

## Rabindranath Tagore – The Great Thinker



### Education

KEYWORDS : Philosophy, Educational ideas, Culture, Thinker, Visionary

**Dr. Nandini Banerjee**

Assistant Professor, Dept. Of Education, Kazi Nazrul University,  
Asansol – 713340, Burdwan, West Bengal

### ABSTRACT

*Rabindranath Tagore was a universal philosopher of 20th century, a thinker, social reformer, educationist and also a great priest of Indian culture and tradition. He tried to spread the Indian philosophical as well as cultural thoughts and ideas throughout the world. Tagore, who had a rare and a great personality, exhibited multidimensional ideas and which has relevance in today's world. He had been endowed with versatile genius and untiring zeal. His knowledge, The Soul, Nature and Man earned him a second name 'Gurudev' and as a politician, philosopher, social reformer and educator, he proved himself worthy of this title. He felt that man and nature have an original integration and hence he based his philosophy of life and education on this concept. Unlike most of the Western educators he was not only a theorist but a practitioner. From this perspective the study attempts to highlight the philosophical ideas of Rabindranath and aims to perceive its relevance in the present educational system. From this angle of vision the objectives of this study have been stated. The method of the study is historical research following a qualitative approach. There have been taken so many different types of aspects through which the views of Rabindranath have been established. The study has been covered by a vast documentary analysis and it has been based on the philosophical thoughts & ideas of Rabindranath. The Works of Rabindranath Tagore have been taken as Primary Source of data and the Works of several authors on Tagore sets up the Secondary Source of data. In course of study of the data from different sources it was seen that ideas of Rabindranath Tagore are very much relevant in present era.*

### INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath not only was a poet but was a visionary also. The fragrance that spread all over the country, permeated into his soul and enthralled his heart. He minutely looked into the matters scattered all over. Some events gave him ecstasy and some plunged him into the deepening waves of woes. He delineated all these things with precisions, subtlety and strength of art at its highest, because Rabindranath was no prisoner of environment enclosures, no thrall to the ancestral tyranny of the dead. He transcended the inherited error with fortitude and self determination. He was a man to whom nothing that was human could be alien. Indeed he was the high priest of life and humanity. The value of life was unfolded to him in the context of universal love to the mankind.

Rabindranath's writings were not those of a man who led the life of a recluse. He read the social and human affairs correctly. When he stripped off knighthood in protest against the torture of the British in the Punjab, it clearly proved that he had a very good sense of patriotism, political maturity and understanding of the social work, because the poet loved India and its beauties. He wanted the freedom of India but freedom to him was much more than political freedom. It was a freedom that would remove poverty, social tortures, inhuman social customs and outrages meted out to the downtrodden by the so-called aristocratic class of people.

The poet resolved to be fearless. He proclaimed that even if tempest came, he would not be afraid and he would not give up hope. The country had given the poet life and strength. We had to cross a thorny path of life where retreat was impossible. He suggested people not to weaken by the timid counsel of over-cautious men. The storm came to humiliate and asked people to rise above it and if not possible, then face it with courage because it came as a necessity with merits and demerits.

### OBJECTIVES

Followings are the objectives of the present study –  
To study the thoughts and ideas of Rabindranath Tagore.  
To review the philosophical ideas of Rabindranath Tagore on education.  
To study the different aspect of Rabindranath's activities.  
To draw a relevance of Rabindranath's ideas in present context.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the ideas of Rabindranath on social and human af-

fairs?

What philosophical thoughts can we get in Rabindranath's writings?

What are the roles of Rabindranath in contemporary affairs of that time?

What are the cultural ideas of Rabindranath?

### DELIMITATIONS

- The study has been confined to Rabindranath's philosophical thoughts in his writings only.
- Only social, economical and political aspects have been taken into consideration in the present study.
- Only few activities of Tagore's life have been taken for establishing his role in contemporary social and human affairs.

### METHODOLOGY

The method of the study is historical research following a qualitative approach. The study has been conducted as follows:

- Collection of data from primary and secondary sources.
- Review of the reliable and valid sources.
- Comparison of data from different sources.
- Making generalization through verification of authenticity and veracity of information and evidence from the sources.

