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CHAPTER IV

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Among the contemporary Indian Philosophers of Education Rabindranath Tagore, holds eminent position. He may be called as a Humanist in the strict sense of the term. His humanist approach is not materialistic but integral in nature. His philosophy is Cosmopolitan Humanism and his theory of education is directly deduced from this philosophy.

The Concept of Universal Man

Tagore Philosophy of Education cannot be understood without understanding his Meta Physical theory. In this theory the concept of universal man is very important. Referring to universal man as the ultimate reality Rabindranath elaborates the concept. He says – truth is the infinite pursued by science, while reality is the definite of the infinite, which relates truth to the person. Reality is human, it is what we are conscious of, by which we are affected, that which we express.  

According to Tagore this universal man is known by the individual not through direct realization. He says “Reality, in all its manifestations reveals it self in the emotional and imaginative back ground of our mind. We know it, not because we think of it, but because we directly feel it. It is not vanished from our conscious mind.”

The concept of universal man in his philosophy agrees with the cosmic vision of divine in Gita. The universal man is at the back of all movements, all change, all order

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92  Meogi, P (Ed). Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics. P.76
and system in the universal. Man is very much a part of him. Man and nature cannot be conceived separate from god. The universel man includes both.  

Rabindranath himself says: I have never looked at god, man and nature as problems which can be considered in isolation from each other. I could never conceive of their occupying watertight compartments.  

According to Tagore this universal man is in every individual person. He lives even in the humblest man. Therefore we should not neglect even the most poor, illiterate and humble human being. He said “He is there where the tillers are tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower and his garment is covered with dust. Put off the holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil.  

For Rabindranath personality is not something limited and mundane but also unlimited and supramundane, while in the human being it is found in the first form in universal man it may be seen in the second meaning.  

Tagore, explaining this meaning of the universal man said “This personality which is the conscious principle of oneness, the centre of relationships is the reality – therefore the ultimate object of attainment. I must emphasize this fact, that this world is a real world only in its relation to a central personality”.  

According to Tagore god is the perfect person. Human beings are persons in an imperfect sense. While man is an individual god, god is universel man. He is the  

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94 Indian philosophy of education , p117  
95 Tagore R.N. ‘Amar Dharma’  
supreme person. This supreme person is in two forms, Saguna and Nirguna. Both are
two aspects of the same universal man god is the perfect idea type of man. He possesses
human qualities. Tagore says, “all human qualities find their suggestion in god”\textsuperscript{98}.

God has even the trait of action which is characteristically human. Action must be attributed to him, otherwise how could he give himself?\textsuperscript{99} He is the meeting ground of man and the world. It is in him alone that human beings exchange their experiences.

**Aims of Education**

Rabindranath gives spiritual approach to Education. He considers that the aim of education is self realization. Self realization according to Rabindranath means the realization of the universal soul in ones self. Man’s aim in life is to achieve this status. It is a process which cannot be realized with out education.

Rabindranath does not find any dichotomy between thought and life, Philosophy and education. He believes many contemporary Indian philosophers like Gandhi, swami Vivekananda that every one is potentially divine and every one can realize this potentiality.

Tagore’s philosophy is very much influenced by the Indian scriptures like the Gita and the Upanishads. However he is also very much influenced by the western classical and modern educational thought like swami Vivekananda, he synthesizes the ancient vedantic tradition with the modern scientific attitude in formulating the goal of education.

\textsuperscript{98} Man p 28
\textsuperscript{99} Karma yoga. Santiniketan XIII series.
**Integral Development**

Elaborating the aims of education, Rabindranath says “the fundamental purpose of education is not merely to enrich ourselves through the fullness of knowledge, but also to establish the bond of love and friendship between man and man”\(^{100}\).

