

Globalization : Visions of Gandhi, Tagore and Nehru

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Introduction

Globalization despite its variegated meanings and interpretations provided by different scholars has become the reality of the day and bears a ubiquitous presence in every part of the world. While debates on its novelty or uniqueness in the current phase are still going on, there is no denying the fact that it is the logical continuation of an ongoing process marked by the spread of liberal-capitalist driven development trajectory embraced by the larger part of the world. Globalization in essence is marked by interconnectedness, integration of societies, cultures, economies for which liberalisation and privatization became the key instruments. However, there are people who don't consider globalization as a path-breaking happening of the last century, for them, the history of globalization is as old as the human history itself. Amidst this ongoing debate regarding the chronology of this phenomenon, there is no denying the fact that the current phase of globalization whose distinctness lies in the high velocity with which the products and ideas are transferred, the ever-growing volume of consumers and products and their variety, and the resultant increase in the growing visibility of this process (Chanda 2007) is marked by many problems. These problems are growing inequality, poverty, marginalization of the third world countries, the reassertion of identities owing to the homogenized culture promoted by it. All this has been leading to the emerging of new kind of civil strifes and crisis of governability and myriad other challenges like the question of the nation state system and hence the debate on nationality, nationalism and meanings and notions of internationalism follow in such circumstances created by globalization's expansion. All these issues appear in our everyday life in one form or the other. India being the part of the developing world as well as the country which has witnessed these issues on its own land especially after its entering into the LPG era actually has seen both aspects of the globalization. On the one hand side there is the glittering side of rich people, shopping malls, flyovers and the other hand there is the India of slum-

dwellers, the poor, deprived, starved sections who have been continuously been sacrificing for making the other India shine. India in fact entered into growth-centered model in this process creating and widening the gulf between the haves and the have-nots. All this leads many of us into wondering if this country (which was ideologically and intellectually shaped in its conscience by many empowering ideas of visionaries since the time of India's struggle for independence against the foreign rule) still can rely on their (the visionaries') notions of how the country should be governed. In fact, in this very context of the current situation and the prevailing crises, the three thinkers whom the author considers as the most relevant in this regard (owing to the widespread and profound influence they have on the collective conscience of India in general, and owing to the critical vision through which they looked at the crisis of their time and based on which they provided many foresighted thoughts which till date are important), are Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Though these three influential personalities of the pre-independence era had mutual disagreements, dissents over many areas of their thoughts and style of critiquing, the given circumstances open up many issues which are till date connected to our problems in this globalized era and their solutions are such that even a common man can connect to them easily. In the background of all these, the purpose of this paper is to first, connect globalization and the problems and tendencies generated by it in the contemporary phase with the tradition of Indian thought especially with reference to these three thinkers, second, to find in their thinking and critiques the relevance for the contemporary world in general and India in particular, third, to showcase through the major areas of their concern like the criticism of western civilization, capitalism, nationalism, internationalism, egalitarianism that these issues are even more pertinent in the current period and need to be looked beyond the ways in which we are habituated to look at, i.e., through going back to our rich legacy of Indian thinking tradition. In this process the paper will present the basic thoughts of the three thinkers, their critique and their mutual points of departure on the same.

Globalization has rendered open debates like whether the present process is inevitable or not, whether the current process is in the interest of all, whether this process of the global expansion of capitalism has an alternative or not. These are directly or indirectly linked to questions of equity, nationality, technical gap or digital divide etc. whose mention is found in the thoughts of

these thinkers, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly. To begin with, Gandhian thought and its major reflections have been taken up in this paper in order to make a connection with globalization. Gandhi in his seminal work, “Hind Swaraj” emerged as one of the most vocal critiques of the western civilization at a time when the west and its preaching was catching roots. World has moved much far ahead since then but problems have only persisted and taken some new forms, the difference being that the west styled modernity for which globalization has proved as an effective carrier is now an accepted fact of our life.

