

Tagore's Philosophy of Education: A New Vista of Epistemology

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Abstract: *The paper aims to find out the views of Rabindranath Tagore on education. The contribution of Tagore to the development of educational philosophy as well as his unique idea to develop an education system combining the East and West views are also noted here. The necessity of humanistic approach of education at present day also has got importance with Tagore's reference. We believe that his idea of epistemology will open new windows to make a world free from violence and unrest based on education and humanity.*

Keywords: Friendly educative environment, Education Reformation, natural approach of education, spontaneous way of learning, Education and humanism, ethics in teaching,

Rabindranath Tagore is regarded as a successful Bengali Renaissance polymath at a time litterateur, artist, musician, painter, educationalist, social reformer, political writer, cultural critic, a philosopher of life and humanity. Tagore was the first non-European and first Asian who won the Nobel Prize for literature. Nobel Laureate, philosopher and author Albert Schweitzer (1875 –1965) tributes Tagore, *'Goethe of India gives expression to his personal experience that this is the truth in a manner more profound and more powerful and more charming than anyone had ever done before. This completely noble and harmonious thinker belongs not only to his own people but to humanity'*. (The Goethe of India). The identity of Bengali nation cannot be hoisted entirely but Tagore. He is often considered a lamppost of the progress and promotion of idea and thoughts on education in the nation. The views of Tagore on education are germane in all time. He is an integral essence of enlightenment epoch to epoch.

The evolution and development of knowledge and education in earth emerged after a long journey and struggle. The development of human beings from the primitive period to post- modern age is the contribution of education. It is known that education is the most significant ancient accomplishment in human history. Thomas Hobbes, innovator of *social conduct tradition*, narrates, *'life in the state of nature is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'*. (Leviathan, 1651, Thomas Hobbes). This short, nasty and brutish life turns to longevity, stunning and humanity through the track of education. Education is the channel which leads pre-historical man to post-modern populace. Jean Jacques Rousseau deems human beings as

'novel savage' (Social Contract, 1762) and *"stupid and unimaginative animal"* (Social Contract, 1762) and Rousseau believes that education makes men *"an intelligent being and a man"* (The Social Contract). To Rousseau and Hobbes, without education, men are like feral animals.

In Western literature, William Shakespeare illustrated human life in seven stages in his famous comedy *'As you like it'* where school life was depicted as one of the stages of life. In this drama, Shakespeare noted school boy as *'the whining school-boy, creeping like snail unwilling to school'*. The presentation of school life by him paved the way to think that school life was a life of imposition and domination over children from long ago. Many educators and philosophers including Rousseau, Bertrand Russell and Rabindranath Tagore endeavoured to draw an education system based on humanistic approach. They illustrated a learner's friendly educative environment. Rabindranath Tagore was far advanced by establishing Santiniketan (*An Adobe of Peace*) as well as wrote many philosophical profound books and articles on the philosophy of education. He combined the positive aspects of many eastern and western views of educational philosophy to make his ideology profound and realistic.

Tagore is truthfully a pioneer to the voyage of modern education. He blends the ideas of east and west wisely and rationally regarding education. Tagore realizes the urgency of a national education system and works for it. He endeavours to insert the promotion of creativity, freedom and joy of India's cultural heritage in education. Hence he is beyond doubt a rider to the modern education. He absolutely opposes to the pressure and imposing in teaching. He is on behalf of spontaneous way of learning, freedom to learner, natural growth in natural circumstance, teaching - practical and real, place of fine arts like drama, music, poetry etc. Tagore affirms, *'The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence'*. Tagore writes a distinguished book on

education named *Shikha* (Education) which contains various treatises including *Education Reformation, Introduction to Education movement, Female education, Education and Culture, Primary Education, Free education, formation of University, National School,*

Evaluation of Knowledge, and Moral Education for Boys and so on. Tagore himself establishes educational institution keeping mind his own views. He established the Ashram School in 1901 at *Shanthi Niketan* on the basis of ancient Indian forest schools. His *Visva Bharati* University is one of the most renowned educational institutions around the world. Tagore selects the motto of the university, '*Yatra visvam bhavati eka nidam*' which means, 'Where the whole world meets in a single nest'. Last forty years of Tagore's life, he worked as a school teacher in humble rural environment.

