“Education is movement from darkness to light”

— Allan Bloom
Chapter-5

PHILOSOPHY OF
RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND
MARIA MONTESSORI
5.0 Introduction

The life sketches of the two educators have been discussed in the last chapter. Rabindranath Tagore and Maria Montessori were the two educators born in two different countries. Both contributed immensely to the field of education. We need to understand the philosophy of these two educators before assessing their contribution in the field of education. This chapter seeks to understand the philosophy of both the educators with a special focus on their educational perspectives.

5.1 Comparative Study of the Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore and Maria Montessori

Rabindranath Tagore’s educational philosophy was greatly influenced by his philosophy of life. Rabindranath Tagore’s educational ideas are reflected in his essays on education and speeches delivered on different occasions. Tagore’s philosophy and principles of education were not the outcome of any formal training he received in any conventional institution. His philosophy was a “poet’s philosophy”. As a poet, he tried to realize the sensitivity of others especially children. Tagore as a visionary communicated the truths that were revealed to him directly through various poetic images. He was a great eclectic, synthesizes and unifier. His educational philosophy was a combination of both traditionalism and modernism Rabindranath Tagore did not belong to any particular school of philosophy. He was influenced by different schools of philosophy. He was a Vedantist, an Idealist, a Naturalist, a Pragmatist and a Humanist at the same time.

Vedanta is based on the most ancient Hindu scripture, the Vedas. Advaita Vedanta arose in 700 C.E. through the thinking of Adi Shankara (700 – 750 C.E.). He created Advaita Vedanta through the reflection on the basic Hindu texts Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and Brahma Sutras. He contented basically that the Brahman (Whole) and the self (Atman) are fundamentally the same. In tune with the philosophy three levels of truth exist:
1) The transcendental or the Paramarthika level with Brahma as the only reality and nothing else.

2) The pragmatic or the Vyavaharika level where both Jiva (living creatures or individual souls) and Ishvara are true.

3) The apparent or the Prabhhasika level where even material world reality is actually false, like illusion of a snake over a rope or a dream.

Brahman: - Brahma is the One, the whole and the only reality.

Maya: - Maya constitutes the illusionary power of Brahma that brings together people to see the Brahma the material world of separate forms.

Status of the world: - Adi Shankara says that the world is an illusion because of some logical reasons.

Ishvara: – Man tries to know the attribute less Brahma with his mind under the influence of Maya, Brahma becomes the lord. Ishvara is Brahma with Maya – the manifested form of Brahma.

Atman: – The soul or the self (Atman) is identical with the Brahma. Atman, the silent witness of all the modifications, stands free and beyond sin and merit, experiencing neither happiness nor pain because it is beyond the triad of experience, experienced and experiencing incorporeal and independent.

Tagore was born in a family which was earnestly developing the Brahma Dharma, a monotheistic religion based upon Upanishad. As Rabindranath himself pointed out: -

“Somehow my mind at first remained coldly aloof, absolutely uninfluenced by any religion, whatever. It was through an idiosyncrasy of my temperament that I refused to accept any religious teaching merely because people in my surroundings believed in its value” (Tagore 1953).

So we can see that Rabindranath was brought up in an atmosphere of freedom from the atmosphere of the dominance of any creed that had its sanction in the definite
authority of the scripture. At the age of twelve, he was initiated to Brahminhood with the Gayatri verse. The true meaning of the verse was not clear to him, although it did produce a sense of exaltation in him. He had a religious experience for the first time at the age of eighteen about which he said-

“One day while I stood watching at early dawn the sun sending out its rays from behind the trees I suddenly felt as if some ancient mist had in a moment lifted from my sight and the morning light on the face of the world revealed an inner radiance of joy. The invisible screen of the commonplace was removed from all things and all men and their ultimate significance was intensified in my friend; and this is the definition of beauty. That which was memorable in the experience was its human message, the sudden expansion of my consciousness in the super personal world of man” (Tagore1961).

The greatest influence that Tagore’s thought bears upon itself is that of ancient Indian philosophical thought – of the Upanishads and the Vedanta. His early education and the ways of his upbringing implanted in his mind the ancient Indian ideals. That influence was not accepted by the poet in a hasty manner. He came under the influence of Vaishnavism and the teachers of the Bhakti Marga. The lyrical outbursts of the saints like Dadu, Ravidas, Nanak and Kabir touched the poetic elements of the philosopher. Finally, the Gita showed the way of reconciling the abstract and impersonal nature of the Upanishad Brahman with the personal god of the Bhakta. This enabled the poet – philosopher to have a vision and come out with firm faith in God who is also the omnipresent reality – the Brahman.

By faith, Tagore was a ‘Brahmo’ and as a true and faithful Brahmo, he had deep faith in the Upanishad philosophy of onenesses and the unity of the Universe – the wonderful creation of the Absolute. The Supreme Being (Brahman) is one (mondualism), absolute and omnipotent. Rabindranath points out-

“The child leaves the refuge of the womb in order to achieve the further growth of body and mind in which consists of the whole of child life, next the soul has to come out of the self – contained stage into the fuller life, which has varied
relations with kins, men and neighbor, together. With whom it forms a large body, lastly comes the decline of the body, the weakening of desire. Enriched with its experiences, the soul now leaves the narrower life for the Universal life, to which it dedicates its accumulated wisdom and itself enters into relations with the life eternal, so that when finally the decaying body has come to the very end of its tether life together the soul waves its breaking away quite simply and without regret in the expectation of its own entry into the infinite. From individual body to community from community to universe, from universe to Infinity this is the soul’s normal progress” (Tagore 1961).