Gandhi and Globalization

While connecting Gandhi and Globalization, an automatic thought that runs one’s mind is that if Gandhi would have been alive, would he support it in its present form? Though Gandhi himself was a globally very well-connected man of his time in terms of the exchange of ideas with people of diverse regions, cultures and ideologies but when it came to his own country, he believed in indigeneity and reserving and respecting the local and not following the west blindly. This presents before us a classic sense of being global at mind but being essentially local in deeds. Thus Gandhi’s thoughts present an interesting study of all the major debates surrounding globalization in the present times, e.g., modernity, capitalism, consumerism, mass production, problem of haves and have-nots, upliftment of the downtrodden people which is directly linked to the social deficit created by globalization. All these questions are addressed by Gandhi in his critique of modern civilization. For Gandhi, modern or western civilization was a ‘mode of conduct’ with its origins in the Enlightenment, and more particularly, from the Industrial Revolution. Thus, as Gandhi points it out that ‘Let it be remembered that western civilization is only a hundred years old, or to be more precise, fifty’ (CW 8:374). As Parel (1997: xviii) remarks in the context of Gandhi that,

The industrial revolution for him was much more than a mere change in the mode of production. As he interprets it, it brought into being a new mode of life, embracing a people’s outlook on nature and human nature, religion, ethics, science, knowledge, technology, politics and economics. The satisfaction of the desire for economic prosperity came to be identified as the main object of politics.... The industrial revolution altered the concept of labour, now accepted mainly for its ability to produce profit, power and capital. Manual

labour was looked upon as fit only for the unlettered and the backward. With the technological revolution that followed the industrial revolution, machines, hitherto allies of humans, seemed to assert their autonomy.

For Gandhi, civilization was a moral enterprise. In his own words as he speaks in *Hind Swaraj* “Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty”. (Gandhi 1909) Hence it is the very basic ethos of this modern west that Gandhi sets himself against. According to Gandhi, there exist two unscrupulous principles guiding the very core of the western civilization, viz, ‘might is right’ and ‘survival of the fittest’. While the first principle is known to legitimize the politics of power as expounded earlier by Machiavelli, the second one idealizes the economics of self-interest as proposed by Adam Smith.” In the west “with rare expectations, alternatives to western civilization are always sought within its own basic thought system.” (Heredia 1999)

Gandhi’s relevance can be better understood in the contemporary world by looking at the three persistent themes in *Hind Swaraj* which has been discussed by many scholars. These three prominent ideas reflected in his work are colonial imperialism, industrial capitalism and rationalist materialism. Gandhi has very emphatically asserted in the seventh chapter of *Hind Swaraj* that “the English have not taken India; we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength: but because we keep them” Thus the ingenuity of Gandhi’s thoughts is in the fact that he was one of the first to comprehend and explain that colonialism had to be overcome in our own consciousness first in order to realize the freedom in its true sense. Moreover, Gandhi pointed it out that capitalism was the force running behind colonial imperialism. Thus, Gandhi’s rejection of capitalism is based on a deep disgust to a system of profit-making economy which values machines more than humans and leads to the degradation of labour. In this system, mechanization is the preferred option over humanism. It was this type of dehumanized set up created by the capitalist production led colonial system which motivated Gandhi to give his famous statement in the chapter 19th of *Hind Swaraj* which also seems to be somewhat of an overstatement in the present times that “Machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilization; it represents a great sin” (Gandhi 1909)

However, Gandhi’s understanding and opinion on machines and mechanization start seeing a change since the 1920s. And he slowly starts to accept some helpful characteristics of machines like time and labor-saving,

however he keeps warning against the detriments of concentration of wealth and dislocation of workers promoted by such a system. This critique of capitalism can be directly linked to the phase of contemporary globalization which has proved to be the most visible outcome of this capitalist ideology.

