



THE IDEA OF THE SELF IN INDIAN SOCIAL THOUGHT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GANDHI AND TAGORE

Manisha Baishya

Assistant Professor Department of Philosophy, Darrang College, Tezpur Assam

ABSTRACT

Reflecting the dynamic relationship among personal identity, ethical duty, and social awareness, the idea of the self has long played a pivotal role in Indian social philosophy. This research compares and contrasts the lives of two giants whose views on identity have had a significant impact on contemporary Indian culture: Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. For Gandhi, the key to personal and social change was a commitment to nonviolence, self-discipline, truth, and the quest of moral integrity, all of which stem from a spiritual and ethical understanding of the self. A more humanistic and global view of self—one that places an emphasis on freedom of thought and expression as well as the interdependence of all living things—is central to Tagore's work. This research compares and contrasts the two schools of thought to better understand how they deal with the conflict between personal autonomy and collective duty, as well as how their ideas are relevant to modern discussions of moral education, social change, and educational policy. This comparative method sheds light on the complex interplay of identity, morality, and civic duty by highlighting the variety of Indian social philosophy.

Keywords: Self, Indian social thought, Gandhi, Tagore, individuality, social responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

A disagreement arose between Tagore and Gandhi due to the fact that they had divergent perspectives of what it meant to be progressive and current. In Gandhi's opinion, the most important factors in India's redemption were the country's return to its rural roots, its embrace of simplicity, and its complete rejection of Western materialism. The spinning wheel, also known as the charkha, was a symbol of independence. It also symbolized the non-cooperation movement, which he felt had the potential to cleanse society on both a political and ethical level. On the other hand, Tagore was not convinced by this tactic.

In accordance with the perspective of Renaissance humanists, he believed that India had to engage with the modern world while yet preserving its cultural significance. Concerned that Gandhi's policies would completely isolate India from the rest of the world in terms of scientific and technological advancement, he expressed his concern. According to Tagore, freedom included not only the attainment of political autonomy but also the liberation of the mind and the resuscitation of cultural traditions that had been passed down through generations.

Reason and emotion's roles in social transformation

The relative importance of reason and passion as catalysts for social change was a central point of contention between the two leaders. For Gandhi, appealing to people's morals and emotions was a more effective way to rally support for a cause than using logic and reason. Spiritual and emotional appeals played a significant role in his satyagraha (nonviolent opposition) strategies. While acknowledging the validity of emotions, Tagore stressed the necessity of using logic and reason to solve social issues. While appealing to people's emotions can work in the short term, he was concerned that they would not result in long-term solutions. According to Tagore, "where the mind is without fear and the head is held high," he describes an ideal society where logical thought is highly valued.

Constructive alternatives and positive programs

Tagore didn't just disagree with Gandhi's tactics; he also proposed viable alternatives, notwithstanding his objections. The educational experiments that Tagore conducted at Santiniketan showed how Indian institutions may integrate contemporary knowledge with ancient wisdom. Even Gandhi, in his latter years, recognized and admired his institution as a paradigm for progressive education. Education, healthcare, and agricultural improvements, not symbolic demonstrations alone, might create progress, as shown by Tagore's rural rebuilding efforts in the communities surrounding Santiniketan. Independent India's development strategies were shaped by these projects.

The synthesis of tradition and modernity

Tagore aspired to make a union of the two, in contrast to Gandhi's desire to maintain Indian traditions by shunning modernity. To him, it was possible for India to embrace modernity without compromising its rich cultural heritage. The development ideology of post-independence India, which aimed to integrate modern institutions and technology with traditional values, was greatly impacted by this approach. While preserving local traditions and customs, Tagore envisioned modern agricultural practices, cooperative organizations, and scientific education as means to improve rural areas. As an alternative to unthinking modernity and blind traditionalism, this balanced approach was presented.

Legacy and reconciliation

Their stances changed and began to converge as the two leaders grew older. At the same time as Tagore recognized Gandhi's abilities to rally the masses, Gandhi came to value education and productive labour. Despite their ongoing differences, their subsequent letters demonstrated mutual regard.

Tagore and Gandhi's divergent views on freedom and development contributed to the growth of Indian political thinking. Grassroots activity and moral reform were Gandhi's strong suits, whereas education and cultural revival were Tagore's strong suits. When taken as a whole, they laid up a thorough blueprint for

comprehending the opportunities and threats facing India. Both Gandhi's and Tagore's ideas have had an impact on modern India. Gandhi emphasized moral politics and self-reliance, while Tagore envisioned educational advancement and cultural harmony. Similar arguments that arose between these two influential Indian philosophers recur in modern discussions about cultural identity, global participation, and development strategies.

