

## CONTRIBUTION OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

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### Introduction:

**Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)**, Asia's first Nobel Laureate, was born into a prominent Calcutta family known for its socio-religious and cultural innovations during the 19th Bengal Renaissance.

Education is the touchstone of civilization and culture. It is an integral part and basis of human life. Ever since the dawn of civilization man has been trying to 'educate' himself in order to meet the changing demands of life. Education is a process, a kind of activity in relation to human beings. Education is scattered to the whole life span and consists of the systematic development and the cultivation of the normal powers of intellect, feeling, and conduct, so as to render them efficient in some form of living or for life in general. In the words of

**TAGORE:** Education means enabling the mind to find out that ultimate truth

Which emancipates us from the bondage of the dust and gives us the wealth, not of things but of inner light, not of power but of love, making its own and giving expression to it.

Plants are developed by cultivation and men by education. This world would have been enveloped in intellectual darkness if it had not been illuminated by the light of education. It is right to say that the story of civilization is the story of education. It is the basic condition for a development of a whole man and vital instrument for accelerating the well-being & prosperity by the light of education.

**Tagore said:** —The highest Education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence.

Education is preparation for life through life experiences. Since children have to enter a complicated society, when they grow adults, education develops in them thinking and reasoning to be used when they are faced with the problems of home, community and world. These two powers help them to live an orderly and moral life. Education trains the eye and the mind so that the individual should make correct responses to the problems and opportunities of life. In the words of Tagore: —Education nourishes our reasoning faculties in order to allow our mind its freedom in the world of truth, our imagination for the world which belongs to art and our sympathy for the world of human relationship

The superstructure of an educational system is raised on the foundation of philosophical thinking. All educational programs cannot be a success if its foundations are not laid on a sound philosophy. Education provides to the children that wisdom which philosophy has expanded for the welfare of man. Education in the wider sense has also been emphasized by International commission on the development of Education (UNESCO). In its report entitled *Learning to Be*, it has given the concept of lifelong education. The report reiterates that human beings keep on learning and training themselves throughout their life, above all through the influence of the surrounding environment and through experiences which mould their behavior, their conceptions of life and the content of their knowledge.

**Rabindranath Tagore** popularly known as Gurudeva was the greatest prophet of Educational Renaissance in Modern India. The syndicate of the University of Calcutta rightly placed on record of his services to India: Through him India has given her message to mankind and his unique achievements in the fields of literature,

philosophy, education, and art have won imperishable fame for himself and have raised the status of India in the estimation of the world.

The outstanding aspect of Tagore's contribution to education was freedom

Tagore had championed the cause of freedom. It means the child's own experience and activities. He explained freedom in three senses namely: freedom of heart, freedom of intellect and freedom of will. For Tagore education has only meaning and object in freedom. The genesis of the ideal of freedom lies in his own experience as a child and his experience of the prevailing system of education. He records his own expressions we had to sit like dead specimens of some museums, whilst lessons were pelted at us from without like hail- storms on flowers

Naturalism made him a universal man. Like a true naturalist, Tagore wants that child's education must be organized in natural surroundings. He strongly believed that education divorced from nature will bring untold harm to young children. Tagore finds a fundamental unity between man and nature. He believes that education given in natural surroundings helps to develop intimacy with the world. His essay entitled—Tapovanl (Forest colony) may be considered a valuable supplement to 'Shiksa Samasya'.

He says —children with the freshness of their senses come directly to the intimacy of this world. This is the first gift they have. They must accept it simple and must never again lose their power of immediate communication with it.

Tagore envisaged that nature is the best teacher to the pupil. Nature will provide the student with necessary situation to earn knowledge. No pressure should be exerted upon the student to learn anything. It is nature which will be the guiding force to inculcate the spirit of learning in the mind of a student to pursue the education he likes. It will shape his behavior and character. Man bears the diverse qualities and potentialities offered by God. These qualities are inborn and innate. The relationship between man and God is strong and permanent. However the dedication to spiritualism and sacredness will lead to the harmonious relationship with man, nature and God. Tagore believes that education given in the natural surroundings develops of his own accord the power of communication with it.

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Nature to him is the focus where the interests and aspirations of human beings meet. It is, therefore essential not only to know Nature, but also to live Nature. Man attains thereby the greater and deeper freedom. He will find fulfillment in the struggle from the dim dream lands of childhood towards maturity.

Humanism made him an outstanding figure much ahead of his times. Because of his Humanism, he was a great lover of children and advises the teachers to be like the children and not to think themselves superior. He believed that neither the education of the senses nor, the education of the intellect but the education of the feeling should receive the place of honour in schools. To Tagore, civilization should be evaluated in terms of what value it attaches to man and not in terms of how many scientific inventions it has produced. The country is indebted to him for leaving an immense heritage in the form of educational experiment. As an educator he had a definite social aim to build up a Social structure to achieve the ideal of society through education.

