

TAGORE'S EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT

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Introduction:

The fundamental purpose of education is not merely to enrich our selves through fullness of knowledge, but also to establish the bond of love between man and man. (Tagore, *Siksha*, p.10). In the world of Indian education, Rabindranath Tagore is a glorious personality. Tagore was a gifted man and his creative power emerged in different directions. There is no experience in human life where his thoughts have not touched. He was not only a poet but also a novelist, dramatist, essayist, philosopher, singer, actor, painter, social reformer and an educator. So we call him an institution in himself. He has influenced many aspects of human life, education also being one of them. Education is the benchmark of any civilization. It is an important part and basis of human life. Education is a process and kind of guided activity which can transform people. Since the beginning of civilization, people have changed themselves through education.

Rabindranath's vision of education was first given a real form in the school that was established at Santiniketan in Brahmacharyaashram (Ashram School) in Bolpur in the year 1901. On December 22, 1921, he established Visva-Bharati, an educational institution that was international in character, where Indian civilization intermingled with other civilizations. Tagore was a visionary. The founding of Visva-Bharati by Tagore was mainly to fulfill his dream of connecting India to the world. Tagore wanted to reconcile the east and the west through education. For Tagore, nationalism confined man within a barrier and the only salvation was embracing cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism does not see any boundaries between nations, states, culture and societies. His cosmopolitan view appeals to the breadth of the human mind. It teaches not only to tolerate otherness but by questioning the boundaries between the home and the world, it expands the reach of experience. In this paper, we will discuss Tagore's idea of education and show how Tagore's educational philosophy includes an attempt at inculcating cosmopolitanism.

Historical Background:

Rabindranath was born in Kolkata's famous Tagore family on May 6 in 1861. At that time, India's, especially Bengal's educational system was influenced by the English system of education. The British established English medium schools for the

promotion of English education in India. Thereby neglecting the ancient education system of India. During the Bengal Renaissance, the Jorasanko's environment of the Tagore family which was a free liberal environment for education influenced Tagore's fundamental education. Rabindranath Tagore's grandfather Prince Dwarkanath Tagore and his father Debendranath Tagore's were very interested and enthusiastic in education. During Maharishi Debendranath's time, the Tagore family was freed from most of the ancient Hindu religion. Debendranath Tagore ceremonially adopted the Brahmo-dharma. But his father Dwarkanath had served Hindu reforms long ago. Rabindranath received a great atmosphere in the Tagore household.

Debendranath's allegiance to mother language influenced Rabindranath's mind. Rabindranath inherited many things from his father such as the deep affection for the mother tongue and cultivation of mother tongue. That's why Rabindranath has expressed his view in different places to teach in the mother tongue. Debendranath was a worshipper of the Brahmo religion, which was a new form of refined Hinduism. Rabindranath and his father were all opposed to ritualism. For this reason, Rabindranath was against the pseudo prejudices of society and religion. So, he created a new society by the light of western enlightenment and rationalistic education. Just as he learned the essence of this ancient and contemporary education from his predecessors Rammohun and Vidyasagar, he also inherited it from his father. Therefore, the influence of Debendranath on forming the nature of Rabindranath's educational thinking is undeniable. Rabindranath Tagore's eldest brother Dwijendranath was a symbol of Swadeshi thinking but he was not anti-western in the pursuit of knowledge. On the other hand, his second eldest brother Satyendranath passed I.C.S abroad.

Tagore was born at exactly that time when English education flourished in India. But English education neglected primary and secondary education. At that time there was a distinction between two classes, the fortunate upper class and the rural people or lower class. That is why higher education was not possible for poor people. But at the end of the nineteenth century, the middle class was protesting against discrimination in English education. The advantage of the education system introduced by the British was only for the high-class people, but a large population of Indians belonged to the lower class.

India then was in an atmosphere of nationalism. So in his early life, Tagore's thoughts were influenced by nationalism. But later on, he became aware of the terrible consequences of nationalism, so he then followed cosmopolitanism. H. B. Mukherjee's *Education for Fullness* (2013) has pointed out how Tagore's view on education grows out of his broader understanding and insight into human life. He argues that in his early life Tagore was influenced by nationalism but when he matured, he recognized that nationalism and national values are not adequate in the modern world. He believed in the cosmopolitan attitude which is the base of his educational philosophy.

