

Role and Impact of Rabindernath Tagore Education Philosophy in Contemporary Indian Education

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Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Not only Indian but was Asia's first Nobel Laureate, was born into a prominent Calcutta family known for its socio-religious and cultural innovations during the 19th Bengal Renaissance. The objective of the paper is to analyse the educational thoughts of Tagore, his basic conception of education and its process. The paper is primarily based on secondary sources like the Books, Journals and Articles etc. The method used is historic-analytic method. Tagore was a great champion of education for international understanding.

He believed that education should help an individual to attain complete manhood, so that all his powers may be developed to the fullest extent for his own individual perfection as well as the perfection of the human society in which he was born. He believed that education was not merely a means for the growth and fullness of the individual, but it was also concerned with the whole physical and social milieu in which his life was lived. He wanted the boys and girls to be fearless, free and open-minded, self-reliant, full of the spirit of inquiry and self-critical, with their roots deep in the soil of India but reaching out to the world in understanding, neighborliness, cooperation and material and spiritual progress. Tagore's concept of ideal education covered the description of ideal atmosphere, institution, teacher, and method. Actually Tagore's success lies in the fact that he did not try to control directly the ideas, feelings, and values of children but imaginatively designed an environment and a program of activities and experiences which evoked the

desired responses. He also believed that the education of a country acquires shape and substance only against the entire background and it is important that there is a strong relationship between education and society. This paper explores the role and impact of his philosophy in detail.

1. Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Not only Indian but was Asia's first Nobel Laureate, was born into a prominent Calcutta family known for its socio-religious and cultural innovations during the 19th Bengal Renaissance. The profound social and cultural involvement of his family would later play a strong role in the formulation of Rabindranath's educational priorities. His grandfather Dwarkanath was involved in supporting medical facilities, educational institutions and the arts, and he fought for religious and social reform and the establishment of a free press. His father was also a leader in social and religious reform, which encouraged a multicultural exchange in the family mansion Jorasanko. Within the joint family, Rabindranath's thirteen brothers and sisters were mathematicians, journalists, novelists, musicians, and artists. His cousins, who shared the family mansion, were leaders in theatre, science and a new art movement.

The tremendous excitement and cultural richness of his extended family permitted young Rabindranath to absorb and learn subconsciously at his own pace, giving him a dynamic open model of education, which he later tried to recreate in his school at Santiniketan. Not surprisingly, he found his outside formal schooling to be inferior and boring and, after a brief exposure to several schools, he refused to attend school. The only degrees he ever received were honorary ones bestowed late in life. His experiences at Jorasanko provided him with a lifelong conviction concerning the importance of freedom in education. He also realized in a profound manner the importance of the arts for developing empathy and sensitivity, and the necessity for an intimate relationship with one's cultural and natural environment. In participating in the cosmopolitan activities of the family, he came to reject narrowness in general, and in

particular, any form of narrowness that separated human being from human being.

He saw education as a vehicle for appreciating the richest aspects of other cultures, while maintaining one's own cultural specificity. As he wrote: I was brought up in an atmosphere of aspiration, aspiration for the expansion of the human spirit. We in our home sought freedom of power in our language, freedom of imagination in our literature, freedom of soul in our religious creeds and that of mind in our social environment. Such an opportunity has given me confidence in the power of education which is one with life and only which can give us real freedom, the highest that is claimed for man, his freedom of moral communion in the human world.... I try to assert in my words and works that education has its only meaning and object in freedom from ignorance about the laws of the universe, and freedom from passion and prejudice in our communication with the human world. In my institution I have attempted to create an atmosphere of naturalness in our relationship with strangers, and the spirit of hospitality which is the first virtue in men that made civilization possible. I invited thinkers and scholars from foreign lands to let our boys know how easy it is to realise our common fellowship, when we deal with those who are great, and that it is the puny that with their petty vanities set up barriers between man and man.

2. Objectives and Research Methodology

Objectives of study are as given below

- 1. To analyze the educational thoughts of Tagore. And his basic conception of education..**
- 2. To evaluate the impact of his philosophy on contemporary Indian Education.**

Research Methodology

This study typically takes the form descriptive study and secondary data available on education system. To understand and conclude the emergence of innovative tools and techniques in Indian education system so as to make it world class, we have gone through a number of reports and papers. This has the advantages of providing very rich information and avoiding the influence of others on the opinion of any one individual.

This study was undertaken to determine the nature of Tagore's educational theory and practice and its impact on Indian education. Material for the research was collected through the various studies and the writer's knowledge of Tagore's philosophy of education was useful in obtaining significant data from Tagore's voluminous writings on education. During the course of study a review of Tagore's writings on education and others on Tagore was found. A discussion of the major educational problems that existed in the British period in India, added to the early educational experiences of Tagore is presented to give a complete background for the basis of Tagore's theory. The core of Tagore's educational theory puts greater emphasis on the complete harmonious development of individual personality.

