

Chapter - V

Tagore's Concept of Education:

The Man Making Process

Tagore was not satisfied with the contemporary education system. Education that was implemented by the British Rulers in India was mainly directed towards administrative usefulness, which was indeed a shortsighted policy. It was implemented just for producing a cadre of pupil with western culture who could oil the administrative machinery of the Britishers. They just wanted to produce the clerks, official technical person, who can just serve them. Systematic thinking of education was not available in their educational curriculum. Before then in the Muslim dynasty there was no scientific education system. Sultans and Mughals were only interested with the religious education system and wanted to produce lot of *Moulobies* and *Mullas* (Islamic religious teacher).

So, they did not establish any modern educational institutions. Before then there were not also any systematic educational institutions. Education was the luxury of the Princes and it was mainly given in the *tols* and *ashrams*. It was totally *Guru Kendric*. So, Tagore was the first Indian who wanted to introduce a totally scientific system of education, which can make a real human being. He was the humanist and he wanted to uplift the human values and cultures through proper education curriculum. Tagore was dead opposed to the prevailing system of education. The agonies of which he had gone through during his school days. He hated bookish learning, by root, and creative education became his ideal, which he tried to fulfil through his life. He wanted a system of education, not hired from the western country but which had

deep roots in the Indian soil and its glorious culture. At the same time its face should be onwards to the future which can help to earn the knowledge from the different countries where science, technology and medicine have a special position. So, with the mixture of both the ancient cultures as well as modern developed western knowledge with values can give a generation of modern India. He identifies himself with all that was noblest and the best in tradition of the country, “synthesizing widely varying ideals and ideas, not only by means of individual feats of system making, but by holding and melting all the elements in the crucible of direct personal realization.”¹ For this he wanted to link up education with the life of pupil. His future plans of linking education with life and having base of country education are more than evident from this fact. The poet’s ideas on education were derived mainly from his own experience and the philosophy of life. He professed, therefore he sought to work out a system that would give due consideration to the inherent tendencies and potentialities of the child by devising activities that would gradually shape his personality. For him imagination aesthetic sense and emotion had equally important in the development of the child personality. In this context Sunil Chandra Sharkar remarks, “raised the imagination, the aesthetic sense and higher emotion to a position all most equal to that of reason. They, while operating in the spheres of poetry, music and art are almost important means of discovering reality as reason....”²

Tagore had his own line of thought when he was dealing with the child nature and its evolution. A think of human soul as being unique in every individual and that it follows its own path in the total development of the individual. At the same time he stated that it was one dimension within the totality of its being where it is absolutely identical with all other soul and with all soul, the universal person. Tagore advocated perfection of soul but also said that it was dramatic and thus susceptible

to change and continuously self-creative. The role of education to provide this changes cannot be neglected. Tagore accepted that one universal person also is responsible for variations in different individuals, which have a different ways of expression of different pupil. All this should be channeled through suitable education to enhance and give the best in every individual. The poet's educational philosophy sprang directly from the philosophy of life he professed and made it his life's mission to be carried out through his own model institution named *Shantiniketan*. His aim of prevailing education were only to develop intellectual and to some extent the physical aspects of child's personality. In such a fashioned way that it can treat the living soul in a sophisticated way and take out their potentiality. Tagore described this process with a few words when he said, we adorned the cage but the parrot within lay starving. He added that education should cultivate the power of acquiring through independent effort and develop the ability to learn directly from nature and life. What was important was not the storage of knowledge gained from books but the ability to use what is learned, develop constant curiosity within the child. For Tagore education is the process of development of whole man not merely intellectual development of the individual. It also emphasizes the physical, moral and spiritual aspect of human personality.