Tagore's Writings on Education:

Tagore's educational philosophy does not follow any traditional trend. So it is a difficult task to categorize him. There is extensive literature on Tagore's philosophy. Tagore himself wrote essays, letters, novels, stories, dramas, as well as delivered speeches explaining his educational thought. His 130 essays covering about 1750 pages on education give us access to his philosophy of education. In *Europe Pravasir Patra* ('Letters of a traveler to Europe' (1881)), he wrote about his first travel to England. At that time he was overwhelmed by the western culture which had an impact on his educational writings. But in his later writings, for example, *Megh O Rudra* (1894), and the *Sadhana* essays, especially 'Redress of Insult' (1894), he told people to fight against the injustice of oppressive rulers. Tagore was sceptical about the work of the British government. His ideas were expressed in 'Englishman and Indians' (1893), *Imrejer Atanka* ('The Englishman's Dread' (1893)), 'Right to Justice' (1894), 'Political Scruple' (1894). In his *Europe Yatrir Diary*- 'Diary of a Pilgrim to Europe' (1891), he managed to connect eastern and western education. So we see that at the time his thinking changed.

Tagore's first major writing on educational problems was entitled 'Sikshar Herpher' (Our Education and its Incongruities, 1892), where he advocated a free, joyous, spontaneous system of education. His main aim was 'education for all'. He was firm in his stand regarding the importance of the mother tongue in teaching. Tagore said that it is not possible to know any language without knowing one's own culture and one's own mother tongue. But he didn't reject the English language. He insisted that English be taught as a supplementary language. In another article, 'Siksha- Samasya' (Problems in Education, June 1906), Tagore gives an elaborate

and significant explanation of what he regarded as the most important features of a national educational system. According to him, the Indian education system should not simulate the European system of education. Rabindranath Tagore said in 'The Problem of Education' *Towards Universal Man* (p.69), 'We must put the European model out of our minds, if only for the reason that European history and European society are different from our history and our society. We must try properly to understand the ideals by which our country has been attracted and stimulated in the past.' One of our difficulties arises from the fact that, lacking knowledge of Britain, we are unable to put English education in its proper perspective. Never having seen it in relation to the society to which it belongs, we fail to find the way by which its Indian counterpart can be harmonized with Indian life.

So, he said that the Indian education system should be connected to the whole life of individuals organically. He says educational institutions should be spaced where people have the opportunity to interpret their ideas. Children's thinking will not increase if there are specific issues in educational institutions. The main thing is what the children want to learn. Children should be taught what they want to learn. He does not want them to engage in rote learning. In an important article, 'Tapovan' (The Forest School of India, 1909), he introduced a new idea of the education of feeling which consists of the realization of a man's attachment with the universal spirit, soul and deeper intuition. According to him, the forest school's education is related to *Sadhana*. In *Sadhana*, he wanted to see the correlation between the individual and the universe. Here he shows that the intimate love, action and beauty are to be part of the educational process. Tagore wrote to C.F. Andrews in *Letters to a Friend* (p.38),

In India the range of our lives is narrow and discontinuous. This is the reason why our minds are often beset with provincialism. In our Ashram at Santiniketan we must have the widest possible outlook for our boys, and universal human interest. This must come spontaneously- not merely through the reading of books, but through dealing with the wider world.

In 'Strishiksha' (The Education of Woman, 1915) in *Siksha*, he emphasized the philosophy of curriculum. He did not believe in any discrimination between man and woman. He believes that woman and men have equal rights to education, which is important for building a peaceful society. In his institution, Tagore gave equal

place to the education of girls and women and had built a hostel for girls. He says in *Personality* (2011), that through education people can know their nature, choose what is right and what is wrong, and one can also choose who is the real ruler of our country so that they can improve our country. Another significant educational writing of Tagore is 'Alochana' (A Discourse, July 1925), where he emphasized the importance of the code of conventions because there are many rules for different occasions. In the Ashram Siksha, people can learn that different kinds of events are associated with different emotions. Here, he refers to his idea about 'the peripatetic' or mobile school, which involves teaching and learning while walking. He always insisted on the importance of learning directly from Nature and Life. Tagore's short story 'The Parrot's Training' (1918) does a creative critique of the common mode of education during the colonial times which is still prevalent as the traditional system of education. Opposing the system of parrot's training, Tagore believed in the ancient Indian belief '*sa vidya ya vimuktaye*' (Education is that which liberates the mind).

