


Introduction to Modern Indian Political Thought
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Lecture - 07
Rabindranath Tagore: Idea of man

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RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Key themes :

- Nationalism
- Cosmopolitanism
- Idea of man

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The slide features a portrait of Rabindranath Tagore on the right side. The text is centered and left-aligned. A red circle with the number '1' is in the bottom left corner. A vertical toolbar with navigation icons is on the right edge.

Hello friends, I welcome you all for this third and concluding lecture on Political Thought of Rabindranath Tagore. In previous two lecture, we have discussed his critique of nationalism and also his views on cosmopolitanism. Today's in this lecture, we will discuss his views on idea of man, and also the debate that famous debate between Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore on some of the philosophical, political, and socio economic issues of their times.

And through this debate, we will try to understand, what kind of challenges we are facing in contemporary contemporary India. And in what ways we can take insights from this debate to resolve some of these complexities in contemporary India. So, this lecture is basically about his views on man and his idea of man. And then, we will try to conclude this lecture by situating Rabindranath Tagore and his thought in the larger political and historical context in which he was articulating about some of his key ideas. And in what ways, he was relevant in his time, why he was criticized, and how he continued to remain

relevant for understanding some of the contemporary challenge in modern India. So, these are some of the thing we will discuss in the concluding part of this lecture.

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IDEA OF MAN

- “In the history of Man there began from that day in many forms, in many ways and many languages the answers to the one fundamental question, ‘What am I?’ In the true answer to this question lies his joy, his glory. He has understood that he is not simple, but hides a mystery of depth within himself, and that he will finally know himself only when the veils of the mystery have been pierced. Through centuries he has persisted in his attempt.”
(Tagore, Rabindranath in *Man, The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, vol. 3.)
- Man and his creative unity and expression at the centre of his thought about *Swaraj*, *Samaj*, *Swadeshi Samaj*, Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism. His understanding of Man had two dimensions– Futuristic as well as Social.

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So, we will start first with this idea of man. With for Tagore it is centre for everything, his views on a number of themes whether it is Swadeshi Samaj, Samaj nation, cosmopolitanism everything revolves around this powerful idea of man, which we can better understand by looking at this quotation from Rabindranath Tagore about the man. The search of man for truth and what is the truth of his or her existence. And at is the basic artifacts or basic building block of all his arguments. So, whether it is his serious, essays or political, writings, philosophical writings or it is his paintings, songs or other forms of creative writings. This idea of man is somewhat at the centre of all his creative expressions and writings.

So, from this quotation one can understand that significance of man in his thought, and in his philosophy, so it is within quote. In the history of man there began from the day in many forms, in many ways and many languages the answers to the one fundamental question, what am I? In the true answer to this question lies his joy, his glory, so that is the search of man. And he has understood that he is not simple, but hides a mystery of depth within himself, and that he will finally know himself only when the veils of the mystery have been pierced. Through century he has persisted in this in his attempt, so that is the real search, real journey in the life of man or women.

So, what he is basically saying is through all his creative expression man is in search of asking, through many forms, through many languages, in many ways, this fundamental question of who, what I am? And to get the answer of this fundamental question, in that answer lies his true glory or his true joy, and that is the basic fundamental search in human individual life.

So, in this journey of searching the answer for this question man has understood that he is not simple. So, what constitute the man, is it his biological or physical being or also there is something beyond the man that transcend, his imminence his immediate biological or physical material surrounding, so that is something, which we come to realize, when we try to ponder upon try to understand or try to answer this question, what I am.

So, the journey of man or his intellectual search for answering this question, who am I does not lie merely on the simple understanding of biological or physical being, but also something that transcend. And this is this is, what that transcend Tagore considered as a mystery. So, according to Rabindranath Tagore the primary or the basic or the fundamental responsibility or search in man's life is to unravel this mystery of something, which transcends his immediate biological or physical surroundings.

And throughout the centuries in Rabindranath Tagore man is continuously making his effort to understand this mystery of something, which transcends. And that leads to some of the fundamental question of origin of man, origin of human being, what is the history, what are the moment, and in what ways human being tries to understand himself. And develop a relationship between something, which is beyond his immediate biological self to the nature, to the society, to the other human being. And that you that creative relationship between the man and his or her immediate surroundings with nature or other human being leads to realization of the self.

And in this attempt, so the real task for man is then to understand his self. And to understand his self, he needs to unravel this mystery, which is something that transcends the physical and biological being of the self. And this point will come again in a moment, so that is the understanding of man. And this becomes the basis on which his philosophy about some Samaj, Swadeshi, Samaj, nationalism, cosmopolitanism whole philosophical artifacts in rather in Rabindranath Tagore thought.

Lies, in this basic understanding of man in search of this mystery in his or her physical biological being, so that is remain very very fundamental. And that is why, many of you might have come across his, his song many of his songs where he expressed the uncompromised freedom or unconditional freedom for the expression of human or individual creativity. The idea is the very search for understanding the mystery of lies a mystery of life or human being, rest on this uncompromised freedom that is given to individual to realize, to experience, to understand, this mysterious existence in himself, which lies behind, which lies besides his physical or biological being.

So, to realize that, he want individual to have complete, uncompromised, unconditional freedom to explore to understand such mystery, Rabindranath Tagore also believes that the whole social, political, economic, cultural, cultural system or community or solidarity. Emerged out of this mutual understanding, and respect cooperation, and love, and that will ultimately lead to a more more robust more intimate relationship between man and the nature, and man and the man. And that is what he, he focused more than the organized, rational, scientific, organization to perpetuate ones narrow individual self-interest, so that sees something which Rabindranath Tagore focuses on his ideas on man.

