

## RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S VIEWS OF EDUCATION

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“The highest education is that which does not merely  
Give us information but makes our life in harmony  
With all existence”

- Rabindranath Tagore, ‘*Personality*’

Rabindranath Tagore was great poet, philosopher and educationist. He was born in Calcutta, India on 7<sup>th</sup> may 1861. He lived 80 long years. He was the first Noble Laureate in continent of Asia. He won Noble prize for ‘Gitanjali’. He was the fourteenth child of his parents. He was born and brought up in an environmental that was full of excitement and culturally rich in every aspect. He had thirteen brothers and sister. They all were perfect in mathematics, Journalist, musicians, novelist and artists. His cousins, who shared his mansion for living, were leader in theater, art and science.

Rabindranath Tagore’s family background had a tremendous impact on his life in early stage, which later would shape his philosophy of education. He did not complete any formal education in any university; he was clearly a man of self-learning with original ideas about education. He had his education mostly at home through tutors and private reading. He left St. Xavier College at the age of fourteen. The last desperate effort for his college education was made in 1878 when he sailed for England and went to school Brighton. He studied English literature there with Prof. Morley for some time and in 1880 at the age of nineteen without completing any course of study he came back to India. He was not keen interested to continue his education in school.

Rabindranath Tagore did not like education of school. He found that atmosphere suffocating at school. He thought school like a prison for children as a child could not do what he felt like doing. While other children listened to the teacher, but Rabindranath Tagore’s mind would wander away. His schooldays experience has been shaped in his ideas of education. He utilized his ideas of education in Santiniketan, a unique university where there are classrooms under the skies, and if the students mind wanders, it dwells on the cosmos. He felt that a curriculum should revolve organically around nature.

Rabindranath Tagore argued that education should seek to develop sensitivity in a child through a direct experience of nature when her/his consciousness is at its freshest level. He recognized that early education of childhood as the most critical time for developing thought and the ability to connect with one’s surroundings. Rabindranath Tagore wrote:

*“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*

The origin of the word ‘Education’ is from the Latin root *educare*. ‘Educare’ means ‘to lead out or bring forth’. Education is meant to enlighten human life. Education clearly bound up with the issues of knowledge. Education, its general sense of education is a form of learning in which the knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through storytelling, discussion, teaching, training, and or research. Education is basically a social process which involves how the student develops as an individual and in group.

*education of sympathy is not only systematically ignored in school, but it is severely repressed. from 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”.<sup>1</sup>*

Education began in the earliest prehistory, as adults trained the young in the knowledge and skills deemed necessary in their society. In pre-literate societies this was achieved orally and through imitation. Story-telling passed knowledge, values, and skills from one generation to the next. As cultures began to extend their knowledge beyond skills that could be readily learned through imitation, formal education developed. Schools existed in Egypt at the time of the middle kingdom. Education frequently takes place under the guidance of others, but learners may also educate themselves.

Education is most important among all of us. Education plays a very important role in our life. Illiteracy is the common problem of all social evils. Society cannot be reformed without the light of knowledge. Education plays a vital role in our success in the personal growth. An illiterate can never understand the problem of life. He is like a blind man for who day and night are the same. Rabindranath Tagore was totally opposed formal education that only make a habit of mind. Full personality development is not possible by formal education. He did not like present system of education.

Rabindranath Tagore believes that the aim of education is self- realization. He believes realization was the goal of education. Because of universal soul is the root of our own soul, man’s aim in life is to reach that universal soul of which all human being are parts. The evolution of nature is consciously or unconsciously driving us towards this universal soul, a process that can be assisted by education. Even if it is not assisted, the progress towards the universal soul will continue, but then individuals will be deprived of self-realization.

Rabindranath Tagore believes in a complete freedom of any kind intellectual freedom, satisfaction, decision, heart, knowledge, action and worship. The student has to practice a clam, temperament, harmony, and balance. The student is able to distinguish between right and wrong, natural and superficial, relevant and irrelevant, permanent and temporal, universal and individual through this process. The aim of education should be to develop and nourish our beliefs, emotions, and imaginations, which enable us to assess, evaluate, and take up appropriate attitudes towards our experience in the milieu in which we live. It is this conviction that account for Rabindranath Tagore’s disapproval of a system of education, which emphasizes too much of theoretical learning. Rabindranath Tagore wrote in Gitanjali:

*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 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 – 2*

This poem is a clarion for “education that liberates”!

Rabindranath Tagore, as Gurudev, argued that education should seek to develop sensitivity in child through a direct experience of nature when her/his consciousness is at its freshest level. He recognized early childhood as the most critical time for developing empathy and the ability to connect with one’s surroundings. He wrote:

*“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 school, 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.” 3*

Rabindranath Tagore’s concept of school was based on Gurukul system. He highly admired the Guru- Sishya Ashram type of education. Rabindranath Tagore believed that school should be integral to society and intellectual education should be linked with the arts and crafts, which deal with human emotions. As Rabindranath Tagore himself suffered in his childhood, he later comes to realize that a child’s mind should have a healthy growth. If a child’s mind is subjected to compulsion and strict rules it cannot bloom properly. Most of the scholars are of opinion that the established of the Ashram school at Santiniketan had its origin in Rabindranath Tagore’s own painful experience about education. Rabindranath Tagore comprehends that we are an integral part of cosmic infinity. Therefore our education should also involve spiritual or religious education. Rabindranath says:

*“I believe in a spiritual world, not as anything separate from this world, but as its innermost truth. With the breath we draw, we must always feel this truth, that we are living in God.” 4*