Tagore's educational ideology is expressed in his three novels 'Gora' (1909), 'Ghare-Baire' (1919) and 'Char Adhyay' (1934). In 'Gora', Tagore describes the nationalistic condition of Bengal at that time. Here he attacks Gora's nationalism and self-definition. Its theme is politico-psychological. In 'Ghare-Baire', Tagore describes the cosmopolitan view. Its theme was politico-sociological. Tagore's last novel is 'Char Adhyay' where his view is more developed. It is a politico-ethical view. These three novels form the core of Tagore's thought on politics, society and education. According to Tagore, '*swadeshikata*' is not the same as nationalism or nation-state. To achieve the universal love '*swadeshprem*', this is the main aim of Tagore's '*swadeshikata*'. His goal is to develop the Indian society and establish unity in diversity. Tagore wanted to show in his novels 'Ghare-Baire' and 'Char Adhyay' that love, believe, universal friendship is more valuable than narrow nationalism.

Tagore was against the conventional educational system because this education does not make people happy. There does not exist any educational value here so it is not real education. He believed in Ashram School which is related to universalism. Tagore sincerely tried to improve India's educational system. He insisted on the ancient teachings of India. So he founded the Gurukul model school. As a result, the ashram school was founded at Santiniketan in Bolpur in 1901. This educational system aimed to ensure all-round development of all children. His main aim was to

make education simple. Real education must be helpful to understand their right throughout the country. He wanted to match the east and west's educational thought. He said, real education removes the barrier of nationalism and it reaches the spiritual and the international stage. He also said that education which is lively and dynamic and connected to our world is called real education. According to him, children learn from nature, not from the book. So he was against book-centered learning. The theoretical education is not real education; according to him, the practical education is useful for life. He distinguished between the education of the senses and the education of the intellect in '*BodherSadhana*' ('Expansion of sympathy'). It also connects the inner perception with external perception.

Tagore's Experiments with Education:

Rabindranath Tagore's spiritual vision is an important aspect of his educational thought. So he said that self-realization is the important aim of education. The first step to self-realization is the complete development of the person. According to Tagore, if the student is not fully developed, then it is not possible for him to fully understand his conscience. He said self-realization means the realization of the universal soul in one's self. A human being aims to achieve this status. We cannot realize it without education. Tagore's cosmopolitanism was based on his spirituality. That is why he treated all people as equal. He saw God in human beings, so he was a worshipper of humanity. The manifestation of personality, which is the goal of education, depends upon self-realization and spiritual knowledge of the individual.

The clerical education that Indians were given under British rule resulted in the loss of their self-esteem. As a result, Tagore was particularly distressed. He realized that Indians had no connection to the national heritage and life within the British-initiated education system. This education has crippled the nation rather than bringing about human self-development. That is why he wanted to establish an Indian educational system based on national heritage, culture and spirituality. He understood that the spiritual connection of human beings with education is necessary for the development of humanity. Tagore thinks that one of the major mistakes of British rule is the educational system in India. This educational system was isolated from the natural environment. By approaching nature, the child's body is organized and learns to realize the absolute truth. So inspired by the Ashram Siksha, he established 'Santiniketan'. Tagore was opposed to the so-called formal and restrictive education.

So he wanted education to be boundless and free. Tagore was keen to build Santiniketan to give form to his educational thinking.

Tagore's educational view is based on Upanishadic philosophy. According to him, education which helps people to develop their self-esteem and humanity is real education. So, Tagore believed that there is a harmony between God, man and nature. Tagore wanted to create an educational centre where people from different countries, different religions, and different cultures could exchange their ideas among themselves so that it can become a pilgrimage place for students. Visva-Bharati was a civilizational meeting place. The motto of this university is *Yatra visvam bhavati ekanidam*- 'Where the world meets in one nest'. Tagore wrote

If ever a truly Indian university is established it must from the very beginning implement India's own knowledge of economics, agriculture, health, medicine and of all other everyday science from the surrounding villages. Then alone can the school or university become the centre of the country's way of living. This school must practice agriculture, dairying and weaving using the best modern methods... I have proposed to call this school Visva-Bharati (*Addresses by Tagore* (1963), p.9-10).