### SOURCES USED

#### 1 Primary Sources :

- **Works of Rabindranath Tagore.**
- **Writings of Rabindranath Tagore.**
- **Letters of Rabindranath Tagore.**

#### 2 Secondary Sources :

Works on Rabindranath & his philosophy by several authors.  
The articles and reports on Rabindranath's ideas by different writers published in news paper, books, journals and websites.  
The views of several **biographers on Rabindranath** given in books & websites.

### TAGORE'S PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHTS

Human consciousness is the starting point of all philosophical inquiry. Tagore opined that the contradictions of human life provoke the quest for truth. Man is a finite-infinite being. He combines in him spirit and nature. He was deeply ingrained by the Vedas and Upanishads in one hand and on other hand, his thoughts represent the culmination of concepts and ideas which were the symbols of enlightenment. According to him man is subject to the law of necessity, as a member of the spiritual realm of ends, he is free. It is this contradiction which is encountered in science, art and morality that demands a solution. The

individual aspires after perfect truth, perfect beauty and perfect goodness.

Tagore believed in the right and freedom of the individual to shape his life in his own way. But he ultimately wanted the unity of mankind. He said that in every one of us the Creator manifests in a unique manner and every individual tries to realize the Creator in his own way through which unity could be found not only amongst human beings but also between man and nature. According to Tagore, nature is the manifestation of the Creator (Brahma). Through its various forms, colours and rhythms the Brahma reveals Himself more clearly through nature than through man. He, therefore, wished human beings to have a close communion with nature and with its purifying and vitalizing influences. So he was an 'individualist' and 'naturalist'.

Tagore's individualism is compatible with the growth of social units. "Experience of the spiritual world, religion as the right centre of life's activities and the unity of thought and truth" was the keynote of Tagore's great philosophy. There should be spiritual relationship between men. He encouraged the individual to reorganize the social groups on the basis of the individual's spiritual worth. By that he never meant parochialism-intellectual, social, political and spiritual. He wanted the essential unity of the universe. He advocated internationalism but not economic or political internationalism. He wanted the spiritual bondage of the universe. Having faith in the fundamental unity of mankind he preached human brotherhood. Tagore's philosophy reflects a perfect blending of Western and Eastern ideas.

#### TAGORE'S PHILOSOPHICAL VIEWS OF EDUCATION

Tagore believed that education can teach people to realize oneness of the universe. To Rabindranath the purpose of education is freedom of mind and spirit. Tagore's philosophy of education conforms to universal philosophy. He approached life as a poet with a totality of vision. He was fully aware of education's numerous implications. According to him education is a permanent part of the adventure of life and the natural expression of their minds vitality. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan said – "Tagore's idealism is a true child of India's own past and his philosophy is Indian both in origin and development".

The three fundamental principles of Tagore's educational philosophy are – Freedom, Creative self expression and Active unity with nature and man. The genesis of the idea of freedom lies in his experience of the prevailing system of education. He spoke of the existing schools as being an "education factory, lifeless, colorless, disassociate from the context of the universe. Our education has taken us away from our natural surroundings. It is dissociated from social contexts. Education "divorced from the streams of life and confined within the four walls of the classroom becomes artificial and loses its value". The primary work in his opinion was to bring the child's mind in contact with nature.

Nature inspires the human beings differently at different stages of human development. "For the young child, Nature will become an unconscious symbol of super personal growth and evolution, something that need not be questioned and which provides an ever ready background for its dreams and its play. For the adolescents, Nature will become an object of either scientific or lyrical curiosity. The adult will see in her the soil on which his country and his people grow, the cultural and economic background of human existence." Nature to him was the focus where the interests and aspirations of human beings meet. It is therefore, essential right only to know Nature.

Education for international understanding & universal brotherhoods are important aim of Tagore's educational philosophy. Dr. Zakir Hussain, himself an able educationist was very impressed

by Rabindranath's ideas on education. He said: "Rabindranath's educational ideas were simple and straight forward, the reason being that he was fully aware of the importance of universal unity. In his educational system there was no place of narrow specialization, because he knew that 'specialisation' hinders the growth of the individual towards unity and universality. Vishva-Bharati is based on this principle."

