

# Rabindranath Tagore's Philosophy of Education and Its Relevance in The Modern Era

## Abstract

There is huge presence of Education behind every developed society, Good education is the back bone and base of bright future. Many philosophers presented their views on Education from the ancient time. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was such a poet, story writer, visionary, social reformer and great philosopher who presented his views on many aspects of society. The concept of Education is one of the significant concepts of his philosophy. He believed in natural education system and wants to open windows of school and mind for nature so he built Shantiniketan (1901), in natural place. Tagore believed that the educational process should be one of self-discovery and free creation. Thus, his concept of education seems to be very much relevant in the present context, where education has become source of business and exploitation.

**Keywords:** Rabindranath Tagore, Education, Freedom, Nature, Philosophy, Shantiniketan.

## Introduction

Ideas play an important role in the society. Ideas do not remain the same, these are changeable with the passage of time, but some great ideas keep long time relevance. Rabindranath Tagore played a pioneering role in expanding modern education and social mobilization on the 19th and early 20th century Indian society. He is one of the architects of the modern India.<sup>1</sup> He was an exponent of Bengal Renaissance. Tagore depicted the India of his vision. Rabindranath Tagore had given flow to steadiness by means of his various new ideas, policies, psychology, concepts and new methods. Rabindranath was a social reformer, political thinker and an educational philosopher also.<sup>2</sup> Tagore, a great intellectual of the 19th century is perhaps one of the best social thinkers and reformers that the world has ever seen. His views on every aspect of the individual and social life have profound impact even after century.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup>

Tagore did not have any academic degree in education, but he was a great educator of his time. The origin of Tagore's educational theory was his own home life and the freedom he had experienced within it. Withdrawing early from formal education and maintaining that "whatever I have learned I have learned outside of class," the poet's own education was to come from the total environment of life.<sup>5</sup>

Rabindranath travelled in many countries of the world. But he studied Indian culture in detail and in that light changed his opinion on various issues of India and the world. This made significant contributions to Indian philosophy. He established new ideas and trends in the field of Indian education and imparted instruction through a blend of theory and practical.

He had established Viswabharati at Santiniketan where there is a unique harmony between man and nature. He had written extensively on the subject of education. His approach, is in itself a unique concept. Education of the body, mind and spirit are each expounded in his writings on education, but their integration is even more significant. He has also



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dwelt on the social, creative and psychological aspects of education. Tagore's life represented a shining chapter in India's rich cultural background. There is no contradiction between a poet and a philosopher. Tagore was not just a political activist in its traditional sense. But his patriotism is reflected in his giving up of "Knighthood" to protest against the massacre at JalianwalaBagh. Though his identity is more as a poet and a thinker he contributed a lot in the innovation in education. There are few people like Tagore who recognized the value of education in the development of the nation.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Review of Literature**

There is so much literature available on Rabindranath Tagore's concept of Education. Most of his works are translated by eminent Indian and foreign authors. Here some of the existing literature is reviewed.

'Rabindranath Tagore and the challenges of today' (1988)<sup>7</sup> edited by B. Chaudhury and K. G. Subramanyan. This book is a collection and combination of different articles and research papers on Rabindranath Tagore's vision regarding Education, his man, nationalism, village reconstruction etc. These articles have brought out some of ennobling aspect of Tagore's life. His countless works have been very useful to understand nationalism and humanism as per his vision. This book also compares his concept of education with the modern educational concept. Author also discusses about his universal man, value of nature and concept of cooperation. Tagore not wanted only the unity of East and the West, but also was worried about the crises of personal identity in the British India i.e. the traditional and human values. This book also compares Tagore and Gandhi on the grounds of their views on village reconstruction. At the end of the book, a condensed account of the discussion is given, which demands of the Tagore's vision, its continuity, validity and relevance of many of his messages in the modern India.

Sarkar Rimi and Ghosh Aritra's research paper 'Rabindranath Tagore: In the age of Globalization' (2013)<sup>8</sup> analyzes Tagore's views on human relation, concept of exploitation, concept of money, imperialism and capitalism in the present context. There is a great deference between Tagore's and that of today's scenario. This research paper examines how far the words of Tagore are applicable to this changed world. The author tells us that Rabindranath has clearly explained to us how capitalism deprived men of all human qualities and had enforced the modern men to live in a class-divided society in an indescribable miserable condition. Tagore opposed imperialism, capitalism, the concept of money, and wanted good human relations and environment, so in this context his ideas are more relevant today.