OBJECTIVE

- A comparative study of Gandhi and Tagore
- Their unique perspectives on Indian social thought complement one another.

RESEARCH METHOD

In order to investigate the perspectives that Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore had on the Self in Indian social philosophy, the present inquiry utilizes a comparative, analytical, and qualitative method. In addition to relying significantly on critical readings of their works, which may include essays, speeches, autobiographies, and philosophical writings, it also makes extensive use of secondary sources, which may include academic publications, journals, and studies. Through the use of conceptual and interpretative analysis, the research investigates significant subjects such as coming into one's own, being one of a kind, ethics, spirituality, and how one connects to society. The writers first situate Gandhi's and Tagore's perspectives on the Self within the intellectual, cultural, and historical context of colonial India and wider Indian philosophical traditions. They then analyze and contrast the two authors' contrasting approaches to this important subject. It is possible to get a comprehensive and thorough understanding of their influence on Indian social philosophy via the use of this technique, which does not rely on statistics or empirical data.

Parallel comparisons of Gandhi and Tagore make it clear how the two thinkers' distinct takes on Indian social philosophy enrich one another. A more ethical, moral, and action-oriented worldview characterizes Gandhi's philosophy than Tagore's more expansive, creative, and spiritual one. According to the results, Gandhi's sense of identity is based on principles of self-control, morality, and social responsibility. Gandhi believed that the way to swaraj (self-realization) was via truth, nonviolence, and social service. Being an integral member of a community brings satisfaction to Gandhians. On the contrary, Tagore values spiritual oneness among people, artistic expression, and freedom of thought. According to the results, Tagore held the view that education, art, and universal humanism fostered the growth of a dynamic, multi-faceted self. While Tagore's moral self is wide and unbridled, Gandhi's is restricted and controlled. The findings demonstrate that both philosophers are against limited individualism. While Gandhi advocates for social activity and ethical self-control, Tagore emphasizes the importance of cultural-spiritual growth and personal liberation.

RESULTS

Nationalism versus internationalism

They also had quite divergent perspectives on the concept of nationalism. The goal of Gandhi's nationalism was to purify Indian society by avoiding the influence of foreigners; it has deep roots in the traditions of India. His concept of swaraj, which translates to "self-rule," placed an emphasis on spiritual and moral autonomy in addition to political liberty. The nationalist ideology of Tagore was more open-minded and cosmopolitan. His belief in what he called "spiritual nationalism" was a kind of nationalism that absorbed global influences while yet keeping a strong connection to Indian culture. He was a firm believer in this form of nationalism. According to Tagore, narrow nationalism has the potential to force individuals to become more conservative and alienated.

Mahatma Gandhi and his idea of accommodative nation

Gandhi's ideas on nationalism demonstrate the harmony between seemingly contradictory concepts such as individualism, kinship ties, regionalism, nationalism, and internationalism. He stated that individuals must die for their families, families for their villages, districts for their provinces, and provinces for their countries. Gandhi said that 'it is not the nationality that is harmful, it is the narrowness, greed, exclusiveness which is the plague of contemporary countries.' Gandhi's main essay *Hind Swaraj* (1909) represents nationalism. The booklet's title, *Hind Swaraj*, refers to both self-rule and 'Hind' or 'India', a 'country.' Gandhi knew people who celebrated violence and aggressiveness in the name of country when he wrote *Hind Swaraj* and sought to confront them. According to Anthony J. Parel, Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* addresses four fundamental problems about Indian nationalism. The first speech refutes claims that India is not a country. Second, in *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi discusses religion, language, and country. Thirdly, the pamphlet reviews the Indian National Congress's contributions to Indian nationalism up to 1909 and its extremist and moderate sections. *Hind Swaraj* concludes by focusing on nationalist elites like attorneys, physicians, and other newly educated Indians.⁴ Gandhi reiterates his nationalism and nationalist beliefs throughout these questions.

Gandhi attacks people who say India was not a country before British rule from the first question. Some argue that the British conquered the subcontinent and established 'Pax Britannica' or 'peace of the British Empire,' uniting its disparate and antagonistic regions and communities. However, they also feel that contemporary technology like railroads, telegraph, etc. were vital to India's progress. In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi systematically challenges all the above assumptions. Gandhi believed that India was a country from pre-British times due to its accommodating ability and the presence of pilgrimage sites.

