

Political Thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy Towards Nationalism, Freedom, Liberty and Human Rights: A Comparative Study

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Abstract:

The concepts of nationalism, freedom, liberty and human rights have occupied a central position in modern political philosophy and social thought. In the Indian context, these ideas developed through a complex interaction between colonial experiences, social reform movements, cultural awakening and struggles for political emancipation. Among the prominent thinkers who significantly contributed to shaping Indian political consciousness, Rabindranath Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy hold a distinctive place. Though belonging to different historical periods, both thinkers envisioned a society based on reason, dignity, freedom and universal human values. A comparative study of their political ideas reveals significant contributions to the understanding of nationalism, liberty and human rights in Indian thought. Both thinkers rejected forms of social inequality and advocated the empowerment of individuals through education, reason and moral development. Their ideas continue to remain relevant in contemporary discussions on democracy, secularism, social justice and universal human values. In this article, comparative studies on political thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy towards nationalism, freedom, liberty and human rights were discussed.

Keywords: Political Thoughts, Nationalism, Freedom, Liberty, Human Rights.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, often regarded as one of the pioneers of the Indian Renaissance, developed his political ideas during the early phase of British colonial rule. His thoughts were deeply influenced by rationalism, liberalism, social reform and the principles of individual rights. He emphasized freedom of thought, religious tolerance, equality before law and the necessity of modern education for social progress. His critique of social injustices and his efforts for the protection of human dignity reflected an early articulation of human rights discourse in India. Roy viewed political freedom as inseparable from social reform and intellectual awakening, arguing that a progressive society requires liberty, rational inquiry and the removal of oppressive traditions. Rabindranath Tagore, emerging as one of the most influential voices of modern Indian philosophy, offered a broader and more humanistic interpretation of nationalism and freedom. Unlike narrow forms of nationalism based on political domination or aggressive patriotism, Tagore advocated a universalist vision where the nation should serve human welfare rather than restrict individual creativity and moral development. His idea of freedom extended beyond political independence to include freedom of mind, cultural expression, education and spiritual growth. Tagore believed that true liberty could be achieved only when individuals recognized the unity of humanity and respected the rights and dignity of all people. The political thoughts of Roy and Tagore demonstrate both continuity and difference. Roy's political philosophy represents the early liberal and reformist foundation of Indian modernity, focusing on constitutional rights, social equality and rational progress. Tagore's philosophy expands this foundation through ethical humanism, cultural freedom and a critique of excessive nationalism. While Roy emphasized the importance of political and social transformation within the framework of modern institutions, Tagore highlighted the moral and spiritual dimensions of freedom and human relationships. The objective of the study is to compare the political thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy towards nationalism, freedom, liberty and human rights.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

A research methodology delineates the procedures and techniques employed to identify and examine data relevant to a specific area of inquiry. Research methodology is a way of explaining how a researcher intends to carry out their research.

Study Area:

Political thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy.

Hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (H₁): It is hypothesized that the comparison of political thoughts towards Rabindranath Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy correlated to nationalism, freedom, liberty and human rights.

Research Design:

The framework of research methodologies and techniques selected by a researcher to carry out a study is known as the research design. Qualitative research design is defined as a type of research methodology that focuses on exploring and understanding complex phenomena and the meanings attributed to them by individuals or groups. In this research, qualitative research design was used.

Secondary Data:

Secondary data is information that has already been collected and documented by researchers but is not pertinent to the topic of the current study. It is available as data collected from a number of sources, including government & non-government publications, books, journal articles, websites, reports, internal organization records, e-resources, documentary evidences etc. In this research, secondary data was used.

Methodology:

In this research, qualitative research design and secondary data source has been used. The textual method involves the examination, interpretation, and critical analysis of written, spoken, or visual texts (such as books, articles, reports, laws, interviews, social media posts, etc.). The comparative studies on political thoughts with special reference to Rabindranath Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy were chronicled in this research. Also due to unavailability of statistical data, charts, graphs etc. the quantitative research design and primary data was not applicable in this study.