Rabindranath Tagore throughout his life and all through his creations endeavored to unite with this absolute reality or the supreme self. He always tried to unite the individual self and the eternal self – in this unity lay his true emancipation or freedom. The Advaita as conceived by Tagore is a dynamic concept and subject to change with the changing pattern of life, society and nature. The poet's mind has always changed with the changing world and tried constantly to adjust with it. As Radhakrishnan observes “we do not know whether it is Rabindranath’s own heart or the heart of India that is beating here” (Radhakrishnan 1918). He says further, that his philosophy is the “ancient wisdom of India restated to meet the need of modern times” (Radhakrishnan 1918). Tagore’s philosophy is an attempt to revive the ancient ideals of life, but they have been restated in accordance with the needs of the present times. The traditional philosophical notions of India have been brought out by Tagore from the dark abyss of abstractions, where they were lying all the time in the open to be viewed in the light of the present philosophical beliefs. That is the reason why a philosopher like Radhakrishnan himself describes his philosophy “He gives us human god, dismisses with contempt the concept of world illusion, process action over much and promises fullness of life to the human soul” (Radhakrishnan 1918). As said in Radhakrishnan’s “The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore”.

“– In the characteristics of “The God” in the Vedanta writings and Rabindranath’s works we find an identity of thought….. the hymn or mantra chanted every evening at the Bolpur School, -The God who is in fire, who is in
water, who interpenetrates the whole world, who is in herbs, who is in trees to
that god I bow again and again,”(RadhaKrishnan 1918).

The hymn or mantra is from the *Upnishads*. So from the above discussion, it is clear
that Tagore’s philosophy had its root in Indian Philosophy.

**Maria Montessori** brought into being a method of education which was a radical
departure from the ordinary teacher-dominated education and popular free-play
concepts of the past. Maria Montessori was greatly influenced by two French
physicians, Jean-Marc Ganspard Itard and Edouard Seguin. Montessori believed that:before she could set about developing new educational principles, she had to
understand a great deal more about the methods and arguments of other disciplines,
particularly psychology and philosophy. From 1900 to 1901 Montessori consulted the
medical libraries of Western Europe seek successful work previously done pertaining
to the education of children with disabilities. Her studies led Montessori to work on
two forgotten French physicians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Jean –
Marc Ganspard Itard and Edouard Seguin.

Itard is well known in the 21st century for his work with the “Wild Boy of Aveyron” a
youth who had been found wandering naked in the forest, presumably abandoned as a
very young child and thus spending his life alone for many years. The boy could not
speak and lacked almost all the skills of everyday life. So he was a ‘natural’ man, a
human being who had grown up outside human society without the influence of
interaction with his own kind. Itard hoped from this study to shed some light on the
age – old debate about what proportion of human intelligence and personality is
heredity and what proportion of it stems from learned behavior. Itard found his wild
boy uncooperative and unwilling or unable to learn most things. This led him to
postulate the existence of developmental periods in normal human growth. He formed
the hypothesis that during these ‘sensitive periods’ a child must experience
stimulation to develop normally or grow up forever lacking the skills and intellectual
concepts, if not developed at the stage when nature expects them to be readily
absorbed. Itard’s effort to teach the wild boy was barely successful, he followed a
methodical approach in designing the process, arguing that all education would benefit from the use of careful observation and experimentation. This idea had tremendous appeal to the scientifically trained Montessori and later became central to her method.

Edouard Seguin, was a French psychologist who studied with Itard, and carried on his research. Montessori drew further confirmation of Itard’s ideas along with a far more specific and organized system for applying it to the everyday education of children with disabilities. Working primarily with the blind, Seguin developed a methodical approach to break skills down into small steps and was highly successful with carefully developed educational materials. Seguin is recognized as the founder of modern approaches to special education.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European thinkers had been providing the intellectual groundwork for the movement towards universal elementary education and reformation of the schools. Pestalozzi’s attempt to create a free school, Froebel’s kindergarten method, Seguin’s and Itard’s methods for educating those who had been considered uneducable all of them got synthesized in the work of Montessori. Montessori was not a philosopher in the true sense. Her philosophical verses are expressed through her writings, and the methods that she accepted into her school. This section of the chapter seeks to understand the philosophy of Maria Montessori.

Montessori’s educational practice was built upon the unique conception of the child as developing through “periods” during which different forms of sensitivity were displayed. In his biography of Montessori E. M. Standing (1962) refers to five of Montessori’s principles which exemplified her philosophy and had clear implications for practice.

- Children are capable of sustained mental concentration when genuinely interested in their work.
- They love order and especially enjoy the repetition of actions that they have already mastered.
• They prefer work to play and prefer didactic materials to toys.
• Reward and punishments are unnecessary to motivate them.
• The child has a deep sense of personal dignity that is easily offended.

It is important to note that not only was Montessori expressing a view of psychological development in these summations, but she was making a statement about what she believed to be the most essential nature of man. She moved from the realm of the strictly psychological to the domain of the spiritual, combining developmental description with human aspirations and inner longings.

Elaboration of her philosophy and practice can be done through careful observation of all aspects of the work of an individual. A technique that she stressed was at the heart of the simplicity of the instruction she espoused. Maria Montessori, like Rabindranath Tagore did not bind herself into any particular school of philosophy. She was an Idealist, a Naturalist, a Pragmatist and a Humanist.

5.2 Rabindranath Tagore and Maria Montessori as Idealists

An Idealist refuses to accept that the world or universe is susceptible to a mechanical explanation. The Idealist believes that there is harmony between the natural processes and human activities. They believe that man being the ultimate in spiritual existent, is central to the universe Man’s ultimate good lies the final objective of the universe. It is a human mind, that the spiritual element underlying the entire universe, realizes its essential and purest nature. Idealist emphasizes the mental or spiritual aspects of the universe. They believe that the elements that are basic to create our experiences, thoughts, reason, intelligence, personality, values, moral and religious ideals, etc. An Idealist believes that the individual should develop his personality and achieve self-realization. The pursuit of the highest ideals, that is truth, beauty and goodness should be encouraged more and more in the man so that he achieves self-realization. These three values determine three types of human activities – intellectual, aesthetic and moral. The researcher seeks to analyze the following section why Tagore and Montessori can be considered as an idealist.
Rabindranath Tagore as an Idealist believes that the entire world is fundamentally about the nature of spirit or mind. He believed that the man should realize the ultimate truth which will liberate him from the worldly bondage. Experience according to him is the world of Maya. He thought that the world is based on truth and Maya. The contradictions of human life provoke the quest for truth. Man is finite – infinite being. He combines in himself the physical nature with the spiritual nature.

