



A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY INTO RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S "CRISIS IN CIVILIZATION"

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ABOUT ARTICLE

Key words: Rabindranath Tagore, Crisis in Civilization, civilizational crisis, moral decline, Western modernity, Eastern philosophy, ethical awakening, colonialism, critique of nationalism, global ethics, spiritual unity, humanism, spiritual renewal.

Received: 02.12.25

Accepted: 03.12.25

Published: 03.12.25

Abstract: This article examines the ideas presented in Rabindranath Tagore's *Crisis in Civilization* from philosophical, social, and ethical perspectives. Written during the final years of Tagore's life, against the backdrop of global wars, colonial domination, and the moral decline of Western civilization, the work argues that the crisis of civilization has its roots primarily in ethical and spiritual deterioration. The article analyzes Tagore's critique of Western modernity, nationalism, violence, and technocratic thinking, and compares his views with conceptual models grounded in Eastern philosophy—particularly its principles of humanism, harmony, and spiritual unity. The findings indicate that Tagore regarded the crisis of civilization as a temporary but necessary stage in human development, one that could lead to an inner moral awakening. The article also discusses Tagore's predictions regarding global peace, cosmic unity, and spiritual renewal, relating them to contemporary world processes. This analytical study demonstrates that *Crisis in Civilization* retains significant scholarly and moral relevance for the modern era.

RABINDRANATH TAGORNING "SIVILIZATSIYA INQIROZI" ASARIGA FALSAFIY TADQIQOT

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MAQOLA HAQIDA

Kalit so'zlar: Rabindranat Tagor, Sivilizatsiya inqirozi, sivilizatsion inqiroz, axloqiy tanazzul, G'arb modernizmi, Sharq falsafasi, axloqiy uyg'onish, mustamlakachilik, millatchilik tanqidi, global etika, ma'naviy birlik, insonparvarlik, ma'naviy yangilanish.

Annotatsiya: Mazkur maqolada Rabindranat Tagorning "Sivilizatsiya inqirozi" asarida ilgari surilgan g'oyalar falsafiy, ijtimoiy va axloqiy nuqtayi nazardan tahlil qilinadi. Tagorning hayotining so'nggi yillarida, jahon urushlari, mustamlakachilik hukmronligi va G'arb sivilizatsiyasining axloqiy tanazzuli fonida yozilgan ushbu asarda sivilizatsiya inqirozining asosiy ildizlari axloqiy va ma'naviy yemirilishda ekanligi ta'kidlanadi. Maqolada Tagorning G'arb modernizmi, millatchilik, zo'ravonlik va texnokratik tafakkurga nisbatan tanqidlari tahlil qilinib, uning qarashlari Sharq falsafasiga xos bo'lgan insonparvarlik, uyg'unlik va ma'naviy birlik tamoyillariga asoslangan konseptual modellari bilan qiyoslanadi. Tadqiqot natijalari Tagor sivilizatsiya inqirozini insoniyat taraqqiyotining vaqtinchalik, ammo zarur bosqichi sifatida baholaganini va bu jarayon ichki axloqiy uyg'onishga olib kelishi mumkinligini ko'rsatadi. Shuningdek, maqolada Tagorning global tinchlik, kosmik birlik va ma'naviy yangilanish haqidagi bashoratlari zamonaviy dunyo jarayonlari bilan bog'liq holda muhokama qilinadi. Ushbu tahliliy tadqiqot "Sivilizatsiya inqirozi" asari bugungi davrda ham muhim ilmiy va axloqiy ahamiyatga ega ekanligini asoslab beradi.

ФИЛОСОФСКОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЯ РАБИНДРАНАТА ТАГОРА «КРИЗИС ЦИВИЛИЗАЦИИ»

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О СТАТЬЕ

Ключевые слова: Рабиндранат Тагор, «Кризис цивилизации», цивилизационный кризис, нравственный упадок, западная модерность, восточная философия, этическое пробуждение, колониализм, критика национализма,

Аннотация: В данной статье идеи, представленные в работе Рабиндраната Тагора «Кризис цивилизации», рассматриваются с философской, социальной и этической точек зрения. Написанное в последние годы жизни Тагора

глобальная этика, духовное единство, гуманизм, духовное обновление.