So, he further goes on and writes that man and his creative unity and expression is at the centre of his thought about Swaraj, Samaj, Swadeshi Samaj, nationalism and cosmopolitanism as I was explaining. So, the idea of man, and the creative unity of man with nature and the other human being and the expression of that creativity is something, which is central to his notion on Swaraj, Samaj, Swadeshi Samaj, nationalism and cosmopolitanism. And this understanding of man in search of unraveling this mystery in his or her existence is two-dimensional. One is more futuristic, and the other is social.

Futuristic is that man if he or she submit himself or herself to something, which is imposed whether by society by religion or by the forces, which is outside himself or herself that deny him or her the potentiality or the opportunity to understand himself or understand the true meaning of his or her existence. So, he want the modern man, the religion of man the essay he wrote. And he explored this point more systematically there that the task of man is to realize or to understand the existence of his or her truth that he or she can realize only when he or she free himself or herself from bondage or conditionalities of all kind it social, political, economic, cultural, religious or whatever.

So, the ultimate objective of individual or man life is to realize his true being, the meaning of his or her life. So, it is a more it is on the one hand, he wanted the modern man to understand this, so by that, he also mean that that kind of man will not try to just imitate or borrow the idea from other contacts from other tradition that is also do not mean, that he will remain very narrow or in a very fundamental sense indigenous kind of indigeneity or rooted to his or her on self.

He was willing, and in many of his expressions and ideas about science or education or economy will see, he is willing or he is accommodating the ideas from other traditions, and that he wants such a kind of creative unity or creative accommodation or cooperation with other tradition other cultures, but he wanted the man to understand this fundamental or basic truth of his existence. And so in search of that realization that understanding, he want complete freedom or and that that is applicable in many many many issues even in contemporary times.

So, one dimension of his idea on man is more futuristic. It wants a new kind of man trying to search his true meaning. And the second is more about the social. So, how this man will realize his or her true nature, unless it also understand his self in cooperation, in love, in intimate relationship with other human in the society and therefore, if you remember the first lecture, when he was discussing about nationalism. He considered India's problem is not political, but social, why because the social organization is based on cooperation, based on self-sacrifice, based on understanding or mutually respecting the needs and the existence of other.

And therefore, he believes that this man, who tries to understand his self can only understand it in relationship w with the other. So, in this point one is to understand this larger heuristic principle of his time, where this relations between imminence and transcendence. Imminence is something more immediate. And transcendence is something, which is beyond. This is something, which is there in other thinkers, certainly in Aurobindo Ghosh. We are going to discuss, even in Vivekananda partly in Iqbal and Mohandas, Karamchand, Gandhi and many European thinkers as well. So, this dichotomy, this heuristic principle of imminence and transcendence is also there and some, he used it very creatively, to understand the role of man in the society or in new India.

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- The idea of man is illustrated in several lectures and essays like “Man”, “Supreme Man”, “The relation of Man”, “Man’s Universe” etc. *Religion*
- Rabindranath Tagore takes into account the moral and spiritual aspects of human nature.
- Tagore talked about the duality in man’s nature. One is the animal aspect of man for which the mere fulfillment of his necessities constitute the happiness. Another aspect is of the Universal man who is concerned with neither happiness nor suffering but strives for something greater; in his words- ‘magnificence’.

So, this views on man in Tagore is expressed in many of his lectures and essays is like Man, or Supreme Man or the sorry it should be Religion of Man, Religion of Man or Man’s Universe. So, on these essays and certainly more systematically, he explained in the religion of man his views on man. So, in these essays, you can find out Rabindranath Tagore views on man.

Now, while describing the human nature or human characteristic, he takes into account both the moral and the spiritual aspects of human nature. For Tagore man is inherently moral or ethical, and that reflects his true nature that reflects something, which is beyond. And that moral and ethical part of man can be explained not by his physical, biological being, but something which is deep inside his or her existence.

So, in a Tagore’s views or perception of man, this moral or ethical side of man’s, if it is a lot to express itself without any restriction, and without any kind of hindrance from the outside, then he or she will be able to realize his self or herself, but also contribute in the betterment of the society or in the collective life of his or her society or community.

So, a Rabindranath Tagore is in a sense too radical too radical in his understanding of man or the individual or individual freedom and the role of individual freedom for the realization of his self and also for the betterment of the society. So, for Tagore this innate nature of human being that is moral and a spiritual must be cultivated. And it should be

allowed to be cultivated without any restrictions, without any conditions from the outside forces be it society or the estate.

So, Tagore then also talks about this dual nature or what is called duality in man's nature, for him this duality of man nature is reflected in the animal aspect of man for which the mere fulfillment of his necessities constitute the happiness, so that is the one side of man that is similar to other species like animal, where man may believe that his real joy his real happiness is there in realization or fulfillment of his necessity or his need.

So, once you once your needs is fulfilled needs here means material needs or your immediate concerns, if that is fulfilled and achieved man may feel happy, so that is a one side of man, one kind of nature in human being. The other, which is more deeper, which is more fundamental that is the aspect of universal man who is concerned with neither happiness nor suffering, but strives for something greater. And this is this something greater is connected to the previous theme.

We are discussing about the mysterious existence of man, when this man come into being, what is the origin, what is the objective, who am I, so that kind of question is something, which constantly put the man in search of something, which is beyond his immediate or biological needs. And there he considered it is something, which is beyond happiness or beyond them suffering, but it is kind of continuous striving for knowing this greatness this mysterious existence, when all of all of us. And it is connected with this expression that divinity lives in man that divinity will emerge can express itself.