There is a significant role of freedom in Tagore's educational philosophy. Freedom is considered as an integral aspect of human development. Education is a man-making process; it explores the innate ideas that exist within a human being. It is not an imposition but a liberal process that provides utmost freedom for development. According to him, the education of the child without independence and happiness remains incomplete. So he favoured teaching by giving freedom. For him, freedom means spiritual liberation. Liberation is the greatest excellence in human life. The spiritual liberation of people is possible through the supreme excellence of education. That is why he thinks that spiritual freedom is greater and wider than physical freedom. When a human being has supreme knowledge, when he understands the distinction between the finite and infinite, then his transcendental knowledge is possible which transforms him from human to 'Supreme Man'. So, he wrote in his *The Religion of Man* (2011)

We must realize not only the reasoning mind, but also the creative imagination, the love and wisdom that belong to the Supreme Person, whose Spirit is over us all, love for whom comprehends love for all creatures and exceeds in depth and strength all other loves, leading to difficult endeavours and martyrdoms that have no other gain than the fulfilment of this love itself (p.359).

In the traditional education system, the freedom of the student has been diminished by the fact that the child is confined within a narrow boundary. Tagore believed that the education system was completely useless if it was set up dismissing the needs of the students. Tagore wanted to establish an intimate connection between the nature of the world and the students. One of the main aspects of Tagore's educational thought is 'education in nature'. That helps to expand children's thinking. They learn to be self-reliant at an early age. With this objective, he had opened Santiniketan, Sriniketan, and Brahmacharya Ashram. These places gave free choice to students to develop their interest in the field of their liking. In Tagore's educational philosophy the terms 'education' and 'life' are the same and inseparable. According to him, the process of education should always be dynamic and free. For him, the education which does not provide freedom and joy to the students is meaningless. Education needs love and active communication. So education stimulates responsiveness only when it is imparted through the path of freedom.

Tagore didn't just give ideas about educational thoughts; he tried to apply them in reality. Tagore's Santiniketan is the centre of this education system. Instead of book-centred education, he promoted vocational education. Students will be able to build their lives by adapting to a simple and working life at school. He thought that education aims to create a real 'Man'. The best development of a person can be achieved by acquiring social qualities. Education eliminates inadequacies. Tagore, however, strongly criticized book-centred knowledge and conventional test-based education. According to him, the development of independent thinking is the main goal of education. One of the aims of education is also to raise the scientific outlook among the students.

In 'Tapovan' Model, Tagore emphasized the importance of establishing an intimate relationship between the Guru and the Disciple in the education system. According to him, if the teacher is enthusiastic and talented, he can always teach the students by inventing new methods. He had a deep faith in the child's inherent ability and enthusiasm to know. Activity is the key to his education system. He preferred teaching through travel rather than teaching in the school rooms because it extends children's experience far beyond the school rooms. Tagore says about the role of the teacher in 'The Problem of Education', in *Towards Universal Man* (1961), that it is

“... to put life into his pupils with his own life, light their lamps with his own learning, and make them happy with his affection.” (p.79)

His focus was on the spiritual development of the children as well as their physical development. Therefore, in his education plan, he organized play, dance and song in the open nature. The purpose of all forms of education is to realize the universal truth that accompanies us. He didn't want to make the school a prison, but rather a shelter for students. There should be a relationship between the teacher and the student which helps the student reveal different aspects of his /her personality. The real teacher's goal is to make the student learn with joy. In “Ashram Education” in *Introduction to Tagore* (1983), Tagore says that an ideal teacher should encourage the students all the time. They create interest in knowing everything in the students.

Tagore emphasized the importance of the mother tongue as a medium of education. To illustrate the importance of teaching through mother tongue, he compared mother tongue to mother's milk. One of the simplest and most natural means of students' self-development is their mother tongue. He believed that if English remains the medium of education, then this education is bound to become upper-class and urban-centric. This education will remain a dream for the lower and the middle class in the village. In his essay ‘Shikshar Bahan’ (‘The Vehicle of Education’, 1915), he stresses the importance of the mother tongue as the medium of education. Despite Tagore's sharp criticism against the adoption of the English language as a medium of instruction and his strong arguments for the mother tongue, he did not express any adverse attitude towards the English language. He mentioned the need to teach different languages, including English in his education plan.