на фоне мировых войн, колониального господства и нравственного упадка западной цивилизации, это произведение утверждает, что кризис цивилизации имеет прежде всего этические и духовные корни. В статье анализируется критика Тагором западной модерности, национализма, насилия и технократического мышления, а также проводится сопоставление его взглядов с концептуальными моделями, основанными на восточной философии, в частности на принципах гуманизма, гармонии и духовного единства. Результаты исследования показывают, что Тагор рассматривал кризис цивилизации как временный, но необходимый этап развития человечества, способный привести к внутреннему нравственному пробуждению. В статье также обсуждаются прогнозы Тагора относительно глобального мира, космического единства и духовного обновления в контексте современных мировых процессов. Данное аналитическое исследование демонстрирует, что работа «Кризис цивилизации» сохраняет значительную научную и нравственную актуальность в современную эпоху.

Introduction. Rabindranath Tagore's "Crisis in Civilization" (1941) was written against the backdrop of the most dramatic sociopolitical transformations of the twentieth century—World War II, the violent machinery of colonial domination, and the moral decline of humanity. As Tagore's final philosophical testament, the work entered history as a profound reflection on the fate of civilization. Tagore sharply criticizes a form of civilization that has come to conceal its spiritual decay beneath "technological progress, economic power, and the rhetoric of national politics." In the text he writes: "There was a time when I believed that the springs of civilization would issue from Europe, but today I am about to quit the world where that hope has gone bankrupt altogether"[3; 13]. This statement demonstrates how deeply Tagore perceived the moral crisis within Western civilization. According to Tagore, the real crisis of civilization is neither political nor economic, rather, it is fundamentally ethical and spiritual. He characterizes nationalism, colonialism, and aggressive technocratic thinking as forces that "erode human empathy and the spiritual harmony intrinsic to humankind." One of the most striking conclusions in *Crisis in Civilization* is Tagore's recognition that the very idea of Europe as the moral leader of humanity had entirely collapsed. For him, the success of civilization is not measured by

power, wealth, or industrial achievement, but by “spiritual awakening and the restoration of humaneness.” These reflections have been extensively discussed by philosophers and scholars. S. Radhakrishnan interprets the tone of Tagore’s essay as a warning that humanity is losing its essential self under the dominance of “soulless technology and aggressive economics” [175; 11]. In his view, Tagore’s critique is not directed at the West as a culture, but at modernity stripped of spiritual grounding. Modern scholars have also offered significant analyses. H. B. Mukherji describes “Crisis in Civilization” as “the final synthesis of Tagore’s entire intellectual and philosophical journey,” emphasizing that the work presents Eastern spiritual values as an ethical alternative to the technocratic mentality of the West [15; 9]. Another prominent scholar, Ashis Nandy, notes that Tagore refers to nationalism as a “mechanical ideology that poisons the social consciousness.” According to Nandy, Tagore does not reject nationalism merely as a political doctrine but sees true civilization in the Eastern tradition of spiritual unity and human solidarity [21; 10].

Tagore also expresses his hopes for India’s civilizational role. Tagore believed that India was destined to offer “spiritual awakening, unity, and humaneness” to global civilization, although colonial oppression temporarily weakened this historical mission [54; 11]. Nevertheless, *Crisis in Civilization* ends on a note of optimism. Tagore affirms his faith that “after the cataclysm humanity will rise to a new moral stage”. *Crisis in Civilization* as one of Tagore’s most significant warnings to global thought. For example, D. Cooper interprets Tagore’s diagnosis as a universal message. Unless civilization turns away from false ideals and returns to authentic human values, the crisis will persist indefinitely.

