



CERTIFICATE NO : ICRESMH /2025/C0425473**Political Thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy
Towards Nationalism and Freedom-A Comparative Study****Anindita Chatterjee**Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Mansarovar Global University,
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ABSTRACT

The political thought of modern India has been shaped by diverse intellectual traditions that emerged during the colonial period. Among the prominent thinkers who contributed significantly to the evolution of Indian political consciousness, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Rabindranath Tagore occupy a unique position. Although belonging to different historical contexts, both thinkers developed profound ideas concerning nationalism, freedom, individual dignity, social reform and the relationship between the individual and the state. Their political philosophies were not limited to achieving independence from colonial rule; rather, they aimed at creating a society based on reason, justice, human values, and moral progress. In this article, political thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy towards nationalism and freedom were discussed.

Keywords: *Political, Thoughts, Nationalism, Freedom.*

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 vision of freedom was closely associated with intellectual awakening, social reform, religious tolerance, and the establishment of individual rights. He believed that political freedom could not be meaningful without social and educational transformation. Roy advocated constitutional governance, freedom of expression, equality before law, and the spread of modern education as essential foundations for the development of Indian society. His approach to nationalism was influenced by universal humanism, where the progress of India was connected with the advancement of rationality and human welfare. Rabindranath Tagore, emerging as a major intellectual figure during the later colonial period, presented a more philosophical and humanistic understanding of nationalism and freedom. Tagore criticized aggressive forms of nationalism that promoted narrow political interests and divisions among humanity. For him, true freedom was not merely the removal of foreign domination but the liberation of human beings from ignorance, social inequality, fear, and intellectual limitations. He emphasized spiritual freedom, cultural development, international cooperation, and harmony among different communities. His concept of nationalism was rooted in universal humanism, where love for one's nation should coexist with respect for global humanity. A comparative study of the political



thoughts of Roy and Tagore reveals both similarities and differences. Both thinkers rejected social oppression, supported education, valued individual liberty, and believed in the moral development of society. However, Roy approached nationalism and freedom primarily through the framework of social reform, modernity, and political rights, whereas Tagore interpreted them through ethical, cultural, and spiritual perspectives. Roy viewed political progress through institutional reforms and rational principles, while Tagore focused on the inner freedom of individuals and the creation of a humane civilization. The ideas of these two thinkers remain significant in contemporary discussions on nationalism, democracy, human rights, and freedom. Their perspectives provide valuable insights into balancing national identity with universal values. The objective of the study is to compare the political thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy towards nationalism and freedom.

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 endeavours. 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.



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Tagore expressed significant criticism of Western nationalism, linking it to imperialism and colonial expansion, militarism and warfare, economic exploitation, and notions of racial and cultural superiority. He contended that Western nationalism exalted power politics, transforming nations into rivals instead of ethical communities. Tagore believed that this variant of nationalism undermined world concord and jeopardized global peace. For Tagore, authentic freedom signified liberation of the human spirit, rather than mere political autonomy. Any nationalism that repudiated human dignity, compassion, and ethical duty was intolerable to him. He contended that India's liberation ought to be attained via moral rejuvenation, education, and social transformation, rather than through violence or animosity. Tagore advocated for a cultural and spiritual nationalism in lieu of political nationalism. Institutions such as Visva-Bharati University exemplified his vision of internationalism, facilitating the interaction of other cultures without subjugation. He contended that without ethical self-restraint, nationalism will supplant colonial oppression with internal despotism. He advocated for international collaboration while honouring cultural diversity, repudiating both isolationism and hegemony. Rabindranath Tagore's political philosophy on nationalism offers a profound moral critique of contemporary nation-centric politics. He dismissed violent, restrictive nationalism and promoted a humanistic, ethical, and universal perspective on freedom and national identity. According to Tagore, the nation should serve mankind, rather than the reverse. His concepts continue to be significantly pertinent at a time characterized by nationalism, strife, and worldwide emergencies (Collins, M., 2012).

Rabindranath Tagore's political philosophy on nationalism offers a moral and human-centric alternative to militant nationalism. He conceptualized a nation founded on intellectual liberty, social cohesion, and universal humanism, rendering his theories particularly pertinent for comprehending the ethical aspects of nationalism in both colonial and modern contexts.