Education for international understanding and universal brotherhood is his significant contribution. The feeling of oneness can be developed through the concept is like fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man all creatures are equal on this earth. Tagore gave a new message to mankind. His faith in the essential unity

of mankind was a step towards internationalism. His theme of education as harmony with all existence is a clear indication towards individuals and social adjustment and adjustment with environment. Tagore, for the first time, visualized a great truth that the synthesis between East and West would help in solving the problems of the world. Today all nations admit this fact. The dilemma of contemporary civilization has been very poignantly voiced by **T.S Eliot** in his path breaking work “**The Wasteland**” rightly considered to be the spiritual testament of the modern times.

—what are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish  
Son of man, you can't say or  
know for you only know, a heap of broken images

The spiritualism of Indian philosophy and progressive outlook of the western people were blended together to give rise to an educational philosophy which marked its distinction incomparably to other educationists of India. One of his outstanding contributions emerges out to be the splendid *Vishwa Bharti* at Shantiniketan. The conception of *Vishwa Bharti* is in accordance with his notion of Greater India where humanity will strive to reach reconciliation of different races with different religions and civilizations. Tagore held that the entire universe is one family. Education can teach people to realize oneness of the globe.

His experiences at Jorasanko provided him with a lifelong conviction concerning the importance of freedom in education. He also realized in a profound manner the importance of the arts for developing empathy and sensitivity, and the necessity for an intimate relationship with one's cultural and natural environment. In participating in the cosmopolitan activities of the family, he came to reject narrowness in general, and in particular, any form of narrowness that separated human being from human being. He saw education as a vehicle for appreciating the richest aspects of other cultures, while maintaining one's own cultural specificity.

## KEY IDEAS:

Rabindranath did not write a central educational treatise, and his ideas must be gleaned through his various writings and educational experiments at Santiniketan. In general, he envisioned an education that was deeply rooted in one's immediate surroundings but connected to the cultures of the wider world, predicated upon pleasurable learning and individualized to the personality of the child. He felt that a curriculum should revolve organically around nature with classes held in the open air under the trees to provide for a spontaneous appreciation of the fluidity of the plant and animal kingdoms, and seasonal changes. Children sat on hand-woven mats beneath the trees, which they were allowed to climb and run beneath between classes. Nature walks and excursions were a part of the curriculum and students were encouraged to follow the life cycles of insects, birds and plants. Class schedules were made flexible to allow for shifts in the weather or special attention to natural phenomena, and seasonal festivals were created for the children by Tagore. In an essay entitled “A Poet's School,” he emphasizes the importance of an empathetic sense of interconnectedness with the surrounding world:

We have come to this world to accept it, not merely to know it. We may become powerful by knowledge, but we attain fullness by sympathy. The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence. But we find that this education of sympathy is not only systematically ignored in schools, but it is severely repressed. From our very childhood habits are formed and knowledge is imparted in such a manner that our life is weaned away from nature and our mind and the world are set in opposition from the beginning of our days. Thus the greatest of educations for which we came prepared is neglected, and we are made to lose our world to find a bagful of information instead. We rob the child of his earth to teach him geography, of language to teach him grammar. His hunger is for the Epic, but he is supplied with chronicles of facts and dates...Child-nature protests against such calamity with all its power of suffering, subdued at last into silence by punishment. (Rabindranath Tagore, *Personality*, 1917: 116-17)

In Tagore's philosophy of education, the aesthetic development of the senses was as important as the intellectual—if not more so—and music, literature, art, dance and drama were given great prominence in the daily life of the school. This was particularly so after the first decade of the school. Drawing on his home life at Jorasanko, Rabindranath tried to create an atmosphere in which the arts would become instinctive. One of the first areas to be emphasized was music. Rabindranath writes that in his adolescence, a 'cascade of musical emotion' gushed forth day after day at Jorasanko. 'We felt we would try to test everything,' he writes, 'and no achievement seemed impossible... We wrote, we sang, we acted, we poured ourselves out on every side.' (Rabindranath Tagore, *My Reminiscences* 1917: 141)

In keeping with his theory of subconscious learning, Rabindranath never talked or wrote down to the students, but rather involved them with whatever he was writing or composing. The students were allowed access to the room where he read his new writings to teachers and critics, and they were encouraged to read out their own writings in special literary evenings. In teaching also he believed in presenting difficult levels of literature, which the students might not fully grasp, but which would stimulate them. The writing and publishing of periodicals had always been an important aspect of Jorasanko life, and students at Santiniketan were encouraged to create their own publications and put out several illustrated magazines. The children were encouraged to follow their ideas in painting and drawing and to draw inspiration from the many visiting artists and writers.