Thus, Tagore approach to education is humanistic and his approach to ultimate reality is integral. He believes in an inner harmony among man and nature and god. They are in fact three aspects of the same reality. In man, again the physical, mental and the spiritual aspects are equally important and internally related. Therefore, like Aurobindo, Rabindra Nath believes in a multi sided education with physical, intellectual moral and religious aims.\(^{101}\)

**Physical Development**

According to Rabindranath, education of the body in the real sense, does not exist in play and experience but in applying the body systematically to some useful work.\(^{102}\)

Pointing out the value of physical activities in the child’s education he says “even if they learnt nothing they would have had ample time for play climbing trees diving into ponds, plucking and tearing flowers, perpetrating thousand and one mischief’s on mother nature, they would have obtained the nourishment of the body, happiness of mind and the satisfaction of the natural impulse of childhood.”\(^{103}\)

\(^{100}\) Bharateeya viswa vidyalaya. Adarsa. Siksa (1342) BSEd. P270.

\(^{101}\) Indian philosophy of education. P119

\(^{102}\) Tagore R.N. Alochana. July 1925.

\(^{103}\) Siksa ( 1342 ) B.S.Ed. P.2
As a poet, Tagore realizes the life giving value of natures contact with man. About the child’s contact with the nature he says, “I speak in very moderate terms. Seven years till then let the child have nothing to do with clothes and shame. Till then let nature alone conduct the indispensable education of the savage."

Almost all contemporary Indian philosophers of education, including Gandhi, Vivekananda, Dayananada and Aurobindo besides, lay emphasis upon the importance of setting educational institutions in natural environment, so that the educands may learn by their touch with nature.

**Mental Development**

Like swami Vivekananda he also critical for the present system of education. This gives importance to book learning. Criticizing this attitude he says “we touch the world not with our mind, but with our books.”

Tagore thinks that intellectualism takes us away from nature and creates a gulf between man and man. In fact, the intellectual aim of education, according to Rabindranath is the development of the intellectual faculties such as logical thinking, critical appraisal and assimilation.

Two mental faculties which should be developed through education are the power of thinking and the power of imagination. He criticizes present system of education. Which puts too much stress on memory and too little on imagination and thinking. He suggests “Ever since childhood, instead of putting the entire burden on the

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104 Ibid p 84.
105 *Indian philosophy of education. P 120*
106 *Siksa P. 90*
memory. The power of thinking and the power of imagination should also be given opportunities for free exercise.\textsuperscript{107}

**Harmony with Environment**

The student must learn to live in harmony with the environment. Rabindranath says “True education consists in knowing the use of any useful material that has been collected, to know its real nature and to build along with life a real shelter for life”\textsuperscript{108}.

Through education, the student should imbibe cultural heritage and should be able to use it in the interaction with the environment. Elaborating the concept of education, he says, “if we believe that the chief aim of education for an Indian, is to be initiated into this unique pursuit of India, then we must constantly remember that neither the education of the senses nor the education of the intellect, but the education of the feeling should receive the place of honor in our schools…our true education is possible only in the forest, through intimate contact with nature and purifying austere pursuits.”\textsuperscript{109}

**Education and livelihood**

Though Tagore does not want to make education an instrument for earning bread alone, he admits that bread earning is a necessary part of any sound goal of education.

Tagore says “knowledge has two departments, one is pure knowledge and the other is utilitarian knowledge, Whatever is worth knowing is knowledge. It should be

\textsuperscript{107} Siksar Herpher. P. 8
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid
\textsuperscript{109} Siksha (1342. b.s.) p 145
known equally by man and woman, not from practical utility, but for the sake of knowing … The desire to knowing is the law of human nature.\textsuperscript{110}

To learn necessary skills for bread earning he says “From the very beginning such education should be imparted to them (Village folks) that they may know well what mass welfare means and may become practically efficient in all respects for earning their livelihood.\textsuperscript{111}

Tagore was critical about the early goals of education of the British which wanted to create clerks out of the Indian educated class. He emphasized that the real aim of education should be to develop men and women who may be able to fulfill the needs of the country. He said one of the main aims of education is to prepare the individual for the service of the country.\textsuperscript{112}