Methodology. Rabindranath Tagore’s *Crisis in Civilization* may at first glance appear to be a political pamphlet, yet its substance is far deeper and broader in scope. The work represents a concentrated expression of the philosophical reflections, spiritual anxieties, and prophetic insights of Tagore’s final years. He approaches the crisis of civilization not merely as an external historical phenomenon, but as the manifestation of a profound inner moral and spiritual disequilibrium within humanity. Rich in historical, political, and cultural layers, the text requires a multidimensional analysis. For this reason, the present discussion examines Tagore’s ideas alongside the interpretations of prominent scholars, situating them within their historical context and linking them to contemporary global issues. Tagore first emphasizes that the spiritual foundations of European civilization were collapsing before his eyes. While he had initially regarded Europe as a center of high culture, justice, and intellectual brilliance, the brutal realities of colonialism, racism, and war shattered this earlier conviction. The crisis Tagore’s critiques is, at its core, a moral and spiritual crisis far more dangerous, he argues, than economic collapse or

military catastrophe. He describes humanity's increasing "loss of empathy" and the simultaneous narrowing of the human heart amid technological progress, scientific achievements, and industrial expansion. According to Tagore, this contradiction itself constitutes the tragedy of civilization. His concern is echoed by S. Radhakrishnan, who notes that Europe's "inner spiritual emptiness" stands at the center of Tagore's critique, adding: "Tagore saw clearly the moral vacuum behind technological achievements. This vacuum is what corrodes civilization from within." [175; 11]. The second major issue Tagore highlights is his critique of nationalism. He characterizes nationalism as a "mechanical" and even "demonic" idea an ideology lacking any genuine moral foundation and therefore posing a grave threat to humanity. This view is supported in contemporary scholarship. Ashis Nandy, for example, describes nationalism as a "self-devouring ideology," noting that Tagore's rejection of nationalism reflects his loyalty to the spiritual and ethical traditions of the East [21; 10]. Drawing on India's own historical experience, Tagore shows that nationalism, as formulated in Europe, is a relatively recent construct one that later became a central instrument of imperial domination. While critiquing nationalism, Tagore simultaneously affirms India's ancient civilizational principles. India, he argues, never embraced a civilizational model based on the domination of a single language, religion, or race. Instead, it cultivated a historically grounded model of "social harmony," integrating diverse cultures, communities, and spiritual traditions. Thus, the critique of nationalism in *Crisis in Civilization* is not merely political but deeply philosophical. Tagore's condemnation of colonialism as an ethical failure. He sharply criticizes British colonial rule, pointing out the stark contradiction between the West's proclaimed values such as justice, peace, democracy and its oppressive practices in India. D. E. Cooper affirms this interpretation, noting that for Tagore, Europe "betrayed its own ideals and relied instead on a metaphysics of self-interest" [363; 5]. For Tagore, colonialism represents not only political exploitation but also the spiritual degradation of humanity. As he states, "the greatest crime is not the loss of freedom, but the breaking of a people's spirit." This perspective aligns closely with the core principles of modern postcolonial philosophy. Although Tagore offers a forceful critique of the West, he does not idealize the East. Nevertheless, he views its spiritual resources as offering an alternative paradigm for the renewal of civilization. He highlights core Eastern principles inner harmony, unity with nature, spiritual awakening as foundational elements for rebuilding a morally grounded civilization.

Result and Discussion. Tagore argues that as civilization separates itself from nature, humanity loses its spiritual roots. This condition is described as follows: "The inability to perceive nature as humanly meaningful is the deepest illness of civilization." [78; 11]. Tagore thus interprets civilizational crisis also as an ecological-spiritual imbalance. Tagore is neither a