#### RABINDRANATH – AN ILLUSTRIOUS TEACHER

When we think of education, two things appear before us – one is school and other is teacher. The images of two things come together – a building where knowledge is imparted and a man sitting before a desk preaching something to his taught. In spite of that everyone knows that there is more education than what we get from school and there are more teachers than we acknowledge. From cradle to the grave we learn from many teachers who are around us. They are old and young, learned or ignorant, highly placed or lowly. From each and everyone we learn something. But it is a no denying fact that there are some teachers who stand out above others. There are some teachers who may be called the makers of a particular generation but there are few who may be regarded as the maker of whole mankind.

Rabindranath was a teacher with versatile genius and he was a born teacher. This is not an exaggerated fact that he will stand out as a teacher above others generation after generation. He was taught us a beautiful language that he has made to use it for our own purposes. He has instructed us with the different shades of the art of poem. None before him knew this technique. Naturally his mode of teaching has taken a big step forward in poetic education. He has unfolded the beauty of nature which earlier men did not know. Again he has taught us how to know life, how to love and weep. He has accorded us with a philosophy of life and trained us in national and individual self respect. He has also raised our moral standard. This is what can be said to be the qualities of a teacher which have been amply found in Rabindranath as a teacher.

#### WAY OF LIFE ACCORDING TO TAGORE

Rabindranath believed that adjustment was the actual way of life. So he acquainted himself with contemporary affairs. As we find Upanishadic thoughts in his writings so we find the characters of 'Upen' and 'Krishnakanta', in 'Dui Bigha Jami' and 'Puratan Vritya' beautifully described giving an account of their sorrows and pains. Though he had Upanishadic thoughts in his mind, he renounced salvation. He thought that proper salvation lay in the works of the masses who toiled hard with their sweat and blood for the uplift of the society. So, he never disowned the society and its people. He wanted an active life developing process – free from evil and inhumanity. In this sense, he was not only a true patriot but also a rebel.

#### GURUDEV & MAHATMA

The friendship between Rabindranath and Gandhiji was remarkable. Though they had differences on many vital political issues, their respect for each other never diminished. The poet always addressed Gandhiji as Mahatma and Gandhiji never forgot to address Rabindranath as Gurudev. What a great attachment! But in this age we see that people who have differences with others, the former never hesitate to drive opponents apart. Gandhiji and Rabindranath both were unselfish and as such they respected each other.

#### RABINDRANATH & RUSSIAN CHITHI

He was impressed with post independence activities in Russia with enthusiasm. In his 'Russian Chithi' he acclaimed it. But he was totally against violence and destruction. He expressed his indignation against it. He opined that violence endangered the ways of love. There was no scope of mercy. As a result of it, values were broken, scattered and torn. Things built up with

painstaking care showed no respect to these but trampled them willingly creating a huge loss to the society. According to him violence had no meaningful and significant connection with the social growth. But to him violence was merely the ashes of the funeral pyre which was found in the war of 'Kurukshetra'. This would lead society purposeless and an emptiness would reign supreme in the man's mind and imagination and as such no growth would happen in our social order.

#### **PRIEST OF SOUL**

Soul, he realized, was the only weapon by which the social order may be changed. He thought that only fearless soul was sure to reach the goal of victory wanted by Tagore. He wanted to pierce through the frontiers to storm the prison house of the soul. So, in his poem 'Nirjharer Swapnavanga' he spoke of breaking the bars of prison of soul with continuous endeavour to break the chains. This indomitable optimism is required today if one wants to serve our nation and its people and to save people immersed in depression and doubt. He was shocked by the miserable state of village life. What shocked him the most were the rural people's attitude towards each other, ill behavior shown to neighbours, pundits futile attempt on empty problems, degeneration of religion, harmful superstitious, poverty – stricken masses and the attitude of heartless aristocrats. He, as if, heard the shrill cry of the hungry and destitute. Despite the earth was full of rich harvest, people still starve. But he never became hopeless and despondent because the radiance of the morning sun already revealed to him a true picture of his mother land. So he believed that very soon the ominous sighs of the people would be turned into ecstatic joy and then people would be happier. He awaited the time only. Without this philosophic and imaginative mind nothing fruitful could be done for the society and toiling masses.