In the conducive environment of freedom or man has not submitted, his views his understanding his intellect to the masses or to the collective imposition. And blindly imitate it that can be developed, when the man using his intellect constantly trying to understand this higher or something greater in his or her existence. So, in this word, he used this as perfection of man or personality that he talks about or what he called magnificence.

So, this dwell or duality in man's nature is one, which is very basic and in many philosophy, you know is a Berlin and many others continental philosophers talking about the lower self and the higher self. So, the lower self is about the basic cardinal necessities of human existence. And higher self is towards realization of something more spiritual

something more ethical moral and such questions. So, a Tagore understood this duality in man's nature.

And he also acknowledged that in all of us I mean all of human being, there is the expression of divinity. Divinity in the forms of humanity, which allows that being to connect with other to relate with others and to develop a relationship of cooperation mutual trust or love. And in that way, he realized himself or herself, she realized herself and also see connect with the others, and form a social, form a collective that helps in the overall development or creation of something, which is greater than the individual self. So, Rabindranath Tagore did understand this duality in this human nature.

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- Unlike animals, man cannot be conformed to his natural conditions. It is in the crossing of his natural conditions that lies his glory.
- "He is not exclusively an individual: he is also one in spirit with the Universal man, under whose inspiration the individual engages in expressing his ultimate truth through crossing nature's limitations....".
- Man is a finite and infinite being at the same time. He is finite in his immediate individuality and infinite in his union with the Universal spirit.

Now, unlike animals, Tagore for the rights, man cannot be conformed to his natural conditions. It is in the crossing of his natural condition that lies his glory, so that is something about inherent search in man to transcend, his immediate physical condition, so that makes the human species very distinct from the other species in the other species. Why, because the man by his inbuilt nature, which is not just biological or physical, but also something which is transcendental, which transcends their biological or physical needs, cannot conform to his natural condition.

Natural condition is mere natural or material condition of his or her lives. So, man constantly tries to transcend his material or physical condition in search of something higher, something deeper, something greater and tries to understand this and as far as

many a lord to search for this greater higher meaning of his or her life. And there is no restriction on that and man constantly strive to understand this higher laws.

There lies the blurry, and that is the whole focus in Rabindranath Tagore. The evolution of man from one kind of stage to the other kind of a stage and then to the understanding or realization with this immersion of self with these; so, complete realization of selflessness or existence with self in the community with others based on true love, crushed, cooperation is something, which remains the ideal for the Tagore and that can be achieved, when man realized or tried constantly try to understand this greater laws, and there is no restriction on that.

Now, what we also find that, he is not exclusively an individual; he is also one in spirit with the universal man, under whose inspiration the individual engages in expressing his ultimate truth through crossing nature's limitations. So, this is quotation from Tagore's essays, where he argues that he or the man or any individual is not exclusively an individual that means, confined to him or her physical biological being. It is not very individualistic in some in terms of atomistic individual or autonomous individual.

For Tagore, this individual is one in spirit with the universal man. Now, this universal man can be considered as something, which is in all of us. And we are expression of this one universal higher self or universal man. And on that basis, we try to connect with each other and develop a kind of collective collective solidarity. So, this individual for Tagore is one in a spirit with the universal man.

And in understanding or under the guidance or inspiration of this this this universal man he can he realize or understand the existence of his ultimate truth. What is the ultimate truth, the realization of the fact that we all are part of same species or same humanity, and therefore we should collaborate, we should develop the relationship with others. On the basis of this principle that all in all of us lies something, which is part of the same universal man, and that will be the true basis of cooperation, true basis of solidarity for Tagore.

And therefore, one can once we realize this true or ultimate truth of our existence. We can transcend all kind of natural limitations be it natural in terms of this surroundings, material surroundings of our life, in terms of religious, narrow, definition of religion in terms of caste, in terms of ethnicity, in terms of language. In so many ways, which tries

to distinct or differentiate between one kind of man to the other kind of man can be transcended according to Tagore.

If one believes in this ultimate truth of our existence, we are all part of same universal man or in terms of humanity the understanding of humanity, then and that can be the basis of true cooperation between an among different groups meet on the basis of caste, religion, nation, etcetera, so that is very crucial understanding of the relationship that individual shares with the universal man. Finally, on this discussion on idea of man Tagore believes that man is a finite as well as infinite being simultaneously. And he is finite in his immediate individuality and infinite in his union with the universal spirit, now that connects with the individual expression of divinity or universal man with this something, which is larger, which is greater than all of us put together.

Now here, I mean one needs to understanding of life in Tagore's political philosophy. Therefore, Tagore life is something, which cannot be measured, which cannot be quantified. It can be valued or that value is something one can realize and that realization comes through this engagement, mental engagement or realization emotional, psychological realization with the something, which is beyond us something, which and we carry in carrying it. So, this relationship between universal and the particular is very crucial for Tagore.

And therefore, he believes that in man, you have both finite and infinite at the same time. What is in finite in man, the immediate individuality, all of us lives in a particular time and space, and that time and space sets a limit on our understanding or our discretion or our judgment or our and our grasp our reality, but that can be transcended.

Once we realize our relationship with something universal, and that is though ultimate truth or of our existence, when we realize that we are limited in our time in a space, but at the same time, we carry in our selves the same divinity or same humanity and once we realize it in each other, then the true basis of cooperation or trust is possible, and that is what he calls this finite and infinite at the same time in the human natures.