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,



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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. While Roy did not advocate for total independence, he persistently contended for Indian involvement in governance, safeguarding of rights, and responsibility of colonial authorities. His articles and petitions disclosed a nascent political nationalism grounded on legal and ethical rationale. Roy's nationalism was inextricably linked to universal human principles. He asserted that national advancement must correspond with universal principles of liberty, equality, and fairness. This cosmopolitan perspective rendered his nationalism inclusive and progressive, rather than parochial or discriminatory. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's nationalism was socially progressive, intellectually sophisticated, and constitutionally temperate. Although he did not support political independence, his endeavors established the foundation for Indian nationalism by fostering social consciousness, encouraging rational thought, and cultivating political awareness. His conception of nationalism prioritized national rejuvenation by reform, establishing him as a forerunner of contemporary Indian political philosophy. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's nationalism was characterized by civic engagement, reformist ideals, and a humanistic approach, rather than being hostile or discriminatory. He asserted that a robust nation must be founded on intelligent citizens, social justice, and rational thought. Roy regarded social transformation as the cornerstone of national revitalization. He contended that behaviors such as sati, caste rigidity, polygamy, and superstition undermined Indian civilization and impeded national unity. Roy's conception of nationalism was inclusive and pluralistic. He advocated for religious reform through the Brahmo Samaj, emphasizing monotheism, rationality, and ethics. He criticized sectarian tensions and underscored the importance of unity between Hindus and Muslims, which he deemed essential for nation-building. His comprehensive religious perspective contributed to the foundation of secular nationalism in India. Roy advocated for collaboration with the British, anticipating that liberal British ideals would facilitate India's advancement. He regarded British authority as a transient mechanism for modernizing rather than an enduring fate. This methodology exemplifies initial moderate nationalism, subsequently embraced by figures such as Dadabhai Naoroji and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. His nationalism was centered on the elite and devoid of mass mobilization. He did not seek total independence but rather concentrated on improvements within the framework of colonial governance. Notwithstanding these constraints, his concepts were historically essential for the nascent phase of Indian nationalism. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's nationalism was characterized by reformism, rationality, constitutionalism, and humanism. By prioritizing social reform, contemporary education, civil liberties, and national unity, he established the conceptual foundation of Indian nationalism. His contributions influenced the development of nationalist ideology in India and motivated subsequent generations to seek freedom with ethical intent and intellectual precision (Chauhan, M., 2021).



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 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. Education was regarded as a method to emancipate the intellect and foster responsible citizens (Quayum, M.A., 2005). 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 moral and intellectual enlightenment could lead to novel forms of subjugation. He underscored the need for intellectual autonomy, moral conviction, and artistic expression. Unquestioning compliance, superstition, and fear impeded true freedom. For Tagore, freedom was primarily a spiritual and ethical state rather than simply a constitutional status. Tagore endorsed India's resistance to British imperialism; however, his methodology diverged. He denounced colonial exploitation and cultural hegemony. Tagore thinks that freedom should safeguard individual identity and human values rather than stifle them under the guise of nationalism. Tagore associated freedom with social reform and cultural revitalization. He opposed caste inequality, untouchability, and social conservatism. Freedom signified emancipation from societal inequities and stringent customs. Cultural freedom was vital for creativity, education, and self-expression. He



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believed that a civilization cannot attain freedom if its populace is socially subjugated or culturally stagnant. Education was crucial in Tagore's conception of liberation. He championed an educational framework that fostered autonomy, innovation, and a symbiotic relationship with nature. His initiative at Visva-Bharati University sought to liberate education from rote memorization and colonial influence. Education ought to equip individuals for autonomy, not subjugation. Consequently, intellectual freedom was essential for political freedom. Tagore's concept of freedom was broad and cosmopolitan. He contended that freedom should transcend national borders. His fundamental focus was humanity, rather than the nation-state. Genuine freedom necessitates collaboration across nations and reverence for all civilizations. He envisioned a future in which freedom fosters harmony amidst diversity, rather than strife. Rabindranath Tagore's political philosophy about freedom was sophisticated and humane. He did not confine freedom to the sole objective of colonial governance but perceived it as an extensive process encompassing moral enlightenment, social equity, intellectual autonomy, and universal human solidarity. His perspective persists in its relevance, emphasizing that political freedom is insufficient without ethical and cultural freedom (Choudhuri, S., 2021).

