

## **Education in a Tagorean Perspective**

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**ABSTRACT:** *I would like to specially commemorate the thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore, the philosopher who has made much contribution in education in the present educational system. The learners' spirit in the learning process can be developed, from the teaching methodology of Rabindranath Tagore, as he had introduced in Visva Bharati University in Shantiniketan. In the classroom pattern of teaching, the philosopher's thoughts are extremely relevant for the puzzled, stressed and burdened learners. The role of freedom in education in an atmosphere devoid of fear is vital. It develops the child's inherent natural beauty. When technology is developing rapidly, changing our life styles, we need to balance it with concepts to encourage the imagination in children in which love and liberty are essential. The changing environmental condition calls for an innovative educational system; a new methodology, which will not only cater to the child's basic career, based formal training but that encourages hobbies, creativity and art, enriching survival.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Art, Creativity, Freedom, Knowledge & Love.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy of education has much to contribute in the present global system of education in order to learn and develop in relation to not only with our selves but also in relation to other nations, their religion and culture. Here I have suggested that learning within a philosophical framework binds both teachers and learners. The poet was creative in his approach in educational methodology in various ways. According to him freedom is required for allowing development of the pupil's individuality, there is need for exposure to and harmony with nature and the teachers should participate in creativity by way of producing knowledge, rather than being transporters of knowledge as a commodity.

Life is in creating and to live in creativity is an art. Rabindranath Tagore's life and learning is inspiring and has much to contribute in the present educational system. His creation in art, literature, music and painting had naturally developed in course of his life which has much to convey to the present generation learners. His teaching methodology initiated in Visva Bharati, Shantiniketan can be a model for the current educational system.

### **II. FREEDOM & LOVE IN EDUCATION**

In education it is seen that freedom, art, beauty and love energizes us whereas a mechanical way of being degenerates us. In a compulsory pressurized system of learning there is hardly any scope for independent thoughts and creativity. An atmosphere of freedom within the educational institution and home enables scope for learning in the true sense. Learning cannot be experienced without freedom and love. The thoughts and ideas that originate in a learners mind can occur when it is out of fear. The aesthetic sense and sacredness of learning not only energizes but benefits us as well.

In today's competitive world, learners learn in compulsion out of fear. Their mentors are creating panic in their minds from the very beginning. In too much of mechanized life style we are getting away from an atmosphere of love and care. In understanding the child with sensitivity we can create an atmosphere of compassion and only then learning is blissful. Without goodness and love one is not truly educated. Philosopher and educationist J. Krishnamurti says in 'What is life' 'Education is the cultivation of the mind so that action is not self-centred; it is learning throughout life to break down the walls which the mind builds in order to be secure, and from which arises fear all its complexities'<sup>1</sup>. He had mentioned that, if one loves what one is doing then one is energized and can learn and develop one's potentialities to the fullest. Usually we are using our mind as storage for knowledge. When the mind is cluttered with too many thoughts and ideas it cannot experience freedom. Without freedom true learning does not occur. At present most of the learners are not experiencing freedom in the true sense and their minds are occupied in too many things creating an imbalance in the learners' lives. Teachers have to encourage independent way of thinking in learning.

Philosopher and educationist J. Krishnamurti had also said in one of his public talks 'Everywhere there is a compelling environmental influence. Newspapers tell us what to think, and there are so many five, ten, fifteen year plans. Then there are these specialists at the economic, scientific and bureaucratic levels: there are all the traditions of everyday activity, what we must do and what we must not do: then there is the whole influence of the so called sacred books and there is the cinema, the radio, the newspaper everything in the world is trying to tell us what not to think. I do not know if you have noticed how increasingly difficult it has become to think for oneself. We have become such experts in quoting what other people say, or have said, and in the midst of this authoritarian welter where is the freedom? And what do we mean by freedom? Is there such a thing? I am using that word freedom in its most simple sense in which is included liberation, the mind that is liberated, free I want, if I may, to go into that. First I think we must realize that our minds are really not free. Everything we see, every thought we have, shapes our mind, whatever you think now, whatever you have thought in the past and whatever you are going to think in the future, it all shapes the mind. You think what you have been told either by the religious person, or the politician, by the teacher in your school or by books and newspapers. Everything about you influences what you think, what you eat, what you listen to, your wife, your husband, your child, your neighbour, everything is shaping the mind. I think that is fairly obvious. Even when you think that there is God that also is the influence of tradition. So our mind is the field in which there are many contradictory influences which are in battle one against the other.'<sup>2</sup>

Beginning of learning takes place only when we are out of fear and influence. Thoughts that naturally rise in the mind should be focused with intelligence in the right direction. Learning with compassion results in restoration of energy whereas there is dissipation of energy in fear. Freedom of thinking and learning exist in the true sense where there is no fear. Freedom, love and discipline are related to one another. The existing system of education is undergoing a crisis, due to fear of competition. Faced with competition from the very beginning learners are facing stress.