“He is earth’s child but heaven’s heir”, Tagore describes this very clearly when he says “At one pole of my being. I am one with the stocks and stones. There I have to acknowledge the rule of universal law. That is where the foundation of my existence lies... But at the other pole of my being. I am separate from all. There I have broken through the cordon of equality and stand alone as an individual” (Tagore 1915).

The finite – infinite man is in fact, the individual – universal man, every individual has his own individual peculiarities on account of which he is different from other individuals. But he also has a nature which he shares with all and on account of which he has a feeling of finishing with every other individual. This is the Universal in him. His individual peculiarities are the aspects of his finite self and his universal nature is the infinite aspect of his personality. Tagore says:

“We have seen men conquering pain by undaunted prowess. Plunging into fiery ordeals only to march forward with triumph. What striving is this? This power that lies behind is neither physical nor mental, it belongs to the inward self where man is united with his God ” (Tagore1917).

So here Tagore stresses on the infinite and the union of man with the God. He said that the Rishis of India asserted emphatically to know him (God) in this life is to be true, not to know him in this life is the desolation of death. He tried to realize him in each and all. Not only in nature, but in the family, in society and in the state, the more we realize the world conscious in all, the better for us.
Ultimate reality to Tagore could not be divorced from personality. The Absolute is the supreme personality in intimate, personal and inter dependent relationship with human beings. “To be truly united in knowledge love and service with all beings and to realize one’s self in the all-pervading God is the essence of goodness….. Life is immense” (Tagore 1917).

Only perfect harmony between man and everything else in nature would enable a man’s soul to comprehend the mysteries of reality and realize the infinite. Man must thus cross barriers to become more than man, experience the freedom of consciousness, to unite with all.

Tagore assigned a lot of emphasis to self-realization through fulfilling the dharma’s. His advice was to find God and live for the ultimate truth which emancipates us from the bondage of the dust and gives us the wealth, not of thing but of thinner light, not of power but of love. Tagore also stressed on the spiritual upliftment of man the development of spiritual powers and divine potentialities.

The intellectual aim of education, according to Tagore is the development of the intellectual faculties which should be developed through education. “Ever since childhood, instead of putting all the burden on the memory, the power of thinking and power of imagination should also be given opportunities for free exercise” (Tagore1972).

Tagore’s stress on self-realization and intellectual development categorizes him as an idealist. As, Radhakrishnan pointed out-

“The philosophy of Rabindranath is an absolute idealism of concrete type….. Rabindranath’s is a wholeness of vision, which cannot tolerate absolute divisions between body and mind, matter and life, individual and society, community and nation, and empire and the world” (Radhakrishnan 1918).

Maria Montessori pursued her educational work with spiritual consciousness verging on mysticism. Montessori’s educational vision is far more profound and aims at a complete transformation of all modern assumptions about teaching. Kramer observed
a peculiar tension in Montessori between science and mysticism, between reason and intuition was already present when she wrote about her success with the children so many others had given up on.

“We must know how to collect the man which lies dormant within the soul of the child. I felt this intuitively and believed that not the didactic material but my voice which could to them awakened the children and encouraged them to use the didactic material and through it, to educate themselves.” Montessori spoke of her “belief that we must act upon the spirit” as a “Secret key” that opened the way to results and added that “while my efforts showed themselves in the intellectual progress of my pupils a peculiar form of exhaustion prostrated me. It was as if I gave to them some vital force from within me” (Montessori 1912).

Standing goes on to speak of

“that mysterious affinity which exists deep down in the soul of the genius, towards that work which he is destined to perform” and his belief that she was “sent into the world to shed new light on the unfathomed depth of the child’s soul …… her life’s mission”(Standing1998).

In 1915 Montessori was applying her educational insights to sectarian religious education and in 1929 she published a book on “The Children the Church.” “It was Christ who showed us what the child really is” Montessori proclaimed – “adult’s guide to the kingdom of Heaven” (Montessori 1972).

Montessori compared the process of psychological and spiritual development to the physical unfolding of the human organism. Montessori’s distinctive notion of the child as a “spiritual embryo” emphasizes the fact that the growing human being is not simply a biological or psychological entity but a spiritual entity. She compared the mysterious emergence of spiritual life in the child to the incarnation of God in Christ as described in the New Testament that children are born not out of blood, nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but born of God.
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The Montessori Method is full of the kind of mystical thought and flowery sentiment that set hard – headed reader's teeth on edge even then:

“The scientist she writes is not the clever manipulation of instruments is the worshipper of nature and he bears the external symbols of his passion as does the follower of some religious order. …. We must make of (teacher’s) worshippers and interpreters of the spirit of nature” (Montessori 1912).

Montessori gave importance to spiritual and religious aims and development of moral values in her education system. She was also opposed to purely utilitarian or materialistic conceptions of education. All these aspects in her education system asserted the fact that she was an idealist.

So both the educators Tagore and Montessori were idealist. Tagore’s idea was based on Vedanta, while Montessori’s idealism was based on Christianity. Both the educators stressed on the spiritual development of the child from a very young age. They also stressed on the development of moral values. All these features assert their idealistic views on education.

5.3 A Comparison of Rabindranath Tagore and Maria Montessori from Naturalist viewpoint

Tagore was a great lover of Nature and he bestowed a very important place to Nature. To him education divorced from nature has brought untold harm to young children. He wanted human beings to have a close communication with the natural surroundings. Before understanding him as a naturalist we need to understand the major features of naturalism in education.