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“From the time when Man became truly conscious of his 'own self' he also became conscious of a mysterious spirit of unity which found its manifestations through him in his society. It is a subtle medium of relationship between individuals, which is not for any utilitarian purpose but for its own ultimate truth, not a sum of arithmetic but a value of life. Somehow Man has felt that this comprehensive spirit of unity has a divine character which could claim the sacrifice of all that is individual in him, that in it dwells his highest meaning transcending his limited self, representing his best freedom.” - Tagore

- He regards individuals as expression of the divine. By uniting with the divine he can evolve to the 'supreme man'. He believed in the unity of men, despite the distinctions of time and place. It is the ability to feel the presence of one spirit in all men that makes one a great soul. The co-existence of finite and infinite man; personal and universal man characterizes the distinctive conception of man in Tagore's writings.
- Tagore was trying to create a space for individual choice that stood apart from the imposed collectivities be it traditional Indian institutions like caste, religion and patriarchal families, or imperial subjecthood of colonial rule, or contemporary mass movements for nationalism.

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Again this through this quotation will try to understand something about his idea on man. So, I just quote that from the time and man became truly conscious of his own self, he also become consists of a mysterious spirit of unity, which founds its manifestation through him in his society. So, the realization of man about himself is also to be conscious of a mysterious spirit of unity that unity between self and something, which is universal something, which is greater than the self.

And this found its manifestation through him in his society. It is subtle medium of relationship between individuals, which is not for any utilitarian purpose, but for its own ultimate truth, not a sum of arithmetic, but a value of life. Somehow man has felt that his comprehensive spirit of unity has a divine character, which could claim the sacrifice of all that is individual in him, that in it dwells the highest meaning transcending his limited self, representing his based freedom.

Now, there he defines both understanding of man. The consistence of man about himself, his place in the larger society, and also why his life is not just for a utilitarian purpose or some arithmetic calculation, but to realize this ultimate truth, true meaning of life. And there lies the greatest freedom ultimate freedom for the human being. So, what he say that, when man gets became truly conscious of his own self that is he on individualistic self, he also become consciousness of a mysterious unity, mysterious spirit of unity that

he finds in his society. It is a subtle medium of relationship between individuals that he sells with the other individuals in the society.

This relationship between other individuals is not for utilitarian purpose. What is utilitarian purpose, we try to develop a relationship with other human being, because it help us in achieving our own interest or self-interest. Now, this whole concept of civil society, if you read in Hegel or in many other thinkers, the relationship between individual is guided by their self-interest or maximization of self-interest or utilitarian philosophy everything, which is good for the greatest number that should be desirable that should be done.

Tagore is someone who is not articulating life or human life in a utility utilitarian purpose. So, everything is weighed or measured on the basis of its utility or its own in the basis of its use value. For him the ultimate, this relationship between man and man is for its own ultimate truth. And this is not some so realizes of this ultimate truth is the search of human life or man life.

So, therefore once man realize that a comprehensive spirit of unity. He also understand that divine character, which could claim the sacrifice of all that is individual in him. So, then once human or man human being or man realizes this comprehensive spirit of unity, then anything that is individual in his spirit can be sacrificed for the realization of that ultimate truth, and that is where lies the best freedom in human life.

So, he regards individual as expression of divine. Divine is something, which is about understanding this greater self or the connection with the universal man in individual soul. So, by uniting with the divine, he can evolve to the supreme man. So, idea of perfection, idea of attaining a personality or character of once on and not guided by other be it society or religion or the caste or the political organization such as a state. So, one realizes this divinity, then one can evolve into the supreme in here, one is evolved with the others.

So, the characterization of Gandhi as mahatma is a greater soul. So, you can realize the pain and suffering or the feelings of others in your own self. Once you realize this fundamental truth of your existence, so that is how he and he conceptualized modern man. So, he believed therefore in the unity of man, despite the distinction of time and place, we are all simultaneously conditioned by our immediate surroundings in terms of

time in a space, and yet we realized the unity with the others. So, it is the ability to feel the presence of one spirit in all man that makes one a great soul. So, the idea of mahatma, one feels the existence or presence of one spirit in all man or all in one is what makes a soul agreed soul or mahatma.

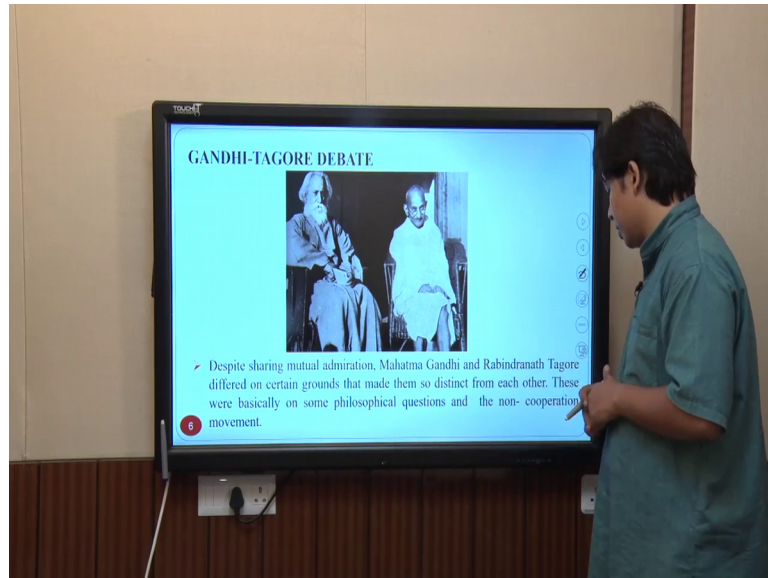
So, the co-existence of finite and infinite man; personal and the universal man characterizes the distinctive conception of man in Tagore's writings. So, this is the perhaps the best way to summarize his understanding of man, which characterizes the simultaneous existence of finite that is his immediate biological or filled physical being with the infinite, which is universal being universal spirit in man, and that is what characterized the conception of man in Tagore writing.