Most of Rabindranath's dramas were written at Santiniketan and the students took part in both the performing and production sides. He writes how well the students were able to enter into the spirit of the dramas and perform their roles, which required subtle understanding and sympathy without special training.

As Rabindranath began conceiving of Visva-Bharati as a national centre for the arts, he encouraged artists such as Nandalal Bose to take up residence at Santiniketan and to devote themselves full-time to promoting a national form of art. Without music and the fine arts, he wrote, a nation lacks its highest means of national self-expression and the people remain inarticulate. Tagore was one of the first to support and bring together different forms of Indian dance. He helped revive folk dances and introduced dance forms from other parts of India, such as Manipuri, Kathak and Kathakali. He also supported modern dance and was one of the first to recognize the talents of Uday Sankar, who was invited to perform at Santiniketan.

The meeting-ground of cultures, as Rabindranath envisioned it at Visva-Bharati, should be a learning centre where conflicting interests are minimized, where individuals work together in a common pursuit of truth and realise 'that artists in all parts of the world have created forms of beauty, scientists discovered secrets of the universe, philosophers solved the problems of existence, saints made the truth of the spiritual world organic in their own lives, not merely for some particular race to which they belonged, but for all mankind.' (Tagore 1922:171-2)

To encourage mutuality, Rabindranath invited artists and scholars from other parts of India and the world to live together at Santiniketan on a daily basis to share their cultures with Visva-Bharati. The Constitution designated Visva-Bharati as an Indian, Eastern and Global cultural centre whose goals were:

1. To study the mind of Man in its realisation of different aspects of truth from diverse points of view.
2. To bring into more intimate relation with one another through patient study and research, the different cultures of the East on the basis of their underlying unity.
3. To approach the West from the standpoint of such a unity of the life and thought of Asia.
4. To seek to realise in a common fellowship of study the meeting of East and West and thus ultimately to strengthen the fundamental conditions of world peace through the free communication of ideas between the two hemispheres.
5. And with such Ideals in view to provide at Santiniketan a centre of culture where research into the study of the religion, literature, history, science and art of Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Zoroastrian, Islamic, Sikh, Christian and other civilizations may be pursued along with the culture of the West, with that simplicity of externals which is necessary for true spiritual realisation, in amity, good-fellowship and co-operation

between the thinkers and scholars of both Eastern and Western countries, free from all antagonisms of race, nationality, creed or caste and in the name of the One Supreme Being who is Shantam, Shivam, Advaitam.

In terms of curriculum, he advocated a different emphasis in teaching. Rather than studying national cultures for the wars won and cultural dominance imposed, he advocated a teaching system that analysed history and culture for the progress that had been made in breaking down social and religious barriers. Such an approach emphasized the innovations that had been made in integrating individuals of diverse backgrounds into a larger framework, and in devising the economic policies which emphasized social justice and narrowed the gap between rich and poor. Art would be studied for its role in furthering the aesthetic imagination and expressing universal themes.

It should be noted that Rabindranath in his own person was a living icon of the type of mutuality and creative exchange that he advocated. His vision of culture was not a static one, but one that advocated new cultural fusions, and he fought for a world where multiple voices were encouraged to interact with one another and to reconcile differences within an overriding commitment to peace and mutual interconnectedness. His generous personality and his striving to break down barriers of all sorts gives us a model for the way multiculturalism can exist within a single human personality, and the type of individual which the educational process should be aspiring towards.

Tagore's educational efforts were ground-breaking in many areas. He was one of the first in India to argue for a humane educational system that was in touch with the environment and aimed at overall development of the personality. Santiniketan became a model for vernacular instruction and the development of Bengali textbooks; as well, it offered one of the earliest coeducational programs in South Asia. The establishment of Visva-Bharati and Sriniketan led to pioneering efforts in many directions, including models for distinctively Indian higher education and mass education, as well as pan-Asian and global cultural exchange.

One characteristic that sets Rabindranath's educational theory apart is his approach to education as a poet. At Santiniketan, he stated, his goal was to create a poem 'in a medium other than words.' It was this poetic vision that enabled him to fashion a scheme of education which was all inclusive, and to devise a unique program for education in nature and creative self-expression in a learning climate congenial to global cultural exchange.

## CONCLUSION:

Rabindranath Tagore, by his efforts and achievements, is part of a global network of pioneering educators, such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori and Dewey—and in the contemporary context, Malcolm Knowles—who have striven to create non-authoritarian learning systems appropriate to their respective surroundings. In a poem that expresses Tagore's goals for international education, he writes:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high,  
Where knowledge is free;  
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;  
Where words come out from the depth of truth;  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;  
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action—  
into that heaven of freedom, my Father, Let my country awake.

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