

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Between the last half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, particularly between 1859 and 1952, John Dewey in The United States of America and Dr. Maria Montessori in Italy brought about a great change in the field of education by propounding their new theories of education and achieving miraculous success through practical experiments. Rabindranath Tagore also at the same time in India dauntlessly revolted against the foreign domination over Indian education and made a bold step towards formulating a new system of education by revitalizing the important elements of the indigenous education of ancient India and relating it to the life, needs and aspirations of the people of modern India, through the establishment of educational institutions for experimenting his educational ideas.

Like Dewey and Montessori Tagore was a great educator and his place in the history of educational reforms is by no means inferior to any other educator of the world and it has been decidedly proved by his new theories of education and experiments, a thorough analysis of which will clearly convince anybody that Tagore was not

only a poet of poets but also he was a teacher of teachers and that he is fit to be ranked with any great educator of the East and the West. It will not be an exaggeration if it is said that he was a born teacher as he was a born poet. He was a creative genius and was able to touch all the branches of knowledge with masterful hand, achieving spectacular success in it. A few lines from J.L. Dees's Tagore And America may be quoted here, "Tagore was not alone a poet. The brilliant, impatient mind which rebelled at formal schooling after the age of twelve found, to be sure, the greatest outlet for its protest and its love of Man, Nature and God in poetry. Yet its owner was also novelist, dramatist, essayist, historian, philosopher, singer, actor, painter and educator." ¹ Tagore was not a teacher in the ordinary sense of the term. He was not a teacher for the Indian children, he was a teacher of mankind as a whole. He preached before the world the lesson of love, peace and service to mankind. His theories of education were not only national but also international in essence. His credit as an educator lies in the fact that his theories were national and international at the same time. In this sense he is superior to all other educators of the world. It would not be out of place to refer here to some lines of T.S. Avinashilingam from "Proceedings of Conferences, Vol. I, Education" "Rabindranath Tagore was a great teacher, not only because he started an educational institution of

outstanding importance giving expression to the great ideals of education which our scriptures preached but also for his great abiding message of love, peace, strength and service, which he gave to the humanity at a time when it was in most need of it."

His theories and experiments are sometimes vehemently criticized as "the product of daring inexperience" which Tagore refers to in "Personality". But in defiance of such criticism it can be said that though he started his experiments at the age of nearly forty his theories and experiments are the outcome of his experience of his boyhood days, the phantom of which haunted him throughout his whole life. So these are based on the foundation of long experience and are by no means extra-vagant as it is thought to be. Tagore was educated in India as well as in England and had ample opportunities to gain firsthand knowledge of the systems of education prevalent in these countries, their merits and limitations, even in his early childhood. Within the long period of forty years he travelled over many lands and came to be acquainted with various people and their culture. He thus developed within himself a clear picture of the existing systems of education throughout the world. Then he attempted in his humble way to experiment his ideas of education which he desired to spread over the whole of India and the outside world. It may also be mentioned in

this connection that other educators like Dewey and Montessori experimented their theories on education at about the age of forty. Late starting of experiments is, therefore, not a charge against Tagore. So Prof. J. J. Findlay observes that 'there are two great men in our epoch, John Dewey in the West and Rabindranath Tagore in the East, whose wisdom not only illumines the general mind but also stooped to the level of children.

The school in the ashram at Bolpur has been conducted for thirty years or more, its fame has extended in the West, Tagore has come to be widely known and honoured in Europe.' We shall refer to it in detail in the subsequent chapter. The following few pages are devoted to a brief discussion of some relevant biographical elements of Tagore with special reference to his educational thought and experiments.