Social Thought of Rabindranath Tagore' (1974)<sup>9</sup> of K. Gopal, is a very dedicated book to Tagore. In this book, author throws light on Tagore's social as well as political ideas. Tagore believed in cooperative society, and his politics was based on equality, liberty, brotherhood etc. The author also tells

us about his religious views which were aimed at welfare of humanity. His political, educational as well as economic vision is also discussed in this book. Tagore said that the aim of education is not only intellectual development but also the physical one. Tagore opposed exploitation of man by man. And in the end a critical assessment on his social thought is explained.

'Gitanjali' (2013)<sup>10</sup> by Rabindranath Tagore. The poems and songs of Gitanjali have established the writer's literary talent as universal. They include the eloquent sonnets such as the famous 'Where the mind is without fear', intense explorations of love, faith and nature and tender evocations of childhood. A poet's poet, he is a maker of not only modern Indian literature, but also of modern Indian mind and civilization. His world-wide acclaim as a social, political, religious and aesthetic thinker makes him universal. A collection of over one hundred inspirational poems, Gitanjali covers the breadth of his life experiences, beginning with the quite pleasure of observing children at play to a man's struggle with his god.

Tagore presents in order to introduce his concept of the tapobon. In 1909, a journal called, Prabashi, published Tagore's article, Tapobon. Throughout his years he referred to the notion of tapobon developed here. Definition of Tapobon The definition of Tapobon is best understood in two parts. Bon (the latter half) means forest. Tapo means meditation. Students live in this forest with their Guru, teacher. The concept of tapobon is a part of India's cultural fabric. People often associate the ward with sages and saints who have devoted their lives to contemplation. Yet we need to draw out implications of what is Literally described as a forest for meditation.

'Philosophy o'-Education of Rabindranath Tagore and Tagore and Education for Social Change' of MohitChakrabarti, he painted Tagore's thoughts on education in far broader strokes than I have in this paper. He has drawn on not only articles and letters but has also presented songs and poetry. At the beginning of each of these works he provides the reader with a series of generalizations on Tagore, education, and in the case of the latter work, on social change. Thereafter, the works focus primarily on translations of individual pieces interspersed with interpretation. These interpretations inform the translations more than analyses Tagore's thoughts.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

1. The main aim of this study is to examine the educational ideas of Tagore, his basic conception of education and its process.
2. To examine the aims, policies, techniques, tactics, strategies, methods and achievements of Rabindranath Tagore.
3. To examine Rabindranath Tagore's Educational ideas and to analyze the relevance of his ideas in the present context.

#### **Research Questions**

The following research questions have guided this study.

1. What did Rabindranath Tagore say about the aims of education in India and elsewhere?
2. What shape should education take? What kinds of curriculum should be implemented and why?
3. What is the relevance of Tagore's Educational thoughts today, in the context of Modern India?

**Hypothesis**

1. Rabindranath Tagore was not only a poet and story writer but also an eminent social reformer and Educational philosopher.
2. There is a great relevance of Tagore's ideas of education, freedom and humanism in the present time. Man is the center of his Educational philosophy.
3. Rabindranath gave spiritual approach to Education. He thinks that there is a very strong relation between human, nature and education. He believes in natural education system.
4. Tagore's concept of Education is based on Nature, co-operation and brotherhood. His method of achieving aims were peaceful and smooth.

**Research Methodology**

For the completion of this research paper historical, descriptive and comparative methods would be used. With a view to achieve the objectives and testing of hypotheses, the study would be theoretical in nature and be based on the primary as well as secondary sources. The primary sources would include articles, original translated works, letters of Rabindranath Tagore and his manuscripts. The secondary sources would be books, journals, newspapers, websites, magazine, encyclopedias, dictionaries and from the official records. Whereas some necessary online data will have been utilized. Other means like personal interactions as well as group discussions with senior teachers, professors, litterateur and leaders will also be used.

**Analysis and Interpretation of the Data**

The contemporary education system in India was firstly borrowed and developed based on the Western ideology. Tagore clearly saw the social upheaval, who determined to present his alternative philosophies and ask for a social reform. After he visited in Santa Barbara in 1917, he sought to make Santiniketan<sup>11</sup>

Tagore claimed that the existing school and university have been operating like "educational factories", and that classroom schooling resembles "parrot's training", where a bird is caged and force-fed textbook pages; knowledge reproduction via classroom learning is dissociated from social contexts; students lack interest to explore ideas, and are instead confined to doing homework and taking tests. In his opinion, education has "divorced from the streams of life and confined within the four walls of the classroom becomes artificial and losses its value."<sup>12</sup>

The focus of Rabindranath Tagore's educational thoughts was not limited to job creation, but it plays a facilitative role in overall development of humanity. He wishes schools to be in natural environment, more live and enjoyable. He furnished equal importance to spiritual, scientific and physical

knowledge. Rabindranath Tagore was against pouring of information into the mind of learners.

