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## Book Review: Nationalism

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### INTRODUCTION

Nationalism is an essay written by one of the best Poets, writers, composers, and social reformers from India- Rabindranath Tagore, criticizing the idea of Nationalism by pointing out its true nature while maintaining the idea of the world being a single nest. Through this book, the author has classified the ideas underlying nationalism and has portrayed nationalism as an organizational mechanism resulting from economical and technological excesses. The book is more of a personal essay than an article. Tagore's thoughts on nationalism from his numerous travels are included in the book. The author has tried to explain the concept of nationalism with an essay divided into three topics. They are Nationalism in Japan, Nationalism in the West, and Nationalism in India. The book emphasizes the extreme patriotism stemming from nationalism.

This book provides us with a unique perspective on the fictional institution known as Nation. Patriotism, an assumed term, is put into doubt. The spiritual foundation of the East is explained, as well as its peculiarity. The author explains how in the name of modernity, development, and nationalism, humans are abandoning their essential principle of humanism.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Nationalism- The book is a set of essays authored by the great Indian polymath, poet, philosopher, and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, centered on the idea of nationalism. The book is published in the English language, published by The Macmillan Company. The first edition of the book was released in 1917 and reprinted in 1918. In the book, Tagore questions the relevancy of nationalism while comparing it with three examples- namely, the West, Japan, and India. Tagore describes the kinds of feelings about the modern world that many of us have but few can express anymore. It is implied that Tagore thought of nationalism as a menace. He says that the basis of nationalism is wanting. Tagore's concept of a nation is the creation of a vast organisation of human resources, technology, and power to command the minds and bodies of everyone who is in its immediate vicinity.<sup>1</sup> The book also discusses nationalism in other regions of the world, such as Europe, the United States, and Japan, and how Indian nationalism differs from that of these regions and continents due to the diversity of Indian society. In such a diverse nation as India, it seeks to achieve political unification and discusses how this is impossible without social unification.

## SUMMARY OF THE BOOK

Through his book, Tagore has tried to provide a new angle on the fictional institution known as Nation. The reader would be astounded to find such a large amount of English verbatim used in this book. Tagore characterizes them as political groups preoccupied with operational efficiency and driven by avarice for power and wealth. He argues that such a quest for wealth and power deprives one of their values and humanity. "Nations" sedulously turn a man against man by fostering moral blindness fostered by a cult of nationalism.

He emphasizes the issues India has experienced throughout its history at the outset of his text. This included the issue of race, which needed to be addressed in all its truthfulness.<sup>2</sup> He talks about how other people had to overcome challenges from their neighbours. At the same time,

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<sup>1</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, 'Must-Read Essay: What Rabindranath Tagore Really Thought of Nationalism' (*The Free Press Journal*, 7 August 2020) <<https://www.freepressjournal.in/india/must-read-essay-what-rabindranath-tagore-really-thought-of-nationalism>> accessed 24 June 2022

<sup>2</sup> 'Nationalism in India' (*Tagore Web*) <<https://www.tagoreweb.in/Essays/nationalism-216/nationalism-in-india-2626>> accessed 24 June 2022

India's problems were internal.<sup>3</sup> While talking about Nationalism in the west, Tagore says that the beliefs and models are in contradiction with what India needs to accomplish. India has made an effort to live in peace and independence from politics. According to Tagore, India has been invaded many times by different people but this time, it wasn't horsemen and foot soldiers digging in our land instead, it was the Western nation rooting machinery into our soil.<sup>4</sup> He makes an immensely eloquent and passionate argument against the present technocratic society of the West, which he describes as a machine that accepts only neatly compressed bundles of humanity as inputs from men and nature.<sup>5</sup> His predictions of Europe's impending doom owing to nationalistic sentiment turned out to be startlingly accurate.

