



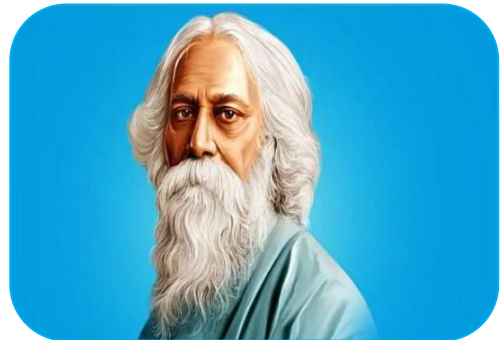
REFLECTING ON RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S PERSPECTIVE ON EDUCATION

Dr. Ravishri Mishra

Department of Sociology, Royal College of Arts,
Science and Commerce, Mira Road.

ABSTRACT :

Rabindranath Tagore a multifaceted personality often called as Gurudev, Kabiraj and Bard of Bengal. He had very unconventional view on education; he believed in education of feeling and did not prescribe for any dogmas. He advocated for education for all irrespective of any age, caste, class gender and religious barriers. His perspective on education is reflected in his art, poetry, speeches, writings and his projects Shantiniketan, Visva Bharti and Sriniketan. Great philosophers like Dewy and Rousseau were influenced by his writings. The present study is desk-research based on secondary data collected from research papers, books and journals reflecting on his philosophy of education and argues that his views are still relevant.



KEY WORDS : Education, Rabindranath, relevant, philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore was a polymath with multifaceted personality, a great poet, an artist par excellence, outstanding novelist and dramatist, innovative educationist, humanist, nationalist, internationalist, a Nobel laureate and a visionary who made immense contribution in the realm of literature, music, education and art. He was often called as Gurudev, Kabiguru, Biswakabi and "Bard of Bengal". In everything he wrote he was a teacher, he believed in education of feeling and did not prescribed any dogmas. He deeply contemplated on how education system should be for Indians irrespective of age caste, class, gender and religion. He did not receive any academic degree in education but he was an exceptional educationist of his time who not only preached but practiced too, which is evident from his projects Shantiniketan, Visva Bharti and Sriniketan. Tagore did not write any treatise on education, his ideas on education find manifestation in his art, poetry, speeches and other writings. Philosophers like Rousseau and Dewey influenced some of his writings. There are four pillars of his educational philosophy- naturalism, humanism, internationalism and idealism.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To reflect on the perspective of Rabindranath Tagore on education.
2. To discuss basic concepts of his educational thoughts
3. To give insight into its contemporary relevance.

METHODOLOGY:

The study is desk- research based on secondary data collected from research papers, books, and journals. The present study reflects on the Tagore's philosophy of education, discusses its relevance in contemporary society, and there by highlights his contribution in the field of education, which is been eclipsed by his literary achievement.

Tagore on Education:

Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy of education evolved from his life experiences. He came from an illustrious family, known for its enormous contribution in Bengal. Dwarkanath Tagore, an associate of Raja Ram Mohan Roy was his grand- father who made notable contribution in the Bengal renaissance. Debendranath Tagore father of Rabindranath Tagore took forward his grandfather's legacy and revived the Brahmo Samaj after his death. He was conferred title of 'Maharishi' for his devotion and selfless service for humankind. His siblings were accomplished poet, philosophers, composers, play writer, novelists and the first Indian to be member of ICS. His household resonated with music, literary and theoretical pursuit (Bhattacharya, 143). Thus, he came from a liberal and progressive family, which was at the helm of the intellectual awakening of 19th century India. All this had profound effect on impressionable young mind of Tagore.

Decolonizing Indian Education:

Tagore was critical of British system of education. In his view, it was a giant machine and teachers were mere part of that machine. Teacher-students relationship was mechanical not organic and humanitarian. The schools were located in artificial environment and lacked human element and natural settings (Poddar and Paul, 85).

The British system of education in India did not aimed at over all development of students. It was against the interests and well-being of people of India. The objective was just to produce educated citizens who were loyal to them and would serve on lower ranks in administrative jobs (Tirath, 154). As the medium of instruction was English, it alienated the English educated Indians from the masses.

Tagore viewed illiteracy to be root cause of all problem in India, therefore he stressed on mass education. He asserted that if nation has to progress, it has to bring common person within the purview of education system.

Rabindranath Tagore proposed alternative philosophy of education and appealed to the Indians to accept purposeful education catering to holistic development of individuals. For him education meant intercultural understanding, harmony, peace, mutual respect, love and appreciation for nature, reconstruction of rural society, social commitment and enhancing artistic and creative abilities in individuals.