Rabindranath Tagore's Cosmopolitan vision of Education

Now the problem before us is of one single country, which is this earth, where the races as individuals must find both their freedom of self-expression and their bond of federation. Mankind must realize a unity, wider in range, deeper in sentiment, stronger in power than ever before (Tagore, *CreativeUnity*, 2011, p.73). Tagore visualized a centre of education as a civilizational meeting place where a student can learn from the treasures of the various civilizations and develop a cosmopolitan attitude. The word *Cosmopolitanism* is derived from the Greek word *kosmopolities* which means ‘citizen of the world’. It helps create fellow-citizens who share their cultures. Achieving cosmopolitanism is one of the most important goals of education.

Tagore's view of cosmopolitan attitude and life is fundamental to his educational vision. Tagore's educational philosophy is designed to nurture the cosmopolitan attitude. For him, socializing is a sharing of wealth and glory between east and west. Western scientific advancement and eastern traditional culture must be associated with each other to create a positive resurgence of true humanity. He believed that this co-existence could bring about all-round development and universal brotherhood. His Visva-Bharati was set up to transcend the boundary and become a meeting place of east and west. He was opposed to the idea of the nation; he was even more severely opposed to India joining the bandwagon of nationalism. For Tagore, cosmopolitanism is different from internationalism. According to him, cosmopolitanism is related to non-nationalist humanistic spirit, while internationalism is related to political geography and national identities. Tagore's Visva-Bharati is the meeting place for all civilizations where he encouraged rootedness. However, he also gave the place a flavour of the idea of universal culture as existing in all people and one kind of cosmopolitan view which transcends nations.

Kwame Anthony Appiah's article 'Cosmopolitan Patriots' (1997) describes Tagore as a 'rooted- cosmopolitan'. The term 'rooted-cosmopolitan' means 'someone who is rooted in his own cultural identity and yet who also considers him/herself as a citizen of the world'. Tagore was rooted in Bengal and yet was a member of the world fraternity. Appiah said, Tagore's philosophy of education was a marvellous syndrome of the interconnectedness of human beings with all life on earth, which is a natural conception of environmental awareness.

'Ghare Baire' has emerged as an important text for studying and devising the opposing theoretical positions of cosmopolitanism and nationalism. Ashis Nandy, in his book *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism*, talks about Tagore's cosmopolitan view. Ashis Nandy points out that the two types of patriotism are symbolized by 'Nikhil' which stands for the cosmopolitan attitude (he doesn't believe in any boundary of a nation) and 'Sandip', which stands for extreme nationalistic attitude, while the character of 'Bimala' stands for the situation of Bengal. She is confused between the two types of patriotism.

Martha Nussbaum has also worked on Tagore's cosmopolitanism. She argues in her article 'Cosmopolitanism and Patriotism' (1996) that we are deprived of the moral right of people to argue or create a question. As a result, we are afraid to give

up our independent opinion, for which we are limiting ourselves and our thinking. For this reason, we are all indulging in discrimination everywhere. Nussbaum agrees with Nandy's view that 'Ghare-Baire' shows 'two different forms of patriotism'. She points out in her book *For Love of Country* (1996), that Tagore sees deeply when he sees that at the bottom nationalism and ethnocentric particularism are not alien to one another, but akin- that to give support to nationalist sentiments subverts, ultimately, even the values of justice and right (p.5).

Conclusion:

Although Tagore was deeply moved by the Tapovan model in ancient India, he did not blindly admit anything. He tried to reconcile eastern and western ideologies. He sought to reconcile eastern civilization and culture with the repositories of western knowledge. He did not want to exclude everything as foreign, and he was opposed to accepting everything just because of its indigeneness. That is why his plan included developing global citizenship beyond the boundaries of the nation. According to Tagore, that which teaches people to be creative, to think, to be free and express their open-minded ideas, that which people take with pleasure is absolute education. This education helps to develop humanity. He believed that education is not meant for livelihood alone, because mere subsistence cannot be the ultimate goal of human life. After all, livelihood only alleviates our poverty and satisfies our needs. It can never fulfil our life. He realized that only through genuine education would the student become conscious of their national culture and heritage and learn to understand their purpose. Along with this he also wanted the students to get acquainted with the cultures of other countries and to learn from them. He also wanted the students to have their own opinion. They should not be influenced by anyone to form an opinion. It was Tagore's wish that they become world citizens by getting rid of the narrow nationalistic boundaries. I feel that Tagore's educational ideal is best captured in his ambition of inculcating cosmopolitanism. Though it is rooted in his native land, for him the whole world is where people need to connect and be treated equally.

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