**THEORY AND PRACTICE**

Rabindra Nath Tagore was not merely a thinker and dreamer. He put in to Practice, his educational ideas by starting three institutions, Sriniketan, Viswabharathi and Sri Niketan. Explaining educational Trinity in the educational philosophy of Rabindranath, S.S Sinha writes, “Santiniketan, Visva Bharati and sriniketan may be said to constitute Tagore’s educational trinity through which he endeavored to develop his educational theme in three different complementary directions. The school came first in the field and was far away the most important as it embodied all the poets’ main

\textsuperscript{110} Siksha 1351 Ed. Vol. P 151  
\textsuperscript{111} Swadhin Siksha P. 522  
\textsuperscript{112} Rabindra Rachanavali Vol. XII. P 517
teachings about education. The three institutions thus displayed a discernible pattern of growth and expansion, illustrating their underlining creative unity.  

**Santiniketan**

The most important in this trinity is the Santiniketan. About the idea of it he wrote to sri. J. C. Bose.

I am trying to start a school at santiniketan. It will be conducted just on the lines of Residential institutions of ancient times. There shall not be the least trace of luxury. We shall not be able to become true Hindus if we do not learn rigid Brahmacharya. Frivolity and luxury are degenerating us wants of all descriptions are over-powering us only because we are failing to accept poverty with equanimity.

Santiniketan was started on a small scale with a school and boarding house. It was called as, Brahmacharyasram and inaugurated on 22nd of December 1901. Its aim was to provide all round development of the students. In brief, it was the student’s own world in which they themselves managed every thing and developed through this experiment. Explaining this pattern of school education Rabindranath says. “I always try to impress upon their minds that are their own world, upon which their life ought fully and freely to react. In the school administration they have their place and in the matter of punishment we mostly rely upon their own court of Justice.”

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113 Siksha. S.S. Social thinking of Rabindranath Tagore (Bombay, Asia Publishing house 1962). P 34
114 Sabuj patra. Vol. ii (Srava 9, 1308 B.S) P.30
115 Tagore R.N.Personality. P. 146.
Visvabharati

Tagore travelled widely in Europe and Asia. He felt the need of harmony and good will and mutual understanding of eastern and western culture. Both the east and the west have much to give and take. He wanted to build up an educational institution for integrating the East and the west. Such a place was developed in the form of Visvabharati at santiniketan.

Explaining the aim and function of visvabharati. Rabindranath said

Being strongly impressed with the need and responsibility, which every individual must today realize according to his power, I have formed the nucleus of an international university in India, as one of the best means of promoting mutual understanding between the East and the West. This institution, according to the plan I have in mind, invites students from the west and the east to study the different systems of Indian philosophy, literature, art and music in their proper environment encouraging them to carry on research work in collaboration with the scholars already engaged in the task."

Thus visvabharati was developed as a centre of Indian culture, Eastern culture, international culture and center for mass welfare and rural reconstruction. This ideal is being realized through the efforts of both the teachers and the students.\footnote{Tagore R.N. An eastern university. P 2 \footnote{Indian philosophy of Education. P 123.}}
Tagore’s comprehensive system

Through his education trinity Rabindranath aims to develop an ideal educational system in India. G.R Sharma rightly says “His aim of education is one of the most comprehensive including various aspects of human personality and different strata of Indian society and the world community. He lays emphasis on physical, mental, moral, religious, spiritual, in fact all the aspects of man’s education” 118

The curriculum in Tagore’s educational institutions is not fixed but changes according to the needs of the students. His only emphasis is on life, life of the individual of the rural masses of the poor Indians and that of man as a member of an international community. 119

Freedom

Rabindranath believes in complete freedom of all types. Freedom of intellectual decision, knowledge, action and worship. This freedom can be achieved by the practice of equanimity, harmony and balance.