“Back to Nature” and “Follow Nature” is the watch words of naturalism for effective education. To the Naturalist the best teacher for a child is nature. Hence, education should be provided in a natural environment. The French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau advocated the negative education. Rousseau asserts: “I call a negative education one that tends to perfect the organs that are the instruments of knowledge
and the endeavors to prepare the way for reason, by the proper exercise of the senses.” (1762)

- Naturalist believes that a child is a child not an adult. So the education should be based on the needs of the child.
- Naturalist lays stress on self-learning. To them all education should be based on learning by doing principle.
- Naturalist education allows full freedom for the child to develop himself, according to his inherent nature, needs and in born tendencies.
- Naturalist regards the sense organs as the gateways to knowledge. So the training of the senses, forms an important part of their educational program.
- Naturalist laid stress on the scientific knowledge. They give importance to science subjects and believe that such subjects prepare the child to contribute to scientific inventions and discoveries.

Rabindranath Tagore was attracted to nature. He believed that Nature has a binding and tremendous impact on education. He created Santiniketan to realize his educational ideals in a natural setting. In his own words “I tried my best to develop in the children of my school the freshness of their feeling for nature, a sensitiveness of soul in their relationship with their human surroundings” (Tagore 1953).

Tagore’s concept of nature was influenced by his childhood perception. Indian philosophic thought, Kalidasa’s writings, Vaishnava poetry, Western romanticism and so on shaped his thoughts and ideas. In his Reminiscences he writes of his early conception of nature as a companion and symbol of unlimited freedom. This came to him at a time when he was confined within the house:

“Beyond my reach stretched this limit less thing called the Outside” he writes “flashes, sounds and scenes of which used momentarily to come and touch me through interstices. It seemed to want to beckon me through the shutters with a variety of gestures. But it was free and I was bound – there was no way of our meeting.” (Tagore 1962)
Tagore believed that education given in natural surroundings developed intimacy with the world. He put more faith on the individual rather than institutions. Nature to him is the focus where the interest and aspirations of human beings meet. It is therefore essential not only to know nature, but to live in nature. “School” according to him, is like a large home in which the children and teachers with their family lived together, sharing a common life of high aspirations, planning to bring a noble effort in contact with nature on one hand and with the spirit of joy on the other. He points out the psychology of exercise of the senses in an energizing atmosphere of joy and freedom. To know and embrace the world through learning for living in a perfect relationship with freedom and joy is the first lesson that every child should be provided in a school. He pointed out:

“Freedom in the mere sense of independence has no content and therefore no meaning perfect freedom is in a perfect harmony of relationship, which we realize in this world not through our response to it in knowing but in being. Objects of knowledge maintain an infinite distance from us who are knower’s. For knowledge is not union. Therefore the further world of freedom awaits us there where we reach truth, not through feeling it by our senses or knowing it by our reason, but through the union of perfect sympathy.

Children with the freshness of their senses come directly to the intimacy of this world. This is the first great gift they have they must accept it naked and simple and must never again lose their power of immediate communication with it. For our perfection we have to be vitally savage and mentally civilized, we should have the gift to be natural with nature and human with human society.”(Tagore 1953)

Tagore advocates education for freedom and joy. A ‘symphony of response between life and world’ will help children to have a wide exposure in education.
Tagore observes

“The primary object of an institution should not be merely to education one’s lines and mind to be in efficient readiness for all emergences but to be in perfect tune in the symphony of response between life and would to find the balance of their harmony which is wisdom. The first important lesson for children in such a place would be that of improvisation, the constant imposition of the ready – made having been banished from here. It is to give occasions to explore one’s capacity through surprises of achievement. I must make it plain that this means a lesson not in simple life but in creative life” (Tagore 1953).

Tagore emphasizes the importance of education to exercise and enrich the power of sensitiveness inherent in everyone which paves the way for free human development. Like the naturalist, he stressed in the training of gateways of learning. He said that:

“If the education of the body does not go on simultaneously with the education of the mind, the mind itself is not properly stimulated. The reason why many boys seem dull is class in that the claims of their bodies are not being met in their education” (Tagore1951).

It can be concluded that Rabindranath Tagore’s Naturalism seeks to exalt the concepts of joy and beauty and emphasizes on the individual spirit. His Ananda-yoga that is a realization of joy in life through the artistic education formed an important aspect of his education ideal.

Naturalism also emphasizes on scientific knowledge. In his later years Tagore also emphasized Science more than ever before as an important component of education. Science received the same sort of attention that music and fine arts received earlier when Visva-Bharati came into existence. Tagore dedicated his book ‘Visva Parichay’ to the Bengali physicist Satyendranath Bose whose name is associated with that of Einstein in ‘Bose Einstein Statistical findings’. Tagore wrote in the preface.

“In the forest the leaves fall from the trees and that fertilizes the soil. In countries where science is cultivated, little bits of that knowledge are spreading
all the time. That fertilizes and animates a scientific mind. In absence of that our mind remains unscientific. It is a poverty in domain of knowledge as well as all the areas of our life and work.” (Tagore 1937)

So from the above discussion, it is clear that Tagore also encouraged scientific knowledge like the naturalist. Rabindranath Tagore represented Naturalistic educators, in the aspects of connotations, targets, and contexts.

The basic theory of education in child development as initiated by Montessori is to literate the child from the dependence on others. She asked for the liberty of child in thought and action. So like a Naturalist, she suggested for freedom in all his activities as an individual. Morrish explains:

“Montessori argued as Rousseau had done that education should be paedocentric. The child had to be central in all our considerations of curriculum and timetable. Moreover the child had to treat as a child and not as little man: Rousseau too had said that nature wants to be children before they are men” (Morrish 1970).

Education was the means and the framework in which, the child was helped to develop normally and to enlarge his awareness of the external world. Both the system or organization and the teacher enlisted simply to help the child (as and when he felt the need of such assistance) but such help was to be unobtrusive. The teacher was a ‘directress’, providing the right direction when the child called for guidance. The essential thing was for the individual to gain experience through spontaneous self-expression and activity, and for this the child needed the right environmental time that is the time to fully express himself and exhaust his enquiry.