So, Tagore was in his definition or understanding of man was trying to create a space for individual choice that stood apart from the imposed collectivities be it traditional Indian institution like caste, religion and patriarchal families, or imperial subjecthood of colonial rule, or contemporary mass movements for nationalism. So, Tagore in his whole writing in his whole creative expression in different general or engagement with other thinkers, such as Gandhi and many others he was trying to create a space for this individual, individual who believes in this simultaneous existence of finite and infinite within his or her own personality.

So, he want this individual to help choice, and you as you know many of our societies including India, deny the individual this choice to think for himself or herself to decide for himself or herself beat khap panchayat or some restriction by the state on the freedom of a speech and expression. So, all these things are some kind of restriction, some kind of restrain to the individual choice.

And Tagore remains somewhat very critical of this kind of restrictions, whether it is coming from the Indian traditional institution like caste, religion or patriarchal families, or the imperial rule such as colonialism, or British rule in India or the contemporary mass movements for nationalism. And we have seen in his critique of nationalism how it denies individual his moral or ethical search.

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And this is a good point to enter into this debate between Gandhi and Tagore. Now, there is a very good work on this debate between Gandhi and Tagore by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya. And I request you all to move through this work and many of the themes that we are going to discuss in this part of our lecture, will discuss it again, when we will discuss Gandhi.

So, there is this mutual respect or admiration between these two stalwart of modern India, Gandhi and Tagore and yet very strong differences on many social and political issues between them. It is well known that Mahatma Gandhi used to call Tagore, the poet or the Gurudev. So, both were in a wave deeply emotionally connected with each others views and role and respected each others opinion. And yet share very strong differences on so many issues. So, in this part of our lecture, we are going to discuss some of those differences.

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- Based on the personal letters and published essays of Gandhi and Tagore, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, in his book, "The Mahatma and the Poet", put a chronological account of Gandhi-Tagore debate on practical politics into four time periods-

Period 1915-1922

- Tagore was sceptical of the instrumental use of Satygraha in the Non-cooperation Movement by some of the followers of Gandhi to promote bigotry. Gandhi was aware of the misuse of his ideal of Satygraha in some instances by some people but regarded them not as his true followers. He also rejected that it happened in the Non-cooperation movement, particularly.
- Tagore did not support the boycotting of government schools since there was no alternative schooling available. Gandhi justified the boycott in saying that the education imparted there make them "helpless and godless."

So, this part of your Tagore, the mahatma, and the poet chronologies. So, if you basically go by this Sabyasachi Bhattacharyas work on mahatma and the poet, there are these collection of letters are divided into different periods. So, in first period from 1915 to 1922. So, we can through this chronology, we can situate these two thinkers in the historical context that was unfolding in India.

So, during this period you know Gandhi returned to India, there was a development for non-cooperation, and use of Satyagraha as a political tool. And Tagore was someone, who realized the role that Gandhi can play in freedom struggle in India, but he was very sceptical of the instrumental use of Satyagraha in the non-cooperation movement by some of the followers of Gandhi to promote bigotry. So, Tagore was someone who want the individual to realize his or her individuality, and then act upon those realization.

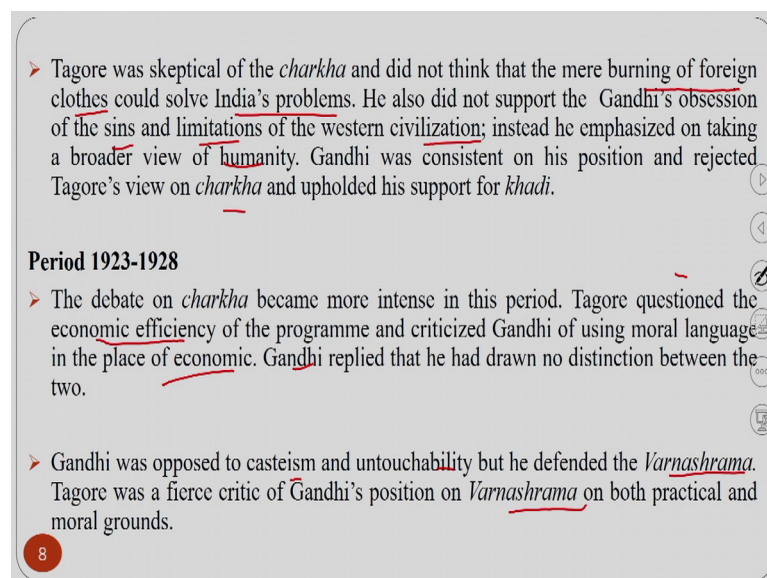
And not by blind or mere blind following or mere imitation of a thought even if it is coming from someone like mahatma Gandhi, so he was very sceptical of this instrumental use of Satyagraha during the non-cooperation movement. Especially, by many of his followers, which in the name of Satyagraha was promoting bigotry. However, Gandhi was aware of the misuse of his ideal of satyagraha in some instances by some people, but regarded them not as his true follower. He also rejected that it happened in the non-cooperation movement particularly.

