

**Rabindranath Tagore: A Comparative Analysis of Indian  
Philosophy of Education vs. Western Philosophy of Education**

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**Abstract**

Rabindranath Tagore was a great activist and intellectual of 21st century. Tagore was a rare great personality, in present era too. It represents important social and cultural changes of the present and rejects claims of classical social thinkers. He establishes a highly pluralistic and diverse view about the education. In Tagore's philosophy of education, the aesthetic development of the senses was as important as the intellectual— if not more so—and music, literature, art, dance and drama were given great prominence in the daily life of the school. This was particularly so after the first decade of the school. Drawing on his home life at Jorasanko, Rabindranath tried to create an atmosphere in which the arts would become instinctive. One of the first areas to be emphasized was music. Rabindranath writes that in his adolescence, a 'cascade of musical emotion' gushed forth day after day at Jorasanko. '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.' (Rabindranath Tagore, *My Reminiscences* 1917: 141)

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**Introduction**

Rabindranath Tagore was a great educational philosopher, visionary, social reformer, and great mentor of Indian culture and tradition. Tagore's ideas for creating a system of education aimed at promoting international co-operation and creating global citizens. Tagore envisioned an education that was deeply rooted in one's immediate surroundings but connected to the cultures of the wider world, predicated upon pleasurable learning and individualized to the personality of the child. He felt that the curriculum should revolve organically around nature, with flexible schedules to allow for shifts in weather, and with special attention to natural phenomena and seasonal festivities. He has versatile abilities. The contribution of Tagore on Indian Education was great. Santiniketan is the best example of his personality. His ideas reflect not only through education. Tagore was a realist and idealist too.

**Concept of Education by Rabindranath Tagore**

Rabindranath Tagore was a prominent poet and profound thinker. He was born in Calcutta on 6 May 1860. Although he was not educated in any university, he was clearly a man of learning. He had his own original ideas about education,

which led him to establish an educational institution named Vishva Bharati in Shanti Niketan with the intention of re-opening the channel of communication between the East and the West. He travelled extensively in different countries of the world, and was a successful mediator between the Eastern and Western cultures. It has been generally accepted that different places have their own culture and tradition. Generally, Western philosophy of education comprises two schools, traditional and modern. It has its roots in Athens, Rome and Judeo-Christianity, whilst Tagore's philosophy of education draws its inspiration from ancient Indian philosophy of education. However, it could be said that Tagore's philosophy of education may become a representation of the Eastern philosophy apart from others like Islam, Confucianism, Taoism, and Mahayana Buddhism. By looking on Western countries and India, both countries have distinct differences in their ways of developing and shaping an individual, in terms of skills and attitudes. Thus, different cultures will have different philosophies, which results in different ways of doing things, especially in educating the next generation.

**The aims of education by Tagore**

- Self-realization: Spiritual is the essence of

humanism. Manifestation of personality depends upon the self-realization and spiritual knowledge of individual.

- **Intellectual Development:** It means development of imagination, creative free thinking, constant curiosity, alertness of the mind. Freedom of child to adopt his own way of learning, which would lead to all-round development.
- **Physical development:** Sound and healthy physique through yoga, games, sports as integral part of education.
- **Love for Humanity:** Education for international understanding and universal brotherhood. Education should teach people to realize oneness.
- **Freedom:** Education is a man-making process, it explores the innate power that exists within man, it is not an imposition, but a liberal process that provides utmost freedom for development.
- **Co-relation of objects:** A peaceful world is only possible when correlation between man and nature will be established.
- **Mother-tongue as medium of instruction:** Language is the true vehicle of expression.
- **Moral and spiritual development:** It is more important than bookish knowledge for an integral development of human personality, by encouraging selfless acts, co-operation, sharing and fellow-feeling among students.
- **Social Development:** 'Brahma' the supreme soul manifests through men and all creatures. He is the source of all life. Brotherhood should be cultivated from the beginning of life.