Research Tools:

Researchers can measure and examine the frequency, significance, and connections between particular terms, concepts, or issues using content analysis. In this research, content analysis tool was used.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Descriptive research analysis is a methodological approach that aims to elucidate the features of an event or subject under inquiry. Descriptive research analysis is a crucial instrument for scientific inquiry, allowing researchers to observe, document, and examine the intricacies of a certain subject. This method offers a comprehensive and full elucidation that facilitates understanding, categorization, and comprehension of the subject. All disciplines extensively utilize descriptive research analysis to systematically observe and record all events and elements affecting the phenomenon. In this research, descriptive research analysis has been used.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:

Political thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy towards Nationalism- A Comparative Study:

Rabindranath Tagore:

Rabindranath Tagore's notion of nationalism was profoundly philosophical, ethical, and humanistic. In contrast to militant or aggressive nationalism, Tagore approached nationalism with critical caution, prioritizing moral freedom, cultural concord, and universal human ideals over parochial political allegiances.

Tagore contended that nationalism, when uncritically adopted from the West, may devolve into a mechanical, aggressive, and dehumanizing force. In his renowned work *Nationalism* (1917), he characterized nationalism as a structured manifestation of power that frequently stifles individual liberty and ethical conscience. He asserted that Western nationalism was propelled by materialism, imperialism, and competitiveness, resulting in strife and exploitation instead of authentic human advancement.

Tagore posited that India's nationalism ought to be rooted in spirituality and culture, rather than in political or militaristic endeavors. He contended that India's strength resided in its civilizational principles of tolerance, unity in variety, and spiritual humanism. Rather than inciting animosity against foreign domination, Tagore advocated for self-realization, education, and social reform as the essential pillars of national rejuvenation. He posited that the moral elevation of individuals will inherently result in the fortification of the nation.

Tagore vehemently condemned chauvinistic nationalism that exalted the nation above humanity. He cautioned that extreme nationalism can result in communalism, bloodshed, and ethical deterioration. His critique of nationalism did not constitute a repudiation of patriotism but rather a denunciation of nationalism that disregarded universal human ideals. He notably relinquished his knighthood in protest of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre (1919), exemplifying his ethical nationalism grounded in justice and human dignity.

According to Tagore, authentic nationalism should reconcile national identity with internationalism. He championed international collaboration and reciprocal respect among countries. His concept of *Visva-Bharati* was a pragmatic manifestation of this conviction, intending to become a hub for global intellectual and cultural interaction.

Although he was profoundly dedicated to India's liberation and cultural revival, Tagore vehemently condemned aggressive, mechanistic, and parochial nationalism, particularly as it surfaced in the contemporary Western context. His perspectives on nationalism were grounded in humanism, universalism, moral autonomy, and spiritual cohesion. Tagore perceived nationalism as a contemporary political creation, predominantly influenced by Western industrial and colonial experiences (Banerjee, A., 2023).

Raja Ram Mohan Roy:

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, acknowledged as the Father of the Indian Renaissance, established the intellectual underpinnings of Indian nationalism well in advance of the emergence of popular nationalist organizations. His conception of nationalism was reformist, intellectual, and humanistic, focused on reconstructing Indian society via social, religious, and political enlightenment rather than via armed opposition. Roy contended that national rejuvenation was unattainable without social reform. Customs such as *sati*, child marriage, caste prejudice, and the restriction of women's education undermined Indian society and obstructed national advancement. His effective battle against *sati* demonstrated his nationalist commitment to human dignity and social fairness, which are vital for a modern nation. Inspired by the European Enlightenment, Roy underscored reason, science, and rational thought as instruments for national advancement. He contended that uncritical adherence to superstition and orthodoxy hindered India's progress. His nationalism was therefore intellectual and ethical, seeking to foster a logical and educated populace. Raja Ram Mohan Roy advocated for constitutional administration, the rule of law, and civil liberties. He endorsed British administrative changes, including press freedom and judicial rationality, believing these would equip Indians for self-governance. His nationalism was temperate, advocating for advancement through discourse, petitions, and reforms rather than conflict. Roy advocated for monotheism, religious tolerance, and ethical spirituality through the *Brahmo Samaj*. He regarded religious reform as crucial for national unity, contending that sectarian divisions undermined national awareness. His concept of nationalism highlighted cohesion transcending religious and caste distinctions. Roy fervently championed contemporary, empirical, and progressive education, encompassing the instruction of English, mathematics, and the sciences. He posited that education will cultivate informed citizens capable of guiding the nation. His endorsement of Western education was not mere cultural mimicry but a tactical instrument for national empowerment (Dey, G., 2023).

