

Educational Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore: Contribution to Indian Education

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Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore's ideas and pedagogical philosophy are incomparable and unprecedented. Even in his most famous poems, Rabindranath emphasises the key issues: the independence of thinking and speech, active communication, blending nature and man, and the encouragement of the highest possible level of creative expression. Naturalism, idealism, humanism, and internationalism formed the basis of his educational philosophy. This paper discusses Rabindranath Tagore's educational philosophy and its practical implications.

Keywords: Philosophy of Life, Educational Philosophy, Aim, Method of Teaching, Curriculum, Discipline, Role of Teacher.

1. Introduction:

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was a renowned poet, philosopher, writer, and educator. He won the Nobel Prize in 1913 for his Literature, Gitanjali (Song Offerings), a free-verse translation of his Bengal poetry based on mediaeval Indian religious melodies. Rabindranath Tagore's ideas and pedagogical philosophy are incomparable and unprecedented. Even in his most famous poems, Rabindranath emphasises the key issues: the independence of thinking and speech, active communication, blending nature and man, and the encouragement of the highest possible level of creative expression. He foresaw a holistic education profoundly grounded in an individual's culture and environment and related to the broader world. He preferred a curriculum that fostered creativity, imagination, and morality above the mechanical, formal system. Naturalism, idealism, humanism, and internationalism formed the basis of his educational philosophy. Moreover, his education philosophy combined nationalist heritage, Western and Eastern philosophy, science, and a global perspective. Shantiniketan and Visva-Bharati, two institutions he established, are practical expressions of his educational ideas and philosophies.

2. Philosophy of life of Rabindranath Tagore:

Rabindranath Tagore was not a systematic philosopher. Still, his thoughts and worldview informed his writings are distinctive and profound. He fused traditional Indian philosophy with Western thought, creating a spiritual humanism that was uniquely his own. The features of his philosophy of life can be stated below:

- **Tagore as a Vendatist:** Tagore was a fervent believer in the Vedic tradition of thought. Human beings have a unique spiritual connection with one another. Brahma is the ultimate reality, and the whole cosmos is his physical form.
- **Tagore as an Individualist:** Tagore was an individualist. He thought people should be given the freedom to make responsible choices. Everyone is unique in their particular way. One cannot find two people who are exactly alike. He believes everyone has the right to decide how to steer their own lives.
- **Tagore as an Idealist:** Tagore felt that man should strive for the Absolute truth, which frees us from the cycle of life and death and unites us with the creator. Tagore had an influence on trust in fundamental ideals and truths that endure and beautify that never fade.
- **Tagore as a Spiritualist:** Tagore thought that everyone should strive for enlightenment. A more just society, more unity among people, and ultimately peace on a global scale are all possible outcomes. The unification of mind and truth and “experiences of the spiritual realm” were central to Tagore’s philosophies.
- **Tagore as a Humanist:** Tagore was a person who cared about people. He preached human brotherhood because he thought people were all the same. In his view, learning about other people was the pinnacle of achievement. In his famous quote, Tagore opines that “Reality is human and Truth is human.”
- **Tagore as a Naturalist:** Tagore saw the natural world as a source of inspiration and learning; in his view, nature is not antagonistic towards humanity but instead takes the shape of “mother nature.” In Tagore’s words, children have suffered greatly due to schooling that is separated from the outdoors.
- **Tagore as an Internationalist:** Tagore’s internationalism is another of his notable traits. As a visionary of global harmony, he spoke with great

conviction. He advocated for more connection between East and West. In his mind, everyone was a brother (Deep, 2019).

3. Educational Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore:

Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy of life is deeply reflected in his educational philosophy. Possessing philosophical thoughts, he is an idealist and naturalist. Some features of Rabindranath's educational philosophy are discussed below:

3.1 Aim of education and Rabindranath Tagore:

Shantiniketan, founded by Rabindranath Tagore, embodied his education philosophy. Rabindranath Tagore's educational aims came from his experience, practice, and experiments. He believed that education should grow one on physical, mental, and social levels, not just in a book. Aims of education, according to Tagore, include the following:

- **Self-Realisation:** Tagore believed that humanism is spiritualism. Self-realisation and spirituality determine personality. Education is about self-realisation.
- **Intellectual Development:** Tagore also stressed children's intellectual development. He defines intellectual development as inventiveness, creative free-thinking, curiosity, and mental awareness. Children must be free to learn to develop way holistically.
- **Physical Development:** Tagore's educational system promotes a child's physical development. Shantiniketan's education included Yoga, games, and sports. He valued fitness.
- **Humanity:** Tagore believed the universe is one family. His pedagogical philosophy promotes global understanding and brotherhood. The fatherhood of God and human brotherhood can foster oneness. Education may teach global unity.
- **Man-God Relationship:** Tagore stated that God gives humans diverse attributes and potentialities, which are inborn traits. Thus, God and humans have a solid relationship. However, spiritualism and sacredness will bring man, nature, and God together.
- **Freedom:** Tagore believed human progress required freedom. Education builds character and explores human potential. It is a liberal procedure that

allows people to develop fully. Thus, only freedom-based education imparts learning.

- **Co-relation of objects:** Tagore thought a peaceful world could only be possible when there is a co-relation between men and nature.
- **Medium of instruction:** Tagore believed a child's language is the best medium for self-expression. Mother tongues allow children unfettered expression. Tagore advocated for teaching children in their mother tongues.
- **Moral and Spiritual Development:** Tagore stressed moral as well as spiritual development in school. Moral education and spiritual education develop the whole person more than bookish knowledge. Educational institutions must foster selflessness, cooperation, love, fellow feeling, and sharing in pupils.
- **Social development:** "Service to man is service to God," declared Rabindranath Tagore. Thus, from birth, humans must form social bonds and empathy. Education develops personality and social character to make people worthy.

3.2 Method of Teaching and Rabindranath Tagore:

Rabindranath Tagore felt education should depend on the individual's personality, background, interests, needs, experiences, attitudes, skills and mental capabilities regarding the best way to educate a child. He criticised the educational system of the day, calling it bookish, mechanistic, stereotypical, boring and uninspiring. He emphasised the following methods of teaching in *Shantiniketan*:

- **Activity method:** Tagore advocated using the 'activity method' of education because he believed it to be crucial for developing the body and intellect of a child. He was convinced that the activity technique was the most effective way to educate students. Lessons need to focus on practicals rather than theory. It's a great way to hone your ability to think beyond the box. He firmly believed that by using the activity method, a learning environment that was centred on the needs of the students could be generated.
- **Education through excursion:** Tagore did not value textbook education and preferred teaching while travelling. The standard classroom setting was something he opposed. He claims that learning cannot occur without direct contact with the natural world. As per his belief, outdoor environments are

ideal for educational pursuits. Tagore hopes to learn new things while doing regular activities, such as walking, climbing, and swimming. He thought field trips and sightseeing tours of historical sites would be a great way to teach students about economics, geography, and other social sciences. This will allow students to obtain first-hand experience and understanding of various topics.

- **Debate and discussion:** Tagore's school organised narrative, discussion, and debate events to help pupils hone their public speaking skills. The students were urged to use reasoned arguments and in-depth discussions to find answers to difficulties in various subject areas.
- **Heuristic method:** Tagore used the heuristic approach as central to his school's curriculum. In this approach, students are encouraged to express their confusion about a specific subject through questions, and teachers are tasked with providing satisfactory answers. The teacher next has the students assess each other's understanding of the material covered in class. This strategy relies on hands-on experience to impart wisdom. Tagore was unwilling to memorise the course materials.

3.3 Curriculum and Rabindranath Tagore:

Tagore strongly disagreed with the prevalent British educational system, which he saw as dull, uninteresting, one-sided, academically focused, and disconnected from the real world. His lessons were adaptable, interactive, and child-focused, designed to foster growth in each student's character. By incorporating elements from both Eastern and Western pedagogy and the study of nature and human nature, he has created a comprehensive educational plan (oriental and occidental culture).

Yet, he did not advocate for traditional book learning; instead, he believed that the finest book from which a child might get a solid education was 'Nature' itself. He advocated for the importance of studying English to access the vast treasury of information in the arts, sciences, and humanities, but also for studying one's native language at the highest levels of education.

His recommendations were to study science, technology, history, geography, and literature. In addition, he proposed the following pursuits as a means of developing one's artistic and emotional capabilities. Artistic pursuits such as singing, playing an

instrument, sketching, painting, dancing, acting and making things (such as furniture, serving food, gardening, or binding books) fall under this category.

From the perspective of inner growth, Tagore emphasised the need for communal life and community service to arrive at the truth. In conclusion, his pedagogical philosophy focused on content, engagement, and service.

3.4 Role of Teacher and Rabindranath Tagore:

Tagore has prioritised the function of the educator greatly in his educational programme. A teacher personifies all the highest standards and ideals. He embodies all that is pure and innocent about life. Instead of being a harsh taskmaster, he should act as a philosopher, guide and friend.

In addition, he said that a teacher could not be an efficient leader if he is not a student. Therefore, he has to inspire the children for their development. It has been said, *“A lamp can never light another lamp unless it continues to burn its own flame”*.

3.5 Discipline and Rabindranath Tagore:

Rabindranath Tagore, like Sri Aurobindo, greatly favoured self-discipline above strict, externally imposed rules. In a liberated setting, self-discipline may flourish naturally. In such an open, all-encompassing, and imaginative setting, self-discipline would come naturally to the student.

He properly remarked, *“I never said to them. Don't do or don't do that. I never prevented them from climbing trees or going where they liked. I wanted to make these children happy in an atmosphere of freedom.”* Thus, he advocated for the freedom and activities of children.

4. Conclusion:

Tagore is among the revolutionary educators, such as J. J. Rousseau, Pestalozzi, August Froebel, Mother Maria Montessori, and John Dewey, who have endeavoured to build non-authoritarian, environment-appropriate learning systems. Tagore made numerous accomplishments in the field of education with his innovative teaching methods. He advocated for a humanistic educational system that considered the natural world to educate the whole person. One of the oldest coeducational programmes in South Asia, Shantiniketan served as a model for vernacular education and the creation of Bengali textbooks. The founding of Visva-Bharati and Sriniketan sparked innovative

work across a wide range of fields, from models for the uniquely higher education of India and popular education to pan-Asian and worldwide cultural interchange.

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