Tagore's special education was to develop the inner self and this can achieve in proper spirit. The innate faculties of the child in this way will find their natural flow and there would be harmony in the development of personality. Tagore was essentially a spiritualist and hence gave stress on moral and spiritual aspects of education. To fulfil the above criteria Tagore developed a suitable education curriculum for his educational plan. He pleaded for the education of the emotion on the same level and that of reason he had realized that the emotion plays an important role in the human life, especially in the younger mind. So,

emotions were educationally potent in the development of the total personality of the individual. So, children should be properly guided to nourish the emotion under a proper guidance. For this Tagore prescribed to develop individual emotion and nourishment the tender mind in a special way by including special subjects like music, art, dancing and craft in his education curriculum. He emphasized modern science, technology and medical science to fulfil his curriculum. Young patron can learn the Indian ancient values and culture with the mixture of modern technology so that they can compete in the modern society with rest of India. He welcomed the budding surge of the scientific thought and exhorted his countrymen to except this fact. However he was not prepared to look at science merely as a tool but it is the part of their life, which can help them in their livelihood but in the modern world science is used just for the destruction of the human society. Tagore realized by his several visits to the European country that they had technologically developed much and earned money by using the scientific knowledge as tools. He also saw in his lifetime that science was used during the First and Second World War for the destruction of human civilization. That was possible because the lack of moralities and negligence of their ancient values. So, he was well conscious at the time of preparing the educational curricula for his model institution *Shantineketana*.

Tagore's viewed that Indian students should realize the Indian culture are an inseparable part of the cultural heritage of the whole humanity. But to grasp the reality, the children must be made aware first of their own culture. So, the function of education should be the transmission of the age-old spiritual edition of our land to enable them to achieve greater height in future. Tagore's own educational system had its implication in the field of natural education. For him education should take the children nearer to nature and being a spiritualist, Tagore added, in close proximity to God. The soul limited in its boundary cannot enter

the divine realm. God wants a royal reception. Hence expansion of the self through communion with nature is essential for spiritual upliftment and revelation of divinity. His educational philosophy was based on three cardinal principles: Freedom and joy for the children in creative self-expression and active communion of man and nature. Children enjoy absolute and unrestricted freedom in the mind, nature and reality. The process of acquisition of knowledge thus becomes a joyful one in contrast with what is being done in regular schools. This process gears up their spirit of curiosity and a feeling of joy to discover them. He advocated wholeness of life and education and states education is a permanent adventure of life.... It is not like a painful, hospital treatment for querying them of the congenital malady of their ignorance. But is a function of the health, the natural expression of their mind vitality. Tagore also said that an education divorced from the streams of life and confined within the four walls of the class room becomes artificial and lost its value. Education leads from freedom from ignorance, and ignorance is one of the root causes of our poverty. Tagore felt that education life cannot be separated from the economic life of pupil. He also fulfils this aim in his *Shantiniketan* to reconstruct the educational curricula. So, for this he introduced crafts in his curricula, which leads to different life activities. According to him, "educational institution, in order to obtain their fulfilment of truth must have close association with economical life.....".³ Children education is not only the training of intellectual power. Tagore dreamt that education of the whole human being besides his intellect, like children emotion and senses. Because it plays a considerable role in the formation of his total personality. For this he included some forms of crafts for every child. In this way children's mind and sense will be stimulated through this various activities. He also did not neglect the significant part of art to improve the emotion of children. So, *Kalābhawan* or the School of Fine Arts and Crafts was introduced for the well development of the child. Tagore's scheme of education included

dancing and drama also. He was conscious that the language of sound and movement is as effective as spoken and written language. The poet regarded this the highest means of self-expression. In this context we can quote from his words, “however great a scholar may be if he has not educated his words, his body, he has to leave a life of depends on other and in many ways like an incomplete man. There is a close and inseparable connection between the faculties of mind and body... hand work, music and arts are the spontaneous overflow of our deep nature and spiritual significance”.⁴ True education, for Tagore, should develop the power of thought and the power of imagination and the instinct of curiosity of the child if he has to discharge successfully the duties of life in future. In this context Eleanor Roosevelt says, “there is a wonderful world ,why? That children, all children ask, when they stop using it, the reason to often is that no one bothered to answer them, no one fostered and cultivated the child’s innate sense of the adventure of life.”⁵