### **Western Education in India**

Philosophy of education developed by the West was shaped through philosophical thought, which manifested through an idea characterized by Materialism, Idealism, Secularism, and Rationalism. This philosophical thinking, however, affected the concept, interpretation and the definition of the knowledge itself. Rene Descartes, for instance, uses ratio as the sole criteria to measure the truth. Other western philosophers, such as John Locke, Immanuel Kant, Martin Heidegger, Emilio Betti, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, among others, also emphasize the use of ratio and the five senses as their source of knowledge, by which it creates a variety stream of philosophies and thoughts,

such as empiricism, humanism, capitalism, existentialism, relativism, atheism, and many others that profoundly affect a number of disciplines, such as philosophy, science, sociology, psychology, politics, economics, and so on. Consequently, western philosophy of education is not established on revelation or any religious tenets but being established on a cultural tradition strengthened by philosophical speculation bounded by secular life placing man in the center as a man of ratio. Hence, the science and its ethical and moral values, administered by human ratio always experience changing. According to Syed Naquib Al-Attas, there are five factors underlying western culture and educational philosophies. First, the use of ratio to guide one in his own life. Second, posing duality between reality and truth. Third, emphasizing an existence projecting secular worldview. Fourth, the doctrine of humanism. Fifth, using history as a dominant element in natural tendency and human existence.

Those five factors have a very great impact on western intellectual paradigm shaping educational pattern in the west. British Educational Approach in India Modern education system in India initially came from British authorities. They initiated Western influence in India. Prior to the advent of the British India, Indian education system was generally private in praxis. In 1835, Lord Macaulay introduced modern education in India through Wood's dispatch 1854, generally known as the Magna Charta of Indian education, which becomes the cornerstone of the current Indian education and changed the scenario. By 1857, British power finally consolidated a colonial system of education in India. Its primary aim was to prepare indigenous Indian clerks to handle local administration and the creation of a class of Indians who had been brought up in an English way. In the lower levels of education, the medium of instruction was vernacular languages, whilst for higher education the medium must be in English. British government continuously provided funds to local schools that further made many of them becoming governmentally aided. Finding it too expensive and impossible practically to import sufficient British to operate and control the rising number of administration branches, British government planned to educate local Indian by the way that they should learn

western education and become westernized both culturally and in intellectual achievement. Lord Macaulay clearly said that, "we must at present do our best to form a class, who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; class of persons, Indians in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and intellect." National universities had been established at Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. The gap between the fortunate upper classes and the vast masses of rural poor continued to widen. A new class of people came to adopt European dress, manners attitudes and life styles. Old values and traditions came to be questioned. And it was a period of social upheaval and reforms in India. In 1844, Declaration Knowledge of English declared English as a compulsory requirement to apply to government civil services. Due to this condition, Indian traditional education system gradually vanished for the lack of official government support. The government made English medium schools became so much popular that tremendously attracted many Indians. The British control over education ended with the Indian independence on 15 August 1947. Positively, the British education system created social and political awareness within the country. It inspired literary and cultural consciousness and developed nationalistic awareness. However, it was obviously British-oriented. Its primary aim was to serve British interest and was colonial in aim and practice. The medium of instruction was an obstruction in the development of creativity. Sometimes it encouraged communal passions. The Christian missionaries and the British administrators encouraged Christian teachings within the educational institutions. However, the British philosophy of education in modern period was not conducive to national welfare. It is in this defects of the British philosophy of education as practices in India in modern period that Indian thinkers have bitterly criticized it and one of them was Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore was critical of the British philosophy of education in India. He clearly saw that its aims and means were against Indian interests and thus presented his alternative philosophies, urging Indians to accept steady and purposeful education.

