

## TAGORE'S VIEWS ON TERRORISM: A PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

*Terrorism is one of the most heinous phenomena on a worldwide scale in the 21st century. The present paper tries to focus on the causes and consequences of violence and terrorism around the world. Tagore opines that terrorism can only be rooted out if Upanishadic thought of universal, simple, and holistic attitude towards life can be embraced. Finally the authors have tried to show the increasing relevance of Tagore's views on terrorism in that terror-haunted world.*

**Key Words:** Tagore, Terrorism, Universal brotherhood, Upanishad, spiritualism

### Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore has nowhere penetrated into the causes and consequences of violence and terrorism under such heading 'Terrorism' but in his writings on nationalism and internationalism he probed into the cultural scenario causing suspicion, unrest, massive weaponization and war. Tagore's indictment against Western materialistic culture which unleashes violence by subduing and subjugating non-western other has been compared and contrasted with the Vedic and the Upanishadic culture upheld by the Indians which comes as a solution to all causes of violence and terrorism, according to Tagore. But it should be noted in passing that Tagore personally bore no grudge against the Westerners. His objection was against their cultural habits which breeds malice and violence by throwing humanity to the wind. He had all respect for the positive sides of Western civilization and his thesis on violence is applicable to any cultural context to check violence and its consequences. In his discussion of Western culture he has gone to identify the causes and consequences of violence and terrorism, and in his re-contextualization of Upanishadic philosophy of universal brotherhood in the terror-haunted modern world he has suggested the solution.

### Discussions

Tagore's reflection on violence and terrorism is revealed in his criticism of modern civilization with its principles of materialism in the essays like My Life, My School, My Religion, Civilization and Progress, Nationalism in Japan, Nationalism in India, Nationalism in the West, International Relations, The Voices of Humanity, The Realisation of the Infinite etc.

Tagore's reflection on violence and terrorism was occasioned by the wreckage wrought upon humanity in the Second World War which was the culmination of modern industrialisation, materialism, capitalism, nationalism, colonialism and imperialism practiced by the Westerners. The causes behind such system of domination are deeply

embedded in the Western concept of culture in terms of 'progress' in the sense of accumulation of wealth supported by such abstractions like 'survival of the fittest' or 'struggle for existence'. The way of proving oneself fittest was made possible by them by pulling down or subjugating other in the name of civilizing them. The Western Eurocentric self projects its superiority by positing itself against non-western others. The narcissistic western self, according to the postcolonial critic, Edward Said, has created the other to exert dominance over everything outside the West by attributing positive aspects to the self and emptying the other of everything. This typical myopic representation of the other holds that the other exists for catering to the needs and wants of the self. This self believes in self-aggrandizement by crushing the existence of other for paving the path to progress in terms of material consumerism on a gigantic scale. Out of such cultural representation the predatory and rapacious nationalism is born and it encounters the other people as the Indians, the Americans, and the Japanese and so on to subdue them and to push to the margin. Tagore was all against such self-centeredness which embraces the Darwinian culture of competitiveness by defeating and destroying its weaker counterparts. As a result it breeds mutual violence and discrimination against others. This chauvinistic nationalism plunges the earth into whirlwind of greed, with jealousy reducing mankind to a 'pack of predatory creatures' or a 'band of robbers' being victim of hypnotic allure of money and materialism. The nations are locked in a devil dance of destruction and retribution perpetuating a cleavage between one nation and another nation.

The modern civilization with its motto of self-entrepreneurship lacks moral centre, according to Tagore and comes under his diatribe because of its fragmented and fragmenting nature, its inclination towards physical and material thin and its celebration of bloodless policies. It is the civilization built on the law of necessity rather than the law of truth, according to Tagore. Modern civilization which is only concerned with balance or equilibrium totally undermines moral and spiritual sides of life like Tennysonian nature 'red in tooth and claw'. It champions

selfishness instead of self-sacrifice, vindictiveness instead of magnanimity. In place of feelings, spontaneity and compassion, bloodless and mechanical logic of usefulness is celebrated.

Tagore's discussion on violence evolved in context of his criticism of nationalism as a political or institutional machinery with the help of which materialistic and capitalistic culture fulfils and manifests itself. Nationalism is possible when 'self-interest is the motto, brute force is the means, conscience is the taboo'. He considers nation as the menace to mankind and spurns it as 'a cruel epidemic of evil .....sweeping over the human world of present age and eating into the moral fibre, as a source of human diminishment, war and carnage as he did with much ferocity in *The Sunset of the Century*, poem written on the last day of nineteenth century:

The last sun of the century sets amidst the blood-red cloud of the west 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 howling verses of vengeance

The hungry self of the Nation shall burst in a violence of fury from its own shameless feeding.

