

RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION AND LIBRARY IN THE MODERN CONTEXT

Ratan Ghosh

Research Scholar of JRU, Department of English, a paper presented to UGC sponsored international seminar at Jadavpur University, India

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ABSTRACT

In an age of anxiety and uncertainty, a universal philosophy needs to be spread among the nations to set up universal laws of peace and harmony. Disintegration is a common threat to the peace and prosperity of nation and thereby integration is now at stake in the age old civilization like India. Disintegration has to be demolished and established 'unity in diversity' afresh to usher a new dimension of hope and aspirations. While lust and hunger for wealth has been in general the key demands of man in the name of modernisation, development, progress and advancement, the ultimate ease is at threat by the rat race of the society. Under this juncture, intolerance with nature and human civilization is weeping out in the heart of man. In the post-modern era, internal or indigenous aggression on nature has been an added problem with western imperialism on civilization, art, literature and society. To restore the peace of mind and to save nature and man, our society feels the need of a universal law of education that will be able to keep harmony intact and open a dynamic world of peace, prosperity, sanctity, solitude, harmony among the nations of the earth. Rabindranath Tagore's thoughts on education and library can suffice this, if his philosophy of life, society and education can be imparted among the learners from primary level to higher education. The basic duality of man's nature, the essential unity of all religions, the Advaita doctrine, Nationalism and the distinct hope of the arrival of the Supreme Man are the basic philosophical aspects of Tagore to be highlighted and spread among all classes of people of India to maintain the age old slogan 'Unity in Diversity'. Library, the store house of knowledge, has to be easily accessible to those who live in the close corner of nature as preached by Tagore.

KEYWORDS: *Peace, Unity, Diversity, Nationalism, Internationalism and Modernism*

INTRODUCTION

It is true that some are born great and this greatness makes them immortal. It cannot be denied that Rabindranath Tagore is one of the immortal noble laureates of the world. The presence of Rabindranath Tagore pervades everywhere and he is felt whenever philosophical debate or discussion especially in higher education takes place among the scholars of the time. Tagore cannot be defined or confined by any period; he is a man who is present in every age and in every period. A universal man and philosopher Tagore has valuable contribution in the field of education and research. His own experiences of life and his utmost faith on God have made him a man of all times. Tagore, a great philosopher, poet, artist, novelist, short story writer, essayist, educationist, idealist, naturalist and what not, has valuable contribution in the field of education. His philosophical views on education are the basis of everyday life of man and nature. According to him,

“Education is that which makes one’s life in harmony with all existence and thus enables the mind to find the ultimate truth which gives us the wealth of inner light and love and gives significance to life” The scientific views of the Western world and Indian spiritualism find their true expression in Tagore family and in such an environment Tagore was nurtured. His philosophy of life is greatly influenced by his personal experiences at school and the experiences he received from his family. His philosophy of life is not limited within the realm of traditional philosophical theories; rather he has tested them in Santiniketan established by him in the abode of nature. In his philosophy of education he is pragmatic and a realist.

From philosophical aspect, Tagore was an idealist. He was greatly influenced by the Indian philosophy, the great epics of the country, Vedas and Upanishads. A true ‘Vedantist’ like Tagore developed faith in universal humanity, brotherhood and love for the nation. He is a man who believes that God is the creator of all things. He believes that the spiritual power pervades everywhere and this power reveals itself in the form of nature, in the form of society and in the form of soul. The three universal formulas like *“Satyam, Shivayam and Sundaram”* form the world. He believes that our education should be in full touch with our complete life. The universal power uniting the whole earth in one thread reveals the universal idea of humanity. Though Tagore was inspired by idealism but in reality he was a naturalist and above all a humanist. According to him, *‘the best function of education is to enable us to realize that to live as a man is great, requiring profound philosophy for its ideals, pooling for its expression and heroism in its conduct.’* Indeed, his educational philosophy is firmly based on his philosophy of life and on Naturalism, Humanism, Idealism and internationalism. The three cardinal principles of his educational philosophy are

- Freedom.
- Creative self-expression.
- Active communion with nature and man.