Education, according to Rabindranath is a progress of self realization. This self realization in the attachment of freedom, when intelligence, feeling and determination work freely. It is not the absence of control but self control, once it is achieved there is no danger of straying from the right path because the senses, intelligence, emotions, feelings and mental powers of the educated person are guided by his own self. 120

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118 R.N. Sharma, Indian philosophy of Education. P 123.
119 Ibid
120 Indian philosophy of education. P 124
Tagore thinks that ideal educational system should aim at man’s perfection. Perfection means the development of all aspects of human personality. The sole aim of education is development of human personality. “This again should be realized on a universal scale since unless the individual acquires an abiding faith in the universal soul, he cannot realize itself. Thus education should lead to the realization of universal man.”

**Freedom and growth**

Rabindranath tries to utilize the buildings of modern western educational psychology as well as the ancient wisdom of India. According to him, educational process is mainly functional with activity as its basis. Teacher and the taught must be always active and both learning and practice should go together.

Rabindranath is against corporal punishment. Discipline through rod is not at all necessary in educational institutions. Use of it leads to depression and humiliation.

Rabindranath observes “I have a deep rooted conviction that only through freedom can man attain his fullness of growth.” He thinks discipline in the schools should be self imposed. The educands are allowed to commit mistakes and learn through them.

Rabindranath was also against the present system of educational evaluation. He also feels that invigilation is unnecessary and the examinees may themselves take their question papers and answer them.

121 Ibid
122 Tagore R.N. The school master modern Review October 1924
EDUCATION FOR THE RURAL FOLK – SIKSHA

Satra experiment

The siksha satra experiment of Sriniketan embodies Tagore’s idea of a rural institute. Its purpose is to serve and Train the rural people. Hence its structure and aims are different from Santiniketan.

Rabindranath had personal experience of the difficulties and problems of the rural people and he was convinced of the need of education among the villagers. He realized that a universal education is very much necessary for the regeneration of the Indian villages.

To fulfill these needs he started siksa-satra experiment at sriniketan. This experiment was based on the fairth that, ‘given the right tools and organizations the villagers can help themselves upward by development based on research and by a welfare programme based upon the study of human need in every village in India.123

Siksa satra experiment was started to fulfill the needs of education in rural areas. It sought to realize the ideal of rural education and rural welfare. It wanted to reform the rural society and at the same time it wanted to teach the villagers the methods and techniques of farming and other vocations. In brief its aim is integrated development of rural people.

Natural Environment

Rabindranath gave importance to the environment. All contemporary educational psychologists give importance to natural environment. It is through the

123 Elmhirst L. Sriniketan, Visva-Bharati-quarterly (1955) P.4
natural environment that the child trains the senses by contact with plants and trees, flowers and leaves.

Education according to Rabindranath should be imparted “in an institution where the first great lesson is the perfect union of man and nature, not only through love but through active communication, it can be had unobstructed.”

Like Aurobindo, Rabindranath maintains that the teaching of different subjects may be made natural through the intelligent utilization of the child’s environment. For example, the Childs knowledge of science may be helped for observation of insects and animals, plants and trees, stars and moon and Sun. Similarly emotional of aesthetic training is helped by his observation and appreciation of forms and colours and movements in nature. The natural environment richly contributes to the development of the child’s sense organs and mind. His creative power is expressed through his contact with natural objects. His extra-curricular activities in a natural environment results in the development of different virtues.

Tagore points out to the gulf between bookish knowledge and the child’s environment. Tagore laments that the current education does not help in making the learner either an efficient worker or a good citizen. He says “it is not enough for a farmer boy only to grow into a good farmer, but he should also grow into a good citizen of the country”.