#### **RABINDRANATH & HUMANISM**

The country, to him, was not a mere fancy or abstraction. He considered it to be personality alive. In his writings he had projected the inner history of his country. He could not put up with any kind of parochialism. Humanism was above all everything. To him, there was only one race in the world – that was the human race. In the recent past what was happening in and around did not please Rabindranath. So he inspired the people to march forward and it was death to lag behind. He further advised us to call them who lagged behind and take them with us. That was why he gave a clarion call to the nation to be united in love and hope. He inspired Indian people to be quickened to a new life being inspired by a high ideal. If the situation permits, no storm has power to shake the unity of people and the nation will take place in the court of the world with eminence.

The philosophy of Humanism found formulation in the aims and objectives of Viswabharati viz., to study the mind of man in its realization of different aspects of truth from diverse point of views, to bring into more intimate relation with one another through patient study and research, the different cultures of the East and the basis of their underlying unity, to approach west from the standpoint of such a unity of the life and thought of Asia, to seek to realize a common fellowship of study the meeting of the east and the west and thus ultimately to strengthen the fundamental conditions of world peace through the establishment of free communication of idea between the two hemispheres.

#### **CULTURAL VIEWS OF TAGORE**

Though Rabindranath spoke of Indian culture, he had no distrust of any culture because of its foreign character. But he thought the necessity of outside forces for the validity of our intellectual nature. He objected the artificial arrangement with which western education tended to occupy all the space of our national mind and thus killed the great opportunity for the creation of a new thought power by a new combination of truths. He

urged that all the elements in our culture had to be strengthened not to resist the alien culture but truly to accept and assimilated, to use for our sustenance not as our burden; to get mastery over this culture and not to live following the paths showed by the other countries which will not be beneficial to us.

Tagore had a special idea about society which other thinkers seldom thought of. According to him, the Indian society was based on a system of reciprocal claims. He opined that in our society the rich should make gifts, the house holders receive guests, the learned would impart the education, the old would protect, the youth would save all in return. Many races had come to our land and started to love it. This was unity in diversity and on the basis of this he cherished a goal of universality, of course, Indian culture would radiate glow through it.

Contextually the poet asserted and advised people of India to go and speak to the farmer as he returned from the field, to the shepherd when he drove his sheep to the devotee as he finished his offerings to the altar of the God, to the Musalman when his chanting of prayer was over. Then the evening sky would echo the song of our united voice. This thought proves that Rabindranath rightly interpreted his country because he was selfless, liberal in his thought. Resultantly he was not far from preaching his thoughts of patriotism. He did it and succeeded to the fullest form.

#### **RELEVANCE OF TAGORE'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION**

The present education system is joyless, colourless, painful, lifeless etc, which are not produced to desired outcomes. It may be appropriate at this time to look at the thoughts and ideas of Rabindranath and re-examine his educational views for its relevance today. The main focus of the India's current education system is a means to future employment creates an obsession with passing examinations, which in turn forces textbook-centered teaching. Learning has little relevance to student's lives and interests today and thus is not enjoyed and valued as an end in itself. With success attributed solely to science and technology skills, development of creativity are artistic skills are mostly disregarded. Hence Tagore's concept of "narrative imagination" will be most useful model for nurturing of creativity, empathy and diversity. For him, one of the central skills needed for a democratic society was the ability to imagine and to see things from varied perspectives. Starting the learning process with a textbook rather than with those things close to a child's heart had much to do with the endless desire for material goods and wellbeing and the meaningless pursuit of the instruments of war and power. Education needs to nurture students' souls and its purpose is not just employment but more importantly personal fulfilment and self-improvement. The inability to empathize with others viewpoints is a key cause of apathy, oppression, racism, violence, and war in today's world. Tagore said that, we may become powerful by knowledge but we attain fullness by sympathy which is not only systematically ignored in schools, but it is severely repressed. He used education as a tool for social change by making young people rational, independent thinkers rather than blind followers of rituals and traditions. Tagore considered the lack of education to be the main obstacle in the way of India's progress and it is the root of all problems. The basic objectives of any worthwhile national education system should be promotion of creativity, freedom, joy and awareness of country's cultural heritage.