He encourages the youth to go outside of the classroom, make connections with others as well as learn themselves in the natural environment; education should be a way to gain freedom and to fully develop their potential. Moreover, Tagore believed that education should be a lifelong process; youth go to school not because the teachers or the parents want them to learn and be successful, but to develop themselves in terms of creating a better understanding of their social surroundings and harmonious relationships linked to the broader world. From this standpoint, education is a way for empowerment, of different social levels and genders. Positive education can transfer population into human resources.

Rabindranath Tagore's experiences at *Jorasankop* 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.<sup>13</sup>

Tagore did not consider education only as a means of knowledge learning but also as a tool of connecting and developing individuals with humanity at large. On the contrary, education, to him, is an important way to obtain freedom of mind and soul. Tagore once said, "education is a permanent part of the adventure of life, it is not like a painful hospital treatment for curing students of the congenial malady of their ignorance, but it is a function of the health, the natural expression of their minds vitality"<sup>14</sup>

"Freedom", "creative self-expression", and "active communion with nature and mankind" are three key principles of Tagore's educational philosophy. Although Tagore embraces "individualism" and "naturalism", he believed that "every one of us the Creator manifests in a unique manner and every individual tries to realize the Creator in his own way through which unity could be found not only amongst human beings but also between men and nature"<sup>15</sup> the keynote of Tagore's educational philosophy was to ultimately realize the unity of human beings.

As a traveler, Tagore believed that education should be the way to relate and to experience the world, so as to understand and realize oneself and one's relation with others, such as parents, friends and strangers. Tagore's concept of society was to "develop the complete man" through education; this can be achieved through interactive activities and exposure to life events. He believed that education is a process that can teach people to "realize their oneness with other individuals of the universe leading to the harmonious development of the personality."<sup>16</sup> Tagore's this view regarding education adopted an

open mind that helps the learners fully discover their potential by understanding themselves and environment too. However, the existing educational systems rely too much on learners' test scores; there is a tendency to equate high test scores with talent, at the expense of other qualities related to human nature, such as one's emotions and good senses towards society and one's surroundings, which should be considered to be as important as one's intellect.

What is direr to Tagore is the imposition of a foreign tongue that results in mental stifling, and mental rigidity. According to him, Language is a means through which we express what we see, what we feel, what we believe, what we are thinking. A foreign language is not as accessible as the mother tongue, and while we are busy acquiring this other language, we do not learn as much as we could. Tagore is condemning the use of the foreign language as the medium of instruction.<sup>17</sup> He believes that young boys entered their schools with curiosity and intelligence and left them with disabled minds and a contempt for knowledge. The reason is that this kind of educational system, *shikkhapranali*, does not "work the mind, but instead turns boys into parrots." Tagore provides a succinct critique of Freire's banking system of education whereby knowledge is stuffed into students hampering the individual's development of the mind. The metaphor of the parrot makes Tagore's critique of colonial education very clear. Education under the imperial power exists for the purpose of creating these "parrots." Education exists not only for the accumulation of knowledge but also for the instillation of values. An educational system that produces parrots will also produce people in whom it is easy to instill values useful for the colonizer.

In Tagore's philosophy of social development, education is the key to make people awaken, especially at the grassroots level; "when literacy rate increases, inequality of resource distribution is reduced"<sup>18</sup>. When people see education as a powerful tool, it can help them protect their own rights in many ways. Being a social reformer, Rabindranath Tagore advocated educational tool for social change by turning young people into independent and creative thinkers rather than blind followers of rituals and traditions. Burden of memory is our obstacle in the flow of learning.<sup>19</sup>

In his 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. According to Tagore, the basic aim of education is to facilitate the individuals to accomplish means of self-realization. The education system of a nation should be able to provide opportunity of all round development to all people of the nation with equal emphasis of acquisition of knowledge and skills.<sup>20</sup>

### Findings

The present education system is joyless, colorless, painful, lifeless etc., which are not produced to desired outcomes. His teaching methodology initiated in Visva-Bharati, Shantiniketan can be a model for the current educational system.

Rabindranath Tagore's teaching methodologies are most applicable in the present system to bring up the learners in love and creativity. Egoism of the individuals should be shattered. The motto of Visva-Bharati was, 'where the world makes a home in a single nest'. Building a relationship with Nature was as important for Tagore as building relationships with teachers and the peers in a school. The entire curriculum would be kept flexible around the ability and natural inclination of the child with a focus on intercultural learning through history, art and literature.

There is a very strong relation between human and nature, man should be careful about it and learn lessons from nature. Thus, his concept of education seems to be very much relevant in the present context, where education has become source of business and exploitation. There is privatization of education, discrimination and gross violation of human rights in order to get education. Tagore believed that the educational process should be one of self-discovery and free creation. To him the object of education is freedom of mind and spirit. The three cardinal principles of his educational philosophy are-Freedom, Creative self-expression and Active communion with nature and man.<sup>21</sup>

Tagore advocated the principle of self-determination in the education of the masses. He was adamant that education must be in the hands of the people and their communities and not passed down by government. Rabindranath believed that "The widest road leading to the solution of all our problems is education."<sup>22</sup> He began to reflect on the best educational thought of the world, past and present.

Rabindranath emphasized on the inner principle of individual of knowledge and all the activities of our social and spiritual being, which is the important objective of education. Education is not primarily didactic but leads to the attainment of a level of life in harmony with the universe. Tagore has described this ideal as the full growth of the individual in harmony with the universal the supreme person who has in himself the venous levels of consciousness and experience corresponding to man's physical self, life, mind and soul.

Tagore's most important aim in education is the development of the individual leading to a harmonious growth of personality. The development of the personality to fullness is also the care of his basic philosophy of life: "To attain full manhood is the ultimate end of education: everything else is subordinate to it."<sup>23</sup>

Now, in the 21st century, too rapid industrialization and technological advancement has negatively impacted both our environment and our society, and we need to put a halt to this type of development. Tagore's philosophy of education reminds us that both education and development should be responsible and respectful towards our human nature. When development has started to harm our natural environment as well as affect the understanding of social values (wealth, success, and power), seeing the harm that development has and is causing, we should look back and ask ourselves deep inside: why are we developing in the first place?

Social sustainability and human development that respects moral and humanistic development should be put in the center of future education. Education, in this sense, should not focus only on developing more advanced technologies or trying to use machines to solve social issues, such as poverty and inequality. Instead, we should see the whole world as a big developing community; becoming globalized means that there is integration across different cultures, and ideas and products become more readily tangible across nations. Thus, in this regard, we will be able to share resources, exchange developmental ideas and skills, and balance adequate and inadequate facilities within a globally human context.

He spoke of the existing schools as being an "education factory, lifeless, colorless, disassociate from the context of the universe. Our education has taken us away from our natural surroundings. It is dissociated from social contexts. Education "divorced from the streams of life and confined within the four walls of the classroom becomes artificial and loses its value". The primary work in his opinion was to bring the child's mind in contact with nature.<sup>24</sup>

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.<sup>25</sup>

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

Intellectual Development, Natural growth in Natural Circumstance, Freedom to Learner, Self-Realization, Love for Humanity, Physical Development, Teaching - Practical and Real, Co-relation of Objects, Place of Fine Arts (Dance, Drama, Music, Poetry etc.), Mother Tongue as the Medium of Instructions, Moral and Spiritual Development, Social Development, Goodbye to Book-Centered Education, Education for Rural Reconstruction and so on.<sup>26</sup>

1. Education may be provided in mother tongue. If needed, foreign languages can be used.
2. We should try to develop physical and morality in the attitude of the students.
3. Teacher - student relation should be friendly and fearless.
4. There must not be any physical torture in the educational institutions.
5. Importance of science and technical education should be increased.
6. There should be special place of Fine Arts (Dance, Drama, Music, Poetry etc.) in Education system.
7. Along with theoretical education, practical education must be emphasized.

8. We have to give more importance to women and co-Education. Because women are fifty percent of our total population.
9. Learning must be joyful, so teachers should be trained up frequently where required.
10. We should emphasize on innovational activities in education in spite of memorizing.
11. According to Tagore, nature is the best teacher. Students can learn enough with the close proximity of nature.

#### Conclusion

Today, there is degradation of environment. Man is running from nature and avoiding it. Our planet is suffering from environmental issues, like Global warming, deforestation, pollution, energy crisis and nuclear issues etc. So, his concept of nature seems to be very much relevant in the present context, because he had talked about the close relationship between nature and human.

The systems advocated by Tagore have solutions to modern day educational problems of India as well as the whole world. The eclectic understanding of Tagore's philosophy has great relevance for the academicians, administrators, policy makers, researchers and policy makers who can use these principles for the building of nation, brotherhood, reduce unemployment and discrimination in educational and other opportunities being practiced even in the face of a vibrant Indian Constitution and legal system. Present writing open avenues for further research on Tagore as an educationist by making further suggestions and presenting an extensive bibliography on Tagore's writings on education.

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