3. Role and Impact of Rabindernath Tagore Education Philosophy on Indian Education

In Tagore's philosophy of education, the aesthetic development of the senses was as important as the intellectual—if not more so—and music, literature, art, dance and drama were given great prominence in the daily life of the school. This was particularly so after the first decade of the school. Drawing on his home life at Jorasanko, Rabindranath tried to create an atmosphere in which the arts would become instinctive. One of the first areas to be emphasized was music. Rabindranath writes that in his adolescence, a 'cascade of musical emotion' gushed forth day after day at Jorasanko. 'We felt we would try to test everything,' he writes, 'and no achievement seemed impossible... We wrote, we sang, we acted, we poured ourselves out on every side.' (Rabindranath Tagore, *My Reminiscences* 1917: 141) In keeping with his theory of subconscious learning, Rabindranath never talked or wrote down to the students, but

rather involved them with whatever he was writing or composing. The students were allowed access to the room where he read his new writings to teachers and critics, and they were encouraged to read out their own writings in special literary evenings. In teaching also he believed in presenting difficult levels of literature, which the students might not fully grasp, but which would stimulate them. The writing and publishing of periodicals had always been an important aspect of Jorasanko life, and students at Santiniketan were encouraged to create their own publications and put out several illustrated magazines.

Rabindranath had understood that the educational system the British had enforced on India was meant only to train people to work as clerk in their offices, and if possible, to inculcate in the so-called educated men a feeling of inferiority for their own culture and philosophy.⁵ For this reason Tagore pleaded for an education system in India independent of colonial British control. This idea of Rabindranath gave birth to “Santiniketan” (abode of peace) an Ashrama style educational institution in which he provided education based on the principle of freedom, natural trust, co-operation and joy. In his opinion child’s education would be more effective if teachers and pupils live and work far away from din and bustle of the city, like the teachers and students of the past. He says, “this school should be home and a temple in one where teaching should be a part of worshipful life”. Placing teachers above the method of teaching Tagore said—

“The fact that education is something vital makes the teachers duties and responsibilities deserving of serious attention. The teachers should know that it is for him to inspire life in the students by his own living to enkindle the flame of knowledge in the students by his own knowledge.”

Rabindranath’s educational philosophy was not a system in the prevalent sense of the term system. A system formulated by modern day pedagogies with rules and regulations and ready-made methodology in which teachers are thought how to teach particular subjects and prepare lessons and text books within set paradigms. Rabindranath discarded the notion of text-books. He put the responsibility of educating the students in a joyful manner upon the guru. He said the relationship between the student and the guru should be of companionship. He said, “The teachers heart

continues to receive every moment of his life, and that is why he continuously gives himself totally.

He finds the proof of his truth and honesty in the process of giving and from the joy he receives from it. Joy emerges on its own when minds meet in a healthy spirit. That joy is the energy of creativity and its result is transfer of knowledge. Those who are conscious of their duties, but do not experience joy, tread on a different path. I consider the person to person relationship between the guru and shishya the prime means of imparting knowledge." Being a naturalist Tagore was aware of the sensitivity of young children and he had a firm faith in the educative value of natural objects and events. According to him "The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence. Children have their active subconscious mind which like the tree has the power to gather food from the surrounding atmosphere.

First important writing in this direction is "**Tapovan**"(Jan, 1910) — Forest. In this article for the first time Tagore introduced a new idea of the education of feeling (**Bodhersadhana**) and he distinguished it from the education of the senses and the education of the intellect. This education of feeling consists of the realization of man's bond of union with the universe through the spirit, through the soul, through the deeper intuition of feeling. Through his national system of education India should endeavor to discover and attain the characteristic truth of her civilization pursued through the centuries by her prophets, thinkers and saints and "that truth is not mainly commercialism, imperialism or nationalism; that truth is universalism" (Tagore, 1351 B.S., p. 100). The highly significant point here is that while Tagore is still talking in terms of nationalism and swearing by the ideals of Ancient India, he is interpreting the highest of these ideals in terms of internationalism.

A letter entitled "**Siksavidhi**" --**The Method of Education**-- is devoted to the problem of the philosophy of educational method in some of the fundamental aspects as well as in the context of the existing socio-political and educational conditions in India. The stereotyped and mechanical educational atmosphere of India was obstructing the originality or initiative of children and he said that education can be imparted only by a teacher and never by a method. "Man can learn only

from a man. Just as a water tank can be filled only with water and fire can be kindled only with fire, life can be inspired only with life. .The mere pill of a method instead shall bring us no salvation" (Tagore, 1351 B.S., p. 128).

In "**Strisiksa**"(August, 1915) — The Education of Woman, shedding some light on the philosophy of curriculum, Tagore writes, "Whatever is worth knowing is knowledge. It should be known equally by men and women, not for the sake of practical utility but for the sake of knowing" (Tagore, 1351 B.S., p. 138) He makes it clear that knowledge is above the limitation of mere utility. He rejects the common notion that in learning some common subjects with men, women would lose their femininity. Later in the article, he makes his point clear. "Knowledge has two departments: one, pure knowledge; the other, utilitarian knowledge. In the field of pure knowledge, there is no distinction between men and women; distinction exists in the sphere of practical utility; women should acquire pure knowledge for becoming a mature human being, and utilitarian knowledge for becoming true women" (Tagore, 1351 B.S., p. 139). There are many more relevant work available that shows his social and value based education philosophy.