Montessori defines discipline in terms of liberty which again is best manifested in the activity. She wanted liberty for the total manifestation of the child. She talks of liberty or freedom for the child, but with restriction. She believed in regulation and control of the child’s action for the child’s gradual unfoldment of the inner self like that of the petals of a flower from its level. Montessori criticized the traditional
school and concerned the classroom environment as an immobile and lifeless human being. She calls these hapless children in the classrooms as “rows of butterflies transfixed with a pin.”

Rita Kramer in her book “Maria Montessori: A Biography” pointed out that Montessori felt-

“The systematic mastery of the environment, met an innate need of the developing human being from the earliest age and was key to both individual development and the progress of civilization. ….. What she wanted was to make use of nature to perfect the school, making it a place that met the real needs of children. What did come down to her through the tradition of education who followed Rousseau was not destructing of education but the idea of developing the senses as a prior basis of abstract learning in a school that was structured the right way”(Kramer1988).

Rousseau’s ideas were brought into the practical world by Pestalozzi and Froebel. They changed the educational thinking of the time. Montessori became familiar with it in the late 1890’s. Montessori made use of many Froebel’s insights, combining elements of his system with ideas and methods. Montessori in her book ‘Montessori Method’ made her statement:

“The transformation of the school must be contemporaneous with the preparation of the teacher ….. The fundamental principle of scientific pedagogy must be indeed, the liberty of the pupil – such liberty as shall permit a development of individual, spontaneous manifestations of the child’s nature. If a new and scientific pedagogy is to arise from the study of individual such study must occupy itself the observation of free children.”(Montessori 1912)

Montessori asserted that her pedagogy was based on scientific inquiry. She argued that

“Practical progress of the school demands a genuine fusion of these modern tendencies, in practice and thought, such a fusion as shall bring scientists
directly into the important field of the school and at the same time raise teachers from the inferior intellectual level to which they are limited today” (Montessori 1964).

Montessori stated that it was the distinguished Anthropologist Giuseppe Sergi, one of her teachers from medical school who had proposed the idea that the scientific principles of anthropology could be applied to the “instruction and education of man” (Montessori 1964). According to Montessori her method was scientific due to the naturalistic observation of children in a prepared learning environment and the teacher’s new role as an objective observer. “Here is the essential point, from her scientific preparation; the teacher must bring not only the capacity, but the desire to observe natural phenomena.” (Montessori 1964). So Montessori’s belief in nature, freedom of child and scientific pedagogy categorizes her as a Naturalist. Like a Naturalist she believed that children spontaneously seek their own growth and development. In the Montessori learning environment, children need to progressively increase their independence in order to free themselves, so that teachers can see the free child, observe the child’s needs and allow the child’s spontaneous activity to guide the teacher to determine the child’s ideal environment.

The above discussion asserts the fact that both the educators were naturalist. Tagore’s naturalism stressed on making the teaching learning process a joyful experience. He also stressed on scientific knowledge. Montessori’s naturalism was based on science. She stressed on the liberty of the child. Her pedagogy was based on scientific principles.

5.4 Rabindranath Tagore and Maria Montessori as a Pragmatist

Tagore’s pragmatism is reflected in his works that he began in the later stages of his life at Sriniketan. This section explores the various pragmatic approaches that were adapted by him in the latter half of his life. Tagore’s liberal mind did not restrict himself to a one sided view. It is reflected in his contributions. He evolved himself with the changing times, which was a true reflection of a pragmatist.
Tagore began to emphasize the *Loka Shiksha* or people’s education in the latter half of his life. A new note sounded in his lectures at the University of Calcutta in 1933 and two essays published in 1935—‘the spread (bikiran) of education’ and ‘the internalization (swangikaran) of education’. Tagore himself breaks a new ground by introducing *Lok Shiksha Sansad*. Tagore focused on the problems of the village. The aims and objectives of Sriniketan point out: “To take the problems of the village and the field to the classroom for study and discussion and to the experimental form for solution” (Tagore 1928). So we can see that Tagore emphasizes on the experiment which is one of the most important feature of pragmatism.

Tagore also emphasized on the principle of activity in education. To Tagore, activity must be purposeful and not mechanical. He emphasized on the economic aspect of the work. In his scheme of “*Siksha Satra*” at Sriniketan, Tagore laid stress on the creative aspects of the work. Dewey the chief proponent of pragmatism considered activity in the interest of improvement of capitalist society. But Tagore’s programme of Sriniketan focused on the social upliftment of the villagers. In his book ‘*Rabindranath Tagore*’ Salkar (1990) commented on the: “Tagore considered that education is the continuous social process and should be linked with the economic and social life of the community. His school became miniature community as propounded by Dewey”(Salkar 1990 ).

To Tagore, the experience was central to a child’s education. The student was not a passive recipient but rather an active agent in the process of knowing and learning. Education to him, was interactive and as well as integrating the individual and social dimensions. He stressed the psychological and social dimensions of education. He sought a balance between the development of the personality and the improvement of the society. “Social responsibility” was described as seemly behavior towards fellow students and seniors. He introduced ceremonies that facilitated socialibility, promoted assistance to the neighbours in distress, interest in every aspect of the country and the people, friendliness towards other sects and communities. Festivals which were geared to promote community spirit included the “*Rakhi Bandhan*” festival which celebrated voluntary kinship. Older students helped the young ones W.W. Pearson in
his account relates a story of how the student organization themselves stayed in a round the clock vigil to tend one of the children who was sick.

Tagore believed in a flexible and open curriculum. It was adjusted to the needs of the individual and the community. The individual and social dimensions of education were given priority in his curriculum. It went beyond the books and the classroom. Tagore included nonacademic aspects of life, such as artistic pursuits, social services, festival and other extracurricular activities. It included communicating with nature, individual growth and community development. Some of the basic assumptions underlying the Siksha Satra experiment were that the program should give the maximum scope to the child’s imagination and that the child should learn by doing and by experiment concerning the hands on the character of the programme.

