

RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S PROGRESSIVE EDUCATIONAL VISION

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ABSTRACT

Tagore is one of the greatest thinkers of modern India. His views on education are really significant for they are progressive yet not compromising with the traditional system. The present paper deals with Tagore's progressive educational vision. He believed that the philosophical profundity and aesthetic luxuriance was the panacea for today's education system in India.

Keywords: Tagore, Philosophy, Education, Learning, Vision, Culture, Nature, Process, Ideas

Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore is one of the greatest minds that modern India has produced. From his early childhood, he was not interested in the academic pursuit of facts but submitted himself to seek joy in the fields of dramatics, music, poetry and art. Being one of the earliest educators in pre-independent era, Tagore was in favor of aesthetic philosophy of education. He laid emphasis on the natural learning process which forms the substance of self-learning, and stood strongly against over-burdening students.

He was an internationally renowned and respected scholar. In spite of being an avid traveler of places, he believed in an Indian way of learning. Education, as he steadfastly perceived, was a strong medium to shape our country's fate, and thus must involve rigorous learning and not enforcement of information into the heads of students. He was definitely the educationist, the creative theorist, the philosopher and the artist whose unstoppable torrential flow of inspiration influenced millions of people all over the world. It is, however a matter of grave concern that our own society has failed to understand him in true spirit.

Tagore - A Multifaceted Personality

Some know him as a poet while others know him as an artist. To many he is a social reformer and to many more, he is a literary artist. The vast dimensions of his personality and his deep character are a result of his conscious learning process, which he himself stood for.

It may be of relevance at this juncture to quote Tagore: "It was morning. I was watching the sunrise from Free School Lane. A veil was suddenly drawn and everything became luminous. The whole scene was one perfect music- one marvelous rhythm...and I was full of gladness, full of love, for every

person and every tiniest thing. Then I went to the Himalayas, and looked for it there, and I lost it...That morning in Free School Lane was one of the first things which gave me the inner vision, and I have tried to express it in my poems. I have felt, ever since, that this was my goal: to express the fullness of life, in its beauty, as perfection- if only the veil were withdrawn.”¹

Tagore’s views on education are not available in any single volume, although they can be traced to some of his expressions in the form of art and poetry. His ideas were mainly derived from his own experiences. He firmly believed that the main aim of education was to prepare the student for life so that she/he acquired the necessary equipment to discharge her/his duties effectively.

Tagore’s Aspersion on Modern Indian Education System

Tagore ridiculed the modern education system in India and was never in favour of the concept of a student carrying heavy load of books in her/his early years of schooling. The Indian mindset which led to fear for learning had to be changed. This transformation cannot happen at once for if a student has to cram to pass all her/his examinations, look for a suitable job and start earning, she/he would have no time left for her/him to enjoy and dwell upon the subtler aspects of life. He wrote: “A boy in this country has very little time at his disposal. He must learn a foreign language, pass several examinations and qualify himself for a job in the shortest possible time. So, what can he do but cram up a few text books with breathless speed? His parents and his teachers do not let him waste precious time by reading a book of entertainment, and they snatch it away from him the moment they see him with one.”²

He wrote: “From childhood to adolescence to manhood, we are coolies of the goddess of learning, carrying loads of words on our folded backs.”³ It is in fact paradoxical that Tagore, one of the greatest patriots himself, called schools as ‘factories’. His passion to reform his motherland was so overwhelming that nothing stopped him from calling a spade a spade. In this context he writes that both the school and the factory open with the ringing of a bell. Then as teachers start teaching, the machines also start churning. Similarly at four the teachers stop teaching and the machines stop producing. Tagore wrote: “To read without thinking is like accumulating building materials without building anything. We instantly climb to the top of our pile and beat it down incessantly for two years. Until it becomes level and somewhat becomes level and somewhat resembles the flat roof of a house.”⁴ The pupils then go home carrying with them a few pages of machine-made learning. Like Tagore, Sidney Hook also wrote about education and its role in the society: “Education is the one that plays a certain integrative role within its culture and in this sense a good education will formally be the same in every culture.”⁵

Tagore's Vision

Tagore's progressive educational vision has largely been forgotten today. The best part of his approach is the easy and fun-loving attitude. Tagore believed that this kind of approach will ease the learning process. He was, however, saddened by the fact that the natural, uni-directional learning that every man undergoes until he joins a school is abruptly stopped by the modern academic setup that gives input only through eyes and ears. He was of the view that education should be a "joyous exercise of our inventive and constructive energies that help us to build up character."⁶

In his essay, *The meeting of the east and the west*, he highlights: "Other men of intellectual eminence, we have seen in our days who have borrowed their lessons from the west. This schooling makes us intensely conscious of the separateness of our people giving rise to patriotism fiercely exclusive and contemptuous."⁷ In another of his masterpieces, *The way of unity*, he has this to say: "All this time we've been receiving education on purely western lines. When this first began, western culture was imbued with a supreme contempt of the east. This speaks of internal dissensions within the temple of mother Saraswati. Meanwhile the system of education in India remained and still remains, absurdly un-Indian, making no adequate provision for our own culture. We have, here, not even anything like the facility that the German student enjoys in Germany, for the study of the love of the Hindu and the Muslim. And if we have become conscious of this vital deficiency in our education that is because of the spirit of the times."⁸

Kathleen O'Connell rightly wrote about the philosophy of Tagore: "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."⁹

Conclusion

Tagore was in favour of students being able to pick up the perennial, perpetual stream of ideas from nature. Students must be provided the right ambience, assisted by picnics, excursions, games, music, and metrical performances and celebrating socio-religious festivals. Kathleen O'Connell speaks rightly about the philosophy of Tagore thus: "In Tagore's philosophy, the aesthetic development of the senses was as important as the intellectual-if not more. So music, literature, art, dance and drama were given great prominence in the daily life of the school. The philosophical profundity and aesthetic luxuriance of his concept is the panacea for today's Indian educational complexities."¹⁰

Tagore's love for nature reveals why he was in favor of education through natural elements in his school Santiniketan. It is apt to say about Tagore: "As one of the earliest educators to think in terms of the

global village, Rabindranath Tagore's educational model has a unique sensitivity and aptness for education within multiracial, multilingual and multicultural situations, amidst conditions of acknowledged economic discrepancy and political imbalance."¹¹

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