmity and competition. In the heaven of freedom people need to be free from all prejudices, superstitions, false beliefs and customs. In another of his poetic verse "Prisoner, tell me who was it that bound you?" Tagore pours out the immense grief of mankind described metaphorically as a prisoner. The prisoner regrets that needless hankering for wealth and power enmeshed him in his own treasure house. He admits his false pride in his invincible power with which he wanted to hold the whole world to ransom. In the process he ended up in forging chains around himself.

IV.CONCLUSION:

The westerners always looked down upon the Oriental culture and condemned it as static and dogmatic, immune to new ideas. Its civilization was only metaphysics. Tagore was a pilgrim of eternity. He urged his people to break free from the shackles of matter. His vision was for the whole humanity and not a fractional group of nationality. The spiritual being had to be freed from tyranny of matter. Divine was to be found in humanity. He believed in "Manusher dharma" (religion of man). He considered religion as responsibility to God and to man. God's love flowed from the east as well as west. He wished that India must give to the world the message of our forefathers: "Peace is where Good is, the Good is where there is Unity." It was the dictum of "Shantam, Shivam, Advaitam". For him India's fight was a spiritual fight and not a fight for "Swaraj" as it was interpreted by the nationalist. Conflict had to be substituted with co-operation to find solutions for the problems of modern age. He yearned for complete awakening. According to him, "Our mind must acknowledge the truth of the intellect just as our heart does the truth of Love". The unity of human civilization could be better maintained by linking the fellowship and cooperation of different civilizations of the world. He reiterated that 'Freedom' is not of this or that nation but of 'Universal Man'. Those who tried to realize one Soul in the souls of all developed into great people. India's mission was to realize the truth of the human soul in Supreme Soul.

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