The role and impact of Tagore's education philosophy as reflected in contemporary educational institution of India are as follows:

- i. Intellectual Development:** Tagore also greatly emphasized the intellectual development of the child. By intellectual development he means development of imagination, creative free thinking, constraint curiosity and alertness of the mind, Child should be free to adopt his own way learning which will lead to all round development.
- ii. Natural growth in Natural Circumstance:** Tagore envisaged that nature is the best teacher to the pupil. Nature will provide the student with necessary situation to earn knowledge. No pressure should be exerted upon the student to learn anything. It is nature which will be the guiding force to inculcate the spirit of learning in the mind of a student to pursue the education he likes. It will shape his behaviour and character.

- iii. Freedom to Learner:** Tagore had championed the cause of freedom. The same he wanted to implement in the field of education. With that object he had opened Santiniketan, Sri Niketan and Brahmachari Ashram. Accordingly, he gave free choice to students to develop their interest in any field they like. To him, education should be after the heart of a man. He explained freedom in three-categorized ways i.e. freedom of heart, freedom of intellect and freedom of will. Education imparted in a natural way will lead to the fulfillment of these three freedoms. One may pursue the vocational education or education of an intellect, or education in any branch of the arts or one may become a sansei by observing celibacy.
- iv. Self Realization:** Spiritualism is the essence of humanism. Manifestation of personality depends upon the self-realization and spiritual knowledge of individual.
- v. Love for Humanity:** Tagore held that education can teach people to realize oneness of the globe. Education for international understanding and universal brotherhoods another important aim of his educational philosophy.
- vi. Physical Development:** Tagore's educational philosophy also aims at the physical development of the child. He gave much importance to sound and healthy physique. Yoga, games & sports are prescribed in Santiniketan as an integral part of the education system.
- vii. Teaching - Practical and Real:** According to Tagore, teaching should be practical and real but not artificial and theoretical. As a naturalist out and out, Tagore laid emphasis on the practicality of education. That will definitely increase the creative skill within a learner. That creativity will bring perfection in the learning process and the student will be a master in his own field but not a slave to mere theoretical knowledge which one delves deep.

- viii. **Co-relation of Objects:** Co-relation exists with God, man and nature. A peaceful world is only possible when correlation between man and nature will be established.
- ix. **Place of Fine Arts (Dance, Drama, Music, Poetry etc.) :** Tagore attached great importance to the fine arts in his educational curriculum. To him, game, dance, music, drama, painting etc. should form a part of Indian education.
- x. **Mother Tongue as the Medium of Instructions:** Language is the true vehicle of self-expression. Man can freely express his thought in his mother-tongue. Tagore has emphasized mother tongue as the medium of instruction for the child's education.
- xi. **Moral and Spiritual Development:** Tagore emphasized moral and spiritual training in his educational thought. Moral and spiritual education is more important than bookish knowledge for an integral development of human personality. There must be an adequate provision for the development of self less activities, co-operation and love fellow feeling and sharing among the students in educational institutions.
- xii. **Social Development:** According to Tagore, "Brahma" the supreme soul manifests himself through men and other creatures. Since he is the source of all human-being and creatures, so all are equal. Rabindranath Tagore therefore said, "***Service to man is service to God***". All should develop social relationships and fellow-feeling from the beginnings of one's life. Educational aims at the individual personality as well as social characters which enables him to live as a worthy being.
- xiii. **Goodbye to Book-Centered Education:** For the first time in the arena of education, Tagore established a new mile-stone. With boldness and firmness, he rejected a book-centered education for students. To him it is not just to confine the mind of boys and girls to text-books only. It will kill the natural instincts of a student and make him bookish. It will kill his creative skill. So, students should be freed from the-book centered education and should be given a broader avenue for learning.

- xiv. Education for Rural Reconstruction:** Tagore was aware about the rural poverty of our country. So, he wanted to eradicate it through education. The practical training imparted in different crafts to the students will make them skilled artisans in their field. They can remove the poverty of the rural bulk by applying their education helping thereby in the process of rural reconstruction.

4. Conclusion

Tagore may be viewed as a spiritualist in education. Generally, naturalism discards transcendental experiences. Tagore was a naturalist but his naturalism was not a narrow one. It was a sort of means to spiritualism which he wanted to develop among the boys. Tagore was a great champion of education for international understanding. He loved his nation and wanted to improve its conditions but in this connection his nationalism was not a narrow one His patriotism and nationalism leads to internationalism. He regarded the world as one and enables us to feel that we have to develop respect for world citizenship also.

Tagore's impact on education in India has not been well recognized and through discussion it was found that educational work of Tagore deserves more scrutiny. It needs to be recognized and evaluated by educationists around the world. His impact on education has been felt more but it has not been articulated' by researchers, or educationists.

5. References

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