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. Roy advocated for liberation from clerical hegemony and uncritical traditions. His promotion of monotheism sought to liberate individuals from fear and exploitation inside religious contexts. Roy contended that political freedom is devoid of significance in the absence of social emancipation. His initiatives against Sati, child marriage, and caste inequality aimed to emancipate society. He underscored women's rights as a fundamental aspect of liberty. Raja Ram Mohan Roy condemned the repressive revenue policies of the British administration. He insisted on safeguarding peasants from exploitation by landlords. He advocated for free trade and economic reforms that could enhance the Indian economy. Roy did not initially seek total autonomy. He claimed that British governance may serve as a provisional civilizing influence if directed by liberal ideals. He vehemently condemned colonial injustices and advocated for administrative reforms and Indian involvement. Roy underscored contemporary education,



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particularly Western science and rational thought. He posited that education would foster political consciousness and equip Indians for self-governance. He asserted that freedom relied on an informed and educated citizenry. He preferred nonviolent, lawful, and constitutional approaches. Roy employed petitions, memoranda, and dialogue instead of mass agitation. His methodology established the groundwork for moderate nationalism in subsequent years. Raja Ram Mohan Roy introduced concepts of liberalism, individual rights, and constitutionalism into Indian political debate. His ideas impacted subsequent leaders such as Dadabhai Naoroji and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. He is considered a trailblazer of contemporary Indian political awareness. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's notion of freedom was comprehensive, integrating political, social, religious, and intellectual liberties. Although he did not endorse rapid political independence, his concepts established the ideological foundation for India's subsequent freedom movement by advancing rationality, reform, and constitutional governance.

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.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy advocated for religious liberty and opposed compulsion in questions of belief. He posited that genuine freedom necessitated the emancipation of the human intellect from superstition and fear. Consequently, Roy's political philosophy connected social reform with liberty, contending that a society shackled by inequitable customs could never attain genuine independence. Raja Ram Mohan Roy advocated for the formation of civil liberties within the framework of the rule of law. He insisted on legal equality and the safeguarding of individual rights. He criticized autocratic authority and advocated for constitutional administration. While he did not explicitly advocate for quick political independence, Roy contended that legal and institutional reforms were crucial prerequisites for liberation. Roy underscored contemporary and progressive education as a pathway to achieve liberation. He endorsed the examination of science, philosophy, and Western political theory. According to Roy, education is essential for cultivating sensible individuals who can exercise freedom responsibly. In the absence of education, freedom would be superficial and inadequate. Raja Ram Mohan Roy embraced a moderate and reformist stance regarding British governance. He initially claimed that British governance might instill liberal principles such as liberty, justice, and the rule of law. His primary interest was the empowering of Indians through rights and reforms, rather than unquestioning allegiance to colonial authority. His methodology established the ideological groundwork for subsequent nationalist organizations advocating for political autonomy (Begam, N.S., 2017).



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Raja Ram Mohan Roy's political perspectives on freedom were multifaceted and progressive. He conceptualized freedom as the emancipation of the intellect, community, and personal conscience. By prioritizing reason, social change, education, civil freedoms, and human dignity, Roy established the foundation for India's contemporary democratic and freedom-centric political culture. His legacy is essential for comprehending the development of freedom in Indian political philosophy.

CONCLUSION

The political thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore and Raja Ram Mohan Roy represent two significant phases in the evolution of modern Indian political philosophy. Both thinkers contributed profoundly to the development of ideas concerning nationalism, freedom, liberty, rationality, and human dignity, although their approaches emerged from different historical contexts and intellectual perspectives. A comparative analysis reveals that both Roy and Tagore viewed freedom as a multidimensional concept extending beyond the removal of colonial rule. Roy focused more on institutional and social reforms as foundations for political freedom, whereas Tagore emphasized moral, spiritual, and intellectual freedom. Roy's nationalism was reform-oriented and modernist, seeking to prepare Indian society for self-governance, while Tagore's nationalism was ethical and universal, warning against excessive attachment to the nation at the cost of humanity. Despite their differences, both thinkers shared a common commitment to human dignity, reason, education, and social progress. They rejected authoritarianism and supported the development of a society based on liberty, equality, and moral responsibility. Their ideas continue to remain relevant in contemporary discussions on democratic citizenship, cultural pluralism, human rights, and the relationship between nationalism and universal human values. Thus, the political thoughts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Rabindranath Tagore demonstrate two complementary visions of freedom: one grounded in social and political modernization and the other rooted in ethical and humanistic transformation. Together, their contributions form an important foundation of modern Indian political thought and continue to inspire debates on the meaning of nationalism and freedom in a changing world.

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