The thought of the poet, philosopher and educationist Rabindranath Tagore in one of his poems from Gitanjali, 'Where the mind is without fear', is much relevant in the present context. It was composed in 1900, in Bengali: as 35<sup>th</sup> poem of the 'Gitanjali', Song Offerings,

published in 1911. It has inspired Indians with its image of a free thinking undivided dynamic nation, which often appears in the textbooks. I find that the inherent interpretation of the poem has a message for the learners –

*"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 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.*<sup>3</sup>

*Where The Mind Is Without Fear:*

The existence of crisis that is in the mind of the students' draws our attention to what the poet educator Rabindranath Tagore had advocated a century back and is applicable in the current system of education. He had found that an authoritative, pressurized system of education which he had himself undergone and experienced in his life created fear in the learning mind. The educational institution Visva Bharati that he had started in Shantiniketan had learning in an atmosphere of freedom. He had cultivated an internal discipline in an atmosphere of joy and motivation devoid of fear. We require the same fearless atmosphere in the educational institutions such that the learners enjoy the journey of learning. Excessive discipline in a child gives rise to fear which shuns the eagerness to enquire and learn.

*And The Head Is Held High:*

Rabindranath Tagore's educational thoughts were not job oriented but on development. Noble laureate Amartya Sen, an ex-student of Shantiniketan said that the poet emphasized on self-motivation and was not only concerned in the education in Visva Bharati but across the country. He wanted schools to be more lively and enjoyable. According to him flowering of the learners mind is only possible in an encouraging atmosphere devoid of fear. A learner's mind develop only with self confidence .He gave equal importance to spiritual and scientific knowledge. Both are essential for developing of confidence essential for learning and living. Developing of self confidence is important for an individual's personality which enables one to accept ones strength as well as weakness. A child's confidence is conducive for excellence as well as acceptance of one's weakness and faults. This plays a significant role in ones conception of oneself, deepening ones sense of individual worth.

*Where The World Is Not Broken Up Into Fragments By Narrow Domestic Walls*

The idea behind his bringing up of Shantiniketan was 'Globalization in Education'. In his book 'Personality' Rabindranath Tagore mentions how contemplation is severely subdued in education. In education we have to consider new facts and ideas. We have to avoid pouring of information into the learners mind. Only with a concerned and inspiring attitude towards learning the learners will be benefiting the society. Education needs to broaden one's mind and make it more tolerant to differences created by boundaries of one's home, culture and nationality. This awareness is most crucial especially in the present times of excessive intolerance and violence seen in all parts of the world. We need to set our home right and unless children who represent the future are educated in an open and liberal atmosphere, we will create a closed society with a closed mind, unable to participate in any kind of progress.

*Where Tireless Striving Stretches Its Arms Towards Perfection*

Crisis in the field of education is the cause of social regression. For social and national progress, we have to rethink the educational system in both the rural and the urban sectors. The nation is like a family and for a family's coming up in society the members should be educated for which we have to eradicate illiteracy. Rabindranath Tagore's bringing up of Sriniketan; a rural development program in proximity to Shantiniketan was a major task. According to him those areas of learning which are based on basic skills like carpentry, weaving should be made part of curriculum. We have to introduce practical applications of basic skills in curriculum learning.

In the present system of learning the learners are so engrossed in the technical appliances that they are ignorant about the natural tools. To make the learners get acquainted with fading skills of rural art and make it part of learning is the job of an educator. I believe that we should start teaching traditional art and craft to students of schools and colleges with craftsmen from the rural sectors. This will encourage those craftsmen who otherwise feel neglected. Schools of both rural and urban sides should have some exchange programs bringing the learners of both the sectors closer. We have very many means of transport and communication and teachers of both the sectors should meet more often. I find that the teachers of the rural sectors quite isolated from the urban side. In being acquainted with the advantages of teaching equipments of urban sectors they could utilize the same in their education.