According to Tagore, education based on three sources i.e. nature, life and teacher. Among them nature can be considered as the generous donor but the sensitivity of the child and its respective power are to be enkindled by independent and creative thinking and this hard job belongs to the teacher. Tagore said, - “teachers play the role like a perpetually burning flame emanating light and knowledge. Even for such teacher and intros sphere of freedom and joy for the children is essential pre-requisite if teaching has to have some impact tender mind. In such an environment our reasoning faculty are to nourished in order to allow our mind its freedom in the world of truth, our imagination for which belongs to arts and our sympathy for the world of human reationship”⁶. Tagore wanted to introduce education system, which was related with the truth and life. So, he prepared a curriculum that would help the student to improve their faculties of mind and improve their knowledge. Nature is a source of inspiration and revolution for the child, it teaches

him for the first lesson of freedom and gives his immense delight and enables him to find his own solution to the problem he faces. Doctor Maris Montessory says, "the child who has never learnt to act alone to direct to his own action, to govern his own will, grows into an adult which easily laid an must always learn upon others".⁷ Bertrant Russel in this aspect says, "no man is fit to educate unless he fills as pupil and end himself, with his own right and his own personality not merely a jigsaw puzzle or a soldier in a regiment or a citizen in a state."⁸ Russel also gives a prominent place to the cultivation of mind over his other aim with an example of ancient Greece. He writes, "Athenian concentrated on the former, the separtants on the later. The sqartants own, but Athenian's are remembered."⁹ The educational scheme which was practiced by Tagore emphasized both these aspects but he added one more dimension to his philosophy of education where education is an instrument of creating the desired type of social order. He agreed to the fact that the present system of education was unsatisfactory and meaningless because it does not take the basic element that education had intimate relationship with the social milieu. Education which does not consider this aspect is to be termed as incomplete. Tagore also considered that in education the most important factor is an atmosphere of creativity in which the intellectual exploration should have full scope, so the teaching should be, like overflow water of spring of culture, spontaneous and inevidable."¹⁰

True education of man is a product of interacting between inner nature and the nature outside. When there is connection between the two men, education attends some sort of connection between their culture and inner human nature. In this way the students can grow their life, health, strength and the power of mind, which are indispensable for discharging his social duties. His system of education can develop the personality – intellectual, spiritual, physical and emotional are to be

developed in childhood in order to enable him to grow up into a mature person. Otherwise he will always remain a child having no self-expression and joy of creativity and no stimulus is received for developing thinking power. In this context Tagore said, "if I want my son to grow up into a man, I should see that he grows up like a man right from his childhood. He should be told not to rely entirely on memory, and be given plenty of opportunity to think for himself and use its imagination... childhood and adolescence are the moments when the stimulus of literature is essential for the growth of man."¹¹ The major difficulties of our modern education was that we are not educated to know ourselves. We are deprived to knowing things, which are Indian and form inseparable parts of social and cultural fabric of our country. He was against the borrowed knowledge of the West which is not of any help for individual development. In this context we can quote from Tagore, "that educational institutions in our country are India's alms, bowl of knowledge, they lower our intellectual self respect, they encourage us to make a foolish display of decoration, comprising borrowed feathers... the result is that we can produce but do not produce. They're trained but not develop individuality... The morphia of obedience is being administered on so liberal a sale that we cannot on living the university hostel recover individuality and free thinkings"¹². So the delicate mission, which had fallen on the shoulders of Tagore, was, therefore, to reform entirely, the system of education artificially transplanted by the British on the Indian soil so that the new system devised through his genius should take him roots in the Indian soil, Indian culture and atmosphere and countries aesthetic and economic condition and he tried to combine them in his educational curriculum. First of all we have to see whatever the educational system we adopt for our country it should be in tune with our natural and cultural circumstances. If some elements of foreign system are suitable for assimilation in our system and if we are sure that such grafting will