Tagore's educational ideals have been agreed by other educationists and many of his innovations have now become part of general educational practices, but his special role lay in the emphasis on harmony balance between materialism and spiritualism in total development of personality. Talking about the crisis of education, Tagore said that a child should be permitted to read books. Our education system is lifeless as small children are

burdened with piles of books. Tagore said that from childhood to adolescence and again from adolescence to manhood, we are coolies of the goddess of learning, carrying loads of words on our folded books. The core of Tagore's educational philosophy was learning from nature, music and life. This is the reason why his education is easily acceptable by human mind. The visionary in him solved the problem of today's century earlier. The problems of modern education are attendance, use of other unfair means and discipline etc. It is more certificates oriented, irrelevant of intelligence and correlation with nature. These problems were solved by providing freedom which is not applied in classrooms.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, it may be said that Rabindranath was a universal philosopher as well as a great educationist. His educational efforts were immense and his endeavour was significantly important. He tried to build up the mind and culture of more than one generation of men. That is why he is adorned primarily in Bengal and indirectly all over the world. He was a great poet indeed but none can deny that he was a great all round man of letters. The core of Tagore's educational philosophy was learning from nature, music and life. This is the reason why his education is easily acceptable by human mind. The visionary in Rabindranath and the great educationist in him solved the problem of today a century earlier. The problems of modern education are attendance, use of other unfair means and indiscipline. It is more certificates oriented irrelevant of intelligence and correlation with Nature. Tagore solved these problems in a grand way. Freedom in the class solved the problem of attendance, absence of invigilator solved the copying or use of unfair means. Thus Tagore's educational system is a great achievement. It is regretted that we did not try to apply the formulas suggested by Tagore. That is why his Santiniketan, Viswabharati and Sriniketan may be said to constitute Tagore's educational trinity through which he tried to develop his educational ideas of converge the whole world in a single nest.

In fine, it can be said that Tagore glorified the concept of unity in diversity which is to be inculcated in our mind if we want to have a shining India without denying outer differences which prevailed in the various cults of Indian people. The poet ardently prayed for the well being of the people of India and he was sure that his cherished thought and his idea of patriotism would usher in if not immediately, then later. He had a deep rooted believe that India had a definite contribution to make the world culture with glittering rays deflected from piece of diamond which is nothing other than India.

## REFERENCES

1. Aruna, M. J. (2010), *Tagore's Philosophy of Life- a study of Sadhana*, Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities, Vol.2, Issue.4, www.rupkatha.com
2. Bhattacharjee, S. (2014), *Relevance of Tagore's philosophy of education in postmodern era- a conceptual analysis*, IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS), Vol.19, Issue. 9, Ver. IX, pp. 34-40, www.iosrjournals.org
3. Dasgupta, T. (1993), *Social Thought of Rabindranath Tagore: A Historical Analysis*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi.
4. Hogan, P. C.; Pandit, L. (2003), *Rabindranath Tagore: Universality and Tradition*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
5. Jha, N. (1994), Rabindranath Tagore, Prospects: the quarterly review of education, Vol.24, Issue.3, pp. 603-619.
6. Kripalani, K. (2005), *Tagore - A Life*, National Book Trust of India.
7. O'Connell, Kathleen. (2002), *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator*, Calcutta: Visva-Bharati.
8. Ray, M. K. (2007), *Studies on Rabindranath Tagore*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi.
9. Sen, A. (1997), *Tagore and his India*, New York Review of Books.
10. Tagore, Rabindranath. (1929), *Ideals of Education*, The Visva-Bharati Quarterly (April-July), pp. 73-74.
11. Taneja, S. & Taneja. (2004), *Educational Thinkers*, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi.
12. Tripathi, V. (2011), *The relevance of Tagore's concept of education in contemporary times*, International Referred Research Journal, Vol.1, Issue.17, pp. 107 - 108, www.ssmrae.com/admin/...../da3435a46c1f73d8ae3c5b367e25745.pdf