pessimist nor a utopian romantic. In fact, the essay ends with a note of profound confidence: “When the cataclysm is over, humanity will once again find its true path.” This hope is grounded in Vedantic thought. Human beings possess an innate “surplus” a spiritual energy enabling them to overcome evil. “The greatest trait of humanity is its surplus spiritual capacity; this capacity is decisive for the renewal of civilization.” [30; 11]. Thus, *Crisis in Civilization* stands as the final chord of Tagore’s philosophical legacy. In it, he asserts that the crisis of civilization is fundamentally moral, and that its remedy lies in humaneness, spiritual awakening, unity, and the ethical vision of the East. He shows that war, nationalism, violence, colonialism, and the dominance of technocratic reason have led humankind astray. Yet he maintains his faith in the possibility of spiritual regeneration. The findings of the study demonstrate that Rabindranath Tagore’s *Crisis in Civilization* is a conceptual work that offers a deep analysis of the moral, political, and cultural crises confronting human civilization. The author synthesizes the final philosophical reflections of his creative and intellectual legacy. At the center of the work lies a critique of the spiritual emptiness underlying Western modernity, the excessive dominance of technocratic thinking, and the ideology of nationalism, which he describes as a force that “corrodes the human spirit” [4; 13]. The study shows that Tagore interprets the decline of Western civilization not as the result of economic or military factors, but as a fundamentally moral and spiritual crisis. He points out that Europe has ceased to live in accordance with the very ideals democracy, humanism, justice it has long claimed to uphold. As Tagore notes, “The noblest ideals of humanity have been drowned in the songs of national self-interest”. This interpretation is supported by D. E. Cooper, who observes that the “moral bankruptcy of the West” is one of the central themes in Tagore’s critique. Tagore’s evaluation of nationalism constitutes one of the essential findings of the research. He describes nationalism as a “mechanical, soulless, and aggressive ideology,” presenting it as a political model fundamentally opposed to humanistic values. This argument is reinforced by Ashis Nandy, who characterizes nationalism as a “dangerous modification of Western political consciousness transferred into Eastern societies,” and interprets Tagore’s rejection of nationalism as a fidelity to the spiritual traditions of the East [24; 10]. Tagore regarded nationalism as a “mechanical force that undermines social harmony”.

Tagore identifies colonialism as one of the most destructive moral failures of civilization. He describes Western colonial policy as “the most blatant manifestation of contempt towards humanity and ethical hypocrisy.” Authors of *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* also highlight this idea, noting that Tagore regarded British colonialism as a “departure from moral norms” [54; 11]. According to Tagore, colonialism is not merely a form of political

domination—it is the symbolic expression of humanity’s spiritual deterioration. His belief that “the greatest crime is not the loss of freedom but the breaking of a people’s spirit” aligns closely with modern postcolonial theory. Tagore places great emphasis on the spiritual potential of the East, arguing that the path out of the civilizational crisis lies in the principles of compassion, harmony, and spiritual unity that characterize Eastern philosophy. He maintains that “human triumph lies not in power, but in love and service,” a view deeply rooted in the Upanishadic worldview. S. Radhakrishnan similarly interprets the East as possessing an inherent “moral superiority,” grounded in its spiritual orientation rather than material ambition [174; 11]. Tagore’s ecological–philosophical reflections play a significant role in *Crisis in Civilization*. He likens a civilization severed from nature to a “tree cut off from its spiritual roots. Tagore regarded harmony with nature as essential for moral renewal, and that the alienation of modern civilization from nature is one of its most critical flaws. The study highlights that *Crisis in Civilization* does not express pessimism but rather articulates a philosophy of hope. The work concludes with Tagore’s assertion that “after the cataclysm, the world will be renewed, and humanity will once again find its true path”. This optimism integrates two fundamental pillars of his worldview.