Gandhi said that to be a 'nation,' a country must be welcoming or have a feeling of community despite individual diversity. Gandhi appears to anticipate Benedict Anderson's claim that a country is a 'imagined community' that is both sovereign and constrained.⁵ Gandhi said no other civilization was as welcoming as India. It assimilated foreign culture, religion, etc. over centuries. Gandhi used 'praja' ('subject') instead of 'Rashtra,' the Gujarati/Hindi equivalent of 'nation.' This is because 'Rashtra' indicates authority and 'praja' suggests community. Gandhi also stressed India's hospitality through 'Sama' (occasional

gatherings). This idea of 'sama,' according to Anthony J. Parel, is similar to Renan's 'fusion.' Ernest Renan believed that 'fusion of people' was necessary for European nation-building.

Rabindranath Tagore and his perceived inhumanness of the idea of nation and nationalism

As has been said, Rabindranath Tagore saw imperialism as an outward manifestation of nationalism and valued 'internationalism' by transcending nationality. Tagore was not always anti-nationalism. Tagore was a staunch nationalist in the early 1900s, and many were inspired by him. He became disillusioned with the Swadeshi Movement in its last phase, when political radicalism and revolutionary terrorism emerged. At the height of the Swadeshi Movement, Tagore retreated from politics. In 1908, Abala Bose, wife of the famous scientist J.C. Bose, asked Tagore why he was upset when things were unfolding aggressively against colonial rule by drawing inspiration from his constructive programs and Atmashakti. Tagore replied: 'Patriotism cannot be our final shelter, my refuge is humanity.' In the second decade of the 20th century, Japan's deadly war of aggression against China, Europe's march toward the global conflict of 1914-18, and India's 'revolutionary terrorism' deepened Tagore's disillusionment with nationalism. Tagore now fiercely criticized nationalism. He said that nationalism was simply another word for appropriating the riches and raw materials of other nations by sheer force and that it would lead to isolationism and violate humanity's greatest aspirations.

Tagore warns that nationalism's aggressive turn in most countries, including India, in the early 20th century will destroy civilization. Tagore believed that nationalism had lost its humanity and would lead to a new type of bondage in the name of freedom and self-determination. This does not imply Tagore abandoned his anti-imperialist views. According to Ashis Nandy, Tagore renounced nationalism but maintained anti-imperialist views throughout his life. According to Nandy, Tagore's position confused most Indian nationalists, who saw nationalism, patriotism, and anti-imperialism as one.

Tagore and Gandhi Comparison as Religious Thinkers:

According to some, Tagore and Gandhi are often compared in terms of their contributions to Indian nationalism. We now have enough academic work that shows how the two famous characters of contemporary India disagreed over the discourse's content and techniques, even if they agreed on its overall goal. In my opinion, such disagreement stemmed from opposing views on culture, epistemology, and existential truths. For instance, Tagore and Gandhi likely had different ideas about what was 'modern' and modernity.

One remembers Gandhi irking Tagore by calling Rammohun Roy a 'pygmy' when compared to medieval Indian saints like Acharya Sankara, Kabir, Nanak, and Chaitanya, who were neither 'modernist' nor English-educated. Tagore considered such labelling unfair and outdated. Indian civilization's noble and lasting values were rooted in distinct intellectual and cultural contexts. Tagore represented the intellectual direction of a province that was the first to encounter colonialism and modernity and was most drastically influenced by both. The ascendancy of western philosophy and social reformism would have made 19th-century Gujarat a

cultural hinterland compared to modern Bengal. The Hindu Bengali was among the first to protest and passively embrace colonization. Despite his dissatisfaction with colonial rule and western education, Tagore did not condemn the West and Western civilization as Gandhi did in Hind Swaraj. He saw imperialism as an expression of nationalism and valued 'internationalism' beyond nationalism.

Tagore was not always anti-nationalism. Tagore was a staunch nationalist in the early 1900s, and many were inspired by him. He became disillusioned with the Swadeshi Movement in its last phase, when political radicalism and revolutionary terrorism emerged. At the height of the Swadeshi Movement, Tagore retreated from politics. In 1908, Abla Bose, wife of the famous scientist J.C. Bose, asked Tagore why he was upset when things were unfolding aggressively against colonial rule by drawing inspiration from his constructive programs and Atma shakti. Tagore replied: 'Patriotism cannot be our final shelter, my refuge is humanity. 'In the second decade of the 20th century, Japan's deadly war of aggression against China, Europe's march toward the global conflict of 1914-18, and India's 'revolutionary terrorism' deepened Tagore's disillusionment with nationalism. Tagore now fiercely criticized nationalism. He said that nationalism was simply another word for appropriating the riches and raw materials of other nations by sheer force and that it would lead to isolationism and violate humanity's greatest aspirations.

Tagore warns that nationalism's aggressive turn in most countries, including India, in the early 20th century will destroy civilization. Tagore believed that nationalism had lost its humanity and would lead to a new type of bondage in the name of freedom and self-determination. This does not imply Tagore abandoned his anti-imperialist views. According to Ashis Nandy, Tagore renounced nationalism but maintained anti-imperialist views throughout his life. According to Nandy, Tagore's position confused most Indian nationalists, who saw nationalism, patriotism, and anti-imperialism as one.

DISCUSSION

by means of education and the need of a social stirring, the development of Indian society is being implemented. It was important to them to instill a sense of moral and ethical principles in the Indian people because they want to instill a sense of dignity and pride in the Indian people. Both Visva-Bharati, which was founded by Tagore, and Gandhi's ashrams were efforts to revolutionize the traditional educational system.

When it came to education, Gandhi pushed for a more community-based and pragmatic approach that placed an emphasis on the empowerment of rural communities and their capacity to provide for themselves. Tagore's paradigm, on the other hand, was more individualistic and worldwide, with an emphasis on creativity, intellectual independence, and global humanism.

territory, bringing attention to the concepts of autonomy, nonviolent opposition, and the rejection of colonial domination from the West. Tagore, on the other hand, was more concerned with the restoration of spiritual and cultural practices than with political nationalism. It was in publications such as Ghare-Baire (The Home and the World) that he expressed his concern about the potential for nationalism to develop into an ideology that is exclusionary and divisive toward others.

CONCLUSION

To illustrate how hazardous and meaningless the present nationalist and patriotic mentality in India's public domain is, the whole purpose of this whole affair is to show how harmful and unproductive it is. As a consequence of this trend, there would be a rise in jingoism, which poses a danger to Indian nationalism as well as nationalism in general. Both Gandhi and Tagore were already concerned about this menace by the time the early 1900s rolled around. Just as a matter of fact, there is a thin line that divides patriotism and jingoism from one another. Unlike jingoism, which generates hatred, patriotism motivates people to be nice. It is possible for this hostility to be directed at a different national group or even another group that also exists inside the same country. Additionally, measuring patriotism based on how it is perceived by the general public would result in an odd situation in which people would be obligated to adhere to the rule of law about their patriotism without having any true passion for their nation. It is imperative that we take measures to prevent India from becoming a "geographical demon" as its self-proclaimed "torch-bearers of nation" consume its own long-lived people and impose its own brand of nationalism on them. Considering the perspectives that Gandhi and Tagore had on the same subject is essential in this context, since there is no other Indian national symbol who could be considered more "nationalist" than these two.

REFERENCE

1. It is the knowledge that he, after all he has suffered and after an experience of life of a seventy years, not only believe on it but believes in it more and more every day, that may yet save not only India but the world.-S. Radhakrishnan (Ed.): Mahatma Gandhi Essay and Reflection on his life and work, Jaico Publishing House, Ahmadabad, 1939
2. Martin Luther King Jr. was the Baptist preacher who led the civil rights movement in America in the 1950s and 1960s. He embraced Gandhi's principles of nonviolence, even in the face of brutal attacks. Just as Gandhi refused to stoop to hatred as he struggled to free India, King clung to nonviolence in his successful crusade to end discrimination in the United States. - Schraff, Anne: Mahatma Gandhi, Saddleback Educational Publishing, 2008
3. What I want to achieve - what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years - is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain Moksha. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal.-Gandhi, M.K.: An Autobiography or My Experiments with Truth, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1968, P-16
4. Alam, Fakrul, Radha Chakravarty. (eds).The Essential Tagore Visva-Bharati, Kolkata, 2011.
2. Bhagat Niranjana(ed.) Rabindranath Collection of Essays by Umashankar Joshi Visva Bharati, Kolkata 2018
3. Parekh Shailesh Gandhi vs Tagore Visva Bharati, Kolkata, 2010
5. Gandhi, M. K. (1938). *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.

6. Gandhi, M. K. (1957). *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Vols. I–XC). New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India.
7. Tagore, R. (1931). *The Religion of Man*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
8. Tagore, R. (1917). *Nationalism*. London: Macmillan.
9. Jahanbegloo, R. (2014). *The Decline of Civilization: Why We Need to Return to Gandhi and Tagore*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
10. Parekh, B. (1997). *Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
11. Sen, A. (2005). *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity*. London: Penguin Books.
12. Chatterjee, M. (1983). *Gandhi's Religious Thought*. London: Macmillan Press