invigorate our education, we should not hesitate, for their acquisition on the country. If we try to introduce them in our system only because of their being foreign or because it has produced fantastic result in foreign soil, there is very reason which discards them. Just we have adopted ourselves to our natural surroundings in respect of food, clothing etc. Regarding this Tagore said, "we have as far as possible, made our food and clothing unburden some, our climate has taught us do so. We require the openings in walls more than the walls themselves. Light and air have more to do with our cloths then the weaver's loom ... all these natural advantages have moulded our life to a particular shape, which I can not believe. It will be profitable to ignore in the case of our education".¹³ An integrated personality can be achieved only when there is a balance development of all the faculties and the main task of education is to give formation of such personality. A society can progress only when the majority of the members have achieved harmony in their personal life. If we want our children to be complete human beings, the seeds for that stage should be firmly sowed, watered and nourished in the early childhood. Whatever effort we make later to recover the lost ground are nothing but fruitless. Tagore's conscience of an artist didn't recognize a separation between art and life. His greatest strength is in the belief in the life. The love for beauty and colour, which Tagore entertained, was rather inborn in his native being. In fact, he was born in a world in which urban development has just triumphed over the green life in ancient village community. However he himself wonders that despite his upbringing in a city atmosphere he was constantly hunted by the nostalgic faces of an exiled life. He remarked that..., "even a few coconut palms growing on the border of his vast compound, same to him likes some war captives from an older army of invaders of the earth and they appeared to speak to him of the eternal companionship, which the great brotherhood of the trees have ever offered to man."¹⁴ According to him Indian education is not only qualitatively merge but also barren,

since it is meant for administrative that Tagore admired to Soviet system of education which according to him had revolutionized the life's of poor people. In a letter he wrote, "here I find education has become vital, because the boundary of school does not separate it from daily life. They do not teach in order to prepare pupils for examination or to produce scholars but to make all-round man. Then he deplored referring to the boys of his school. How often we have tried of our boys into discussion but found that they had no question to ask...."¹⁵ It is exactly this attitude that hurts Tagore. In the total development of our school children, satisfaction of instinctive curiosity has no plays in our school system as well as in the home environment system. It was, therefore, the endeavor of Tagore too creative such positive and mind nourishing surroundings for his children to enable them to enjoy their freedom and develop their natural faculties.

Spiritual Education

Question may arise: What was Tagore's actual religious status? He became atheist at his old age or he had strong faith in God. This kind of question was raised. The metaphysical world where he belonged to was so vast that ordinary people like us cannot evaluate it. In Indian philosophy theism (*āstika*) and atheism (*nāstika*) are measured not in the traditional way. An individual who believes in the *Veda* is called theist and one who does not is called atheist. So, in Indian philosophy not only Cārvāka but also Buddha and Mahavīra also belong to the atheist group. Tagore firmly believed in the *Veda* and *Upanisad*. So, he can be said to be theist, but he didnot having any faith on traditional so-called gods and goddess. There was no doubt about the poet's religious belief. God revealed to him in so many forms like the worldly object. The earth became meeting place of God and living being. Here the time had lost its dimension and the past and the future merge into one eternal superior authority. And in this way the poet's religious feeling crossed its