In determining the aims of education, Tagore grossly criticised the traditional system of education. According to him, Indian philosophy of education has been overlooked in the traditional system of education. He opines that the aims of Indian education should reflect the principles of national education system of India and they should stand for the values of Indian civilization. Aims of education cannot be confined within skill development and enhancement of knowledge rather they will reflect international consciousness among the learners. His principle aim of education is to develop freedom and creative self expression among the learners and for this free atmosphere is essential for them. For this great work, he has established *Shantiniketan* at Bolpur, now a central university with the name of *Bishwabharati* where he had built a *‘Polly Bhawan’* for imparting education from the abode of nature. Child’s mind should be brought in contact with nature. He treats nature as the mother of man and it is the nature that can be the best educator of a child. He conceives education as a dynamic force that has a deeper association with life. He feels that man receives everything from nature and he should keep close harmony with his surroundings. He again emphasises that the principle aim of education is to bring joy, freedom, creative self expression, integration and coordination of all knowledge among the learners. The learners’ interests should get channelized to well balanced and harmonious forces in order to develop a sense of unity in the world. Tagore also aims at the integrated culture of the East and the West along with the values of the past with the values of the present day civilization.

In his philosophy of education, Tagore has accepted the universal value of curriculum. He has tried to introduce

the complete cultural form of the learners through curriculum. He defines school as the best medium for the learners in the development of their culture. He has advised to include the cultural practices in the curriculum so that they can be reflected. He has advised to include language, literature, philosophy, science, art, music, dance and other social and cultural activities of daily life in his proposed curriculum. Tagore was not in favour of English education; rather he advised to implement mother tongue as the medium of education in the curriculum. According to him, the learners should be acquainted with Indian culture first and thereby they will be able to learn their mother tongue. For this Tagore was interested to include The Ramayana and the Mahabharata in the curriculum. Among all the languages Tagore gave priority to Sanskrit language to inculcate the ancient cultural heritage of India. He also felt the importance of science and ethics in daily life with the progress of the society. That is why; he included science and philosophy in the curriculum along with other subjects like arts and crafts, music, dance, social activities and the development of the village.

Tagore aimed at harmony with the universal necessity of self-realization. He advocates both individual and social aims of education. He has given emphasis on the following:

- Physical development
- Individual development
- Moral and Spiritual development
- Harmonious development and international understanding.

His '*Shantiniketan*' is the school of imparting art, music, picture making, dancing and other performing arts. The learners are taught to master some form of handiwork and thus the learners become self dependent. For this, he has recommended frequent tours and excursion to gain firsthand knowledge. According to him there are three sources of knowledge-Nature, Life and Teacher. The Teacher enkindles independent thinking, imagination and judgement among the learners. Tagore emphasised on the self-expression of the child through various forms of art, drama, music and handicraft in general. Freedom of learning was the main priority in Tagore's philosophy of education. The learners will receive unbounded pleasure from their own artistic creations. In his thoughts on education Tagore has imposed special significance to the personality of the teacher. He believed that teacher is an integral part of education. Without the positive participation of the teacher in the teaching learning activity the process of education remains incomplete. According to him a teacher has to be dedicated to the learning process and his contribution should be selfless. Besides, the teacher must possess never ending thirst for learning. He says- "***A most important truth which we are apt to forget, is that a teacher can never truly teaches unless he is learning himself. A lamp can never light another lamp unless it continues to burn its own flame***". He believes that the relation between teacher and student should be ideal and without respected relation between them an ideal teaching- learning process cannot be successful. In the 21st century, Tagore is deeply felt for the philosophy he has preached for the nations in general. His lecture on man and universe delivered at Harvard University in the year in which he was to win the Nobel Prize for literature is significant enough even today. He begins with a consideration of the relation of the individual to the universe; discusses the age-old problem of evil and indicates the way to the realization of the infinite, through intermediate stages such as realization in love, in action and realization of beauty. Tagore ends with a reiteration of the non-dualistic faith: '*Thou dwellest in me and I in Thee*' The very quote '*Thou dwellest in me and I in Thee*' is like Robert Browning's philosophy of robust optimism. Tagore's faith on almighty is robust here and he envisions Him in every life which is the soul idea of all religion. Since independence though discernible before, even today India's

harmony is threatened by the religious and cultural diversity as it is a multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-racial country. It is Tagore's universal idea of the humanity of our God or the divinity of man that has opened a new dimension of peace, harmony and integrity for future generation. He declares '*My religion is in the reconciliation of the Super-personal man, the universal human spirit, in my own individual being*'. He mainly emphasises the values of life from the Vedic-Upanishadic position and the essential unity of all religions is his philosophical views on religion.