Political thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy towards Freedom- A Comparative Study:

Rabindranath Tagore:

Rabindranath Tagore's concept of freedom was profoundly intellectual, ethical, and humanistic. In contrast to

of moral and intellectual enlightenment could lead to novel forms of militant or strictly political conceptions, Tagore regarded freedom as a comprehensive state encompassing the individual, society, and mankind as a whole. Tagore posited that genuine freedom originates inside the individual. Freedom signifies the emancipation of the intellect from fear, ignorance, dogma, and uncritical compliance. He underscored self-realization, moral autonomy, and intellectual independence as the pillars of authentic freedom. Tagore articulated freedom as the absence of fear and the lucidity of thought. Tagore condemned British colonialism yet repudiated violent opposition. He condemned imperialism for its exploitation and dehumanization of individuals. He advocated for freedom via moral fortitude, education, and cultural enlightenment instead of violent conflict.

Tagore cautioned against insular, belligerent nationalism. He apprehended that excessive nationalism may curtail individual liberty and incite animosity. Tagore posits that freedom must not supplant foreign oppression with domestic despotism or unthinking compliance. He asserted that nationalism should be directed by universal human principles rather than by simple political strength. Education was crucial in Tagore's conception of liberation. He challenged mechanistic, colonial educational systems that suppressed creativity. At *Visva-Bharati University*, he advocated for an education that fostered independent thought, creativity, and a harmonious relationship with the environment. Education was regarded as a method to emancipate the intellect and foster responsible citizens. Tagore championed liberation from societal injustices and stringent customs. He condemned caste prejudice, social orthodoxy, and inequality. Freedom encompasses social justice, gender equality, and the inherent dignity of all humans. Cultural self-expression was vital for national revitalization. Tagore posited that freedom ought to be beyond national confines. He envisioned a world founded on collaboration, mutual respect, and universal fraternity. In his perspective, genuine freedom is deficient unless it enhances the freedom and well-being of all people. Rabindranath Tagore's political philosophy of freedom was multifaceted—encompassing spiritual, social, cultural, and political dimensions. He prioritized moral autonomy, intellectual independence, and global humanism above restrictive political nationality. Tagore believed that India's

liberation was significant only when it preserved human dignity, peace, and ethical principles. Rabindranath Tagore's notion of freedom was multifaceted, encompassing not only political autonomy but also moral, intellectual, cultural, and spiritual emancipation. In contrast to militant or exclusively political nationalists, Tagore regarded freedom as both an internal and societal condition that necessitates the transformation of human consciousness alongside institutions. Tagore posited that genuine freedom commences with the emancipation of the intellect. He contended that political freedom devoid of subjugation. He underscored the need for intellectual autonomy, moral conviction, and artistic expression (Chatterjee, C., 2023).

Raja Ram Mohan Roy:

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, frequently referred to as the Father of the Indian Renaissance, significantly influenced the development of early Indian political ideas regarding independence. His ideals were reformist, reasonable, and constitutional, as opposed to revolutionary. Raja Ram Mohan Roy regarded freedom as civic, intellectual, and moral liberation, rather than solely as political independence. He maintained that genuine freedom required the safeguarding of thinking and expression, liberation from societal ills and superstitions, and the protection of individual rights within the legal framework. Roy fervently championed the principles of free speech and journalism. He contested the press limitations enforced by the British government and advocated for the right of Indians to articulate political views. He asserted that public discourse and reasonable deliberation were crucial for social and political advancement. Raja Ram Mohan Roy advocated for constitutional governance founded on the rule of law. He esteemed British legal institutions for safeguarding individual rights and maintaining judicial independence. He advocated for equitable treatment of Indians inside the administration and judiciary, denouncing racial discrimination. He championed religious freedom and opposed religious dogmatism.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy regarded freedom not solely as emancipation from colonial domination. For Roy, political freedom lacked significance unless society was first liberated from ignorance, inequity, and senseless traditions. Roy's campaign for intellectual freedom was one of his most significant accomplishments. He vehemently resisted dogmatism and championed the right to reason and discourse. His advocacy for press freedom is a significant milestone in Indian political philosophy. He condemned colonial policies that enforced limitations on newspapers. He asserted that a free press is vital for public education and the oversight of arbitrary power. Roy regarded freedom of expression as the cornerstone of all other liberties in contemporary society (Begam, N.S., 2017).