**Tagore's Educational Philosophy:** Rabindranath Tagore was more than a

resounding leading Indian thinker of India in the twentieth century. A prominent figure through his poetic brilliance, Tagore is known to India and the world as the winner of the 1913 Nobel Prize in Literature, the first non-westerner to be honored so. Ramnath Sharma depicted that there are two different thinkers of education in India, the traditional group of Indian philosophers of education on the one hand and the propagators of western philosophy of education on the other, represented by Jawaharlal Nehru and M.N. Roy. While the later were inspired greatly by the Western philosophy of education, the former, including Rabindranath, drew their inspiration from ancient Indian philosophy of education. Drawing their inspiration from ancient Indian philosophy of education, the characteristics of the traditional group can be grouped into four basic aspects: Neo- Vedanta Philosophical Basis, Integral Approach, Integral Psychology, and Synthesis of Idealism and Pragmatism. He is one among the others, such as Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, and Mahatma Gandhi, who bitterly criticized the defects of British philosophy of education. They criticized western educational approach in India, for its aim and means were against Indian national interest, and thus presented educational philosophies. The questions to which Tagore devotes himself are: What is the aim of education? And how are we to achieve it?

**Tagore's Principles of Education:** The aim of education, as Rabindranath Tagore sees it, is to give one a sense of one's identity as a total man and to bring education in harmony with life. It is self-realization. He believed that this realization was the goal of education. A total man is the one who thinks of himself first and foremost as human being. What matters to him is not his birth and social status. What crucially matters to him, rather, is the conviction that he is above all a man, irrespective of his socio-economic placing, of his caste, creed, and religion. The prevalent social condition creates a situation in which the rich family grows up with arrogance and the poor with an inferiority complex. This creates a yawning gap between the two. It is, thus, the process of education that is based on self-realization is extremely needed in order to establish a well-balanced relation with others belonging to different social strata. In order to reach this basic identity of human being, one

needs to undertake processes towards this stage of a total man, a process that can only be assisted through education. Tagore did not find any dichotomy between thought, life and philosophy. Besides, he believed that every human being is one who has potentialities to progress towards the super human being, the universal soul. His conception of the universal soul is derived from the Gita and Upanishad philosophies. Tagore based his ideas on the ancient Indian thought. Indian tradition believes that man's soul and the universal soul are one, and that self-realization amounts to realization of

integration with God. Self-education is based on self-realization, which its process is as important as education itself. The more important thing is that the educator must have faith in himself and universal self, underlying his individual soul. All those actions, which provide a natural sense of contentment, promote educational process. Contentment is a reaction of soul and hence different with merely satisfaction and pleasure. According to Tagore's concept of self-education, the educator has to follow the three following principles:

**1. Independence-** Tagore believed in a complete freedom of any kind – intellectual freedom, satisfaction, decision, heart, knowledge, actions, and worship. But to achieve this freedom, the student has to practice a calm temperament, harmony, and balance. Through this process the student is able to distinguish between right and wrong, natural and superficial, relevant and irrelevant, permanent and temporal, universal and individual, etc. Consequently, after being able to make this distinction, the student can create a harmony and synthesis in what is right, natural, relevant, permanent, and the real element he has acquired and then turned to self-guidance. This independence is not to be confused with the absence of control, because it is self-control, it implies acting according to one's own rational impulse. Once this level of freedom has been achieved, there is no danger of the individual straying from his path, because his senses, intelligence, emotional feelings and all other powers are directed by his ego.

**2. Perfection-**Perfection implies that the student must try to develop every aspect of his personality, all the abilities and powers he has been endowed by nature. Therefore, academic

learning is not merely to pass examinations, acquiring degrees or certificates with which he fulfils his livelihood. The sole aim of education is development of the child's personality which is possible only when every aspect of the personality is given equal importance, when no part of the personality is neglected and no part is exclusively stressed.