Elmhirst has written:

“Under such a system, text books, classroom and formal laboratory go by the board. There remain the garden plot, the plotting shed and the workshop. Records are kept and reports and accounts written up, revived and corrected, giving scope for literary training in its most interesting form. Geology becomes the study of the fertility of the plot, chemistry the use of time and manures of all kinds, of sprays and disinfection, physics the use of tools, of pumps the study of water lifts and oil-engines, entomology the control of plant pests (ants, caterpillars, beetles) and diseases (leaf curl, wilt and bacterial attacks) ornithology the study of birds in their relation, first to the garden plot and then to the world in general.” (Elmhirst1961)

Tagore, like a Pragmatist also laid emphasis on economy. He laid a special emphasis on agriculture and local handicraft. Regarding economic development Tagore’s aspiration “was to make the cultivator self-confident in his own ability ….. he felt that the right of the agricultural lands should vest with the peasants. There cannot be real improvement of agriculture unless we adopt collective and co-operative farming on scientific lines” (Tagore 1961). Tagore considered educational development as foundation of rural reconstruction and “reform of education and regeneration of
villages are the major tasks of my life.’” (Tagore 1961). The poet further observed that a natural bond between education in the schools and colleges and the country outside them is immensely necessary.

In his school Tagore encourage the students to carry out a variety of duties, in dormitory, kitchen, garden poultry and dairy. The students learned games, songs and plays, carpentry and some other craft and their views and writing were focused on their daily experience. In his writings, he pointed out that

“I am therefore all the more been that *Siksha Satra* should justify the ideal. I have entrusted to it, and should represent the most important function of Sriniketan, in helping students to the attainment of manhood complete in all its various aspects. Our people need more than anything else a real scientific training, that can inspire in them the courage of experimental the initiative of mind which we lack as a nation.” (Tagore1970)

To Tagore, ideals permeating the life and activities of an institution are more important than the subjects taught and activities pursued there in. Subjects that are taught to students, the teaching, the department of higher studies and research work conducted were not the permanent signs of glory to Tagore. To him, they exist today and may not exist tomorrow. It changes with time and need. This reflects his belief in dynamic curriculum. Tagore’s experiments in education are reflected in his constructive and creative activities – rural reconstruction, creating environmental awareness or innovative festivities. All these reflect his pragmatic outlook on education.

John Dewey was the advocate of Pragmatism. Kilpatrick as a disciple of John Dewey visited the Casa in Rome and returned to write a little book, The Montessori System Examined published in 1914. He dismissed *Montessori’s* thought as fifty years behind the time and her methods as mechanical, formal and restricting (Kramer 1976). Kilpatrick criticized her system for not providing more situations for social cooperation and imitative play. He pointed out that the enthusiasm for her methods were due to various reasons-
“A simple procedure embodied in definite tangible apparatus is a powerful incentive to popular interest. Professor Dewey could not secure the education which he sought in so simple a fashion. Madam Montessori was able to do so only because she had a much narrower conception of education, and because she could hold to an untenable theory as to the value of formal and systematic sense training. Madam Montessori centered much of her effort upon devising more satisfactory methods of teaching reading writing, utilizing there to in masterly fashion the phonetic character of the Italian language. Professor Dewey, while recognizing the duty of the school to teach these arts, feels the early emphasis should rather be placed upon activities more vital child life which should at the same time lead toward the mastery of our complex social environment” (Kilpatrick1914).

In spite of the criticism by Kilpatrick (a disciple of John Dewey) if we analyze the Montessori Method we will find reflection of many principles of Pragmatism. Montessori believed in the principle of activity. The curriculum adapted in Montessori Method was based on activity. The project method which is the most popular Pragmatic Method of education, bears resemblance with the Montessori Method. The child is an active participant in both the method of learning. In both the methods understanding comes through the child’s own experiences. Promotion of children’s ability to find out things for themselves is stressed in both Project and Montessori Methods.

Again Dalton Plan, which is a Pragmatic Method of teaching was based on the Montessori Method. Dalton Plan was set out in detail in Parkhurst’s book Education and Dalton Plan in 1922. Rita Kramer in her book points out:

“The plan itself was original and nothing like Montessori’s own ideas for secondary education, which stressed less the academic than the life experiences of adolescents in a rural setting. But the principle on which it was based – the pupil’s liberty as the basis for developing independence, his freedom to work when and for as long as he wants to on a given task and to progress at his own
rate – is pure Montessori and it was from her former teacher that Parkhurst had learned the attitude toward education which she had adapted in a special way for older pupils” (Kramer 1988).

The principle philosophy of pragmatism is practical utility. The child is the central figure in this method. Pragmatic method is activity method. The child should learn by doing “Learning by doing” is the great maxim of pragmatic education. To the pragmatist education is not so much teaching the child things he ought to know as encouraging him to learn for himself through experimental and creative activity. Kramer while referring to Montessori’s work, pointed out certain characteristics of the Montessori Method-

“Montessori’s work at the start of the century, all of which she either invented or used in a new way, might include.

- The concept that children learn through play and the ubiquitous “educational” toys and puzzle that stimulates early reading and writing and basic math skills as well as programmed “teaching machines” and child scaled furniture. ……

- The importance of the environment in which learning is to take place………

- The observation that children take a natural pleasure in learning to master their environment and that this mastery beginning with the manipulation of objects, is the basis of the sense of competence necessary for independence………

- The ideas that the school must be part of the community and involve the parents if education is to be effective.” (Kramer 1988)

From the above discussion, it is clear that Montessori Method is based on the pragmatic principle of activity method and it also gave importance to the environment and community life. So we can come to the conclusion that Maria Montessori was a Pragmatist.
The discussion above asserts the fact that both Tagore and Montessori were Pragmatist. Both the educators stressed on the social development of the child and believed in the close relation between the society and the institution. Their methodology of teaching was based on learning through experience.