limitation and became 'the religion of man'. Man naturally wants to know the infinite and it helps him- "to train his attitude and behaviors towards the infinite in its human aspects" (*The Religion of Man, Rabindranath Tagore*). He does not belong to any religious sect and for this it became easy to him to criticize the so-called religious groups. He realized that religion was a special kind of feeling, self-realization and so called orthodox system of any religious group stands as a wall in between man and his God. So, Tagore again and again criticizes the Hindu rituals. Tagore's religious feeling became truth in *Pareshbabu* and *Anandmoye* in his novel *Gorā*. We can also see in the *Hobib Khan* in Tagore's *Musalmanir gappo*. It is seen also in Tagore's real life that he had a relation with his friend Andrews. Andrews could not understand what was his religious attitude. Would he keep any relation with Christian religion or not? Then how Tagore made him understand and relieve him can be seen in Andrews biography - "Tagore met his needs with the insight and patience of genuine friendship. Faithfully he reminded him that human love, when not disinterested, must be shunned at any cost; he saw the tendency for his friend to slip into the vagueness and laxity which two years earlier he had so strongly condemned, and he urged him to return to his God, and to cling fast to the priceless heritage of his Christian devotional life". (*Charles Freer Andrews*, [1971]: Benarasidas Chaturbedi, Marjothic Sykes, pg. 107).

So, it is clear that Tagore was not in favor of any religion. He was not also against of any religious group, but he was against the religious group, which was not in favour of the growth of human personality. Actually religion should keep human consciousness alive. For this he called the atheism the 'atheistic religion'. He said: -

Nastik seo jai Vidhatar bar.

Dharmikatar kore na arambar

Shraddha korea jale buddhir alo

Shastra manena, mane manusher bhalo

That is,

Atheist who are also getting the bliss of God,

are not showing their fake religious faith

They used to lit the light of knowledge

They donot believe in God

But have a vast faith on the goodness of the humanity.

Tagore was associated with the pupil who believed strictly on religious scripture but it is difficult to say how he was influenced by the atheist and created the character like *Jathamahasai* in *Chaturanga* and *Abhik* in *Rabibar*. How man crosses his limitation and belongs to his surplusness without believing in God is evidenced form the characters of *Abhik* and *Jathamahasai*. Tagore was blamed for his atheism and he answered in this way – The real God is roaming out side the temple. They spread their hands for begging on the road. Though I am blamed as a atheist ! What is the use of those rituals which are offered to the Gods in the religious temple by neglecting the needy, hungry poor people?... I love to those needy people and I pay my gratitude to them. I donot have any faith on those imaginary deities. (12 April, 1931 *Chitipatra* [collection of letter])

The positive side of Tagore's atheism reached to its highest value when atheist *Jagamohan* invited the *Muslims* poor people and needy untouchable cobblers at his home. His brother *Harimohan* opposed it and then *Jagamohan* answered that – "they are my *Gods* and I must offer my bhog (sacred food offered to God) to them, please donot oppose me... they are my *Gods* because they can eat food which are offered to them". Tagore wrote the drama *Rabibar* when he was 80. He was too much matured himself and created a character like *Abhik* in *Rabibar*. He is the representative of non-believer of gods and in the story Tagore's voice comes out in *Abhik's* mouth. In our country people are quarreling with themselves for their own religion. They claim that their religions are superior to other. Here *Abhik* says, "in that country, where people are quarreling for the superiority of their religion, there the Nobel task of me like atheist is to make a bridge among all religions" (*Rabibar*, Rabindranath Tagore). Tagore's religious viewpoint will be more clear from his statement in his letters – Where people are cheated in the name of deity, then I can not control myself. When I visited Gaya, there I saw a landlady offered a lot of gold and money to the Panda – those gold coins were forcibly collected form the poor citizen of her reigns.... The negligence of man to his own fellow cannot be seen in other country because the deity takes the lion's share from the poor people (*Chitipatra*, 14 June 1931). The so-called religion makes him so dissatisfied that he addressed himself as atheist and created a character like *Abhik* in *Rabibar*. Atheist here is not used in a negative way or it is not slang. The people, who are doing business with religion, use atheist in a negative sense for hurting the people. So, they donot have any idea that man may have ethics detached from religion. But Tagore strongly believed that atheists are more ethical than religious people. It is evidenced in the dialogues between *Abhik* and *Vibha* in *Rabibar*.

Vibha: Please wait and look after my Jewellery, I am coming

Abhik: But who will control my greed?

Vibha: Why? Your atheism!