The liberal-capitalist dominated world has for the first time in the human history been known to combine the “internationalization of trade, finance and production.”(Went 2004) In the words of Went (2004: 341), this internationalization of these economic processes does not automatically involve trade, finance and production (the three circuits of capital) in the same manner. Thus, the decades preceding the World War I, which are often compared with the phase of contemporary globalization, it was only trade and finance which were strongly internationalized. Thus, it is the accelerated internationalization of production capital since the decade of 1980s which has added the newness to the contemporary globalization in addition to the combination of international trade and international capital flows. And this has been an unparalleled instance in the evolution of the ideological as well as material path of the world dominated by the capital. Thus, in what is now seen and aspired as “a perfectly integrated world economy, individual nation states have to focus on being as attractive as possible to international markets.” (Went 2004) Thus, the space for autonomous and divergent decisions with regard to policies in a country has been curtailed, and issue areas such as distribution of public goods is subject to the whims of traders, investors, speculators and other big players on the integrated global market.

Thus Thomas Friedman (1999) deftly elucidates this. In his own words,

When your country recognizes(...) the rules of the free market in today’s global economy, and decides to abide by them, it pits on what I call ‘the Golden Straitjacket.’ The Golden Straitjacket is the defining political-economic garment of the globalization era. (...) On the political front, the Golden Straitjacket narrows the political and economic policy choices of those in power to relatively tight parameters. That is why it is increasingly difficult these days to find any real differences between ruling and opposition parties in those countries that have put on the Golden Straitjacket, its political choices get reduced to Pepsi or Coke – to slight nuances of policy, slight alterations in design to account for local traditions, some

loosening here and there, but never any major deviation from the core golden rules will see their investors stampede away, interest rates rise and stock market valuations fall (Friedman 1999: 86-8).

The above given discussion about the contemporary globalization points towards its peculiarity as well as the advancement of capitalism through this which has generated problems like monoculture, consumerism and the declining capacity of states to deliver on issues of social justice on account of adhering to the free market principle. These are some the issues which ask for a detailed thinking and interrogation on our part vis-à-vis the critiques and insights given by visionaries like Gandhi. It is important because the types of questions asked by Gandhi nearly a century ago are the ones which are now appearing before both “the under-developed and the post-industrial societies caught up in a deep upsurge confusion and disillusionment.”(Sethi 1979)

Thus, in order to better contextualize and interpret the relevance of Gandhi today, (whether this be with respect to politics in the globalized world, use of modern technologies in our present times, or the prevailing culture of our times), the real limitations of Gandhi’s critique have to be recognized.

Thus, Gandhi unlocks many pertinent and ethical issues which are relevant till date such as the relations and issues of inequality between between “the colonizer and the colonized, the dominant and the dominated, the oppressor and the oppressed.” The globalized world has brought such questions into focus again and again for the world. Thus, in our own country, this broadening of gap between the haves and the have-nots hold up and encircles us even more daringly than ever before. The new economic path followed by India in the post-LPG era steadily epitomizes a completely new vision of society which has internalized the internal colonialism (talked about by Gandhi much earlier) we are facing presently. Thus, as Roy (1986:185) marks, Gandhi had sought to undo the damage done to the collective Indian psyche through his “redefinition of courage and effective resistance in terms of, or through non-violence”.

The philosophy driving the globalized era and nations which are part of this globalization spree is the same as that which was behind the industrial capitalism (in the context of which Gandhi wrote), which is the market mechanism and profit. Gandhi’s critique was actually a disapproval of these very ideas and philosophies. Thus the new consumerist society I dehumanizing

in many ways. Gandhi's idea of trusteeship also holds hope for the inequity and injustices prevailing in the present day global world.

Thus we can summarize this whole discussion on Gandhi and Globalization by saying that though Gandhi was not adverse to Global ideas and influences, he was certainly critical of the modern, capital civilization which makes us to conclude that he would certainly not support the contemporary globalization in mass production propagated by high technological, machine-centered drive, the consumerist culture, homogenized monoculture, the social deficit created by it. To quote Gandhi,

I would categorically state my conviction that the mania for mass production is responsible for the world crisis. Granting for the moment that machinery may supply all needs of humanity, still, it would concentrate production in particular areas, so that you would have to go in a roundabout way to regulate distribution, whereas, if these production and distribution are both in the respective areas where things are required, it is automatically regulated and there is less chance for fraud, none for speculation. (Gandhi 2001)

Tagore and Globalization

While Gandhi had rejected the modern civilization by calling it the 'satanic civilization', Tagore stands in contrast to him who talked of amalgamation of the good virtues of the east and west, and this is what makes him an 'internationalist' or a 'cosmopolitan' as well as global in today's sense. Though both Gandhi and Tagore were great lover of their motherland and witnessed the same plight of their country, their divergent views though championing the same cause makes their study interesting especially when here we are to grapple with the questions generated by the globalization debate.

Globalization which is about the openness of the economies, societies, cultures and their integration to an extent that each one has repercussions for another has been seen as both as boon and bane. But certainly for the large, underprivileged masses it has brought more suffering. It has generated debates of identity, nationality in a globalized world, cultural homogeneity, about particularism and universalism etc. which in some way talked about by Tagore, who is seen widely as a great internationalist and cosmopolitan thinker of his time and went ahead of his time when going against the narrowness of

nationalism, which he called a west-borrowed concept. Tagore's critique of nationalism, and his call for cosmopolitanism can be a good way to look at the tasks ahead in the globalized era. Tagore's views on nationalism are dictated by the immense importance he attributed to freedom in the broadest sense of the term. His attitude to politics and culture, nationalism and internationalism, tradition and modernity can all be seen in his strong belief of living and reasoning and freedom.

Vital and myriad changes have occurred in the world in over seven decades since the death of Tagore. Many of these changes have been profound in their impact. Thus, the world is now more integrated through globalization. The world as a whole has been said to become a 'flat earth' (Thomas Friedman's terminology) due to the massive technological developments in information technology, communications and transport. However, this economic growth has hardly reached hundreds of millions living in extreme poverty in the underdeveloped countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America as their development indicators of literacy, life expectancy and child mortality remain very low. Disparities among nations, and within nations, continue to be great. The spread of democracy and human rights have been uneven. Environmental degradation, climatic change, and international terrorism have emerged as major concerns.

Tagore is known to be proud of the age of science and technology during his times. However, even though he really valued the benefits of science, he agreed that it was not sufficient in itself. And that the hopes and desires of the humanity could be fulfilled only through a universalist and democratic framework. This gets us to his important views on humanism, culture, nationalism and internationalism which are as much important presently.

Nationalism in Tagore's words was "a great menace". Thus he described it as "a cruel epidemic of evil that is sweeping over the human world of the present age, and eating into its moral vitality." (Tagore 1917) Nationalism according to Tagore was an imported category from the west. It was not based on the spirit of social cooperation but on conflict and conquest. According to Tagore, imperialism was also a making of nationalism. Tagore was of the belief that the adoption of the western concept of nationalism by the Indians in their fight for freedom meant submitting to the outsiders yet again even though it promoted their cause for fighting against the imperial rule. Thus, Tagore while accepting and supporting the need for an anticolonial struggle

actually had rejected the modern notion of nationalism. It is interesting here to point it out that Tagore was also against the non-cooperation movement from the outset. He contended that the Indians should apply their energies in constructive efforts such as in the spread of education and social reforms rather than in such destructive activities such as burning of foreign cloth which were the hallmark of Swadeshi and non-cooperation. Also, according to Tagore, the boycott of British goods promoted under the non-cooperation meant rejecting everything that was western. Tagore urged the Indian people not to completely boycott everything western but to integrate the best of the west with their own values in order to be able to create a self-reliant country. Thus, he points out the difference between “constructive and destructive swadeshi” in his work *Ghaire-Bhaire* or “The Home and the World” which was written in the aftermath of the Swadeshi movement. (Radhakrishnan and Roychowdhury 2003)

Tagore had immense faith in human cooperation as the cure for individuals and for India. In his views, it was disunity and wealth from cooperation which is the cause of human poverty. He held that through cooperation, one could convert individual weakness into strength. He considered the idea of non-cooperation a path of negation. Alienating the west, he believed would result in “spiritual suicide” (Moolchand, 1989: 170). However, Gandhi refuted Tagore’s views by saying that the non-cooperation was not intended to erect a Chinese wall between India and the West, but pave the way for voluntary cooperation. He said that, “The non-cooperation struggle was against compulsory cooperation and against the armed imposition of the modern methods of exploitation” (Radhakrishnan and Roychowdhury 2003: 34).

Gandhi and Tagore were united in their thoughts and goals as they both wanted to see India as self-sufficient and independent by ending its dependence on the foreign rule. However, both of them differed in their methodology. Gandhi has been known to have encouraged the use of charkha which in his views would serve as an important role in letting India achieve self-realization (Sen 1997: 58). However, Tagore believed that use of charkha was economically not viable on large scale and it would only end up serving the purpose in partial ways and means. In his views, industrialisation was the need of the hour and foreign clothes represented better quality clothing which had no harm in itself so far as it catered to the needs of the Indian masses.

Thus, while Gandhi's advocacy of the indigenous spinning wheel or Charkha was evocative of his observance to indigenous or native ideas and institutions and his refusal of the Western civilization. For him, to wear foreign cloth was a sin and therefore burning of foreign cloth was a crucial part of the freedom movement. However, for Tagore, hand-spinning was only a form of another type of extremism. He asserted that Swaraj (home rule) couldn't be thought of in terms of adopting cheap clothing or apparel only, nor was it possible to have achieved Swaraj by involving everyone in spinning the wheel and burning the foreign cloth. Thus, in Tagore's views, spinning of charkha catered only to a small section of the market for high quality homespun fabric didn't sound feasible economically. In his views, hand spinning as a widespread activity could only be survived with the help of heavy government subsidies (Sen 1997: 58). And he was foresighted, rational and practical enough to foresee this. Also, being a great advocate of rationalism and liberalism, he also believed that hand-spinning was a drift away from modern industrialism, which India greatly required, and that over-emphasis on spinning wheel would promote superstition in place of science in economic matters. Thus for Tagore western ideas, particularly science and technology, were important for the development and revival of India's political and economic destiny.

Tagore's idea of internationalism is located in the interactions of the colonial and post-colonial, East and West, tradition and modernity and it contains the seeds of cosmopolitanism. Instead of pitting nationalism and cosmopolitanism against each other, Tagore shows how one grows out of the other. He sees colonialism as a two way process. In the context of the British colonialism in India, Tagore observes that on the one hand, "colonialism steers nationalism into becoming imperialistic, but on the other hand colonialism also presented a chance through which West came to be experienced by India and thereby introduced a channel of learning and exchange." (Bhattacharya 2009). For him, independence lay both in denunciation of imperialism and the retention of the channel of learning and exchange. It is in this double-move of Tagore that the roots of cosmopolitanism can be found. This aspect of exchange and interaction contained in colonial and post-colonial experience, indicate a cosmopolitan pattern inherent to it.

Thus Tagore can be seen as an open-minded thinker for whom the borders between countries, societies and cultures were but not good. He was a true humanist, believed in the unity of humankind. His whole philosophy can be linked to the globalization debate in the sense that while globalization

is also a process known for integrating societies, cultures, economies, where would actually Tagore stand in viewing Globalization in its present form. In the view of the author presented through an analysis of the thoughts of Tagore presented here in this paper, he would surely be in the favour of cross-cultural, global interactions and for inhibited openness among the nations but when it comes to problems of livelihood, inequality generated by globalization which is to look at the economic side of the phenomenon of globalization, definitely Tagore would not have supported the way globalization is being led by big corporations and according to the whims of international financial institutions and other big players to hijack its benefits.

Nehru and Globalization

Nehru being the one who shaped the Indian nation-state since it achieved its independence, one vital difference that accounts for between him and the two thinkers we discussed is that while the two had their thoughts on different issues on the personal sphere, Nehru's thoughts could also see their manifestation at the implementation level. Progress has been the creed of the thoughts of Jawaharlal Nehru. Progress in his conception was two-dimensional: while material welfare or economic development provided its one dimension, development of the human personality provided the other. For him, the two dimensions belonged together and were mutually concomitant. To Nehru, the problem of development was basically a problem of scientific orientation of the nation's attitudes and the progress of the country was not possible without training her population in rational models of thought. In his views, the Indian culture was rich but static and its social framework was oppressive and non-functional. Moreover, he was only modestly optimistic about India's economic and industrial resources, and was frightened at the rate at which some other countries of the world-notably the USA were consuming the limited resources of the world. He was also opposed to free enterprise as the dominant form of economic organisation, but at the same time did not approve of a fully-controlled economy. He chose to steer the middle-path, and adopted for his country the framework of a mixed economy. He further observed that "the strongest urge in the world today is that of social justice and equality.", and came to the conclusion that any social structure based on the possession of land and capital by a few with "the others living on the verge of existence" stood self-condemned and had to be changed (Nehru 1960:39)

For Jawaharlal Nehru, it was the need of every state to have a 'national philosophy' and a 'national ideology' in order to hold it together and give it

unity and a sense of direction and purpose. In his view, the need for such a philosophy was particularly great in a new country like India whose people were divided on religious, ethnic, linguistic and other grounds, and were economically undeveloped, socially static and politically inexperienced. (Parekh 1991) As such they desperately needed a shared public philosophy to unite them and provide them with a set of clearly defined 'goals' and 'objectives'. As India's first Prime Minister, he took it as one of his most important tasks to develop such a national philosophy. Like most nationalist leaders, Nehru was convinced that India had become deeply degenerated and turned the corner in the nineteenth century by comprehensively reorganizing themselves along the lines required by the modern industrial civilization. For Nehru 'modernisation was India's national philosophy and involved seven 'national goals', namely, national unity, parliamentary democracy, industrialisation, socialism, development of scientific temper, secularism and non-alignment. (Parekh 1991)

Thus, in sharp contrast to Gandhi, modernisation and scientific development were the crucial instruments through which Nehru wanted to shape India. He promoted industrialisation through heavy industries in India, but at the same time talked of protecting the cottage industries of the country. Unlike Gandhi, he saw the economic progress of India not through agriculture but through industries. But, certainly he never intended to ignore agriculture. Unlike Gandhi, he was convinced that India could not permanently eliminate poverty and satisfy the legitimate aspirations of its people without large-scale industrialisation. More importantly, the modern world was industrialised, and a country that failed to keep with it remained weak and vulnerable to foreign domination. As he put it: "It can hardly be challenged that, in the context of the modern world, no country can be politically and economically independent, even within the framework of international interdependence, unless it is highly industrialised and has developed its power resources to the utmost. Nor can it achieve or maintain high standards of living and liquidate poverty without the aid of modern technology in almost every sphere of life. An industrially backward country will continually upset the world's equilibrium and encourage the aggressive tendencies of more developed countries." For centuries India had remained scientifically and technologically primitive and carried on with its centuries old mode of production. That was why it fell an easy prey to industrialised Britain. Now that it had learned the 'painful lessons' of history, it must speedily 'catch up' with the advanced western nations." (Nehru 1985)

Thus, Nehru was all for the scientific and industrial growth in India, however he was also a leader from the third world who championed their cause and struggle against imperialist tendencies of the west, he also stood as a doyen of south-south cooperation. Despite the inconsistencies cited by his critiques in his critiques in his thoughts and action, Nehru was no doubt the architect of modern India. Though it is very difficult to predict if he would support the LPG reforms in India or India ushering into globalization era because it was something which was the demand of that time, but certainly he would have stood firmly for the kinds of dilemma and problems the process of globalization has generated for the people and countries at the marginalia.

Thus, this paper attempted to look at the modern Indian thinking tradition through the prism of globalization, thus looking back at the issues addressed by three of the most influential and internationalist thinkers of modern India and linking their major thoughts to the contemporary debates on globalization.

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