5.5 Humanistic Ideas of Rabindranath Tagore and Maria Montessori

Humanism is a system of thought that focuses on humans and their values, capacities and worth. It is a cultural and intellectual thought that emphasized the human potential to attain excellence. The humanistic approach places a great deal of emphasis on student’s choice and control over the course of their education. Students are encouraged to make choices that range from day to day activities to periodically setting future life goals. This allows for students to focus on a specific subject of interest for any amount of time they choose, within reason. The Humanist teacher’s role is that of a facilitator. He believes that it is important for students to be motivated and engaged in the material they are taught.

Internationally, Tagore was known as a humanist who sought to reconcile such apparent opposites as humans and nature, materialism and spiritualism, and nationalism and internationalism. Tagore expressed a philosophy that was uniquely his own. His vision of the underlying wholeness of life was based on a synthesis of classic eastern religious texts and the works of early Indian poets and philosophers with western thought and modern European literature. Tagore a man of great courage and gentleness of nobility and grace is generally viewed as a symbol of integration of East and West. Tagore’s biographer Kripalini stated that: “he lived as he wrote, not for pleasure or profit but out of joy, not as a brilliant egoist but as a dedicated spirit, conscious that his genius was a gift from the divine, to be used in the service of man.” (Kripalini 2008) His writing is deeply rooted in Indian social history. Tagore’s gift for expressing the unity of life and the grandeur of humanity gives it universal appeal.

The purpose of civilization, according to Tagore, is to hold up a mirror of the ideal, eternal person, to which all individuals aspire. The humans realize the infinity of their true being through the arts of civilization, science, philosophy, religion, art and music.
The essence of religion is the divinity of humanity and the humanity of God. The most important components of true religions are love, the renunciation of self and service to others. These are the basic ideas that were reflected in his book “The Religion of Man” (1931).

To Tagore religion develops human consciousness and enables one to realize the eternal spirit, through science, philosophy literature and the arts. He believed in direct experience of the union of the individual self and the eternal spirit. In his chapter “The Vision”, Tagore relates his own experience of this process which crystallized when he was eighteen years old.

“Of all the creatures man has reached that multi cellular character in a perfect manner not only in his body but in his personality. For centuries his evolution has been the evolution of a consciousness that tries to be liberated from the bounds of the individual separateness and to comprehend in its relationship a wholeness which may be named Man. This relationship which has been dimly instinctive is ever struggling to be fully aware of itself. Physical evolution sought for efficiency in a perfect communication with the physical world, the evolution of Man’s consciousness sought for truth in a perfect harmony with world of personality.” (Tagore 1953).

Tagore approaches the “Religion of Man” from the standpoint of science, arguing that the process of evolution finds its full meaning only in humanity. To Tagore, there is a shaping spirit of life that introduces more and more complex and interrelated forms of life in the evolutionary process, culminating in the creation of the mind. Mind is the revelation of any truth that is not limited by space and time and the vehicle of this revelation is humanity. People realize themselves in others making up a great social and cosmic wholeness that free all humans from their consciousness of separateness: “However whatever name our logic may give to the truth of human unity, the fact can never be ignored is that we have our greatest delight when we realize ourselves in others and this is the definition of love. This love gives us the testimony of the great whole which is complete and final truth of man” (Tagore 1953).
In his theory of surplus he explains the heart of his religion of humanity. The universal reality, according to Tagore, is simply people's innate sense of their own fully developed consciousness. Tagore does not dispute the truth of experience. To Tagore humans are more prefect as humans than when their individual consciousness is dissolved into formlessness. He stresses on personality. For him the true religion is the pursuit of an ideal unity that is none other than the people themselves in their most expanded infinite states.

To Tagore everyone is an artist because people are co-creators of their world. Tagore exalts the function of creative imagination. It is the imaginative faculty that brings before humanity the sense of its true being and the full extent of it. He states: “The spirit of love dueling in the boundless realm of the surplus emancipates our consciousness from the illusory bond of the separateness of self; it is ever trying to spread its illumination in the human world.” (Tagore 1953)

Tagore outlines how the religion of humanity brings opposites together. Both the Indian tradition of contemplation and detachment and western ideals of service to humanity are necessary. Together they can create an ethic of love in action, which is the only way that perfect knowledge, conceived as wisdom can be obtained. It requires a confluence of two aspects of the human mind which seeks satisfaction in external objects and the inner which seeks unity in truth.

For a brighter prospect of humanity and the education for the universal brotherhood of humanity necessitates rethinking from the Tagore perspective. Tagore reminded the people of the world that empathy and not apathy are the only way of avoiding the crisis – the crisis of civilization. As hatred begets hatred, the rebirth of compassion is not only what should be the prayer of mankind, but a practice in performance in right earnest ways also. Today’s world awaits more Rishis in a practical educational endeavor than spiritual accomplishments however desirable and worthwhile.

At a time of disillusionment with conventional religion and steady growth in materialism, Tagore’s visionary and optimistic philosophy pointed the way to the recovery of faith in the limitless potential of humanity. Tagore believed that the
function of civilization was to keep alive the faith in the possibility of ideal perfection on that human culture should be understood as an unfolding discovery of a new level of humanity beyond the individual self. He regarded the human race as fundamentally one and it is a concrete reality. To him, reality is human and truth is human. The harmony of human consciousness, as Tagore seeks in the pursuit of education for fullness is the harmony of human endeavor. The cross fertilization of culture through education can stop human disintegration and disbelief. He remained faithful to human endeavor.

So from the above discussion, it is clear that Rabindranath Tagore had an immense faith in humanity and he called for universal brotherhood. His educational endeavors asserted freedom of thought. He advocated education in a natural setting, where the mind is free. Like a true humanist, he believed that both feelings and knowledge are important to the learning process. The curriculum of Tagore focused on the various aspects of a child’s development. The philosophy of Humanism also finds its manifestation in the aims and objectives of Visva-Bharati. Through his institution he tried to transcend the culture of the east to the west and make the students citizens of the world. At Sriniketan he tried to uplift conditions of rural people by developing the ‘atmoshakti’ that is the belief in self.