Children from disadvantaged social areas can be exposed to demands of the globalised world like learning new languages, developing communication skills and technical expertise. Perfection in society is a goal that must be inclusive of all categories and classes of society. We need a blue print that is able to bridge the rural – urban unite in the form of reviving neglected traditional skills. The simple lifestyle of the rural devoid of technology and rich in natural resources has much to contribute, which would help in national development. The poet had said in his book 'In the ideal of Education' that Education must sensitize us to the imbalances in society and although no society is perfect it is the constant attempt to reduce inequalities that make for a harmonious social life.

*Where the Clear Stream of Reason Has Not Lost Its Way into the Dreary Desert Sand of Dead Habits*

In the classroom pattern of education we require more and more exploration of thoughts and ideas. I find that learning is through participation of teacher and student in sharing and exploring of facts and ideas on a common platform. Rabindranath Tagore used education for social change by making young people independent thinkers rather than blind followers of rituals and traditions. What is required in education is an enquiring mind and giving up of attitudes and habits that are defeatist and destructive. Unfortunately we have not introduced a system of education that tests students on the knowledge that they have. The examination system is largely devoted to passing due to a formula of preparing for examinations in terms of memorization rather than understanding. Formal education needs to increase the creative components significantly in order to make a difference to the quality of education.

*Where the Mind Is Led Forward By Thee into Ever Widening Thought and Action My Father Let My Country Awake*

Progressive ideas must be accommodated from wherever it may come. The burden of memory is an obstacle in the flow of learning. Understanding enables learning to deepen and consolidate as well as open itself to creative experimentation. Thought and action can integrate continuously leading to newer ways of thinking, bridging at once the past with the present and the future. When there is change in the environmental nature there are some obvious changes of the mind and body. Learning needs to be in accordance with ones living. The present times require certain obvious changes which will be quite different from earlier traditional one. Teaching and learning requires being in relation to art and nature.

*Into That Heaven of Freedom Let My Country Awake*

Rabindranath Tagore considered 'freedom' of the child essential in learning. A child should be fearless in expression. Rabindranath Tagore used to say he had three aims - to enrich literature and other arts, to reform education and develop villages. In the present system of teaching and learning I find this most relevant and we need to continue his agenda which is almost forgotten. Rabindranath Tagore wanted his students to think in terms of the entire mankind. Freedom and creativity are linked in the poet's thought. According to him the more one goes beyond the limitations of their animal nature, the closer they come to humanism. This quest alone gives a meaning to life. In his book 'Human Values' Rabindranath Tagore says, 'the educational institution, therefore, which I have in mind, has primarily for its object the constant pursuit of truth from which the imparting of truth naturally follows. It must not be a dead cage in which living minds are fed with food artificially prepared. It should be an open house, in which students and teachers are at one. They must live their complete life together, dominated by a common aspiration for the truth and a need of sharing all the delights of culture.'<sup>4</sup>

In the past, life was simple and the atmosphere was less contaminated. Nature with its own beauty has inspired writers. The beauty of art leaves its fragrance in living. In understanding art we have to understand nature's art and beauty. It has been the source of many literary compositions.

According to Rabindranath Tagore 'God is satyam, truth.' 'He is ananda rupam amritam'. 'Water, earth, sky have bound us in many ways. But the grand festival of myriad beauty that is held by the varied colors, fragrances, and music in this water- air sky does not force itself upon us in the least'

He also says ' Truth can be irrefutably proved through arguments. It is not possible to prove beauty by anything whatsoever except through our free delight.' God's matchless, mysterious display of beauty in this universe does not extract any fee or tax from us. It seeks our free will and says, 'May you find joy in me: accept me spontaneously'<sup>5</sup>.

The poet mentions that the teachers are gardeners who help the learners grow on their own. Noble Laureate Amartya Sen, a student of Rabindranath Tagore says in 'In Education And Freedom' - 'I am partial to seeing Tagore as an educator, having myself been educated at Shantiniketan. The school was unusual in many different ways, such as the oddity that classes excepting those requiring a laboratory were held outdoors {whenever weather permitted}. No matter what we thought of Rabindranath's belief that one gains from being in a natural setting while learning {some of us argued about this theory} we typically found the experience of outdoor schooling extremely attractive and pleasant. Academically our school was not particularly exciting [often we did not have any examinations at all], and it could not by the usual academic standards, compete with some of the better schools in Calcutta. But there was something remarkable about the ease with which class discussions could move from Indian traditional literature to contemporary as well as classical western thought and then to the culture of China or Japan or elsewhere. The schools celebration of variety was also in sharp contrast with the cultural conservatism and separation that has tended to grip India from time to time.'<sup>6</sup>