Tagore was of the view that nationalism born in the laboratory of industrial capitalism is but an organization of politics and commerce that brings harvests of wealth by spreading tentacles of greed, selfishness, power and prosperity sacrificing in the process the moral man or the complete man. Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner, the postcolonial critics also attributed the birth of nationalism to the European Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution. According to them, the rise of nationalism in Western Europe was made possible by the decline of religious modes of thought in the wake of rationalist secularism of Enlightenment or the Age of Reason. The guiding principles of this intellectual movement were glorification of reason and faith in human dignity and they were instrumental in breaking down the old belief system of theo-centric world-view and gave rise to a pragmatic and worldly socio-political system of the nation that suited the secular world of 'godless expanse of homogeneous empty time'. Gellner traces the emergence of nationalism in the rise of industrialism or capitalist economic system in the 18th and the 19th centuries.

Tagore looked upon nationalism as a recurrent threat to humanity as it trampled over the human spirit and upsets man's moral balance obscuring his human side under the shadow of soulless organization. This deification of nation breeds exclusivism, fanaticism, cultural particularism, paranoia and xenophobia. Tagore considered the colonialists to be the conspicuous example of such nationalism which thrived by victimizing and looting others.

Tagore saw that capitalist, nationalist, imperialist, or colonialist systems were destroying both the individual human soul and collective humanity. His critique of modern civilization centres round these criticisms: modern man's equation of progress and success with accumulation of wealth; its understanding of the relationship between the East and the West; its view of science and technology which comes as an instrument to hasten the pace of progress for the modern man. The modern man considers 'others' to be his obstacles in his path of progress and strip others of their potentials to exploit them mercilessly. They spit upon the moral law and take it to be a sign of racial superiority in the satisfaction of their desires. There is no limit to their self-indulgence and voracious appetite. The metaphor of

progress results in destruction of mankind when progress greedily allows life's field to be crowded with excessive production of instruments. People are building vast and monstrous organizations. They are seeking mere unlimited augmentation of power in the name of progress. Tagore saw that in these man-killing systems men are equated with wild animals and bureaucracy which reduces men to generalizations would destroy the whole world of human potential and human life. Likewise marketing system and mass media also reduce men to producers and consumers and passive receivers respectively. These systems built upon the cancerous sense of progress thus devalue love, truth and human relations and allows baser elements to prevail. They have taken men away from the foundation or the centre of life. As a result materialism runs rampant and the quest for power and wealth takes precedence in human life. The profit making capitalist system of production exerts direct effect upon the social order. They produce irreconcilable class divisions breaking social bond, drains life sap of humanity, and wreck havoc over the world by force that coerces people to deeds of injustice and wholesale horror. As Tagore explained that when increasing private possessions or enjoying exclusive advantage runs ahead of establishing common good or general happiness, the bonds of harmony and sustenance get violated, forcing brothers to separate and become enemies. Moreover, the cumulative greed of power and possession has no finality of completeness and energy and materials get concentrated in the hands of few to satisfy their exaggerated appetite.

Tagore was disheartened to observe that the relentless pursuit of wealth had taken root in the Indians' appropriation and imitation of Western knowledge, as the titanic forces of intellect were overwhelming the spiritual power and science was supplying the death-dealing weapons helping its votaries to crush the weak, to rob those who are asleep. Scientific knowledge was strengthening human power but was not contributing to the development of humanity. Tagore realized that the reductionist system of science could not provide for or replace the wholeness—the beauty, art, goodness and love-of human existence. Like countless other critics from Gandhi to Marx, Tagore believed that science and technology promoted profit over people and hollow materialism over spiritual power.

Thus the gigantic manufacture has usurped the place of spirit. The nation-states with help of science began to harvest wealth with amazing rapidity and goad all neighbouring countries with the greed of material prosperity and mutual suspicion. Consequently, competition grows keener, organization grows vaster, and selfishness attains supremacy. Greed and fear occupy more and more space in the society and at last become its ruling force. The more they gain wealth the more they feel insecure and so they seek salvation and security in the arms and weapons. The neighbouring countries raise arms against one another; the living bonds of society are breaking up by declaring war between men and women and between labour and capital. The natural bond of harmony and co-operation is replaced by competition bred by primitive psychology of fighting. The continual pressure of the inhuman upon the living human is tearing humanity to pieces. These are the facts of the world of nations and the only moral of it is that all the people of earth should strain their physical, moral and intellectual forces to the utmost to defeat others in the wrestling match of powerfulness.

The whole world of today is now in constant threat of holocaust. Wherever there is a dark corner, there is

suspicion of secret malevolence and people live in a perpetual distrust towards one another: Every sound of footstep, every rustle of movement sends a thrill of horror all around. The nation with its blasphemous prayer and literary mock-thunder of patriotic bragging cannot hide the fact that it is the greatest evil of humanity.

The Western people, the begetters of nationalism are thus petrifying moral nature to lay foundation for gigantic abstraction of efficiency. Its disastrous ramification is suffocating the earth with the black smoke of suspicion and terror. Concomitantly broken faith breeds international suspicion and moral shame.