Montessori’s life and work was a balance between rationality and intuition. The blend of science and religion in Montessori’s worldview forms the basis for a truly holistic conception of the universe. Montessori pointed out that ‘All things are part of the universe and are connected with each other to form one whole unity’ (Montessori 1973). She was deeply impressed by the harmony in the natural world, the ecology of existence that gives every living thing a meaningful function in the universe. Every species, indeed every individual organism, contributes to the good of the whole by performing its cosmic function. Montessori was convinced that the purpose of life is to obey the universal law which harmonizes all and creates an ever better world. The Cosmos are engaged in the evolution toward a greater harmony - towards the fulfillment of God’s mysterious purpose. The guiding belief of Montessori’s educational philosophy, the fundamental point around which all her principles and
techniques revolve, is her conviction that humanity has its purpose to fulfill in this world. The human species is “God’s prime agent in creation” and it is our responsibility “to learn to do more effectively our share of work in cosmic plan” (Montessori 1973). She believed that the mission of the human life is to give expression to the forces within us that are trying to complete the cosmic plan. She called people to work in partnership with the divine. This understanding of our existence places all our cultural, political, economic and even personal strivings- in an entirely spiritual light. “The world was not created for us to enjoy” Montessori proclaims “but we are created in order to evolve the cosmos” (Montessori 1989). So the work of education is to awaken every person’s soul that enables the individual to make his or her own unique contribution to the cosmic plan, especially to fulfill his or her own destiny. The unfolding of human potential is the process of humanization. Montessori said that

“a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being…… it is acquired in virtues of experience in the environment…..individual activity is the one factor that stimulate and produces development and this is not true for the little one of pre-school age than it is for the junior, middle, and upper school children” (Montessori 1967).

Montessori wrote that humanity’s role in the evolution is to construct a “supranature”- a social, cultural and technological extension of nature that calls forth ever greater dimensions of human creativity and understanding. But she repeatedly observed that our material, technological progress had far outpaced our psychological, moral and spiritual development and in the twentieth century we must overcome this imbalance. To address the imbalance, Montessori came out with a curriculum for elementary school students that she called ‘cosmic education’. The purpose of this approach is to provide the young person with an expansive, inspiring vision of the universe and one’s personal destiny within it. This is an education that gives life meaning because all aspects of creation are shown to fit into a complex, interconnected whole that is far larger than our customary limited worldview. Cosmic education lifts the young pupil’s consciousness out of the materialistic concerns of
modern society and instills a sense of awe, touching a receptive and searching soul. She considered people as fundamentally citizens of the cosmos. She argued that it was time to put partial identities and false distinctions aside and work together globally to achieve our collective mission of furthering the evolution of consciousness.

Montessori sought spiritual reconstruction and at several international peace conferences, she asserted that only spiritual renewal of human beings through education could alter the violent course of human history. It is the task of education to encourage peaceful cooperation “readiness to shed prejudices in interests of common work for cosmic plan which may also be called the Will of God, actively expressed in the whole of his creation” (Montessori 1973). She said that an education capable of saving humanity is no small undertaking; it involves spiritual development of man the enhancement of value as an individual, and the preparation of young people to understand the times in which they live.

Montessori’s writing supports the humanistic assumption of the self-actualizing capacity of human beings. Montessori believed in the development of the unique personality as the ultimate purpose of education. Montessori stresses the importance of self-determination within a prepared environment which responds to the developmental needs of the child. The humanistic values of integration are evident in Montessori’s approach of education. Montessori’s educational environment is full of movement. Children are free to move about the classroom at will. There is a sense of mutual respect in the environment. Children learn to develop friendship through the lessons in grace and courtesy by being helpful and kind to others. Montessori based on the humanist philosophy defended the uniqueness of each child, with concern for his/her development by respecting his/her dignity and individuality.

Montessori lived her life in a spirit of service to all humanity and dedicated her life to that goal. A famous scientist and a pedagogue who dedicated her life to the spiritual renewal and to the progress of humanity through child are the words which were inscribed on a commemorative tablet of the Montessori family grave in Rome indicate her legacy.

From the above discussion, it is clear that both the educators stressed on humanistic principles of interpersonal connectedness, integration and universal peace. So
Rabindranath Tagore and Maria Montessori were also humanist. Tagore’s humanism stressed on people’s education while Montessori stressed on self-actualization. Both the educators stressed on spiritual awakening of the individual and they had immense faith upon the child and its uniqueness. They agreed on the fact that human development and peace can only be achieved through education.

5.6 Conclusion

So the philosophies of Rabindranath Tagore and Maria Montessori have been discussed in this chapter. It can be concluded that both the educators did not limit themselves to a particular school of philosophy. Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophy is more a poet’s outlook while Maria Montessori was more scientific in her approach. Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophy had its base in the *Upanishad* and *Vedanta*. Montessori’s philosophy was based on scientific observation. They were dynamic in their approaches. Both the educators were Idealist, Naturalist, Pragmatist and Humanist. Tagore’s Idealism was based on the ‘Brahman’ and found its manifestations in all the institutions of Tagore. Maria Montessori tried to find the manifestation of God in each child. She referred to the child as a spiritual embryo. Rabindranath Tagore’s Naturalism was more of a poet’s perspective. He cried for the freedom of the child and tried to provide education in the cradle of nature. Maria Montessori’s approach to Naturalism was a scientific one. Her educational method was based on observation. Pragmatism was reflected through the activity based curriculum of both these educators. They were the advocates of child-centric education and they also believed in individual difference. Both Rabindranath Tagore and Maria Montessori were Humanists. Both these educators had immense faith in the powers of Man. They cried for the spiritual awakening of man. Rabindranath Tagore and Maria Montessori were also pioneers in Peace Education. Maria Montessori talked of self-actualization of man. Rabindranath Tagore regarded the development of ‘atmo-shakti’ as the basis of human development. So from the above discussion the researcher concluded that both these educators were Idealist, Pragmatist, Naturalist and Humanist at the same time.
Chapter References:


