



Tagore's Gitanjali and Gandhian Philosophy vs. Narendra Modi's Ideology: A Comparative Study of Humanism, Nationalism, and Cultural Politics

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Abstract

This Paper examines humanism, nationalism, and cultural politics to analyze Gandhian philosophy, Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali, and Narendra Modi's ideology. The profoundly spiritual and humanist perspective presented in Tagore's Gitanjali places a strong emphasis on moral freedom, individual dignity, and universal brotherhood. Gandhi's philosophy is based on ethical universalism, self-control, nonviolence, and a moral understanding of nationhood, even though it differs from Tagore's. On the other hand, a majoritarian kind of cultural politics, national-populism, and Hindu nationalism are all intimately associated with Modi's political worldview. The study contends that these three viewpoints reflect various conceptions of India: as a political-cultural nation structured around aggressive majoritarian nationalism, as a moral society based on nonviolence, and as an ethical-spiritual civilization. Gandhi's philosophy and Gitanjali's are similar in their moral seriousness, but they emphasize different things. Gandhi focuses on social action, discipline, and collective transformation, whereas Tagore looks inward toward spiritual freedom and universal humanity. To put it simply, Gandhi asks how society becomes just, while Tagore asks how the soul becomes free.

This paper compares and contrasts the political philosophies of Narendra Modi and Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali. It contends that Modi's worldview is more strongly linked to Hindu nationalism, cultural assertion, and state-centered nation-building, whereas Tagore's vision is based on universal humanism, spiritual inwardness, and resistance to narrow nationalism. Both have prominent places in contemporary Indian public discourse, but they reflect radically different conceptions of India, identity, and moral community, making the comparison noteworthy. The study demonstrates that while Modi's politics prioritize collective identification, civilizational pride, and political consolidation, Gitanjali presents a global and ethical view of the person.

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Introduction

Gandhi and Modi both play significant roles in the public discourse of modern India, but the comparison is remarkable since they represent drastically different ideas about India, identity, and moral community. The analysis shows that Gitanjali offers a global and moral perspective on the individual, but Modi's policies place a higher priority on collective identification, civilizational pride, and political consolidation. Gitanjali represents a broad humanism that cuts over national and religious divides, but it is not a political statement. In contrast, Modi's philosophy is frequently defined in terms of populist mobilization, Hindu nationalism, and the cultural-majoritarian reinterpretation of national identity.

When these three frameworks are compared, different perspectives of the individual, society, and country are revealed. Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva, which aims to construct India's political identity through a Hindu civilizational lens, is frequently addressed in relation to Narendra Modi's political ideology. This project, according to analysts, combines strong central leadership, national pride, and electoral populism. This approach views the nation as a more cohesive cultural and political structure rather than as a plural ethical space.

This ideological posture has also been linked to the mainstreaming of Hindu nationalism in Indian politics over the last decade. Modi's public rhetoric often emphasizes development, cultural confidence, and civilizational resurgence, which aligns with the broader ambitions of right-wing populist politics. Such an ideology differs fundamentally from Tagore's universalist imagination, which was suspicious of cultural exclusivity and mass political fervor.

Objectives

1. To examine Tagore's Gitanjali's humanist worldview.
2. To investigate Gandhian philosophy's ethical nationalism.
3. To examine Narendra Modi's ideological stance on cultural politics and nationalism.
4. To contrast the three viewpoints on Indian identity and public life.

Research Questions

1. In what ways does Gitanjali embody Tagore's humanism?
2. How does Gandhi's ideology relate to or diverge from Tagore's vision?
3. How is Modi's philosophy presented in current nationalism and cultural politics scholarship?
4. What do these viewpoints imply about evolving perceptions of India?

Methodology

This research paper employs a comparative and interpretive approach grounded in conceptual and textual analysis. Gandhi's thoughts are seen as ethical-political thought, whereas Tagore's Gitanjali is read as a literary-philosophical work. Recent research on ethnic democracy and Hindu nationalism examines Modi's philosophy. Secondary sources from political theory, literary criticism, and cultural studies are used in this study. Gitanjali is one of Rabindranath Tagore's most well-known works, known around the world for its spiritual intensity and lyrical depth. Tagore is still regarded as one of the most important voices in contemporary Indian literature. On the other hand, Narendra Modi is a modern politician whose leadership has been strongly linked to majoritarianism and Hindu nationalism. A comparative analysis of these two individuals is worthwhile not because their roles or genres are immediately comparable, but rather because they both significantly influence Indian conceptions. In addition to being a devotional work, Tagore's Gitanjali is a philosophical reflection on freedom, humility, surrender, and the connection between the limited self and the infinite.

According to significant political studies, Modi's ideology is based on an assertive cultural politics focused on Hindu identity, national-populist mobilization, and Hindutva. The differences between these two frameworks' conceptions of nation, religion, individual freedom, and the role of the state are examined in this essay.

Discussion

Tagore's Vision in Gitanjali

The worldview presented in Tagore's Gitanjali holds that spiritual openness, as opposed to political dominance, is how people find meaning in life. The poems place a strong emphasis on humility, introspection, and an intimate rather than sectarian relationship with God. Rigid borders, whether religious, cultural, or nationalist, are continually challenged by Tagore's literary and philosophical endeavors. According to academic interpretations of Tagore's nationalism, he was against forceful and exclusive nationalism. The idea that human dignity must transcend political extremism and tribal identity is the foundation of his larger humanism. This vision manifests itself in Gitanjali through recurrent themes of humanity's unity, spiritual freedom, submission, and service.

Shared ground - Humanism

Truth, simplicity, self-control, and moral courage were important to both thinkers. Additionally, they disapproved of meaningless materialism and held that morality, not just comfort or power, should be the driving force behind human existence. Gitanjali and Gandhian philosophy are similar in that they both emphasize the importance of inner character over external achievement. In Gitanjali, Tagore's humanism places a strong emphasis on individual dignity, compassion, and spiritual unity. Gandhi's humanism is pragmatic and moral, with a focus on self-control, nonviolence, and service. According to academics, Modi's ideology is more politically identity-driven and less universalist. The way that Gitanjali and Modi's ideologies handle nationalism is one of their most obvious differences. Tagore frequently cautioned against narrow nationalism, viewing it as a force that might exacerbate isolation and reduce people to categories. According to Tagore, the greatest allegiance is to truth, beauty, and humanity rather than to a state or a religious community.

In contrast, Modi's policies have been seen as a kind of majoritarian nationalism that aims to strengthen India's civilizational narrative. According to this vision, national identity serves as a catalyst for public mobilization and political consolidation. Thus, the distinction is conceptual rather than merely stylistic. Modi's philosophy centers political life around the nation and culture, but Tagore distrusts the nation when it becomes an idol.

Tagore's humanism in *Gitanjali* is rooted in the belief that divinity is experienced through the human spirit, humility, love, and service. His vision is inclusive and universal, placing emphasis on the inner moral life rather than external displays of power or identity. Gandhi also promoted a form of humanism, but his was more ascetic and disciplined, tied to truth, nonviolence, and social reform. Modi's ideology, as described in recent scholarship, is less centered on universal

humanism and more on political mobilization through identity, development, and majoritarian consolidation.

Nationalism

Tagore favored a more expansive cultural and human community and was harshly critical of limited nationalism. Modi's nationalism, on the other hand, is frequently tied to Hindu majoritarianism and "civilizational" identity, in which the country is intimately associated with a dominating cultural group. This represents a substantial divergence from both Gandhi's ethical pluralism and Tagore's universalism. Tagore was critical of narrow nationalism and valued a broader human community. Gandhi only backed nationalism as long as it was inclusive and morally sound. In scholarly discourse, Modi's nationalism is frequently linked to Hindu majoritarianism and civilizational rhetoric. Aggressive nationalism alarmed Tagore, who thought blind nationalism could erode human values. Modi, by contrast, has been widely associated with a more assertive nationalism that emphasizes pride, civilizational memory, and a stronger central political identity. That makes Tagore's imagination more universal and Modi's more ideological and strategic in political terms.

On Freedom

According to Tagore, freedom is mostly internal, encompassing freedom of thinking, imagination, and spiritual self-realization. Gandhi believed that freedom was both internal and external; self-mastery must result in moral public behavior, community elevation, and altruism. Therefore, Modi views liberty as pragmatic and reformist, whereas Tagore views liberty as lyrical and universal. According to Tagore's *Gitanjali*, freedom is inner liberation—the ability to feel, think, create, and connect with the divine fearlessly. Sincerity, not power, is the foundation of this truly moral freedom. In this way, Tagore's self is spiritually receptive, open, and vulnerable. In contrast, Modi's philosophy places a higher value on political efficacy, discipline, and group strength. The self is less central than the nation, and personal freedom is often framed through the lens of collective prosperity, order, and pride. This creates a sharp distinction between Tagore's inward ethical freedom and Modi's outward political mobilization. *Gitanjali* and Narendra Modi's ideology stand in sharp contrast: Tagore's vision is universal, inward-looking, and humanist, while Modi's political project is often associated with Hindu nationalism, majoritarian identity, and strong state-centered nation-building. In one sentence, Tagore seeks the freedom of the soul; Modi's ideology seeks the power and cohesion of the nation.

Cultural Politics

A cultural politics of introspection, spiritual liberation, and aesthetic universality can be seen in Tagore's *Gitanjali*. Gandhi's cultural politics connected culture to daily life and social duty by emphasizing simplicity, self-control, local production, and ethical transformation. The literature that is currently accessible indicates that Modi's cultural politics are more overtly assertive and strongly associated with media projection, institutional authority, and the symbolic elevation of Hindu identity. These variations demonstrate the diversity of cultural politics in India, which might include majoritarian

cultural assertion, moral nationalism, and spiritual humanism. Tagore's cultural politics are universal, spiritual, and artistic. Gandhi associated culture with moral change, local self-sufficiency, and ethical living. Many people characterize Modi's cultural politics as more forceful, symbolic, and state-centered.

Religion and Public Life

Spirituality in *Gitanjali* is both profoundly individual and universal. Tagore views religion as an inward route to moral and emotional wholeness rather than reducing it to ritual or collective identification. Because of this, his poetry transcends cultural and theological barriers. However, the public declaration of Hindu identity is frequently linked to Modi's political philosophy. This gives religion and culture a clearly political function, even though it does not necessarily abolish other aspects of governance. Modi's philosophy has been interpreted as one in which religion supports political identity and nation-building, in contrast to Tagore's expansive spiritual humanism. Aggressive nationalism alarmed Tagore, who thought blind nationalism could erode human values. Modi, by contrast, has been widely associated with a more assertive nationalism that emphasizes pride, civilizational memory, and a stronger central political identity. That makes Tagore's imagination more universal and Modi's more ideological and strategic in political terms. While Modi's politics are typically interpreted through growth, discipline, and mass political mobilization, Tagore's philosophy emphasizes creativity, transparency, and the dignity of the person. Modi's concerns are more administrative, electoral, and state-driven than Tagore's, which are ethical and civilizational in a wide human sense. For this reason, the two represent quite distinct perspectives on India's future.

Comparative Analysis or Overall Contrast

Gandhi's vision is more social and community-focused, whereas Tagore's is more individualistic and global. Gandhi thought nationalism might be a force for liberation if it was defined by nonviolence and self-reliance, but Tagore disliked limiting nationalism and desired a more expansive humanism. While Gandhi emphasized responsibility, discipline, and constructive social activity, Tagore also placed a high value on artistic life and creative freedom. In Indian thought, Tagore and Gandhi are frequently viewed as opposing but complementing voices, with Gandhi standing for moral activity and rigorous public ethics and Tagore for cultural and artistic universalism. Their philosophy emphasizes plurality, self-criticism, and ethical responsibility rather than reducing India to a single identity or community. Modi's ideology, by contrast, is widely analysed as centralizing power and redefining the nation through a more singular cultural frame.

Tagore's vision is more global and personal, while Gandhi's is more social and community-oriented. Gandhi believed that nationalism might be a liberating force provided it was characterized by self-reliance and nonviolence, whereas Tagore preferred a more expansive humanism and disapproved of restrictive nationalism. Gandhi stressed accountability, self-control, and positive social interaction, while Tagore also valued artistic life and creative

freedom. Gandhi and Tagore are often seen as complementary but competing voices in Indian thinking, with Tagore representing cultural and artistic universalism and Gandhi representing moral action and strict public ethics. Instead of reducing India to a single identity or community, their philosophy places an emphasis on plurality, self-criticism, and ethical responsibility.