Tagore is said to be the true maker of universal man. He tried to develop a child into a universal man. So, personality development takes an important part in his education system. For this he prescribed spiritual education along with emotional and physical. Truly speaking spiritual education takes a vital role to develop a child. For him religion cannot be imparted in the form of lesson in the classroom. It is not a commodity that can be rationed in fixed weekly period in fixed doses as a subject of school curriculum. To him religions are the way of life to us. It is actual means, which help us to reach our goals. It makes ensure us to get a close relation with the infinite. So, it can be said that it is the center of gravity of our life and can be developed by the daily practice from our childhood. Truth of spiritual life not in the artificial necessities but the simple livelihood surrounded by fullness of leisure, by ample space and pure air and profound peace of nature, where man lives with a perfect faith in the internal life before them. Tagore's religious life was all pervading. It is not based on any partial feeling and parochialism. It was truly a religion to be practiced by man to make himself happy and the world better place to living. To him religious education is not teaching of some rules and dogmas. So, in his own school he felt that his students could enjoy and realize their reunion of delight in the midst of nature. It is enough for them. He makes sure that religious education is not an external imposition but an internal development and it definitely leads us to sublimity of thought. Tagore experienced such a situation when he wrote... "when I was 18 a sudden breeze of religious experience comes in my life for the first time and passes away, living a message of spiritual reality... the poem I wrote on the first day was called the *Nirjharer Sapnabhanga* (awakening of the waterfall)." ¹⁶ He described his religion as

the religion of man and advocated that God manifested himself in man in the sense that it was through human activity he realized himself in the universe. The evaluation of the universe is a co-operative activity in which man is not only a recipient but also a donor. Tagore was of the opinion that religion can never be taught in a prescribed lesson. He believed that a person, who has undertaken a profession of teaching about God and good to others, merely confuses and does not guide the aspirants of truth. Religion to him as to us is to be lived and not taught.

We have to remember that Tagore is dead against moral institution as imparted by teachers in schools. For him, it is a pure waste of time and effort. He said - "it is futile and it is disagreeable and I cannot think anything that does more harm to society. It is not moral institution that is needed for building up a boy's mind and character but friendly guidance and congenial environment."¹⁷ Tagore believed in universal religion, which is taught or practiced. It is rather the idea of universal religion that is propagated. In his *Shantiniketan* there is no moral and religious education as a separate curriculum. Since, Tagore believed that this two cannot be part of school syllabus but the whole *Shantiniketan* curriculum was so devised that one could imbibe this values naturally in an atmosphere of freedom. Even the very conception of discipline has a special connotation here.

Discipline here means the attitude of discipline. It stands for good behavior irrespective for other orderliness, modesty, cleanliness- all this benefits a student and without which a life of serious study is impossible and this can lead a student to an ideal man.

Critics may think that Tagore was an atheist because there was no place of God in his religious philosophy but he was not in favour of godless system of education. Even so, he admired the Russians for their

achievements and raising their living standard in period of hardly two decades. In his address in Moscow he expressed to his feelings – “I have been able to realize that your ideal education is very much similar to that of mine, that the people are living a complete life through which their minds are prepared to receive education in his full richness and not merely horde of isolated facts of scientific instruction and information...”.¹⁸ It is said before that Tagore’s idea of education is a part of life and something realistic and also concrete. With such high ideas Tagore never compromise him with the budding Russian system of education. His mind was clear on this point and wanted to uplift the tender mind and to bring repulsive uniformity in their thinking. It was his desire that children were to be allowed to lead a life of their own amidst utmost freedom to develop a variety of interest and to participate in a lot of activities which could stimulate their faculties and strengthen the development of their own self into a complete person. Tagore was an optimist, and hence he was confident that India will have a better future and the country will be progressive through the light of education where will reach every corner of the country. In his farewell address he expressed such hope.. “I dream of the time when it will be possible for the ancient land of Aryan civilization also to enjoy great boon of education and equal opportunities for all pupil”.¹⁹

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