Tagore's anti-English attitude is well reflected in his idea of nationalism. His views on nationalism are universal forces of life. He has severely criticised the western notion of nationalism. According to him Indian social life functioned undisturbed before the British conquest. The solidarity of Indian nationalism is its age old values of life. The imperialistic 'nationalism' of the West has destroyed Indian socio-economic position. Predatory nationalism has given Western man mental and material power at the cost of moral strength, and is sure to destroy itself one day according to Tagore. Hence he has advised Indians not to ape the West in the name of modernization; for true modernisation begins with freedom of mind, not slavery of taste. He denounces the West as it '*has not sent out its humanity to meet the man in the East, but only its machine*'. According to Tagore, 'the real problem of Indian nationalism is not political but social. He says- Let our civilization take its firm stand upon its basis of social co-operation and not upon that of economic exploitation and conflict'. Tagore's is also known for his internationalism and world humanism. He preaches the gospel of universal harmony between man and man, man and nature and man and the divine. This philosophy of universalism he has derived from *the Gita, the Upanishad, Buddhism and Vaishnavism*.

Tagore's liberal views on women education in India have great significance even today. India, a land of '*Devbhumi*' i.e. a land of religion as well as a land of traditional deep-rooted faiths, has marginalised women from the participation of social and educational sphere. Women are treated here as weaker sex and they are born to nourish children and provide service to their husbands and the other family members. They did not have any right to go to school and receive education from any other institution like men. It is Tagore, who felt the urgency of women education in India and condemned the established views about women education in the country. In his essay "*Strishiksha*" written in 1915, Tagore has elaborately discussed the need of education for women in our country. He has vehemently criticised the so-called views of some people that women should not be allowed to receive education on the ground that educated women may neglect their daily duties of family life. Tagore realised that family is a form of cooperation of both man and woman and the family duty must be maintained by both. What he dreamt and thought yesterday it is proved today. In the modern and post-modern times his thoughts on women education have revolutionised the whole world. Even in Latin America Tagore's philosophy of education is highly practised today. According to Tagore men and women should be given equal opportunity of education. He strongly criticised the distinction made by the social system in education. Desire to know is the law of human nature as Tagore said. For the sake of personal enrichment and creating a better generation the education of women is inevitable. But Tagore appears partial in his approach of women education. Education has double facets –pure knowledge and practical knowledge and skill. Though he strongly advocates that there should be no distinction between a boy and a girl in the field of pure knowledge but he slightly ignores the need of practical knowledge and skill for women. He says that women should acquire pure knowledge for becoming a mature human being and utilitarian knowledge for becoming true women i.e. an ideal wife and an ideal mother. Education should cater to the special needs of womanhood. A woman should be able to fulfil her duties towards her husband and children. Here Tagore's thoughts on women education can be criticised in the modern context. Today women are actively participating in all fields. Besides

maintaining family modern women play significant role in the practical fields. They today are successfully performing in all fields. Today they are performing well in marine engineering, pilot, rail, space research, chemical engineering, genetic engineering, and so on. Tagore has also emphasised on the importance of good manner and orderliness. He says *"It is ugly to be unmannerly, and particularly for women it unpardonable"*

Tagore emphasises on the spread of mass education which is the only means to eradicate the established superstition of the society. He chiefly emphasises the need for leading men from darkness to light, from nescience to knowledge for the progress of the nation. According to him it is light that can unite the whole world and darkness only can separate. The urgency of that light of knowledge is felt in our country to maintain the integrity of the nation. In his *'Shiksha Bikiran' i.e. Diffusion of Education* he says that knowledge is the greatest factor in the unification of mankind. This is specifically needed in our country where the majority of the people are illiterate. Mass illiteracy is a curse that threatens the national integration. He believes that only rural reconstruction of India can solve many established problems that are the main barriers of development. He believes in the pragmatic philosophy of education and for this he established **the Sriniketan in 1922** and **the Lok Siksha Samsad in 1936**. Till date, these two have been playing a significant role in rural reconstruction and mass education. He firmly believed that the universities of our country have a vital role to play in rural reconstruction and mass education. These are not ivory towers for the elite only; they have a great responsibility to participate actively in the reconstruction of the rural areas for the future of the country.