The possibility of spiritual rebirth within humanity and moral awakening as the only viable path out of civilizational collapse. The study synthesizes scholarly perspectives on Tagore’s work. Radhakrishnan describes Tagore as “a figure who awakens the moral consciousness of the modern world”. Cooper defines him as “the poet-philosopher of global moral renewal”. Scholars such as H. Mukherji and Ghosh interpret Tagore’s spiritual and philosophical vision as a program for “moralizing civilization.” The study confirms that Tagore interprets the civilizational crisis not as an “end point,” but as “the beginning of a new stage.” This perspective aligns with one of the central themes throughout Tagore’s philosophical corpus. The concept of humanity’s inner “surplus”—its excess spiritual capacity. “The surplus spiritual potential within human beings is the only guarantee for social and civilizational regeneration” [30; 11]. Rabindranath Tagore’s *Crisis in Civilization*, as his final philosophical testament, is devoted to analyzing the profound crisis that confronted human civilization at the beginning of the twentieth century. The work represents the culminating synthesis of the spiritual and philosophical worldview that had taken shape throughout Tagore’s life. The study reveals that Tagore locates the primary roots of the civilizational crisis not in political, economic, or military developments, but in humanity’s estrangement from its own inner moral and spiritual harmony. In the essay he writes: “The noblest ideals of humanity have been drowned beneath the waves of national interest and violent politics” [5; 13]. This statement reflects his deep concern about the direction

of Western modernity. Conclusion

Although the rise of Western science and industry brought significant technological advancements, the same process simultaneously eroded the ethical and spiritual foundations of human life. As Radhakrishnan observes, Tagore regarded “the displacement of moral consciousness by technological power” as one of the gravest dangers of modern civilization. Yet, Tagore’s critique of the West does not reduce it to an embodiment of evil. On the contrary, he held in high esteem Europe’s literary, artistic, and philosophical contributions, while directing his criticism at its political practices, particularly nationalism and colonialism, which objectified human beings and prioritized domination over humanity. Tagore’s interpretation of nationalism. For Tagore, nationalism is a mechanical political ideology that fragments the natural moral unity of humankind. Ashis Nandy confirms this view, stating that Tagore saw nationalism as a “European construction incompatible with the spiritual traditions of the East”. This perspective highlights Tagore’s grounding in India’s ancient civilizational ethos, especially in its commitment to multicultural harmony. According to Tagore, British colonialism was not merely a form of political exploitation but a profound failure of moral responsibility—a symbolic erosion of humanity’s respect for itself. Tagore viewed colonialism not as a sign of Europe’s civilizational maturity, but as an indication of its deepest moral defeat. Drawing upon India’s historical experience, he argues that the future of civilization depends not on power, but on moral awakening, harmony with nature, and compassionate human relationships. Tagore regarded Eastern ethical and aesthetic traditions as a meaningful alternative to the technocratic orientation of the West. The study demonstrates that ecological harmony plays a crucial role in Tagore’s conception of civilization. A society severed from nature, he argues, is like a “tree cut off from its spiritual roots.” “A society alienated from nature is already close to moral collapse.”. Thus, Tagore interprets the crisis of civilization also as an ecological–spiritual imbalance. A foundational element of the work is Tagore’s philosophy of hope. Despite writing amidst war, violence, nationalism, and colonial oppression, he retains faith in the spiritual renewal of humanity. As Tagore writes: “After the cataclysm, the world will be renewed, and humanity will rediscover its path”. This optimism is rooted in his Vedantic concept of “surplus”—the excess spiritual energy inherent in every human being. Humankind’s surplus spiritual potential is the only guarantee for the reconstruction of civilization. The study confirms the contemporary relevance of Tagore’s civilizational analysis. The resurgence of nationalism, militarization, violent political ideologies, moral disintegration, and ecological crises all reflect tendencies that Tagore had anticipated with remarkable clarity. In this sense, *Crisis in Civilization* is not merely a historical document but a philosophical warning addressed to the globalized world.

In conclusion, Rabindranath Tagore's *Crisis in Civilization* offers a profound philosophical diagnosis. The crisis of civilization is not caused by technological change, political power, or economic systems, but by the erosion of the moral foundations intrinsic to human nature. The path out of this crisis, according to Tagore, lies in love, service, harmony, and spiritual awakening. These conclusions demonstrate that Tagore's thought holds a significant place not only in literature but also in the broader intellectual history of global ethics.

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<https://doi.org/10.37547/supsci-ojhpl-05-06-26>