So, Gandhi even when there were instances of using Satyagraha as an instrumental tool, yet where with the opinion that it is not the done by the true follower of his idea. And he

did realize that he particularly, he said that it has not happened during the non-cooperation movement. Tagore did not support the boycotting of government school since there was no alternative school or schooling available. And Gandhi justified the boycott in saying that the education imparted there will make them helpless and godless.

So, there is this famous debate between Gandhi and Tagore, but boycotting the government schools during the non-cooperation movement. Tagore was of the view that as long as there is no viable alternative available for the students, they should not go for boycotting, but Gandhi believed that there is no point having that kind of education, which will make them helpless or godless in other sense merely as a kind of tool in the whole structure of colonial domination and exploitation.

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➤ Tagore was skeptical of the *charkha* and did not think that the mere burning of foreign clothes could solve India's problems. He also did not support the Gandhi's obsession of the sins and limitations of the western civilization; instead he emphasized on taking a broader view of humanity. Gandhi was consistent on his position and rejected Tagore's view on *charkha* and upheld his support for *khadi*.

Period 1923-1928

➤ The debate on *charkha* became more intense in this period. Tagore questioned the economic efficiency of the programme and criticized Gandhi of using moral language in the place of economic. Gandhi replied that he had drawn no distinction between the two.

➤ Gandhi was opposed to casteism and untouchability but he defended the *Varnashrama*. Tagore was a fierce critic of Gandhi's position on *Varnashrama* on both practical and moral grounds.

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So, Gandhi called for the boycott, but Tagore believed it, this kind of boycott without having any alternative is something, which is not very helpful for national awakening or political freedom. Tagore was also a skeptical of the Charkha, and did not think that mere burning of foreign clothes could solve India's problem. He also did not support the Gandhi's obsession of the sins and limitations of western civilization; instead he emphasized on taking a broader view of humanity.

And what you find is during this non-cooperation movement, Tagore was promoting for east and west cooperation, but in India Gandhi was promoting the non-operation. So, he wrote a letter to C F Andrews. Andrews and arguing about his ironical situation, here in

the west he is preaching about east west cooperation, but Gandhi in India talking about this non-cooperation between them between the two. And in reply to that Gandhi has said that he is also as open or as free to accommodate ideas from other cultures or intellectual tradition as poet are referring to Tagore, but he refused to be blown away by any of the ideas.

So, the famous quote we all are aware, that I want my home or window should be open for all kind of ideas to flow by, but I refuse to be blown by any ideas So, this debate help in actually learning from each other, yet at the same time maintaining their maintaining their difference. So, on his position on Charkha because of their economic region, Tagore criticised such the use of symbol for political mobilization.

So, this debate on charkha becomes more crucial between 1923 and 28. And Tagore questioned the economic efficiency of the program and criticized Gandhi for using moral language in place of economics. And for Gandhi this economic or moral is not that distinct, it is for Gandhi its in continuum. So, Charkha as he used for the political mobilization for realization of Swaraj in his terms economic Swaraj for him its a kind of continuum.

There is no distinction between moral and the economic as Tagore was trying to argue, how the other difference was that Gandhi was opposed to casteism and untouchability, but he defended Varnashrama. Tagore was fierce critic of Gandhi's position of Varnashrama for both political and moral grounds that is the self-difference between Tagore and Gandhi and also Gandhi and Ambedkar. We will discuss, when we will discuss Ambedkar, but Tagore also saw some problematics in Gandhi's thought where on the one hand he criticized untouchability, he criticized casteism. But, he defend defended Varnashrama and he could Tagore criticize such defence of Varnashrama both on political and moral ground.

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Period 1929-33

- This was a period when eradication of communalism became the common concern for both Gandhi and Tagore.
- Tagore's practical experience of Calcutta Riots in 1926 made him write fiercely against communalism. He went to the point of supporting "straightforward atheism" instead of delusive religiosity. Gandhi was equally against communalism but he could not be expected to employ this kind of approach in the case of atheism.

Period 1934-1941

- When Gandhi made a statement associating the Bihar earthquake of 1934 with "divine chastisement" -as the result of continuing caste oppression in the state, Tagore was shocked to see the irrationality in his argument. Tagore was aware of the effect Gandhi's statement may have on the common people who blindly followed him and asked him clarifications. But, Gandhi didn't change his take on that.

The next period between 1929 to 33, they said some of the challenges that India was facing that was about rising communalism. And they tried to develop some common grants which can help in mitigating this rise of communalism. So, Tagore also experienced this Calcutta Riots in 1926. And he therefore wrote very fiercely against communalism. And one has to remember during the Swadeshi movement also he was very critical of this growing difference between two major communities Hindu and Muslims, and therefore, developed some kind of difference and distance with the Swadeshi movement.

So, he went on to support straightforward atheism instead of delusive religiosity. Gandhi was equally against communalism, but he could not be expected to employ this kind of approach in the case of atheism. So, Gandhi using a lot of religious vocabulary into to contour even the communalism the religious vocabulary and terms was essential for Gandhi. And it is part and parcel of his vocabulary. Of course, it has very wider and flexible or accommodative interpretation, but for Tagore he supported straight forward atheism in fact to counter such challenges.