He has warned India and other countries against hastily adopting the western idea of nationalism without first understanding the extent to which they can affect their own culture and the potential costs associated with it. He urged Asia to go on a new road and quit moping over what is no longer true. He cautions that although Japan is a progressive country with weapons to protect it, it must never embrace the negative traits of the west or its corrupt societal values since that would undoubtedly lead to their demise.<sup>6</sup> Tagore's admiration for the Japanese nation is evident in the chapter on Nationalism in Japan, which identifies Japan as the nation that the Asian area should aspire to be like.<sup>7</sup> He praises Japan by saying "One morning the whole world looked up when Japan broke through her walls of old habits in a night and came out triumphant". He says that Japan is both old and new at the same time. But seeing the rise in nationalistic sentiment in Japan, Tagore says that "I, for myself, cannot believe that Japan has become what she is by imitating the west". He sincerely hopes that Japan will never let the mere pride of her foreign acquisition cause her to lose faith in her own soul.<sup>8</sup>

According to Tagore, the social issue plaguing India is more widespread than a political one and affects all countries, not just that country. He has spoken about nationalism in India with

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*

respect to Japan and the west. The developments in India severely disturbed Rabindranath Tagore. Additionally, Tagore believed that the British were ruining India at the time they were in power by making these advancements. However, India has faced the issue of race constantly since the beginning of recorded history. Even though he was taught as a child that nationalism is almost better than reverence for God and humanity, he believes that he has outgrown that teaching, and is convinced that his countrymen will truly gain their India by fighting against the education that encourages them to think of their country as being superior to human ideals.<sup>9</sup> When our nationalists discuss values, they overlook the fact that the basis of nationalism is wanting. The most conservative social practices are exhibited by those who are defending these principles. He says nationalists point to Switzerland as an example of a country where the people have united despite racial differences. But keep in mind that because they have a common ancestor, people of different races can mix and marry there. There is no common birthright in India. He says real nationalism has never existed in India.

## REVIEW OF THE BOOK

After reading this book, I find Tagore's approach to the idea of nationalism to be amazing. The English used seemed to be a little difficult but there are many things that I agree upon. The chapters give information about nationalism and advancements in the mentioned countries. This book serves as a critique of the concept of nationalism; it does so by comparing nationalism in India to that in Japan and the west. When the chapter on nationalism in India began, Tagore skilfully outlined the genuine meaning of nationalism and the reasons why India is misinformed about it.<sup>10</sup> He emphasized the way western values intimidate us Indians and claimed that losing our roots had become a big factor in how we misunderstand what the genuine meaning of self-awareness is. Because of its imperialistic ideas, Tagore was dissatisfied with western nationalism. The working of humans in Europe has been hampered, according to Tagore. The part on Japanese nationalism reveals Tagore's deep admiration for the Japanese people and his belief that they should be emulated by the rest of Asia.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>10</sup> Jaya Pandey, 'Book Review: Nationalism By Rabindranath Tagore' (*Youth Ki Awaaz*, 24 November 2020) <<https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2020/11/book-review-nationalism-by-rabindranath-tagore/>> accessed 25 June 2022

I find it appalling that a book published more than a century ago still holds today, and I find it sad that men's mentalities have not improved in some cases; they have gotten worse over time. One of Tagore's quotes that took my attention is, "... nations who sedulously cultivate moral blindness as the cult of patriotism will end their existence in a sudden and violent death." At times, he also sounds a bit angry. There are also times when I was confused as to why he called new-age technology and western mentality- soulless, in an attempt to discredit them. Several of the lines are incredibly sharp, and they gave me the kick I needed to grasp some concepts. The author did a good job of outlining his points regarding how our society differs from that of the West and how Japan came to be so dominant today. The troublesome contrast between individuals and the nations they are a part of is addressed by Tagore in a phenomenally brilliant manner. It's unsettling to realise that this information was accessible far before World War II.

## CONCLUSION

Rabindranath Tagore criticized nationalism by pointing out its bad qualities in this book. He tries to maintain what it can do to countries that develop severe nationalistic environments. He talked about the problems of nationalism and how people are misinformed about it. He talks about how the idea of a nation is not a good thing. The book is praised by many world-renowned authors and is also culturally important. His idea of nationalism can be summed up by his quote, "*Nationalism is a great menace. It is the particular thing which for years has been at the bottom of India's trouble.*" In the modern world, religion and communalism have transcended regional boundaries and identities to become the unending source of retaliation, political agendas, propaganda, etc. The concepts Tagore outlined in this book have grown increasingly significant over time. Many people will find the political thinker in Tagore more interesting than the poet. Nevertheless, this book is a good read for those interested in Tagore's writing and nationalism.