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

- Rabindranath Tagore
Chapter 7

METHODOLOGY OF EDUCATION AND TEACHING OF TAGORE AND MONTESSORI
7.0 Introduction

This chapter takes a look into the implementation of the educational principles of Rabindranath Tagore and Maria Montessori. Rabindranath Tagore experimented with his educational ideals in the Santiniketan School (1901), Visva-Bharati (1921) and Sriniketan (1922). Rabindranath Tagore was not only a theoretical thinker but also a practical organizer and reformer. He worked with his educational ideals throughout his life. He evolved as an educator between 1902 and 1920. The early model of his school was a cultural statement. Later he rebelled against the narrow and rigid aspects inherent in the original model. Gradually a broader and more humanistic approach became evident in his institutions.

Maria Montessori gave shape to his educational ideal in the Casa dei Bambini or the Children’s House (1907). One of her duties was to visit the various asylums in the city to select patients to be brought to the clinic for treatment. She was touched by the sight of retarded children who were there for lack of other facilities to care for them (Kramer 1976). She realized that the problem was primarily educational and not medical. Through various writings and lectures, she called attention to the need of research into the causes of delinquency, maintaining that among them was the lack of adequate care for the retarded and disturbed children she identified as potential delinquents. She pointed out that these children were educable in varying degrees and society owed the responsibility. She brought together her knowledge from medicine, from anthropology, from education and her practical experience in the field to highlight the problems of vast number of children in Italy. She tried to provide solution to the problems through her Casa dei Bambini.

7.1 Santiniketan

The first clear indications of his plans for Santiniketan came in letters to his friend Jagadish Chandra Bose. In a letter dated August 1901 he describes his plans for opening a school modeled on ancient lines. He wrote: “I have been working hard to open a school at Santiniketan. The whole system will be just like that of ancient
resident guru-schools. Not a trace of luxury will be found ………………rich and poor alike will undertake the strenuous brahmacharya initiation.” (Tagore1989)

7.1.1 Inauguration of the Bramhacharyaashrama: The Brahmacaryashrama was opened on December 22, 1901 with five pupils. Rathindranath Tagore son of Rabindranath Tagore was one of the pupils. All of them were dressed in long yellow robes. Rabindranath Tagore initiated the boys into brahmacharya with the chanting of Gayathri Mantra. His opening speech-

“Let us salute those Brahmins who were the forefathers, not just by bowing our heads but through the acceptance of their teachings and through following their examples……I have summoned you to this secluded ashram as that you may acquire that kind of instruction and dedication by way of which the Brahmins Kshatriyas and Vaishyas of those days became great and courageous.” (Tagore 1988)

The concept of Santiniketan ashram extends back to 1863 when Debendranath Tagore purchased the land after having had a deep spiritual experience while resting there during a journey. In 1887 he created a trust deed which set aside twenty bighas of the land including a one storey and a two storey building for the purpose of meditating. He also stated that the land would be used for meditation and the trust deed states that a “Brahma Vidyalaya and libraries may be established at Santiniketan”.

There was rapid turnover in the first years of ashram. Mohit Chandra Sen became the headmaster in 1904. It was under his term the pioneering experiment in student self-government begun. “Sense training” of children was also introduced programme of game was designed to train children in gauging weight, distance and numbers. This became a standard aspect of the curriculum and was included as an objective of the Patha Bhavan syllabus.

“Sense training” is in the Patha Bhavan syllabus which states that: “Students should be helped from the beginning in perfecting their sense training. This is the first
requisite towards self-reliance. Everyone needs in his daily life on exact sense of the proportion, quantity and quality of objects.” (Patha Bhavan Syllabus 1935)

Since 1905 political activities began building up over the partition of Bengal Rabindranath Tagore and the ashram become increasingly involved in national politics. Ajit Kumar Chakraborty describes the involvement of the ashram in anti-partition activities:

“For four years since its foundation the ashram went on humming the old forgotten strain that came from past, from the woodlands of Aryan India of four thousand years ago. Then there burst into the country a thunderstorm. The great national movement with its trumpet blast of Bande Mataram, its flaunting hopes and high aspirations its riotous extent and frantic expectancy came. The poet became its high priest. The ashram was no longer a shadow of the benighted past it was a reality of the dawning day. The country consciousness surged high in the ashram. Of course the western features of the school example self-government of the boys and the atmosphere of freedom, did not suffer at this period. But the emphasis was certainly laid on the spirit of ancient India. Not simply on the spiritual side of ancient India, but on the side of social life and rules as well, which were without questions narrow and convention bound.” (Chakraborty 1917)

Early years of the school were a difficult one. Financial difficulties weighed heavily upon the school. From 1907 there was a shift in emphasis, as teachers and students at Santiniketan started village reconstruction at Bhubandanga which marked the beginning of the concept of Sriniketan. In September 1907 new festival “Rakhi Bandhan” was celebrated to mark the friendship between all religions and groups. There were new festivals celebrating nature like the Spring Festival or Vasant Panchami was initiated in the year 1907 which was followed by Barsha Mangal or rain festival in 1908.

In 1910, Jagandananda Roy was appointed as the first “Superintendent of the school”. The student body was divided into three sections “Adaya” (senior school), “Madhya”
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(middle school) and “Sisu” (junior school). A new system of instruction was introduced during this period, one where by the students were divided into “bargas” or groups according to their ability in various areas. Basanta Roy, who visited the school during this period writes that the classes were not fixed and “a student who is advanced in English may have his English with senior boys of the high school, and he may have his mathematics with students in the final year in grammar school”(Roy 1916). Experiments in student democracy were carried out after Tagore’s return from America. This has been pointed out by W.W.Pearson. Basanta Kumar Roy reports that:

“To teach students, leadership and self-government the internal management of the school is left to the students. Every Tuesday the students elect a captain for a week. He is the chief magistrate. Every house elects its own leader. The leaders take note of acts of misbehavior in class and outside. The cases are not brought before Tagore or before the teachers, but before the students court which sits in the evening on appointed days.”(Roy1916)

Ernest Rhys in his 1915 account of the school pointed out that Tagore was influenced by the principle of self-government in George Junior of America. It became a rule at Bolpur that the “boys should be left as much as possible to themselves and manage their own affairs without any interference from outside” (Rhys 1915). In 1909 women were admitted to the school thus making it coeducation school. The girls shared the same classes within the boys. Rabindranath began the program of drama, including women students. In 1922 a women’s hostel “Nari Bhavan” was constructed.

7.1.2 The main features of Santiniketan School -

Learning in Nature-Tagore’s concept of nature was influenced by his own childhood perceptions, Indian philosophic thought, Kalidasa’s writing, Vaishnava poetry, western romanticism and so on. In his Reminiscences he writes how he was confined within the house and he longed for the outside world through the window. He regarded nature as his companion and a symbol of unlimited joy and freedom. In his school he tried to provide education in a natural setting. The concept of Tapavon was
elaborated first in ‘Siksha Samasya’ (1906) and ‘Tapavon’ (1910) which focused on tranquility or Santa Rasa as the unique feature of the forest in Indian civilization. Santiniketan was an ideal location in a natural setting which had associations of physical and mental freedom for Rabindranath. Here children are able to come directly in contact with the nature. The children in Santiniketan sat beneath the trees on the mats. Children were allowed to climb and run around between the classes. Nature walk and excursions were the part of the curriculum. Besides this spring festival or “Basant Panchami” and rain festival or “Barsha Mangal” were celebrated at Santiniketan.

**The Guru Model**- Rabindranath Tagore wanted his students to live in close association with dedicated teachers. A “Guru” is a teacher who devotes his whole mind and spirit to the service of students “to put life into his pupils with his own life, light their lamps with his own learning, and make them happy with his affection” (Tagore 1906). In “Asrama Education” Rabindranath Tagore writes that the qualities of a born teacher.

“The born teacher is the man in whom the primal child responds readily to the call of the children. The gay laughter of youthful jollity gushes faith from his deep throat. If the children did not know him as one of those pre-historic mammoths, they would never be able to hold out the hand of friendship to him.” (Tagore 1983)

Rabindranath Tagore set example of his life and regarded his brother Jyotindranath as a model. Tagore also set himself as an example. He was affectionately called Gurudev by the students. He provided an inspiring role model with his multifaceted talent. He could spontaneously create an atmosphere of games, play and songs to engage the students. He created a family atmosphere as he also brought in members of his own family like his brother Dwjendranath Tagore and his nephew Dinendranath Tagore. From outside teachers like Satish Chandra Ray, Ajit Chakrabarti, Nandalal Bose, Mukul De, C.F. Andrews and W.W. Pearson taught at Santiniketan.
Spiritual Integration- The first syllabus for Santiniketan stated that Rabindranath’s principle in starting his school was to give the students a spiritual culture. “We rely more upon the subconscious influence of nature, of the associations of the place and the daily life of worship that we live, than on any conscious effort to reach them” (Tagore 2002).

*Gayatri Mantra* was used because it was a useful vehicle for helping the students realize the connection between the world and their consciousness, and between themselves and other. Another mantra was also employed to help the students identify with nature. “The God who is in water, who interpenetrates the whole world, who is in herbs, who is in trees, to that God I bow down again and again”. When the children recited these words in the vast Santiniketan landscape, wrote Rabindranath, it was easy for them to realize that the divine is manifested through water, land, fire medicinal plants and vegetation (Connell. M.K., 2002).

Aesthetic Education- Tagore gave importance to the aesthetic development of the senses and music, literature, art, dance and drama were given great prominence in the daily life of the school "we felt we would try to test everything” he writes, “and no achievement seemed impossible ............... we wrote, we sang, we acted, we poured ourselves out on, every side” (Tagore, 1962). The students of Santiniketan were encouraged to create their own publications and put out several illustrated magazines. They were encouraged to follow their ideas in painting and drawing. Most of the drama of Rabindranath Tagore was written at Santiniketan and the students took part in both performing and production of the plays.

Education in Mother Tongue- Rabindranath Tagore was in favour of imparting education through the mother tongue. His view was strengthened and consolidated by his personal experiences acquired in different progressive countries of the world, including Germany, France, Japan and America. He was of the opinion that proper grounding in mother tongue helps to learn foreign languages.

At Santiniketan the medium of the primary level was Bengali with English as a second language. One of Rabindranath Tagore’s concerns from an early age was the
development of Bengali resources. He tried to enrich the language by writing poems, plays, novels, essays and text books on language and science. The first criterion in Rabindranath's vision for relevant education was its local relevance, but at the same time its conclusion with the larger world.

**Kinesthetic Education**- Rabindranath placed great importance on practical and physical training. Early accounts of the school have mentioned training of the senses, which included training of one's ability to judge size, weight and distance, and to distinguish different sounds, colours and smells. This has been described in some of the later syllabi, which state that sense-training being able to estimate proportion quantity and quality is the first requisite towards self-reliance. (“Abridged Syllabus, and Recommended Books, *Patha Bhavana*” Visva-Bharati Bulletin No. 19 Jan 1935)

Tagore also pointed out 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 seen dull in class is that the claims of their bodies are not being met in their education. In my opinion we should so far as possible make every pupil in the asrama proficient in some form or other of manual work. The chief object of this would not be the manual training in itself, its real value is that through the exercise of physical skill, the mind also is filled with life and energy.” (Tagore 2002).

Sports of different types like gymnastics, lathi play, ju jitsu and dance were included in the curriculum which provide physical and practical training. So we can say that kinesthetic education was given priority in Santiniketan.

**Education for freedom**- Rabindranath experimented with his concept of freedom at Santiniketan. In his views an atmosphere of joy and freedom would prevail in schools where the pupil would learn under the influence of the teacher. Mukti-freedom, liberation, deliverance, release, salvation - is another concept central to Tagore's educational thought. The simple ingenuity of a child to enjoy freedom in the world of
his creativity should, as Tagore poignantly feels and makes experimentation in his own school for children in Santiniketan be allowed to have its spontaneity. Tagore states -

“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 the human surroundings, with the help of literature, festive ceremonials and also the religious teaching which enjoins us to come to the nearer Presence of the world through the soul, thus to gain it more can be measured- like gaining an instrument in truth by bringing out its music.”(Tagore 2002)

So to Tagore primary importance in education is to exercise and enrich the power of sensitiveness inherent in everyone which above paves avenues of human development and all round excellence. This principle was implemented in Santiniketan.

Education for Social Responsibility- Rabindranath Tagore sought a balance between the development of the personality and improvement of the society. Students were made aware of the social responsibility. Fellow feelings among the students and seniors, assistance to the neighbours in distress, friendliness towards other sects and communities were encouraged in the institution. A festival like Rakhi Bandhan was celebrated in Santiniketan to promote community spirit. Older students were encouraged to help the younger ones this illustrating the spirit of concern among the students. Ashrama Sammilani a student council played a vital role. Weekly Sahitya Sablia (Literary meeting), Dan Sangrha (collection of donation), Gram Paridarshan (visit to villages) Van bhojan (Annual Picnic) formed a part of co-curricular activities. Rabindranath Tagore through his school tried to bring back the ideals of ancient India. Tagore had by then established an alternative system of education at Santiniketan which was later renamed as the Patha Bhavan in 1925. He took a leading role in articulating the nationalist programme of education. Gradually Tagore's nationalist idea of education gained an individuality of its own. His nationalist outlook greatly differed from the other leaders of his time. It was unique and different from others. He
tried to spread the spirit of cooperation, brotherhood and universalism through education. Visva-Bharati was the manifestation of his universal education.

7.2 Visva-Bharati

Rabindranath Tagore's nationalistic outlook can be divided into two phases based on his activities and interactions. In the first phase, Tagore was actively involved in the national education movement. In the second phase, Tagore gave shape to a new educational thought where he assimilated the nationalist ideas with the world outlook. He gave expression to his new educational thought by creating the Visva-Bharati.

Rabindranath Tagore in his address to the students in the National Education Movement he emphasized on three major points.

- First, Tagore stressed the need to connect college education with the life of the nation. A deliberate effort had to be made to bring this since college education is directed by foreign hands.

- Secondly, Tagore stressed on the decolonization of education. The imitation of a foreign stereotype of education can bring to us neither the benefits of the education that foreigners receive in their country nor the enrichment of the mind that acquaintance with our own culture would bring.

- Thirdly, Tagore in his essay on National School welcomed the effort as the beginning of the mind of the nation and he greeted the newly established National School with this hope that they will fully realize themselves.

Tagore was, however, doubtful, about the potential of National educational institutions. He was anxious for a clear conception of what is ‘National’ about national education and he put forward the concept of the ashrama as the answer to the question. With the waning of the enthusiasm in the first flush of the Swadeshi movement, various questions were raised in Bengal. Tagore was concerned about the intolerant, racist and communal intellectual outlook. He pointed out that-

“By all means the constraints on the cultivation of knowledge in our country must be removed. We have failed to do so by political movements etc., which
are extraneous and have dispersed our enterprise. Through many educators and many experiments we have to bring life to the stream of education in our country only then will education be in accord with the nature of our country……………. We cannot bring to life particular system of education naming it national. The system of education which is born of variously directed endeavors of various people of this nation that is what can be called national.”(Tagore 1993)

Tagore’s dissatisfaction with the British education system and the nationalist alternatives helped him to give shape to the concept of Visva-Bharati from around 1916. In his article ‘The Cause of Dissatisfaction’ in 1919 he focuses his dissatisfaction ‘English Education’ on one hand and ‘National Education ‘ on the other hand. The first makes the student a vessel to pour in bookish knowledge, but the students cannot digest it to draw nourishment and strength from it. The second is unsatisfactory because it has failed to break away from the conventional method. He pointed out-

“When we try to establish new universities we turn this way and that but we never think of changing the system; thus the new is being cast in the mould of the old. We want innovation but we lack the confidence. That is what ails us; our confidence has been killed to core under the pressure of a burdensome education.”(Tagore 1993)

Later in his essay entitled ‘Cooperation of Knowledge’ he calls for inclusion of world outlook in nationalist approach. Tagore says that the humiliation of foreign domination led Indians to make an absurdity of patriotism. He called his countrymen to break down the wall of isolation for the age of cooperation between civilizations. He said-

“Therefore, in one country we need an institution where knowledge will be exchanged and compared, where India’s knowledge can be located and analyzed in the perspective of the knowledge acquired by entire mankind….Those who regard India in isolation, apart from the world, do not
truly comprehend India. Likewise, those who regard only one part of India, violating the wholeness of India, cannot capture in their mind the Indian mind.”(Tagore1993)

Thus Rabindranath goes beyond his nationalist perspective and negative criticism of the British Education system and move towards Universalism.

7.2.1 Inauguration of Visva-Bharati-

Rabindranath Tagore wanted to make Santiniketan the link between India and the world. The war torn world of 1914-18 must have induced in him the mission to promote global peace through the creation of Visva-Bharati. He said to loosen the serpent’s grip of Nationalist self-pride of the world is the task of the remaining part of his life.

Rabindranath undertook a long tour in 1920-21 to Europe and the United States. He spoke everywhere on the need the meeting of east and west in common fellowship of learning and a common spiritual striving for the unity of human races. Tagore returned to India in 1921. In the midst of unprecedented political unrest and excitement due to Non-Cooperation Movement, and against the popular sentiment he expounded his own views in two lectures “The Call of Truth” and “The Meeting of Cultures” (1921). He said:

“It is a fact of unique importance in the history of the world today, that the human races have come together as they had never done before………..The mentality of the world has to be changed in order to meet the new environment of the modern age………..All that is great and true in humanity is ever waiting at our gate to be invited. It is not for us to question it about the country to which it belongs, but to receive it as our home and bring before it the best we have. …..Our mission is to show that we have a place in the heart of the great world; that we fully acknowledge our obligation offering it our hospitality.”(Tagore 1921)
The inauguration of Visva-Bharati took place exactly twenty years after the founding of the Brahmacharyashrama. The meaning of “Visva” in Sanskrit is the world in its universal aspect and “Bharati” is wisdom and culture. Visva-Bharati means the centre of learning for the whole world. The motto of the university reflected the global scope of the undertaking: *yatravisvambhavati ekanidam*—“Where the world meets in one nest.”

In December 22, 1921 Visva-Bharati was inaugurated. At the opening ceremony, he spoke of the radical changes in civilizations and the need for new forms of education. Visva-Bharati was to be an experiment in which individuals of different civilizations and traditions learned to live together, not on the basis of nationalism but through wider relationship of humanity.

The Constitution designated Visva-Bharati as an Indian, Eastern and Global cultural centre whose goals were:

a. To study the mind of Man in its realization of different aspects of truth from diverse points of view.

b. To bring into more intimate relation with one another through patient study and research, the different cultures of the east on the basis of their underlying unity.

c. To approach the West from the stand point of such a unity of the life and thought of Asia.

d. To seek to realize in common fellowship of study the meeting of East and West and thus ultimately to strengthen the fundamental conditions of world peace through the free communication of ideas between the two hemispheres.

e. And with such Ideals in view to provide at Santiniketan a centre of culture where research into the study of the religion, literature, history, science and art of Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Zoroastrian, Islamic, Sikh, Christian and other civilizations may be pursued along with culture of the West, with that simplicity of externals which is necessary for true spiritual realization, in amity, good fellowship and cooperation between the thinkers and scholars of
both eastern and western countries, free from all antagonisms of race, nationality, creed or caste and in the name of the One Supreme Being who is Shantam, Shivam Advaitam.

In May 1922 a constitution was drafted and adopted by the newly formed Visva-Bharati. All the activities of Santiniketan and Sriniketan were taken over by Visva-Bharati and the main school became the Purva Vibhaga which was later changed into Patha Bhavan. The institution for higher studies the Uttara Vibhaga was split up into two departments- Vidya Bhavan which concerned itself with research work. Shiksha Bhavan imparted collegiate education up to graduation level. In 1934 the Kala Bhavan or the music and art section was split into Sangeet and Kala Bhavan.

7.2.2 Visva-Bharati as a Centre of Indian Culture-

Rabindranath Tagore turned to the development of a national model for higher education with the establishment of Visva-Bharati as an Indian University. He referred to the ancient Buddhist monasteries of Nalanda, Taxila and Vikramshila as Indian models of hospitality, cosmopolitanism, scholarship and a harmonious relationship with the local community. Administratively the academic and arts programs at Visva-Bharati were carried through various departments called Bhavans. Vidya Bhavan administered academic activities and supported scholarly research on a wide range of topics. Kala Bhavan gave expression to Tagore’s aesthetic vision; it was the school of art. Hindi studies had begun in the early days of Visva-Bharati and in 1935 Hindi Bhavan was inaugurated. Tagore brought together scholars from various parts of India in a community setting to carry out their scholarship and act as resource person for Vidya Bhavan. He invited some of India’s leading artists, musicians, dance performers and critics on their creative work and advise students of Kala Bhavan. Visva-Bharati became an undisputed national centre for the arts. A definite Santiniketan style developed which was recognized throughout India and influenced the standards by which other works of art were evaluated.

Vidya Bhavana administered academic activities and supported scholarly research on a wide range of topics. The method of instruction was that of guru-disciple, of
students working closely with senior scholars without conventional examinations. The linguistics medium at Visva-Bharati was Bengali with English as second language. In 1926 Siksha Bhavana was set up to train students for Calcutta University Examinations with Ramananda Chatterjee as the first principal. The success rate was high, but Tagore considered it a concession to conventional education and a hindrance to his own approach.

Tagore’s aesthetic vision for Visva-Bharati seem to have been most vitally manifested in Kala Bhavana and its principal Nandalal Bose. In Nandalal, Tagore found his ideal teacher or Guru. He played an important role in preserving the traditional crafts in India and he sought to integrate craft with education.

7.2.3 Visva-Bharati as a Centre of Asian Culture-

Rabindranath had realized the need for Asian cultures to unite in preserving their heritage and opposing the negative aspects of Westernization. He stated that before Asia is in a position to cooperate with the culture of Europe, she must base her own structure on a synthesis of all the different cultures which she has. Sino–Tibetan researches had been originally initiated in 1921.

Chinese studies were started a little later with the help of funds raised by Chinese friends and a magnificent collection of one lakh of Chinese books were received from China. The Cheena-Bhavan was opened in April 1937. The rapport which Rabindranath had with numerous artists become the basis for cultural exchange at Visva-Bharati. The individuals from China and Japan recruited by Tagore as staff members the Cheena Bhavan and the Kala Bhavan included respected scholars and artists, leading representatives of their respective cultural traditions. The effectiveness of the Cheena Bhavan in pioneering rigorous scholarship in India on China, Japan and Tibet attests to a sound basis of understanding of East Asian culture by its founder.

7.2.4 Visva-Bharati as Centre for Global Cooperation-

Rabindranath Tagore invited creative individuals from around the world to share those elements in each other’s culture which will nourish the human personality. Tagore’s
model was development of human sympathy through community life and friendship in the presence of nature. The academic curriculum included modern and classical languages, logic, philosophy, political economy, sociology and science. The Visva-Bharati staff and students came from different parts of India and the world. Visva-Bharati represents India, where she has her wealth of mind meant for all. Visva-Bharati acknowledges India’s obligation to offer to others the hospitality of her best culture and India’s right to accept from others their best. Students from various parts of India and the world lived together and shared their culture with each other. Tagore’s goal for Visva-Bharati as an international center was no less than to establish a cultural Centre, which was in tune with the symbol of comprehensive totality of global life. As an experiment in human living, Visva-Bharati was highly successful.

Tagore had suggested that a centripetal force should be generated by the University which would attract and group together from different parts of our land and from different ages all our own materials of learning and thereby create a complete and a moving orbit of Indian culture. Visva-Bharati was the first all-India University, which consciously tried to develop a national model for integration and aesthetic standards in India. It was successful in drawing attention to the rich tradition of national arts and crafts and in stimulating new forms of artistic expression and fields of scientific study.

So we can see that Visva-Bharati’s development was concentric in nature. The innermost core of the Visva-Bharati was the Indian Culture and tradition. It gradually spread out to the second layer that is the Asian subcontinent in nations like China, Tibet, Japan, etc. At the outermost layers it spread out to the world that is to continents like Europe and America. In 1941 Rabindranath Tagore passed away. Just after ten years of the poet’s eternal journey Visva-Bharati was declared Central University under a Central, Act (Act No XXIX). The university is gradually expanding with various new Bhavans and departments. It is an idea and it has a form. The form may change, but the idea remains eternal and unaltered. Tagore wrote in his famous letter to Gandhi: “Visva-Bharati is like a vessel which is carrying the cargo of my life's best treasure, and I hope it may claim spec; care from my countrymen for its preservation.” (Tagore 1940)
7.3 Sriniketan

Rabindranath Tagore's first concerns for rural problems began in 1890 when he took charge of the family estates in East Bengal. In 1919 rural reconstruction efforts gained momentum when Tagore met Leonard Elmhirst, a British agronomist studying at Camell. Tagore invited Leonard Elmhirst to open the Institute of Rural Reconstruction at Santiniken. He accepted his invitation.

7.3.1 Inauguration of Sriniketan

In the year 1922 February the Institute of Rural Reconstruction was opened with the help of Leonard Elmhirst along with dozen of students. The main objective was to make the villagers self-reliant and self-respectful, acquainted with the cultural tradition of their country and competent to make use of modern resources for improvement of their physical, intellectual and economic conditions.

The “Aims and Objects” for the Sriniketan workers were stated as:

1. To win the friendship and affection of villagers and cultivators by taking a real interest in all that concerns their lives and welfare, and by making a lively effort to assist them in solving their most pressing problems.

2. To take the problems of the village and the field to the classroom for study and discussion and to the experimental forum for solutions.

3. To carry the knowledge and experience gained in the class room and the experimental form to the villagers, in the endeavour to improve their sanitation and health, to develop their resources and credit; to help them to sell their produce and buy their requirements to the best advantage; to teach them better methods of growing crops and vegetables and of keeping live stock; to encourage them to learn and practice art and crafts; and to bring home to them the benefits of associated life, mutual and common endeavour.

(Aims & Objects. Visva-Bharati Bulletin No. 11, Dec1928)
Tagore’s failing health and age prevented him from taking an active physical part in the affairs of Sriniketan, Elmhirst observed that Tagore's ideas “inspired and penetrated every corner of Sriniketan” Elmhirst writes that

“Tagore would urge them to draw upon all resources in music, song, drama and dance, drawing and design at Santiniketan in order to enrich our lives, to live our aspirations, to inspire our leisure and to increase our delights in every kind of artistic expression, until we and the cultivators could produce a richness and a wealth of cultural life of our own and a rejuvenation of those ancient art forms that still survived, but so tenuously in the villages around us.”(Elmhirst 1961)

Sriniketan project was based on an international cooperation. Elmhirst, W. W. Andrews represented England, Kim-Tara Kashhaliara a wood cutting expert from Japan, Gutchen Greena a nurse from United States followed later by Dr. Horry Timbres and benefactor Dorothy Straight and Miss Jeanson the weaving instructor from Sweden. Besides this Rathindranath Tagore, Santosh Majumder were close associates of Elmhirst. Mazumdar helped to set the dairy farm and was in charge of the Siksha Satra. Kalimohan Ghosh laid the foundation for all the work in the village in his role as chief interpreter and contact person. Dhuanand Ray assisted by V.S. Masaji organized the Brati Balikas a group patterned after the boy scouts/girl guides. Gaur Gopal Ghosh took charge of the village Welfare Development.

The team began documenting the appalling conditions of the villages surrounding Sriniketan. The preliminary efforts of the team met with opposition from all sides. The suspicion of the villagers was the first obstacle which had to be overcome, and the team discovered they could best establish credibility through health services. They also had to deal with the hostile zamindars and work out an acceptable relationship with government officials.
7.3.2 The Sriniketan programmes

In Sriniketan there were four kinds of programmes. They are namely research, education, service and commerce. The research programme comprising of surveys of the villages to find out the problems faced by the students. The educational programme included a range of educational activities. Service included demonstrating to the villagers better methods in agriculture and industries and other extension services for village upliftment. In Commerce branches of the institute were run on commercial scale to give employment to some of its trainees. The Sriniketan programmes were run by four general departments:

**Agriculture**- Agriculture section under the direction of Elmhirst included farming, vegetable, gardening orchards, dairy and poultry with later inclusion of sericulture and fishery. New festivals such as *Hala Karshana*, *Briksha Rapana* and *Nabanna* were introduced. An annual Sriniketan Mela was inaugurated to celebrate the achievements of Sriniketan.

**Crafts and Industries**- The revival of cottage industries and crafts had been a major goal of Sriniketan and this department helped to create local industries, initiate new artistic designs and train apprentices. In the craft area, training centers were set up to restore local industries with craft like leather works, tailoring, carpentry, lacquer works, raw silk production, pottery, tile making, cane work, tailoring, embroidery bookbinding and so forth. By 1928, one hundred and sixty two individuals had received training in weaving carpet and durries making dyeing and calico printing. There were 18 centers within the Birbhum district under the direct supervision of the crafts department and outside the district. In 1932 the Birbhum Asprisya Sevak Samiti was set up - with Rabindranath as president and Kalimohan Ghose as secretary- for relief of the untouchables. A separate unit of Shilpa *Bhavana* was set up in a small scale in 1922. It proved to be a popular unit and in 1937 it became independent.

**Village Welfare Department**- An important function of the village welfare section was rural health, which began on a small scale. Gretchen Green opened the first dispensary. In her account it is said that there was a shortage of personnel and medical
facilities for treating vast numbers of patients. Kalimohan Ghose began to organize co-operative health societies in which villagers took out membership entitling them to a limited amount of free treatment. By 1933 three health cooperatives had been established in the villages of Ballabpur, Bandora and Goalpara.

During 1933 in the villages surrounding Sriniketan for example, 418 new drains were opened and 2643 old drains repaired, 14 bighas of jungle cleared, 26 pits filled and 39 cleaned, 15979 grains of quinine sulphate and 910 plaseno-quinine consumed. Large areas were sprayed with kerosene to control mosquitoes and fifteen latrines were constructed. The most successful co-operative, in terms of fighting rural indebtedness appears to have been the Visa-Bharati Central Co-operative Bank stated in 1927, which had 236 Agricultural Credit Unions attached to it. Economic research and rural surveys were also carried out by the welfare section. The 1929 Annual Sriniketan Report states that seven hundred acres of land were acquired by Sriniketan in conjunction with the Bengal government and that plots had been allotted to Santal families for cultivation.

**Education**- Educational activities were carried out at all levels. By 1929, there were night classes in twelve villages for children and adults who were unable to attend day school and one day school for girls. The curriculum included basic literacy, mathematics, crafts and recreational activities. There was a rural circulating library -the first of its kind in Bengal which contained 1500 books by 1940. An early form of distance education was initiated through the Lok-Siksha Samsad a society which organized home study and examination for people who could not attend school. By 1957, 5689 had passed their desired level of “Adya” (Matriculation) "Madhya" (Intermediate) and “Upadhi” (B.A).

Special training for primary school teachers called *Siksha Charcha Bhavana* was organized. A meteorological observatory was created in 1929 and the apprentices learned to chart weather conditions. Special women's educational projects which were handled by the *Mahila Samitis* were started. Programs such as nutrition, maternity, child care, literacy and so forth were organized.
Siksha Satra- One of the most notable and successful educational projects of Sriniketan was Siksha Satra (where education is given freely) which began in July 1924 after six destitute boys were placed under the care of the Institute. The learning framework created by Rabindranath, Elmhirst and Santosh Majumder reflected a more practical adaptation to village life of Santiniketan ideals. It gave maximum scope to the child's imagination, and the child should learn by doing and by experiment. Elmhirst has written:

“Under such a system, text books, class room and formal laboratory go by the board. There remain the garden plot, the plotting shed and the workshop. Records are kept, reports and accounts written up revised and corrected, giving scope for literacy training in its most interesting form. Geology becomes the study of fertility of the plot; chemistry the use of lime and manures of all kinds, of sprays & disinfectants; physics the use of tools, of pumps, the study of water-lifts and oil engines; entomology the control of plants pests (ants, caterpillars, beetles) & diseases (leaf curl, wilt & bacterial attacks); ornithology the study of birds in their relation first to the garden plot and then to the world in general.” (Elmhirst 1961)

Shiksha-Satra was always associated with Sriniketan, the initial location of Siksha-Satra was in Santiniketan, at the home of Santosh Majumdar, who was put in charge of the project. The group consisted of the seven-year olds, three nine-year olds and a ten-year old drawn from different castes. At Siksha-Satra there were no set classes and the teacher was viewed as a facilitator and collaborator. Elmhirst writes:

“Under skilled stimulation and guidance there is out-of-doors an unlimited field of experiencing and experimenting with life. The school master here is an anachronism. He can no longer tower over his pupils from his rostrum and threaten them with his power to grant or withhold marks and certificates. He is forced to adopt his rightful place behind the student, ever on the watch ever ready with a word of advice or encouragement, even ready to be a student himself but never in the way.” (Elmhirst 1961)
Santosh Majumder in his report of *Sikha Satra* after a year and a half wrote that the physical improvement of the boys was remarkable. They had made progress in all areas: gardening, weaving, sewing their own clothes, constructing their own tables and boxes, cooking, painting, writing Bengali, reciting poems and solving mathematical problems in relation to life situations. Many of the students from Siksha-Satra went on to productive careers in teaching, weaving, journalism, village leadership and sports. The school was moved to Sriniketan after Santosh Majumdar's death in 1926 it was placed under E.W. Arajanyakam and by 1929 the students had increased to twenty.

### 7.4 Casa dei Bambini (The Children’s House)

Montessori’s work in Medicine and Anthropology, her experience of working with the children from asylums of Rome and study on the treatment of such children had convinced her of the need for special schools for education and training of mentally retarded. In 1899 Montessori laid out this view in an address entitled "Moral Education" before a distinguished educational conference in Turin. As a result, Dr. Guido Bacelli then minister of education in the Italian government invited her to give a series of lectures further exploring this issue. This in turn led to the establishment of the Orthophrenic School in the country, which provided facilities to train teachers in the special needs of retarded children. She served as the first director of this school and during her term of office, she travelled widely studying new educational developments in the field. Montessori believed that before she could set out to develop new educational principles she had to understand a great deal more about the methods and arguments of other disciplines, particularly psychology and philosophy. It was through this set of circumstances that Montessori encountered the works of Jean-Mac-Gaspard Itard and his disciple Edouard Seguin. She was greatly influenced by the educators Jean Jacques Rousseau, Johann Pestalozzi and Friedrich Froebel.

In 1906, Maria Montessori was asked to help in an urban renewal project. Eduardo Alamo, the Director General of Roman Association for Good Building invited Montessori to set up a Centre for children aged 3 to 7 years in the notorious Rome slum tenement of the Quarter of San Lorenzo. The Roman Association for Good
Building owned more than 400 tenements in the city with plan for each tenement to have its own school. Maria Montessori realized the importance of these institutions. She said: “From the very first I perceived in all its immensity the social and pedagogical importance of such institutions, and while at that time my visions of a triumphant future seemed exaggerated, today many are beginning to understand that what I saw before was indeed the truth.” (Montessori 1964)

7.4.1 The Inauguration of Casa Dei Bambini—On January 6, 1907 ‘Casa dei Bambini’ or ‘The Children’s House’ was officially opened in the tenement at 58 Via dei Marsi with a formal inauguration ceremony.

Montessori described the entrance of the children:

“They were dressed all alike in some thick, heavy blue drill. They were frightened and being hindered by the stiff material, could move neither arms nor legs freely. Apart from their own community they had never seen any people. To get them to move together, they were made to hold hands. The first unwilling child was pulled thus dragging along the whole line of the rest. All of them were crying miserably. The sympathy of the society ladies was aroused and they expressed the hope that in a few months they would improve.” (Montessori 1970)

Montessori brought in some of the teaching materials based on those Itard and Seguin had designed for the feeble minded which she had modified in her work with children at the Orthophrenic School and asked her assistants to make them available for children. She did not place any instructions for its use. Children showed a remarkable interest in the materials. They chose those materials over toys or drawing materials.

"Children began to place wooden cylinders in the corresponding holes in a board, arrange cubes in descending order of size to build a tower, put circles, squares and rectangles into spaces of the same shape in a wooden tray. Not only did they prefer these materials to dolls or, balls or little wagons, but once involved with them they would persist at the task until they succeeded in fitting..."
everything into its proper place and then go on repeating the process over and over again. Along with developing unsuspected concentration they began to change socially as well." (Kramer 1976)

Montessori observed the children work at the "sensory materials" she had provided, modifying them until she felt she had hit on the right thing but began to add to the classroom a number of things of her own design (Kramer 1976). Montessori designed special anthropometer in order to take the measurements recorded on biographic charts. She arranged for a physician to examine the children at regular intervals and had special charts printed up for keeping track of their developmental histories. She designed and made special child sized light weight table and chairs that even the smallest child could move. Little wash stands and low cupboards were built so the children could use them easily. Due to shortage of fund Montessori called all her friends for contribution. She brought potted plants and small animals the children could tend themselves and hung blackboards around the room at children height. She also hung the picture of 'Madonna Della Seggiola’ in which Saint John pays homage to maternity.

7.4.2 Features of Children's House or Casa dei Bambini-

Montessori, was able to trial her ideas in the Children Houses. Montessori combined ideas of Rousseau, Pestalozzi Froebel, Itard and Seguins' educational principles with the "games of practical life and the education of senses" that she had experienced with the children at Orthophrenic Institute (Montessori 1964) Montessori focused on the physical and mental needs of the children through a sensory motion approach. She also tried to meet their social and emotional needs. Montessori introduces various activities which allowed for a much greater degree of independence an individual activity. By constantly watching the children and learning from them she experimented with many material and activities, keeping only those that the children were spontaneously drawn to (Kramer 1988)

By 1908 there were three Children's Houses in Rome and one in Milan, catering for children of all social classes (Montessori 1948). In the summer of 1909 Montessori
gave the full training course outlining her approach to early education to about one hundred students. Encouraged by a patroness, Baranessa Flarchetli, the former Alcèa Hallgaiten Montessori published a detailed exposition of her works at the Children's Houses during this period. She wrote in under a month “Metoda della Pedagogica Scuntifica applicala all'educazione infantile nelle Casa Dei Bambini’ (the Method of Scientific Pedagogy Applied to the Education of Young Children in the Case dei Bambini) which was later translated as The Montessori Method.

7.4.2.1 The Prepared Environment- Montessori believed that the children absorb unconsciously from their environment. She designed an environment to meet their needs, interests, abilities and development. The first Montessori school was a tenement room in Quarter of San Lorenzo but she expand this to "set of rooms with a garden of which the children all the masters" (Montessori 1914). The main room was utilized for "intellectual work". This area needed to be larger than customary classrooms for the child sized tables and chairs, the small rugs children spread on the floor to work on, and freedom of movement around the furniture (Montessori 1914). Montessori suggested playground with room for a garden and it should adjoin the "school room so that the children may be free to go and come as they like, throughout the entire day" (Montessori 1912).

The furniture as we have already discussed before were child sized. Two pieces of furniture were indispensable for Montessori one was long low cupboard and other a chest of drawers. Each child had their own drawer for personal belongings. Montessori felt that "beauty both promotes concentration of thought and offers refreshment to the tired spirit” (Montessori 1917). These concepts are very common today, but a special learning environment for children was a revolutionary perspective in the early 1900.

The first aim of the prepared environment is as far as it is possible to render the growing child independent of the adult. That is, it is a place where he can do things for himself /herself - live his/her own life - without the immediate help of adults.. It is true that one adult - the directress is in a sense a part of his environment, but the function
of both directress and environment is to assist the child to attain perfection through his own efforts (Standing 1957).

The prepared environment will have to contain great many more things than just the small tables and chairs, cupboards lavatories etc. We can group what is required under the following heads:

1) The materials necessary for the carrying out of the exercises of practical life and similar occupation.
2) The sensorial materials
3) The materials for the acquisition of Culture the Three Rs, history, geography, art, handwork etc.
4) Those things necessary for the development of his religious life. (Standing 1957)

So the prepared environment gave a culture to the children without destroying the freedom and spontaneity of the child. But the fact is that without a trained directress the prepared environment would be useless. She is the "dynamic link" between the children and the environment.

7.4.2.2 Didactic Apparatus- The materials used in the school were known as the "didactic apparatus". They were designed to the self-correcting. Through trial and error the child rectified his own mistakes, until, he succeeded in his work. The apparatuses were-

1. Dressing-frames Purpose: Finger gymnastics.
2. Solid geometric insets Nail board Purpose: Visual perceptions.
4. Sandpaper strips for rough bodies of various degrees and smooth polish and resistance Purpose: Development of tactile sense.
5. Stuffs-fabrics Purpose: Quality through touch.

7. Plane geometric insets, Plane geometric figures fitted Purpose: Adjustment of fine movements’ knowledge of form.

8. Cylindrical sound boxes Purpose: Discrimination of auditory perceptions


Thus, each didactic material had some carefully planned objective that was predetermined by Montessori. As she observed, children repeatedly placing the cylinders in the holes, she noticed that the children were interested in the challenge presented to them. They persisted in figuring out how to use the materials, and they were happy in doing it by themselves. The teacher was only a facilitator as the child was busy with the various sequences of activities. In this way children learned to recognize different patterns, colors, shapes and quantities.

The following examples show how Montessori’s used the didactic materials. The examples also cite how she used repetition, individual liberty in her learning process and focused on motor and sensory education of children. A young boy once chose an activity by using coloured pencils to colour in an outline of a tree. At first he coloured the trunk red, and Montessori interpreted that he had not yet become “an observer of his surroundings” (Montessori 1964). In the following days, the boy went for walks in the garden with other children, and the teacher continued to give him outlines of tree to colour. One day he coloured the trunk brown and the branches and leaves green. Gradually he coloured both the trunk and branches brown and only leaves green. This example demonstrates how sensory observation, repetition and teacher guidance combine to direct the learning of the child, until he understands and completes the sequence of a particular activity. (Spock and Hathaway1967).

Montessori used her ideas to invent a different methods for teaching reading and writing for children. She designed a set of script letters of the alphabet made from
wood, painting the consonants in blue and the vowels in red (Montessori 1964). She painted a set of cards with letters of the alphabet in the same style as the wooden ones. Each card also had a simple word that began with that letter. Once the children become comfortable with moving the letters onto the cards, they put the wooden letters together to match the word written on the cards. At this point the children would trace the letters in “the fashion of flowing writing” (Montessori 1964). A child first traces the letter with his index finger, then the index with the middle finger, and finally with a small wooden stick head as a pen. Other materials like sandpaper were also used to distinguish between consonants and vowels. Thus she created stages that a child needed to pass through in order to learn how to read and write.

7.4.2.3 The Child as the Master – Montessori believed that the child was master of his house and there was no one cookie-cutter method of teaching children (Freud.A 1976). Montessori believed that the school was as the place to develop cognitive skills and a self-reliant character and that everything else would be taken care of by other spaces, such as the home or the church (Kramer 1976). She focused on learning different skills and practices that were useful in life. She stressed on the principle of learning by doing and gave importance to exploration and creation of own world by the children. She created a child friendly environment to facilitate this process. She criticized the traditional classrooms. Maria Montessori’s standard classrooms included light small tables and chairs so that a child can carry it herself, low wash basin stands and different corners were allotted for materials and pets. Each room contained a set of designed materials and equipment that would cultivate children’s curiosity and help them in learning.

The “liberty of the pupil” was fundamental to the Montessori Method. This liberty according to Montessori should “permit a development of individual, spontaneous manifestations of the child’s nature” (Montessori 1964). Her belief in the liberty of a child was based on Montessori’s conviction that a child was striving for order in his or her life to match the “inherent order and structure in nature” (Spock and Hathaway 1967). Montessori’s liberty was always defined in relation to the didactic materials, directress and prepared environment. So her approach was to “encourage
accommodation to external reality, rather than assimilation to the personalized motives and fantasies of the child (such as are expressed in spontaneous play)” (R. Gardner 1966). As her biographer Kramer pointed out- “To be in control of one’s self was for her the ultimate end of the process of education. It was what she had achieved in her own life and what she wanted to make possible for the children in her schools” (Kramer 1976). So Montessori concluded that all children were looking for an organized structure or order and best way to achieve it was to provide liberty to the children so that they can reach the goal in their own way.

Montessori cited example of an eleven year old girl who could not sew even after several instructions given to her. Montessori then adopted a method developed by Froebel the founder of the Kindergarten that was based on threading slips of paper horizontally, in and out of vertical slots as in a weaving a mat. When the girl was able to do this task, she was given a needle and thread, and this time learned how to sew and darn (Kramer 1988). Montessori asserted on child’s liberty and she believed in providing an opportunity for children to learn and discover themselves rather than being taught.

Montessori also discovered that children were not motivated by rewards. Rather, their motivation and persistence at a task were driven by their desire to work at the task itself. For example, she watched what happened when medals were given as a reward for good work and was surprised to see that the “children accepted them politely but with little interest; they were more interested in being allowed to get on with the work” (Kramer, 1976). Montessori believed that each child was driven by intrinsic motivation and thus should not be forced to do anything. Instead, her didactic materials would encourage the child to learn, where the learning process meant repeating tasks for as long as the child wished. Through this repetition, a task would eventually be considered completed and would enable the child to proceed to the next level. Montessori believed that the process of repetition was the most effective way of learning a task and ways of understanding its meaning. Repetition was necessary for mastery that took place in contextually meaningful environment.
7.4.2.4 Discipline- A set of rules was drawn up and pasted in the Casa Dei Bambini. It spelled out clearly the responsibilities of the parent.

The parents wish to avail themselves of the advantages of the Casa dei Bambini pay nothing. They must, however assume these binding obligations:

a) To send their children to the Casa dei Bambini at the appointed time, clean in body and clothing and provided with a suitable apron.

b) To show the greatest respect and deference towards the Directress herself in the education of the children. Once a week at least, the mothers may talk with the Directress giving her information, concerning the home life of the child and receiving helpful advice from her.

Students shall be expelled from the Casa dei Bambini:

a) Those children who present themselves unwashed or in soiled clothing.

b) Those who show themselves to be incorrigible.

c) Those whose parents fail in respect to the persons connected with the Casa dei Bambini or who destroy through bad conduct the educational work of the institution.

Montessori described her institution in the following way:

“This is not simply a place where the children are kept, not just an asylum, but a true school for their education, and its methods are inspired by the rational principles of scientific pedagogy. We see here for the first time the possibility of realizing the long talked of pedagogical ideal……. We have put the school within the house, and this is not all. We have placed it within the house as the property of the collectivity, leaving under the eyes of the parents the whole life of the teacher in the accomplishment of her high mission” (Montessori 1912).

7.4.2.5 Maternal function and Parental Obligation: Montessori’s ideas demonstrated sensitivity to the problems of others taking over the “maternal function” (Montessori 1012)” The “Children's Houses” solved many of woman's problem at
home. That the children would be well looked after during the absence of the mother was a reflection of her concern. The notion of women as mothers to society, as both caress and social workers is noted in Montessori's discussion of the role of the directress in the “Children's Houses”. She emphasized the need for families and educators to work together in close contact with each other. Parents could observe at any time their financial support of the program "maintained by a portion of the rent they pay" provided a sense of parental ownership (Montessori 1964). The teacher further more lived in the same tenement building as the children and their families, making her accessible to parents. Parents had certain responsibilities and they were required to follow the direction as laid down by Montessori.

7.4.2.6 Teachers or Directress- Building upon these ideas, Montessori proposed to radically change the role of the traditional school teacher. The teacher would no longer command children forced to sit quietly in rows. She would be a facilitator, a directress who “teaches and observes children” (Montessori, 1964). Montessori's success with mentally deficient children stemmed from her belief that they were capable of learning, a belief which she only arrived at by taking time to observe and analyze them. Just as she tried to understand the world of the asylum children, she believed teachers should try to understand their children through observation and analysis. Then, they would facilitate or guide the learning process instead of directing the classroom and dictating what had to be learned at what pace. This more passive role of teachers is consistent with Montessori's belief that man is not what he is because of the teachers he has had, but because of what he has done.

Montessori shared experiences with the teachers on how to observe children, how to provide them with freedom, and how to offer 'help' in the correct dose and at the right time. She believed that the children themselves were the "real teacher of the Montessori method" (Kramer. 1976). Conveying this concept to teachers-to-be was a challenge in itself. Montessori worked out a way of teaching which her assistants followed. For example “This is red the teacher would say holding up a coloured square.”, “This is blue.”, “Give me the red”, “Give me the blue”. If the child faltered or made a mistake he was never criticized; the material was put away until another
time, when he was "ready" - when the material at hand caught his interest. The teacher would show the child how to use the materials, arranging them by size or color, distinguishing hot from cold, perceiving different sounds, matching and sorting and leave him to himself (Kramer 1976). Teaching gradually progressed from simpler to complicated perceptions and manifestations.

Casa dei Bambini or Children’s House became a prototype for Montessori early childhood education. Children’s House was a place of experiment for her. It was an environment in which children advanced in learning and became self-reliant. They were given complete liberty. It was as if the children were educating themselves. Dr. Montessori’s school, and publication in which she recorded her experiments in pedagogy, became international sensations. People flocked from around the world to visit the school and learn how to apply Montessori principles in schools of their own. She dedicated the rest of her life to develop and promote her educational method.

7.5 Comparison of Rabindranath Tagore and Maria Montessori’s Institution

Rabindranath Tagore through Santiniketan tried to provide education in a natural setting, Visva-Bharati tried to preach universal brotherhood while Sriniketan tried to cater to the needs of the rural people. Maria Montessori on the other hand redefined children's education in her ‘Children's House’. She experimented with various materials and subsequently developed the Montessori Method based on activity. Both these educators tried to bring a new innovative approach to education in their own way.

Tagore and Montessori experimented with their educational ideals in their institutions. Tagore believed that the best way to turn his vision into reality was through educational institutions. He founded a school that eventually became a university with a global village consciousness. Santiniketan (The Abode of Peace) was established in the lap of nature to provide education based on the ‘Tapovan’ concept of ancient India. Tagore’s concept of education for social development was expressed through Sriniketan (The Abode of Prosperity). At the apex of Tagore’s educational endeavor came Visva-Bharati University, where his vision of education for fullness, harmony
Methodology of Education and Teaching of Tagore and Montessori

and international understanding became a reality. While Maria Montessori’s ‘Children’s House’ was an institution where she tested her theories and developed the Montessori Method. Casa dei Bambini (Children’s House)—was a testing ground for her theories and where she refined her method of education. The school gave Montessori a laboratory for observing the natural behaviours of children and experimenting with methods for engaging them in the actual learning process.

The objective of the institutions established by Tagore and Montessori was to serve the humanity, though they were different in their approach. The origin of Tagore’s Santiniketan had a social and universal dimension. He said that his school was a temple built for the service to humanity. Education for him was for complete living and it involved knowledge, enjoyment of life, creative work, and service to one another which he tried to realize with his institutions. Maria Montessori on the other hand tried to implement teaching reform with a disadvantaged population. Casa dei Bambini was slum school catering to Rome’s disadvantaged children. Her educational methods were a form of social activism. Her school structure created a place where children could learn how to be self-directed; self-disciplined, and empowered them to be active members of the society. She truly believed that her method would help children reach their full potential and help them to create a better world. Both Tagore and Montessori ensured an open, free and spontaneous environment in their institutions so that the children can grow experience, express their creativity and realize their full potential. Freedom was the key word for both these educators and they tried to realize them in their institutions. They tried to provide a non-threatening atmosphere for the children in their institutions.

Rabindranath Tagore’s tried to give shape to all his educational ideals through his institutions, though he did not evolve any particular method of education like Maria Montessori. He worked with his educational ideas throughout his life. He referred the growth of his school as the growth of his life. His ideals changed with its maturity like a ripening fruit that only grows in its bulk and deepens in its colour, but undergoes change in the very quality of its inner pulp. Maria Montessori on the other hand focused on the development of the Montessori Method through her institution. She
developed her own concrete materials and approach of education. Her ‘Children’s House’ and the publication in which she recorded her experiments in pedagogy became international sensations. The Montessori Method became popular and Montessori schools appeared throughout the world.

Tagore through his institutions tried to cater to all the stages of human life, starting from the childhood to adulthood. Patha Bhavan catered to primary and secondary stage of education, Visva- Bharati to higher education and Sriniketan to people’s education. Montessori on the other hand focused on the early childhood education or the pre-primary stage of development through his institution.

Rabindranath Tagore’s institutions were based on his own experiences of life. His institutions facilitated the opening up of a child’s unique creative personality in a setting harmonious with his environment. His far reaching vision foresaw the global village and focused on the need to educate children in a way that roots them in their culture. Maria Montessori’s Children’s House was based on her knowledge of medicine, psychology, anthropology and her early experiences with differently abled children. She concentrated on the pedagogy of the institution. She was scientific in her approach.

7.6 Conclusion

The main features of the institutions established by Tagore and Montessori were discussed in details in this chapter. Both these educators established their institutions for different purposes, but they were similarly inspired by the deadness of the traditional education system in their respective countries. Through their institutions they tried to set examples for the world how to enliven the education system. The researcher also compares the institutions established by Tagore and Montessori to find out the similarities and dissimilarities in their practices. From the comparison the conclusion that can be drawn is that though practices of these two educators were different they were based on similar ideals.
Chapter Reference


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