In 1901, Rabindranath laid the foundation of ashram school at Shantiniketan, which was a blend of modernity and traditionalism. With this project, he developed a national system of education based on the ancient wisdom of gurukul or forest schooling prevalent in ancient India and incorporated modern scientific temper and attitudes of the West.

Tagore on Medium of Instruction:

Tagore accentuated on mother tongue as a medium of instruction as he felt people could express well in their mother tongue. He compared mother tongue language to "mother's milk". For him mother tongue as a medium of instruction makes learning undemanding and natural (Tirath, 158). He perceived that English education's reach is limited to urban centers especially to upper classes only. In addition, if we want education system to penetrate to rural areas to uplift the masses, it is essential to focus on mother tongue as a medium of instruction. However, he was not against foreign language but he wanted formative education to be in child's mother tongue.

Tagore on Ideal School:

Tagore was against the western model of educational institutions where greater emphasis was on structure of the buildings, materials, furniture, equipment and books. He argued that it made education expensive and beyond the reach of masses. The ideal school for him was away from the hustle and bustle of human habitation; located in the lap of nature surrounded by trees, plants, farms under an open sky.

In such an environment, the teacher would engage in teaching –learning process and students would gain practical knowledge and experiences. He believed that an ideal teacher would only impart an ideal education. For him an ideal teacher is someone who do not mechanically replicate mere bookish knowledge; an ideal teacher is one who inspires students, develop creative faculties of the students and introduce them to the world of knowledge and experiences (R.Dipu)

He was first to reject bookish learning or book centered learning as it kills the creativity and the natural instincts of the students. They become unsocial as the entire process of education is dehumanizing. In his view, the first twelve years of education should focus on educating the child's mind in tune with his natural tendencies and instincts and then they should be exposing to books. In an ideal institution, Tagore says, the child learns the significance of improvisation and becomes self-reliant. There is no foisting on off the shelves knowledge and ideas.

Regarding disciplining students, Tagore believed that discipline in students should be achieved through self-governance and not through coercion and force. He was against corporal punishment (Mondel and Mete, 54). He believed that children should be provided with an opportunity to grow and discover their inner self in an atmosphere free from fear and imposition. He advocated incorporating various methods of teaching such as field visits, learning by doing, Narration, Discussions, Debate and Heuristics (Mondal, 7).

Tagore on Women's Education:

Tagore was a passionate champion of women's rights and empowerment. He believed that women and men complement each other leading to the development of harmonious relationship of mutual respect. He advocated for mental, physical, moral and spiritual development of women through education. He asserted for freedom of mind and social and individual development for women. He averred that education would lead to cultural development and character building of women. He considered women equal to men in all aspects, therefore advocated for same curriculum for boys and girls but with separate practical courses for women. To develop aesthetic sense in women he recommended music, painting, dance and craft based curriculum. He wanted women to be financially independent therefore, endorsed agricultural and technical education for them (Gurjar, 614).

Tagore's Educational Trinity:

Shantiniketan, Visva Bharti and Sri Niketan add up to Tagore's educational trinity:

Shantiniketan was Tagore's substitute for British pattern of education prevailing then in India. He started Shantiniketan as an experimental school in 1901. Later he added Visva Bharti, an international university and Sriniketan an institute for rural reconstruction (DasGupta, 9).

With Visva Bharti, an Indian center of education Tagore presented an educational model of inclusive society, global interconnectedness and harmony. At Visva Bharti both academics and aesthetic were given importance. Aesthetic education with training in music and fine arts was consider as a vehicle for national expression. While the study of cultures, the Vedic, Puranic, Buddhist, Jain, Islamic studies, folk cultures, etc. were thought as a means for understanding the India and its under currents.

Visva Bharti widened its linguistic and cultural horizon by developing connection with other parts of Asia and thus, became "Eastern University". It also stressed on blending the local culture with the global cultures to develop the ideal of holistic approach to education and made Visva Bharti a global center of learning.

Sriniketan-Project of Rural Reconstruction:

Tagore launched his another project Sriniketan with rural reconstruction as its aim. The main goal of Sriniketan was all round development of village children so that they were equipped to earn decent living and improve their living conditions. Many agricultural based research and experiments were conducted to improve the productivity of the land, and the knowledge thus gained was passed on to the villagers so that they could get the benefit. He emphasized on overall improvement in villagers life by focusing on their various needs such as education, health, agriculture, craft and trade. More than two hundred cooperative societies were set up for agricultural credits, granaries and irrigations in Sriniketan (Jha, 8).

Right to Education

Education is human rights of every individual. Acknowledging this, the government of India enacted Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009. However, critics and social activists claim that the act though appears to be progressive fails the test of constitutional mandate guaranteed under various articles such as Article 14, and Article 38, which deals with right to equality and right to social justice. The act strengthens and legalizes some already existing discriminatory practices. The act has no provisions for regulating the fees structure, thereby perpetuating commercialization and corporatization of education (Desai, 630).