Tagore deems that nature is a great faithful and vivid source of learning. He believes that detachment from nature is a burden to rise up literary and aesthetics sense. Tagore says, '*Wealth is a golden cage in which the children of the rich are bred into artificial deadening of their powers. Therefore in my school, I had to provide for this great teacher – this bareness (non existence) of furniture and materials; Not because of its poverty, but because it leads to personal experience of the world and nature*'. The deliberation of Tagore is still a mentor to present time because gradually academic education are detaching from the smell of soil, tress, birds or nature. Learning excluding the sense of nature and aesthetics is an anathema. Readers can consider Tagore a rational nature lover sage. He claims learning attached with darling nature. Tagore adds, '*The mind of the child is always on the alert, restless and eager to receive firsthand knowledge from Mother Nature. Children should be surrounded with the things of nature which have their own educational value. Their minds should be allowed to stumble upon and surprised at everything that happens in today's life*'.

As an educator reformer Tagore endeavours to sketch something new and up-to-the-minute ideas in lieu of traditional rigid thought on education. He does not accept daunting

dominating way of teaching. He is totally on behalf of free and spontaneous way of learning. Tagore concerns, 'don't limit a child to your own learning, for he was born in another time'. Learning is not mere imbibing knowledge but also creating knowledge by learners and educators both throughout the passage of time. Tagore supports free learning way so that learners can grow up intending to create new and innovative knowledge that is crucial for the progress of humanity. Growing knowledge through creativity is very urgent for all time. Intellectual exploration amid the learners is mandatory for constructive work of knowledge. Tagore says, '*In education, the most important factor must be the inspiring atmosphere of creative activity. And therefore the primary function our university should be the constructive work of knowledge. Men should be brought together and full scope given to them for work of intellectual exploration*

and creation; and the teaching should be like the overflow water of this spring of culture, spontaneous and inevitable. Education can only become natural and wholesome when it is the direct fruit of a living growing knowledge'.

As a renaissance man, Tagore explicitly understands the need of progress of education. Education is a continuous process of developing, erecting and voyaging forwards. The role of teacher is significant. Tagore realizes the universal axiom that a teacher must need to keep him on study new and innovative knowledge for progressing and enlightening. Tagore advises to the teachers, '*A most important truth, which we are apt to forget, is that a teacher can never truly teach unless he is still learning himself. A lamp can never light another lamp unless it continues to burn its own flame*'.

Education removes rigidity and meanness. In addition, it broadens outlooks. Knowledge is not regional but a wealth of entire world. True learners always hanker after the best knowledge or thinking of everything and anywhere. Tagore comprehends that education is for all and no one alone possesses any knowledge. He talks about his founded university *Visva-Bharati*, '*Visva-Bharati represents India where she has her wealth of mind which is for*

all. Visva-Bharati acknowledges India's obligation to offer to others the hospitality of her best culture and India's right to accept from others their best'.

Tagore urges that music, literature, art, and dance need to be practiced in school for the intellectual and aesthetic sense. He considers that traditional schools are nor joyful and fruitful to the learners. To him, the school activities are often not alive but product making mill. Tagore fears that those schools are not fit for learner's physical and psychological pleasure and freedom. It makes them academic slaves, not humanist. Tagore satires, '*What we now call a school in this country is really a factory, and the teachers are part of it. At half past ten in the morning the factory opens with the ringing of a bell; then, as the teachers start talking, the machines start working. The teachers stop talking at four in the afternoon when the factory closes, and the pupils then go home carrying with them a few pages of machine-made learning. Later this learning is tested at examinations and labelled*'.

Rabindranath Tagore was undoubtedly a man of progressive views in educational philosophy. He wrote '*Chuti*' (Holiday), a short story, where he presented a thirteen age boy who died by the imposition of mechanical lifeless medium of schooling with a very sensitive way. Fatik, the boy, was the protagonist of this story who was playing all day long with his brother in village field happily. One day his mother sent him to city

(Kolkata) for urban education; and thus he had to live in mechanical city life leaving his evergreen rural natural life. He was far from her mother and younger brother living in his uncle's house. Fatik was highly oppressed and insulted by the teachers and hosts. Rabindranath depicted the position and troubles of Fatik's life, *'He too can sense that somehow he does not really fit anywhere; this makes him continually ashamed and apologetic. And yet this is the age when the need for some affection is actually felt more acutely. If he can have some affectionate consideration from a kind-hearted person, he will be eternally bound to them. But sadly no one dares to approach him with affection, because most see that as leniency and thus bad for him. This is*

why with constant scolding and correction he becomes like an unloved stray dog, both in appearance and in manner. As a result any new place outside the mother's home is hell for such boys. The loveless dislike that surrounds him stings him like barbs. This is also the age when the female members of the species starts appearing like an unattainable being of a superior heavenly sphere and therefore any neglect from them is utterly unbearable'. Fatik strongly wanted to emancipate from this imprisoned and unpleasant educational life and thus he asked holiday to go to his mother, to his natural and friendly life but his teachers and uncle did not allow his holiday. One day Fatik came out of home under rain, got wet and thus got severe fever. By the hallucination of fever, he wanted his mother for holiday from school; he also wanted to embrace his beloved mother. Whole night he cried and thirsted for holiday to go to his village and to his natural lovely life. Fatik opened his eyes red-faced with fever, then looked up to the ceiling, and said inanely, *"Uncle, have the holidays come yet? May I go home?"* Tagore depicted the very necessity of love and nature in children's life along with educational system. When his mother came to him, he looked very feeble. He said to his mother not opening his eyes, *'mother, holidays have come'* and then he died. In this Tagore's short story, this boy had to die for the cruel education system that was out of love and natural environment. Love is an emotional object that is a must in child education and development; it was the core lesson and philosophy of Tagore's educational ideology and proposition. The story indicated the discontent of Tagore on the so-called educational system which is out of nature and humanistic approach vividly. He cited, *"At first, children must gather knowledge through their life because children are in love with their life, and it is their first love. All its color and movement attract their eager attention, and then they will renounce their lives to gain knowledge"* (Education / Tagore). Rabindranath Tagore also writes on the spontaneous self resembling growth of children to the readers. Rabindranath Tagore responds with full assurance, *"Children are living beings - more living than grown-up people who have built shells of habit*

around themselves. Therefore it is absolutely necessary for their mental health and development that they should not have mere schools for their lessons, but a world whose guiding spirit is personal love." [Shikha (Education), Rabindranath Tagore].

Rabindranath Tagore believed the necessity of ethics in teaching children. To make a world free from violence and oppression, ethic and philosophy based education is a must. Ethical education can draw a man in enlightened path. French philosopher and educationalist Jean Jacques Rousseau excellently visualised the importance of nursing ethical sense in childhood. He wrote in his famous book *Emily, 'Plants are shaped by cultivation and men by education. We are born weak, we need strength; we are born totally unprovided, we need aid; we are born stupid, we need judgment. Everything we do not have at our birth and which we need when we are grown is given us by education'*. (Jean Jacques Rousseau/ Emile). In the curriculum of Rabindranath Tagore's educational philosophy, the teaching of ethics is highly patronised. Tagore says, *"Ethics should be taught in childhood. Purity, truth, kindness, non-violence have to be explosion in mind to attract towards ethics. How ugly cruelty, envy and jealousy is needed to be shown to children"*. He considered that without ethical sense among the tender minded young learners, education cannot get moral success in society. Tagore delivered how learners can engage in ethical and moral learning. Parents and teacher should inspire children to read extra-curriculum books that contain philosophical brainstorm. By this way children and teenage can reach intellectual world, they will not be brutal as well as they will teach affection and sympathy. Rabindranath Tagore said it in nineteenth century, *"If you want to teach the difference between beauty and ugly and want to persuade them to feel it, let them to read good novels and poems"*. Children always like to follow what they see; they take it by and large. Through watching violence picture, horror film, action movie etc, teenage and children are becoming crazy, cruel and aggressive. If child or teenage flavored films are not available, they get entertainment through these unhealthy films that are harmful for their philosophical views. Akin to Rabindranath Tagore, great western philosopher Bertrand Russell also asserted, *'Teach the boy respect for life; do not let him see you killing animals, even wasps or snakes. If he does something slightly unkind to a younger child, do the same to him at once. He will protest, and you can explain that if he does not want it done to him he must not do it to others'*.

It is high time to review Tagore's philosophy more to reform and enhance education as well as to make learners humanists for a safe and sound world. Tagore 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’.*

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