### **III. ART, CREATIVITY & NATURE**

Rabindranath Tagore thought that the young Indians should be more rational and less subject to meaningless social and individual rituals. The existing crisis which is in the mind of the learners at present is calling for an educational system, in which new thoughts and ideas can be introduced with ease. A change in the educational system has to be introduced with Tagorean principles which will be in coherence with the changing environmental, social and political scenario. His idea of art in education and in life is unique. In today's busy schedule where the learners are easily getting tired with routine learning only art in the form of music and others could make learning energizer and effective. The input of energy and the effort needed in learning would be minimized. The focus and concentration required would be improved as minds would be relaxed and less stressed. Mind would experience a natural freedom from within. We have to improve survival significantly aesthetically and this is only possible if we could understand the essence of learning and share it compassionately with living.

A natural tendency in exercising of freedom of thoughts is common to all. Only in knowing how to carry out it in action is an art. Exercising freedom in understanding self discipline has to be inculcated in the early years of learning. We are born in freedom but due to the outer circumstances which cover our mind as a blanket we hardly realize this universal truth of 'freedom'. Freedom, love and intelligence are closely related. Freedom can be experienced with encouragement. A natural way of learning is required in which knowledge cannot be poured down the throat of the learners but has to be imbibed in gradual growth and development such that they cherish the journey of learning. The conditioning of the mind due to following a patent methodology is causing frustration in the mind of the learners.

Education is in relation to minds not just a formal system. An attitude of teaching and learning in a spirit of sharing, rather than giving and taking is important. Love is unconditional and education is to be fostered in such an atmosphere. We can certainly create environments conducive to the development of values like compassion and love that foster enabling education that is more enriching than a purely formal inhuman education that does not teach one the importance of caring and sharing in a society. Caring is an important aspect in bringing up of a child. We have to bring up the child in an atmosphere of happiness and joy. Rabindranath Tagore had said in his book 'My School', that Children are not born ascetics to fit to enter at once into the monastic discipline of acquiring knowledge. At first they must gather knowledge through their love of life, and then they will renounce their lives to gain knowledge, and then again they will come back to their fuller lives with ripened wisdom.

Educational policy that is in coherence with ones social changes will have benefitting effect in the society. American philosopher John Dewey had rightly said that a child's education should be in balance with the social environment. The ideas of John Dewey regarding creativity are relevant in the present. In his book *Democracy and Education*, Dewey stresses that taste is determined by environment. If the surrounding is in harmony with beauty, aesthetic, then the child will develop a taste accordingly whereas barren or disturbed surroundings which the busy life schedule has catered will take one away from aesthetic way of being. Taste has to be developed originally not from second hand information. He said that what nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life. He had also emphasized that all experiences cannot be educative and the job of an educator would be to make the learners aware of the experiences which would enable them to live creatively, constructively, dynamically, fruitfully in the changing environment.

If our minds be alert in learning, we will experience it in living. Such a mind is an intelligent mind that does not conform to anything without self understanding. Understanding with a conditioned mind covers it as a blanket and hardly do we realize the changes occurring in every situation from time to time.

Education is in continuation of the past to the present and will be carried over to the future. What we receive in the present is the result of the efforts put in by our ancestors. Every period of History leaves a mark in the system of education. In India the Mughal emperors who ruled from 1526 A.D to the beginning of the 18th century enriched the period in every sphere of cultural life - in art, literature, drama, poetry and history. The period of History in which the society exists have much contribution in education. The teacher is the guide and director; he steers the boat, but the energy that propels it must come from those who are learning. The more a teacher is aware of the past experiences of students, of their hope, desires, chief interests, the better will he understand the forces at work that need to be directed and utilized for the formation of reflective habits. We need to connect with the aspirations of a child in order to reach the mind and so develop tools that will help a teacher be aware of the child's background, interest's temperaments and so on.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Rabindranath Tagore's teaching methodologies are most applicable in the present system to bring up the learners in love and creativity. His ashram vidyalaya's methodology is appropriate for the learners in the present. A common blueprint of an educational system that is flexible to meet the diverse needs of a country as well as development of an individual is urgently required. By equally emphasizing the aesthetic sensibilities of children in education we open up the areas of the core of true education. Sensitivity to ones surroundings teaches one to be responsive to ones thoughts and ideas as well. The poet's vision of situating educational institution amidst nature is instrumental in playing a significant role in developing a creative mind. This should be given central importance in the present educational system. Equalizing the importance of music, art and creativity in an atmosphere of liberty will benefit any society in transforming it into a rich and vibrant culture.

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