According to Tagore, Education has two fold aims-narrower and wider. In the narrower sense, it aims at securing practical gains or material benefit. In the wider sense the aim of education is the fulfilment of human life. In the other words it has an economic aspect as well as aspect of the development of the mind. Different educationists have defined this developing aspect of education in different ways. But to Tagore, it is the means of developing humanity in man. It aims at developing higher and nobler human values such as justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, co-operation, righteousness, etc. To him education inculcates the common human values in the minds of the pupils since childhood. Renunciation and sensual pleasures have immense value but there must be a balance utility of the two. It is the proper education that helps to establish this. This balance is highly needed when man has both individual self as well as social self. An individual can not attain his fullness outside the orbit of society. Total development of an individual is possible only in and through society. An individual's fulfilment lies in union with the society, nature and the God. Hence one of the significant aim of education is to socialise the child and in this respect Percy Nunn's opinion is praiseworthy:

"Individuality develops only in a social atmosphere where it can feed on common interests and common activities. Man is never individual when alone"

Tagore's opinion on the role of teacher in promoting teaching is praiseworthy. In any scheme of education teacher plays a very important and crucial role. He is the central figure throughout the teaching learning process and it is he who imparts knowledge among the learners and helps to enlighten them in many fold manners. His idea of education centres round the Guru or the teacher. In this regard he has followed the ancient philosophy of learning. There is an integral contact between the Guru and the people in this process and this is inherited generation to generation. The gurus are erudite scholars in their own specialised areas through self-discipline and they constantly run after truth and knowledge. In this context the view of Tagore is remarkable, particularly in respect of our present educational set up-"Guru held the key position in the Tapovan system of education. He was the chief living dynamic and active educative agency. He was not a

machine but a human being with ever shining personality engaged in the pursuit and determination of learning. The books were not the only sources of knowledge. The method of imparting knowledge was chiefly oral. The students used to learn by heart and mind. The teacher was more important than the method. Teaching was the moral obligation of the teacher". Tagore did not emphasise on any particular method of teaching. Human mind is dynamic and hence method is bound to be dynamic. No method can teach, the teacher can only teach. Yet Tagore opined that modern education is based on the principle of association of ideas, knowledge moves from concrete to abstract, known to unknown, simple to complex. Education should proceed along with the daily chores of life. Education does not mean only training of the senses or the acquisition of intellectual knowledge but also education of feelings. He says:

“A most important point 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. The teacher who has come to the end of his subject, who has no living traffic with his knowledge, but merely repeats his lessons to his students, can only load their minds; he cannot quicken them. Truth not only must inform but inspire. If the inspiration dies out, and the information only accumulates, then the truth loses its infinity”.

Tagore’s writings on library and establishment of his experimental school and its library at *Santiniketan* are based on his educational philosophy of ***“freedom of mind, freedom of heart and freedom of will”***. According to him a library is the store house of pure knowledge. His idea of a library was alike with his idea of rural development as he states *“reform of education and regeneration of villages are the major task of my life”*. Tagore gave stress on rural library services as he felt *“a natural bond between education in the schools and colleges and the country outside them is immensely necessary”*. This is necessary to fulfil the objectives of education as *“the highest education is that which does not give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence”*. A library as the storehouse of the recorded knowledge has a tremendous role to play. But to ensure fullest use of its resources Tagore suggests, *“It is necessary that its contents should clearly and specifically brought to notice”* of readers with human touch, because *“the library by itself imposes a responsibility – the responsibility relating to riches. In the post-modern era, Tagore’s thoughts on library and education shall have an important part and the authorities of both state and central government have decided to open up the library facility to all who wish to access. The Calcutta central library is a representative example of this. This has been now a people’s library as the government of West Bengal has taken initiative in favour of public in general.*

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