Political thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy towards Liberty- A Comparative Study: Rabindranath Tagore:

Rabindranath Tagore's notion of liberty was profoundly moral, spiritual, and humanistic, transcending the limited political interpretation of freedom. In contrast to revolutionary nationalism, Tagore prioritized inner freedom, ethical autonomy, and universal human ideals as the genuine basis of liberty. Tagore posited that genuine freedom originates inside the individual. He contended that political freedom devoid of moral enlightenment could result in disorder or subjugation by self-serving interests. Liberty signifies emancipation from fear, ignorance, superstition, and uncritical compliance. He emphasized self-discipline and moral accountability as essential conditions for freedom. Tagore fervently championed liberty of thought and expression. He resisted dogmatism, inflexible customs, and enforced nationalism. He thinks that education should foster creative thinking rather than rote memorization. His pedagogical attempts at Santiniketan epitomized this conviction in intellectual freedom. Tagore endorsed India's liberation movement while condemning militant and exclusionary nationalism. He apprehended that unrestrained nationalism might stifle personal freedom and incite animosity. Tagore asserted that political independence should not be attained at the expense of human values and the freedom of conscience. Tagore perceived liberty as inherently linked to social justice and human dignity. He opposed caste discrimination, untouchability, and socioeconomic inequity. In his perspective, liberty necessitated emancipation from social subjugation and economic exploitation. Tagore's conception of liberty was universal, transcending any singular nation or ethnicity. He posited that genuine freedom fosters concord among nations instead of discord. His perspective associated liberty with internationalism and global collaboration. Tagore underscored that freedom must be harmonized with accountability (Choudhuri, S., 2021).

Raja Ram Mohan Roy:

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, considered the Father of the Indian Renaissance, espoused progressive and logical perspectives on liberty, significantly shaped by Enlightenment philosophy, Western liberal thought, and Indian ethical traditions. His notion of liberty was all-encompassing, including civil, religious, intellectual, and political freedoms. Raja Ram Mohan Roy fervently championed human rights and legal equality. He criticized capricious authority and advocated for the rule of law. He insisted on the safeguarding of individual rights, particularly against tyrannical traditions and colonial abuses. He underscored the importance of freedom of expression and the right to disagree via petitions, essays, and public discourse. Religious freedom constituted the essence of Roy's conception of liberty. He denounced religious rigidity, superstition, and unthinking ritualism. He advocated for

freedom of conscience and rational monotheism through the Brahmo Samaj (1828). He advocated for the autonomy of individuals to independently interpret religious texts, free from clerical authority. Roy associated liberty with social reform and human dignity. He opposed repressive societal customs like Sati, perceiving them as infringements on women's freedom. He advocated for women's rights, encompassing widow remarriage and women's education. He fought caste rigidity and championed social equality.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy's political philosophy on liberty reveals a sophisticated comprehension that surpassed simple political freedom. He championed intellectual, social, legal, and political freedom, perceiving them as interconnected. His legacy consists of promoting liberty as a moral, social, and political value, thus setting the groundwork for future reformers and the Indian independence movement (Dey, G., 2023).

Political thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy towards human rights- a comparative study:

Rabindranath Tagore:

Tagore asserted that every individual possesses intrinsic dignity, which societies must honor. He asserted that liberty and equality are fundamental for the moral and spiritual development of individuals. For him, human rights were not only legal entitlements but also ethical imperatives grounded in humanity. Tagore fervently championed individual liberty as an essential human right. He criticized tyrannical colonial systems because of their constraints on free thought, speech, and innovation. Education, literature, and art were regarded as tools to empower individuals and safeguard their freedom of expression. Tagore criticized British colonial governance in India, perceiving it as an infringement of political and social liberties. He contended that genuine freedom encompasses not just political autonomy but also the social, cultural, and economic empowerment of individuals. His writings frequently emphasized the exploitation and degradation experienced by the colonized, correlating it with abuses of human rights. Tagore's notion of human rights transcended national boundaries. He championed universal humanism, asserting that every individual, regardless of nationality, religion, or ethnicity, merited respect and justice. In his lectures and publications, he underscored peace, mutual understanding, and tolerance across states as a foundation for global human rights. He regarded education as an essential instrument for the realization of human rights. Tagore established Visva-Bharati University with the aim of fostering unfettered inquiry, creativity, and human values, which underpin the respect for rights. He posited that an enlightened society will inherently champion justice, equality, and liberty. Tagore criticized social practices that infringed upon human rights, including caste discrimination, gender inequity, and religious intolerance. He contended that social reforms were essential to guarantee that rights were not merely theoretical but actively implemented in daily life (Chatterjee, C., 2023).

Raja Ram Mohan Roy:

Raja Ram Mohan Roy firmly advocated for individual liberty and the ability of individuals to make decisions free from arbitrary interference. He challenged repressive conventional traditions, particularly those that restricted the freedoms of women or oppressed people. His concepts underscored that every individual should possess the right to exist with dignity. One of his most significant efforts was the eradication of the Sati system (widow immolation). Roy contended that Sati infringed upon essential human rights, specifically the rights to life and liberty. He solicited the Indian authorities and the British colonial administration, employing intellectual, ethical, and humanitarian arguments instead of religious doctrine. This demonstrates his conviction in the legal safeguarding of human rights via state involvement. He was a fervent proponent of women's education and empowerment. He criticized customs like child marriage, female infanticide, and limitations on widows remarrying, emphasizing that human rights are universal, irrespective of gender. Raja Ram Mohan Roy advocated for religious tolerance and the liberty to practice one's faith without compulsion. He rejected conventional rituals that damaged persons or constrained personal freedom. He asserted that freedom of thought and conscience constitutes a fundamental human right. Roy championed equitable legislation that safeguards personal rights and mitigates exploitation.

His endeavors to advance English and scientific education, in conjunction with moral and religious instruction, sought to develop reasonable individuals equipped to comprehend and advocate for their rights. Roy was influenced by Enlightenment principles, particularly those advocating liberty, equality, and human dignity. His involvement with European political thought enabled him to express human rights in a manner consistent with both Indian traditions and contemporary universal norms. This intercultural amalgamation fortified his assertions for reform and human rights advocacy. Raja Ram Mohan Roy is regarded as a forerunner of human rights in India. His political philosophy focused on individual liberty, safeguarding the vulnerable, reasonable and equitable legal systems, freedom of religion and expression, and education as a means of empowerment. His methodology was pragmatic and visionary, integrating social reform with political activism. The findings indicate that Roy's comprehension of human rights extended beyond civil liberty to include social, legal, and moral aspects, establishing him as a comprehensive reformer whose concepts continue to hold significance today (Chaudhary, P.K., 2022).

From the above study, it has been stated that the “Hypothesis 1 (H1): It is hypothesized that the comparison of political thoughts towards Rabindranath Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy correlated to nationalism, freedom, liberty and human rights” was accepted.

IV. CONCLUSION:

The political thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy represent two significant intellectual traditions in the evolution of modern Indian political philosophy. Both thinkers contributed profoundly to the understanding of nationalism, freedom, liberty, and human rights, while placing human dignity and moral progress at the centre of social and political life. Raja Ram Mohan Roy’s political philosophy was rooted in rationalism, reform, individual liberty, and universal human values. He challenged social inequalities, religious orthodoxy, and oppressive customs through the principles of reason and human rights. His advocacy for freedom of the press, women’s rights, educational reform, and social justice reflected his belief that political freedom could not be achieved without social awakening and individual empowerment. For Roy, nationalism was connected with modernity, constitutional governance, and the protection of fundamental freedoms. Rabindranath Tagore developed a broader philosophical vision of nationalism based on humanism, spiritual freedom, and international cooperation. He criticized aggressive nationalism that promoted conflict and division, arguing instead for a universal human identity beyond narrow political boundaries. His concept of freedom extended beyond political independence to include intellectual freedom, moral development, creativity, and the liberation of the human spirit. Tagore viewed human rights as universal moral principles emerging from respect for human dignity and harmony among individuals and nations. A comparative analysis reveals that while Roy emphasized political reform, constitutional liberty, and social transformation as foundations of progress, Tagore focused on ethical nationalism, cultural freedom, and global human solidarity. Both thinkers opposed forms of domination and advocated a society based on equality, justice, education, and respect for human values. Their ideas continue to remain relevant in contemporary debates on democracy, citizenship, human rights, and the meaning of freedom. Thus, the political thoughts of Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy demonstrate that true nationalism must be guided by liberty, social responsibility, and respect for humanity. Their philosophical contributions provide a lasting framework for understanding freedom not merely as political independence but as a continuous pursuit of human development, dignity, and universal justice.

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