Education, Culture, and Society

Gandhi favored education linked to work, independence, and moral instruction, but Tagore saw education as a place for creativity, worldliness, and holistic development. This contrast reflected their broader ideologies: Gandhi valued discipline and societal reconstruction, whereas Tagore valued openness and cross-cultural interaction. However, both desired education to improve people rather than just make them more prosperous. According to R.N. Tagore, education fosters creativity, global awareness, and holistic growth. He saw education as a process of mental liberation and was against limited and mechanistic forms of learning. This approach echoes Gitanjali's broader philosophy, which holds that self-refinement is the key to understanding life. According to recent analysis, Modi's ideological framework tends to place a strong emphasis on discipline, development, national pride, and cultural reorientation. This orientation reflects the larger spirit of *Gitanjali*, where life is understood through refinement of the self. Modi's ideological framework, as discussed in contemporary analyses, tends to emphasize discipline, development, national pride, and cultural reorientation. Education in such a framework is more likely to be linked to social utility, political identity, or civilizational confidence than to Tagore's cosmopolitan ideal. The contrast reveals two different conceptions of what a society should produce: reflective human beings in Tagore, and assertive national citizens in Modi's politics.

Critical Evaluation or Overall view

Therefore, the ideologies of Gandhi and Gitanjali are complementing tensions within contemporary Indian thought rather than antagonists. Gandhi reminds us that morals must influence society, while Tagore reminds us that humanity cannot lose its spirit. When read in tandem, they present a more complete picture of both external duty and inward freedom. From a critical perspective, Tagore stands for an aesthetic and moral ideal that defies simplicity. His *Gitanjali* is still relevant today because it challenges the reader to look beyond identity politics, fear, and dogma. In contrast, Modi's ideology is more challenged intellectually because it is linked to issues of governmental centralization, cultural dominance, and majoritarianism, yet it is effective as a political mobilization tool. This does not imply that a polemical comparison should be made. Rather, it should be understood as a study in contrasting intellectual histories: Tagore belongs to the tradition of universal humanism, while Modi belongs to contemporary nationalist politics. Their difference shows how Indian thought today continues to oscillate between openness and assertion, compassion and consolidation, universality and identity.

Conclusion

The ideological differences between Gitanjali and Narendra Modi are essentially a difference between political nationalism and humanism. While Modi's political goal prioritizes national power, majoritarian consolidation, and civilizational pride, Tagore wants inner freedom, global fellowship, and resistance to limiting identification. When read together, they shed light on India's two distinct moral conceptions. Three different forms of Indian public imagination can be found by comparing Gitanjali, Gandhian philosophy, and Modi's ideology. Tagore presents a spiritual and humanitarian perspective on universality. Gandhi presents a moral-national vision based on self-control and nonviolence. According to current research, Modi's ideology incorporates populist and Hindu nationalist inclinations that transform cultural politics in a more majoritarian manner. In the contemporary moment, Tagore remains a corrective to the dangers of exclusionary politics, while Modi represents a powerful current in the politics of collective identity. A serious scholarly engagement with both is necessary to understand modern Indian public life. But if the question is one of philosophical direction, *Gitanjali* points toward the universal human spirit, whereas Modi's ideology points toward the political nation. The ideological differences between Gitanjali and Narendra Modi are essentially a difference between political nationalism and humanism. While Modi's political goal prioritizes national power, majoritarian consolidation, and civilizational pride, Tagore wants inner freedom, global fellowship, and resistance to limiting identification. When read together, they shed light on India's two distinct moral conceptions. Three different forms of Indian public imagination can be found by comparing Gitanjali, Gandhian philosophy, and Modi's ideology. Tagore presents a spiritual and humanitarian perspective on universality. Gandhi presents a moral-national vision based on self-control and nonviolence. According to current research, Modi's ideology incorporates populist and Hindu nationalist inclinations that transform cultural politics in a more majoritarian manner. When combined, these frameworks shed light on the conflict that exists in contemporary India between forceful cultural nationalism and plural humanism.

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