Between 1934 to 1941, when Gandhi made a statement associating the Bihar earthquake of 1934 with divine chastisement - as the result of continuing caste oppression in the state Tagore was shocked to see the irrationality in his argument. Tagore was aware of the effect Gandhi's statement may have on the common people who blindly followed

him and asked him clarification. But, Gandhi did not change his take on that. So, there was an earthquake in Bihar in 1934 and Gandhi responded to that earthquake by portraying it as a kind of divine chastisement for the caste oppression. Such kind of irrational unscientific observation by Gandhi and also because of the possibility of its consequences on the common people, Tagore was very critical of such kind of utterance, but Gandhi remained consistent with this position.

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➤ Tagore and Gandhi had disagreement also on Shubhas Chandra Bose being eased out of Congress.

➤ Debate between Gandhi and Tagore on philosophical questions can be found in their ideas of swaraj, state, nationalism; etc.

Swaraj and State

➤ While Tagore had an individualistic notion of liberty, Gandhi's one is more collective.

➤ In Tagore's view, society was central to Indian context than the state. For Gandhi, adopting this view was practically not possible.

Nationalism

➤ Tagore was very critical of the ethnic and chauvinistic forms of nationalism. Instead, he urged for the upholding of "universal human."

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So, what we find is that Tagore and Gandhi had disagreement also on Shubhas Chandra Bose being eased out of Congress. So, this debate between Gandhi and Tagore there is also some historical happenings when Shubhas Chandra Bose and his politics and policy in the Congress, and Gandhi had serious differences with such policies and politics. Shubhas Chandra Bose had to resign from the presidency of the Congress and they had the both also differed. Finally, in summarizing their influential debate, we can find this debate on Gandhi and Tagore on some of the philosophical question based on swaraj, state and nationalism.

So, very briefly on swaraj and state what we find is Tagore had more individualistic notion, individualistic notion as I have explained on his idea of men, or the role of men the freedom of men of liberty Gandhi one is more collective consider. So, it is not easy to distinguish one with the other, there is many complementary trends in their thought on men or in their thought on swaraj also. But Gandhi was more practical more pragmatic in

terms of balancing the notion of swaraj or his ideal swaraj with the practical necessity of the historical time in which he was trying to mobilize public opinion and different sections of society.

So, in Gandhi you have that pragmatic concern, but Tagore was very radical, too radical in terms of understanding the individual notion of swaraj. In Tagore's view, society was central to Indian context than the state. For, Gandhi, adopting this view was practically not possible. But here again you see the complementary thoughts in both the thinkers well certainly for Tagore the major problem or major challenge before India is the social and not the political. But Gandhi realized that political freedom is as important perhaps as social social freedom or realization of swaraj in society or in the field of economics.

But for Gandhi also remember he we will discuss his views on state or in his idea of oceanic circle or bottom up approach, he wanted to create a society which is not governed from top down, but from bottom up, but still the role of a state and the idea of political freedom is much more much more there in Gandhi's thought than in then perhaps in Tagore, but certainly for Tagore the whole and this is described in swadesi samaj during this Swadeshi movement where these real organization of Indian society and Indian context the primary role is that of society and not that of a state. Wherein the western civilization or western society the role of a state or in present modern times the role of nation was more central.

And Tagore want to continue with organizing the society creating and organizing this Swadesi samaj then making the state more central in Indian situation. On views his views on nationalism we have discussed it instead of ethnic or chauvanistic form of nationalism Tagore was more in favour of upholding the universal human being or brotherhood.

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- Gandhi, too, was aware of the limitations of nationalism. For him, in patriotism lies the path of attaining universal humanism. Evil was only the exclusive, selfish and narrowness of modern nations.

Science and Technology

- Morality was the lens through which Gandhi viewed the world. In advocating *charkha* and explaining the cause of Bihar earthquake he employs the moral language. On the other hand, Tagore was very critical of using moral language where economic is the appropriate one. Moreover he was more scientific in explaining natural phenomenon.

Education

- Both Tagore and Gandhi had run schools outside the state sponsored system. While both of them emphasized on the use of mother tongue, reflection of Indian life and culture and participatory schooling they were different in the matter of basic education scheme.

Gandhi too was aware of the limitation of nationalism, but for him in patriotism lies the path of attaining universal humanism. Evil was only the exclusive, selfish and narrowness of modern nations. So, for Gandhi and in many other political thinkers as I have said in my introductory lecture, when they were fighting for the nationhood or attaining political freedom from the British, they were also equally mind full of the universal connection or the role of India in the larger community of nations. Yet many of them believe that India to play a greater role in the community of nation has to attain its own freedom first. It attained its own political freedom from the British first.

But there is a difference between Gandhi and Tagore, where for Tagore is more about developing the cooperation dialogue or solidarity than this ethnic chauvinistic nationalism which inherently lead to competition, conflict and violence.

Similarly, on science and technology both thinkers in a way share some of the ideas, but they were also differ on the use of science and technology where Gandhi in his critique to modern civilization was critical of the use of many modern technology or big technology. But, for Tagore the role of science and technology can be liberating for the human being as well.

So, finally, on education what we find is that both Tagore and Gandhi had run schools outside the state sponsored system. Gandhi in his ashrams and in many of the national schools; and Tagore in his experiment in Shantiniketan and Sriniketan while both of

them emphasized on the use of mother tongue, a reflection of Indian life and culture and participatory schooling they were different in the matter of basic education scheme.