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125 Indian philosophy of education. P 126
126 Rabindranath Rachanavali. Vol. XII. P516
**Need for social Environment**

For the development of the child both natural and social environment are needed. The social environment makes the surroundings of the children in which they fulfill their needs and drives and develop their beliefs and ideas. The impact of the relationship between the educator and the educand is the one-hand and the educand and his companions of the other. If this relationship is based upon love, sympathy and mutual understanding the educand easily develops moral virtues.\(^{127}\)

**Medium of Instruction**

Almost all contemporary Indian philosophers of education pleaded for the adoption of mother tongue as the medium of child’s education and Tagore also held similar opinion. He observes, “If education does not enter into the deeper strata of the society and does not attain permanence through mingling with the living stream of the mother tongue, then, however, much it may bubble up and dance like foam on the surface, it can only become an object of temporary beauty but can never become a lasting foundation of life.\(^{128}\)

India needs education on a large scale particularly technical and vocational education. Unless our education institutions adopt regional languages and national language as medium of instruction and unless sufficient books are available in these languages, the aim of universal education in India cannot be realized.\(^{129}\)

\(^{127}\) Indian philosophy of education, P. 127
\(^{128}\) Rabindra nath Rachanavali, Vol. P618
\(^{129}\) Indian philosophy of education, P127
Reviving the Rural Institutions

Rabindranath is in favour of reviving the old rural institutions in the villages. He gave importance to community entertainment programmes and singing of religious Kirtans and Bhajans. These are very much useful in giving the people entertainment and at the same time imparting moral and religious education.

The community fairs organized in villages from time to time is also means of education. These fairs also give scope for exchange of skills in vocational trades. To make the education mass oriented the means of education should also be indigenous and easily available in the rural areas.

Critical estimate

In Rabindranath’s philosophy of education man is the center of all his thinking. his philosophy religion, literature, poetry, social activities and educational programmes. He is a humanist in the real sense. He is not a naturalistic humanist. He can be considered as an integral humanist. 130

Tagore did not deny the need of reason but believes that there is something higher than reason in men. He does not think that science alone can deliver the goods. There by it does not mean that he has not accepted the efficacy of science.

Tagore is a nationalist, but at the same time he is a true internationalist. To him the ultimate God is the universal man and the only aim of all the man’s activities was the realization of this god. His aim is universal regeneration and his educational system is a means to achieve this aim. Tagore therefore, bases his educational system on

130 Indian philosophy on Education. P 128.
essential human virtues such as freedom, purity, sympathy, perfection and universal brotherhood.\textsuperscript{131} Like other Indian thinkers of his time he opposed British system of education. He felt that those who are educated through English medium got alienated from the people. He felt the children should be taught in their mother tongue which helps the students to understand the subjects easily and learn quickly.

Tagore wanted to build up educational institutions with these noble ideals. He wanted to remove the defects of the then existing educational system which was introduced by the British government. He studied different problems of Indian society particularly that of the rural people and tried to remove them through education. His educational system was a synthesis of east and west ancient and modern and happy blend of science and Vedanta. It is because of its noble vision, national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and other eminent educationalists considered Viswabharati as the true representative of India.

Humayun Kabir, one of the eminent writers and thinkers of modern India wrote “Rabindranath Tagore was one of the greatest humanists that the world has known. The keynote of his life was resistance to tyranny in all forms. He struggled against economic exploitation, political subjugation, social inertia and injustice and religious intolerance and insensitiveness”\textsuperscript{132}

The humanism of Rabindranath is generally expressed in his literature. In his works he laid emphasis upon the uniqueness of the human individual, his greatness in the world of living beings and his intimate relationship with nature and god.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid p 128.
\textsuperscript{132} Bhattacharya-k. Rabindranath on Religion.
Homage from visvaBharati (Santiniketan 1962) P.32
Tagore’s educational philosophy is no less an example of his humanism than his literature and religious writings. He tried to build up an ideal educational system and experimented in all its branches such as aims, medium, means, curriculum administration and extracurricular activities.

G.R. Sharma rightly observes, “the literature of Tagore and said one may not agree with the details of his educational system and may not accept all of it but none can deny that it was a bold attempt based upon a very comprehensive philosophy and with the most human intention of developing perfect men and women, citizen of a world community.”

133 Indian philosophy of education. P 129