Rabindranath Tagore was against the heavy load of books and begs students had to carry to the school. Rabindranath Tagore notices that, at the very starting age of the life of a student,

his/her parents keep a lot of burden of begs and books on his/her shoulders. He wrote: *“From childhood to adolescence and again from adolescence to manhood, we are coolies of the goddess of learning, caring loads of words on our folded backs.”*<sup>5</sup> (Kabir 1961:67) According to Rabindranath Tagore, it makes education joyless. He was in favor of easy education, that is, education through music, art, literature, and nature. Therefore, Rabindranath Tagore had founded Santiniketan. It is right to say that in our childhood we learn everything with the aid of our body and mind, with all the senses active and eager. When we are sent to school, the doors of natural information are closed to us; our eyes see the letters, our ears hear the lessons, but our mind misses the perpetual stream of ideas from nature, because the teachers, in their wisdom, think these bring distractions and have no purpose behind them. But Rabindranath Tagore was in favor of teaching the things from nature a lot. Rabindranath Tagore said:

*“Yesterday, the first day of Asarh the enthronement of the rainy season was celebrated with due pomp and circumstance. It was very hot the whole day, but in the afternoon dense clouds rolled up in stupendous masses. I thought to myself this first day of the rains, I would rather risk getting wet than remain confined in my dungeon of a cabin”*<sup>6</sup>

Again, Rabindranath Tagore described the natural things in a very beautiful way by writing these lines.

*“After walking about a mile we came to a dam, and along the pool of water there was a row of tal (fan palm) trees, under which was a natural spring. While we stood there looking at this, we found that the line of cloud which we had seen in the North was making for us, swollen and grown darker, flashes of lightning gleaming the while”*<sup>7</sup>

Rabindranath Tagore considers joy and freedom in education every much desirable and essential to be worthy of being rather than mere becoming. He strongly feels and advocates, is practically impossible unless joy and freedom are closely associated with day-to-day programmes of activities in teaching and learning. Education should be imparted in the natural background. Children should never be pressed to learn. They should be invited to learn. Rabindranath Tagore had bitter experience of formal education in his childhood. He always used to run away from the school after that his father had arranged a private tutor at home to teach him. It is the duty of a teacher to provide opportunity of direct contact with nature for student. Teachers must first create interest in the student for knowledge. Too much insistence and guidance arrest the growth of their original talent.

*“The main object of teaching is not to explain meaning, but to knock at the door of the mind.”*<sup>8</sup>

Education in natural background will make them curious and sympathizer of not only human life but of all forms of life. Education should be imparted through play and work system i.e., learning by doing. Children are fond of play. Interest is latent attention and attention is interest in action. First of all student must have ‘will to learn’ that is the first condition of learning. Rabindranath strongly opposed the system of English education.

*“Our English teachers are birds of passage they cackle of us but do not sing, their true heart is not in the land of their exile.” 9*

The medium of education must be our own mother tongue. If we try to make our country educated it is never possible by a foreign medium. When we feel appetite and eat we enjoy the taste of food. He puts the ideas in his educational philosophy. He wrote:

*When taste begins from the first bite, the stomach is wakened  
To its functions before it is loaded, so that its digestive pieces  
got fully play, but what happens, ‘the first bite bids fair to wrench  
loose both rows of teeth like a veritable earthquake in the mouth and ley  
the time he discovers that the morsel is not of the genus stone but a digestible  
bonbon, half his allotted span of life is over. While one is choking and  
spluttering over the spelling and grammer. Inside remain starved and when  
at length taste felt, the appetite has vanished. If the whole mind does  
not work from the beginning its full powers remain undeveloped to the ends.” 10*

The world of nature beckon the child to participate in all her/ his marvels of beauty and joy, let them allowed to solve the mystery of his/her own being in association with that which is realized in ‘same pure moments of ecstasy’ as revealed in the language of joy. According to Rabindranath Tagore:

*“All the language of joy is beauty. It is necessary note, however,  
that joy is not a pleasure, and beauty and mere prettiness. Joy is  
the outcome of detachment from self and lives in freedom of spirit.  
Beauty is that profound expression of reality which satisfies our heart  
Without any other allurements but its own ultimate value. When in some  
pure moments of ecstasy we realize this is the world around us, we see the  
world, not as merely existing, but as decorated in its forms, sound, colours  
and lines; we feel in our hearts that there is one who through all things  
proclaims: ‘I have joy in my creation’ 11*

Rabindranath Tagore allows freedom for pupils in education not because they lead in indisciplined life but it essential, they will learn discipline by own excrement. Rabindranath Tagore wants to involve the child in his inherent finer elements of sensitivity. Rabindranath Tagore encourages life-centric education for children. He allows indigenous education with creative and aesthetic modification suited to them for efflorescence of joy and freedom.

Rabindranath Tagore was not educated in any university. Rabindranath Tagore was clearly a man of self-learning Rabindranath Tagore’s educational philosophy was learning from nature, music and life. This is the reason why his education is easily acceptable by human mind. Rabindranath Tagore insists that no mind can grow properly without living in intimate communication with nature. Rabindranath Tagore always wanted our own language to be taught along with India’s own philosophy and spiritual knowledge at Indian universities. Rabindranath Tagore envisaged that nature is the best teacher to the student. Nature provides the student with necessary situation to earn knowledge.

Rabindranath Tagore had his own original ideas education, which led him to establish an educational institution that named Vishva Bharati in Santineketan with the intention of re-opening the channel of communication of nature. Rabindranath Tagore absorbs and learns

subconsciously at his own pace, giving him a dynamic open model of education, which he later tried to recreate in his school of Santineketan. Rabindranath Tagore emphasized on the use of a national language as the vehicle of education at all stage of education. He wanted Indian universities to integrate themselves with society and make an effort to educate people living in the countryside. Rabindranath Tagore considered the lack of education to be the main obstacle in the way of India's progress. Education enlightens our whole personality and destroys all egoism, narrowness, selfishness and ill feelings.

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