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- While Tagore criticized the basic education scheme of Gandhi on the ground of overemphasizing material utility at the cost of the overall development of the pupil and limiting the poor students to a definite vocation; Gandhi thought it as a means of working independent of government support. He also regarded manual work as a means of intellectual training.
- In Jawaharlal Nehru's words- "No two persons could probably differ so much as Gandhi and Tagore... The surprising thing is that both of these men with so much in common and drawing inspiration from the same wells of wisdom and thought and culture, should differ from each other so greatly!" (Jawaharlal Nehru to K. Kripalani, 27 August, 1941; as cited in *The Mahatma and the Poet* by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya)
- "The poet lives in a magnificent world of his own creation—his world of ideas. I am a slave of somebody else's creation—the spinning wheel.... But I may say in all humility that we complement each the other's activity". Gandhi

So, for Gandhi the Tagore criticism was that the basic educational scheme of Gandhi on the ground of over emphasizing material unity. So, Gandhi was more towards vocational training, vocational education at the cost of overall development of the pupil and limiting the poorest students to the definitive vocation. So, Gandhi for him the use of education should be to prepare the men or give the men vocational training for his economic betterment and etcetera.

But for Gandhi the manual work therefore, the charkha and other symbols that he used that becomes the means of intellectual training. But for Tagore the role of education is realizing the men are individual the true nature, the true character of his being which is as we have discussed the simultaneous existence with the immediate biological physical self with the universal self and men.

So, finally, on the relationship between the two one, one can you know one can understand that Gandhi was more pragmatic political thinkers, yet he shares a lot of ideas with Tagore and vice versa, Tagore shared a lot of ideas and have mutual admiration for mutual admiration for Gandhi. But they remain very sharp very they had very different opinion on many many issues as we have discussed on education, state, or science and technology and some of the symbolic or irrational even superstitious expression on the

part of Gandhi. And he was therefore, criticized by many of the Gandhi Gandhi followers also even when he was regarded as a great thinker.

So, in Jawaharlal Nehru's word which he wrote in his letter to Kripalani on 27th August, 1941. This is from the book I have told you about Sabyasachi Bhattacharya where he writes that no two person could probably differ so much as Gandhi and Tagore. The surprising thing is that both of these men with so much in common and drawing inspiration from the same wells of wisdom and thought and culture so differ from each other so greatly. So, it is something which is very unique about Gandhi and Tagore where on the many issue they were deriving inspiration or their source of inspiration remains the same.

They share some of the some of the common grounds in terms of many political or social economic issues of India, and yet they differ a great deal and that we have just discussed and that is something very very surprising according to according to Nehru. But it will be wrong to understand that they do not do not come complement each other or respect respected each other.

So, what we find is that both while sharing a friendship or mutual admiration to each other remain consistent with their opinions. And in the practical, political unfolding of our modern India, Gandhi did shape or influence a lot of political political programs, but ideals of Tagore remains valid even when these political events was unfolding or even in our contemporary times. So, in the words of Gandhi himself he writes and I quote that the poet lives in a magnificent world of his own creation his world of ideas I am a slave of somebody else creation the spinning wheel. But I may say in all humility that we complement each the others activity.

So, this basically summarized the relationship between Gandhi and Tagore, where Tagore and he believed that there is some kind of detachment from the actual immediate need of the politics for someone like him as a poet or as a poet philosopher to reflect about the larger aims and objectives of India and how to achieve them and someone who is grounded or embedded in the politics of the time. So, the difference will emerge out of these two location or situation of the thinkers and yet both of them believed and in Gandhi's word, they actually complement complemented each other's, each other's work

So, that is all on Gandhi Tagore debate. Tagore to conclude is someone who was far ahead of his times. And as I have explained in previous lecture that he saw things he was more a kind of visionary thinker who saw things which many of his contemporary could not see.

And he thought about India or Indian identity which should be rooted in Indian cultural social ethos, and yet should be open or accommodative to the ideas which is coming from the other intellectual tradition so more about dialogue and thinking about universal man, cosmopolitan ideas that is there in Tagore which perhaps in today's world remain more relevant than he then he was writing during the anti colonial struggle. And Tagore provide us insights on so many issues and challenges that we face especially about lot of unscientific or unsubstantiated claims and counterclaims that we that we see so that that is all on Tagore.

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Resources

1. *Political Thought in Modern India*; edited by Thomas Pantham and Kenneth L Deutsch, Sage Publications, 2016
2. 'Creative Unity', 'Man', 'The Religion of Man' from *Rabindranath Tagore Selected Essays*, Rupa Publications, 2010
3. *The Mahatma and the Poet* by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, National Book Trust, 1997
4. 'Tagore: Unlocking Cages 1861-1961' in Sunil Khilnani in *Incarnations India in 50 Lives*, Allen Lane, 2016
5. 'Two Roads to Decolonisation: Tagore and Gandhi', Hiren Gohain, *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 30, 2011, pp. 23-26
6. *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol.3, edited by Sisir Kumar Das, Sahitya Akademi, 1996

So, on this topic which we have discussed Gandhi and Tagore debate, and Tagore's ideas on men you can look at some of these texts from this Kenneth L Deutsch or Pantham. You can read which is there for other readings also. And especially some essays by Tagore on creative unity men the religion of men from Rabindranath Tagore selected essays from the Rupa publication. And then Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, the mahatma and the poet and you can also look at a very good writer on Tagore unlocking cases from Sunil Khilnani's in *Incarnations India in 50 lives* and also *Two Roads to ecolonization*

Tagore and Gandhi by Hiren Gohain, Economic and Political Weekly. And also the English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Volume 3 which came from Sahitya Akademi and edited by Sisir Kumar Das, so that is all on Rabindranath Tagore.

Thank you for listening. In the next lecture, we are going to discuss Aurobindo Ghosh.

Thank you.