If we review RTE, 2009 in the light of Tagore's philosophy of education -Tagore viewed education as means to achieve life's goal not only the economic goals. The motto of educational institution for Tagore was that one should see all being in one's own self and one's own self in all beings. For Tagore the aims of education are based on context, he emphasized that if man is a consumer then he should also be a producer. He attempted to decolonize the educational system and educational institution. He asserted that western education system robs the child of earth when it teaches child geography and robs child of his language when grammar is being taught. He stressed equally on aesthetic aspects of education that is neglected in our educational system (Desai, 631).

Tagore's educational philosophy and experiments still exist- the Patha Bhavan and Sriniketan. However, with modification. Only when we put the RTE, 2009 in the perspective of Tagore's philosophy we will be able to reap the benefit and achieve its objective.

Although it has been over a decade of the implementation of RTE, 2009 the elementary education for children from marginalized section both in urban and rural areas are facing challenges and at present it is due to pandemic, as education is now online. Are we able to provide them with education as guaranteed under RTE, 2009?

Tagore stressed on holistic development of students. He through his experiments attempted to make education accessible to all the elite and the masses, the boys and the girls and promoted interconnectivity between the urban and the rural, provincial and the regional groups, the locals and the global.

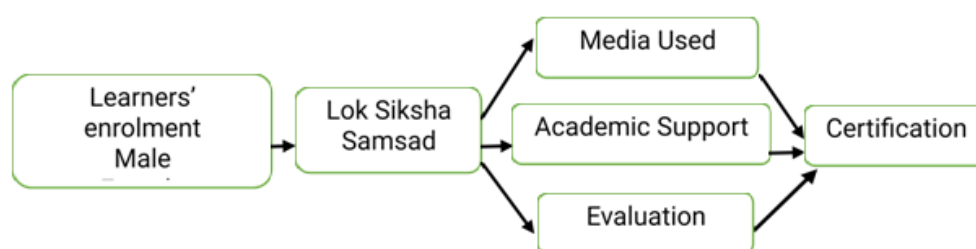
Tagore on Higher Education and Distance Education

Tagore visualized university as a powerhouse of knowledge. Therefore, the goal of university as per Tagore was to develop and disseminate knowledge to the younger generation of the nation and assist in rebuilding rural India. He argued that the Universities were merely churning out graduates, professionals like lawyers, Doctors, Engineers, and Civil Servants. He asserted that Universities in India are not connected to the life of its people; neither engages in collecting and preserving the national heritage nor involve in upliftment of the rural society. He believed that Indian universities should be as a truss, and cater for rural development (Jana et al, 829). He proposed cooperative methods involving students, teachers and people for the development process.

Tagore realized the significance of distance education long before anyone else. He introduced it through Lok Siksha Samsad. His Lok Siksha Samsad organized home study and examination for those who due to some reason could not attend School. Tagore pleaded for Home University scheme in Education Conference, held in Calcutta in 1936. Tagore maintained that most of the educational

institutions and examination centers are located in town and cities, which deprive students of their right to education. Through distance education the students such as the women and also the men who are out of the ambit of formal educational system would be encouraged to pursue education at home in their leisure time. They should be provided with guidance through proper syllabus and study materials. This would help them to complete their education, improve their social status, and enhance their chances of employability.

Tagore's' proposed model of Distance Education



Source: Rahman, et al (2011)

Contemporary Relevance of Tagore's Educational Ideals:

Inequality in access to basic needs and violation of human rights is a global phenomenon. The world today is grappling with the problems of inequality, rural-urban disparity environmental crisis, global warming, sustainability, gender disparity, war, terrorism and discontent. Countries are competing for scarce resources, promoting neoliberal economic development, and rapid urbanization that is contributing for the growth of unsustainable cities. The advantage of scientific and technological development been enjoyed by some regions of the world. In pandemic, these disparities are more visible. The digital divide that the online education has created would have long-term impact on those who do not have access to technology- the poor's and the marginalized section of Indian society.

Tagore's legacy of inclusive society, ecological awareness, inter-cultural understanding and sustainable development makes sense even today. His emphasis on creativity, love for nature, and tolerance are more meaningful than the emphasis on grades, achievements and employability. Tagore's ideals of nationalism, universalism, religion, rural development, mass education, self-discipline, and self-realization and world centrism would address many problems faced by present day society. His contribution in the arena of education is at par with many international figures such as Rousseau, Froebel, Dewey and Malcom Knowles endeavored to build non-authoritarian pedagogy apt and desirable to their social milieu.

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