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Q2

What was the difference between Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore in their approach towards education and nationalism?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · GS I · 10 marks · The Freedom Struggle

The Freedom Struggle - its various stages and important contributors / contributions from different parts of the country.

Core demand of the question

- What was the difference between **Mahatma Gandhi** and **Rabindranath Tagore** in their approach towards education and nationalism?
- Treat education and nationalism as two linked parts of one comparison

Revision summary

Gandhi's Wardha scheme of 1937 put mother tongue, craft, and character at the centre of schooling.

Tagore's Santiniketan and Visva-Bharati put nature, art, and world learning at the centre.

Gandhi's nationalism was mass satyagraha and village swaraj.

Tagore's nationalism was freedom without the cult of the nation.

Both opposed colonial rule; they split on industrial civilisation and on how open India should stay.

Introduction

Gandhi and **Tagore** both rejected colonial schooling that produced clerks, and both wanted a free India. They differed on what a school should teach and on how far the nation should close itself against the world.

Body

Education

- **Gandhi's** Nai Talim, stated at Wardha in 1937, made the mother tongue, a productive craft, and character the centre of the school.
- He wanted learning to serve the village, the spinning wheel, and swaraj as self-rule in daily work, not only in exams.
- **Tagore** founded Santiniketan and Visva-Bharati in 1921 as an open ashram of art, nature, and world literature rather than a craft mill.
- He criticised rote, fear, and the prison of the classroom, and he wanted the child to meet many cultures, not only the local trade.
- **Gandhi** feared that English and city colleges would cut the mass of Indians from their own life; **Tagore** feared that a narrow craft school would cut India from science and the world.

Nationalism

- **Gandhi**'s nationalism was mass satyagraha, the constructive programme, khadi, and **Hind Swaraj (1909)**, which treated modern industrial civilisation as a moral problem.
- He accepted the nation as a field of duty and used Hindu-Muslim unity and village India as its social base.
- **Tagore** warned against the cult of the nation in lectures such as **Nationalism (1917)** and in his debate with **Gandhi** after Non-Cooperation.
- He opposed the burning of foreign cloth when it became hatred of the foreigner, and he wanted India to be a meeting place of civilisations.
- Both wanted freedom from British rule; **Gandhi** organised the nation as a moral army, while **Tagore** wanted freedom without making the nation an idol.

How the two differences join

- A craft-centred school fitted **Gandhi**'s village nation; a world university fitted **Tagore**'s universal humanism.
- The difference is of emphasis, not of loyalty, because both criticised colonial power and both loved the Indian poor.

Flow diagram

Gandhi -> Nai Talim craft village
Gandhi -> Satyagraha khadi swaraj
Tagore -> Santiniketan Visva-Bharati
Tagore -> World humanism
Satyagraha khadi swaraj -> Different nation idea
World humanism -> Different nation idea

Conclusion

Gandhi tied education to craft, village, and mass swaraj; **Tagore** tied it to art, freedom, and the world. Indian public life still needs both the constructive village programme and the warning against a closed nationalism.

Facts & figures

Nai Talim / Wardha, 1937

Gandhi's basic education plan of mother-tongue schooling around a productive craft.

Visva-Bharati, 1921

University at Santiniketan founded by **Tagore** as a world centre of learning and the arts.

Hind Swaraj, 1909

Gandhi's text that criticised modern industrial civilisation and set out swaraj as moral self-rule.

Nationalism, 1917

Tagore's lectures warning that the nation as a cult can crush the person and the world.

Non-Cooperation debate

Tagore questioned the burning of foreign cloth and the mood of rejection; **Gandhi** defended non-cooperation as discipline, not hatred.

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