### Conclusion

To put a stop to the rising violence and terrorism unleashed by Eurocentric culture and to lighten the material burden under which humanity is groaning it is required on our part to articulate and rediscover the Tagorean world-view of universal brotherhood influenced by the Upanishadic culture of self-sacrifice instead of selfishness. The aggressive, self-centred and mechanistic culture will be replaced by a spirit that has a heart for all humanity crossing the narrow boundaries of nations, castes and creeds. Tagore believed that machinery promoted the pursuit of self and power over people and hollow materialism over soulful connection. But Tagore did not wholly reject the role of science and technology, rather he re-envisioned the role of science while rejecting its supremacy. He claimed that science also presented a form of truth, but not the whole truth and could serve its own useful purpose. Considering the supremacy of machine over man, Tagore propagated a paradigm shift with regard to civilization. In contrast to Western goal of spawning machinery to better control and fight nature or other races, he claimed that the Indian ideal of civilization focused on contemplative life, the realization of the Infinite and not success in economic, military and political ascendancy. Civilization is the creation of art, a continual discovery of our transcendental humanity guiding us towards the objective realization of our vision of spiritual perfection. Thus Tagore realized that the next civilization would be based on world-wide co-operation and the spiritual ideal of reciprocity, not an economic ideal of profit, competition and exploitation. He held simplicity of spiritual expression as the highest product of civilization. And he thought that civilization existed to express Man's dharma- the fullness of humanity-not merely to show off his cleverness, power and possession. Therefore civilization should be judged by how much it had evolved and had given expression to the love of humanity. With this understanding of civilization Tagore rejected the Western version of nationalism and imperialism. He was also against the political violence and considered the concept of a single-ethnic Hindu 'rastra' as anti-Indian and anti-Hindu. Thus instead of exterminating and enslaving different peoples as was done in Australia and America, India tried to attain social unity while allowing for individual differences. It made for diversity and prevented jealousy and competition. Thus Tagorean philosophy of universal camaraderie points to the connection between individual human personality and collective spirit. Drawing upon the Upanishads Tagore defined dharma as the realization of the infinite self through a life of self-sacrifice. The Tagorean self is not self-centred but selfless and dedicated to larger universe, where one can discover one's whole or fuller self. Each person should find their place in the Infinite by living, being and relating in self-giving and self-potential discovering ways.

So Tagore thought that Nature is not something to be controlled or destroyed; instead as a source of life it is to be loved and respected. True realization of life emerges from the combination of the individual and the universal-humankind must recover and discover itself in the larger universe. Realization of this philosophy is a remedy for the terror-haunted and spiritually bankrupt modern world. With this conviction in his heart he challenges the Enlightenment-driven, anthropocentric view of the world where humans stand loftily at the centre and dominate other creatures. Only goodness and love help to connect the link between the individual and the universal. By living the life of goodness one lives the life of all and merges in the Infinite. By replacing the individual taking primacy in the society, the best of individual expression would enable a connection towards the universal whole. In order to realize the universal whole one should discard the negative form of freedom in the sense of doing what one wants and we should use our freedom towards uncovering truth, goodness and simplicity in relation to the larger and the collective which leads one to positive freedom. The freedom of self-will is integral part to discovering and uncovering the human potential of infinite goodness and love. It is the vision of freedom that takes the direction of searching for internal goodness and collective love, not by trampling upon fellow human beings to go ahead or be on top. It is a freedom from isolation of self, and things that suggest a sense of possessiveness. Drawing upon the Upanishads Tagore explains that 'though individuals are separately seeking their expression, their success is never individualistic in character'. Human beings must find and feel and represent in all their creative works the Eternal, the Creator. And the ultimate end of freedom is to know that I am', 'to know that We are'. and to redirect human consciousness from the separateness of the self into unity with all. Tagore asserts emphatically that 'when in the name of progress,' the civilization is ready to sell its soul, then I choose to be primitive in my material possession, hoping to achieve my civilization in the realm of the spirit'. Tagorean vision of humanity encapsulated in his philosophy of universal fraternity which is relevant today to counter the depravity of modern civilization must be addressed today in an attempt to regenerate India on its own terms from its abject status of a slavish imitator of Western life. Notably Tagore never wholly rejected the West and never encouraged the cultivation of hatred against it. He never perceived the East and the West as monolithic entities and recognized the beauty and injustice in both. He encouraged that India and the East should re-think their relationship with the West, by reflecting on themselves. India should shed its self-abasement and reclaim its responsibility to humanity by recovering its own mind, its own culture, what is best and permanent in its own history. Tagore passionately urges India to take this path in his poem, 'The Sunset of the Century':

Be not ashamed, my brother, to stand before the  
proud and the powerful  
With your white robe of simpleness.  
Let your crown be of humility, your freedom the  
freedom of soul.  
Build God's throne daily upon the ample bareness  
of your poverty  
And know what is huge is not great and pride is  
not everlasting

Tagore wanted us to attain awakening of full consciousness in soul freedom, where neither enmity nor competition exists, where both collectives and the individuals are beyond attacks. These systems founded on

these principles counters fragmentations by breaking the walls of narrow self between you and us, and paves the path of progress of humanity with mutual cooperation and reciprocation by calling everyone into line and move to the drumbeat of life hand in hand. In his poem, Where The Mind Is Without Fear the poet urges us to come out of our narrow boundaries of walls and to shake hands with humanity irrespective of castes, creeds and religions:

Where the mind is without fear and  
the head is held high;  
Where is knowledge is free;  
Where the world has not been broken  
up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;  
Where words come out from the depth of truth;

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