**3.Universality-**Universality implies the important aspect of an enduring faith in the universal soul, which exists within himself. It is thus important to identify one's own soul with the universal soul. One can search for this universal soul not only within oneself, but in every element of nature and environment. This search is achieved by knowledge, worship and action. Once this realization of the universal soul is achieved, it becomes easier to progress further. It is, thus, evident from the above principles that the aim of Tagore's pattern of education is independence, perfection, and universality. The educator creates an environment in which the personality of the student undergoes a free, perfect, and unrestricted development.

### **Tagore's Educational Philosophy comparative with western education philosophy**

Tagore considered lack of education as the main obstacle in the way of India's progress and at the root of all its problems. Looking upon the western approach on education in India, which emphasized and focused merely on sheer placement in British administration offices and businesses in India, Tagore had bitterly criticized the idea. This had become very important in view of the fact that the civil service was saturated and as the students grew, the majority of graduates failed to get any type of white-collar jobs. The time, however, had come against which Tagore urged to attempt a change in the aims of academic learning and thus offered his own remedial idea. According to him, academic learning becomes joyless and purely mechanical if it is looked upon merely as an instrument for getting jobs and for material and financial gains. In order to ensure the posit of becoming a total man, the aims of education should be not only as a means to a livelihood, but more importantly to promote awareness of human identity, where one comes into well-



balanced relations with others. It means that the end of education is to lead us into how to live meaningfully comparative the people around us.

However, this does not mean that learning has nothing to do with subsistence, rather it should be aimed at something not only collaborated with pragmatic ends. Academic learning should enable us to understand the situations in which we are placed and to adopt proper attitudes towards them. The attitudes derived from the experiences we have in our lived situations, which involve our relations with the people around us – our relations with families and socio-political surroundings. Because education serves no real purpose in our life if we are unable to connect with the place we are in. As a result, if we are unable to connect with the milieu we are live, thus, it does not stimulate our ideas, nor does it nourish our emotions and imaginations. Tagore criticized the prevalent system of education, which puts too much stress on memory and too little on imagination and thinking. Tagore highlights the futility of mere scholarship, the idea propounded by some western educational philosophers including Nietzsche. He then criticized any education system whose aim is on the sheer pursuit of knowledge with no end beyond it. Tagore wants to make us aware of the evil of a traditional education system that is a dry scholarship, which encourages acquisition of static ideas without contributing anything to significant living, an education which remains far away from our life. There must be no gap between ideas or theory and their application to life. The aim of education should be to develop and nourish our beliefs, emotions, and imaginations, which enable us to assess, evaluate, and take up appropriate attitudes towards our experience in the milieu in which we live. It is this conviction that accounts for Tagore's disapproval of a system of education, which emphasizes too much of theoretical learning. Politics, say, may give us information about the process of democracy, but it cannot become beneficial if it does not bring prosperity to the people.

Tagore viewed the traditional academic learning as merely a knowledge-factory, a mechanical system producing students with

machine-ground knowledge for the purpose of being examined and graded. He criticized the idea propounded by Michael Foucault in his *Discipline and Punish* in which he looks at educational institutions on the model of prisons of a disciplinary mechanism involving continuous surveillance, examination, training, punishment. Tagore maintained that the aim of education should not be producing like a machine-made product in a factory, because each individual has a distinctive character of his own. Therefore, education system should attend to it carefully; it should enable each individual to blossom in his own way.

### **Nature-based Education**

Tagore frustrated with the denatured situation of academic learning process and promoted the system on the model of forest solitude or under the open sky. It is by this method that gentle breezes, sunshine, green trees and plants not only to making children physically sound, but to nourishing their minds. He insists that no mind can grow properly without living in intimate communion with nature. Those situations presents to the learner a situation, which stimulates his imagination and creativity, and combats the boredom of mechanical learning. In Tapovan (The Forest School of India) Tagore asserted that the forest school was typical of the Indian system of education with its emphasis on three basic elements of Indian culture, namely Advaita (non-duality) in the field of knowledge, friendship for all in the field of feeling, and fulfilment of one's duties without concern for the outcomes in the field of action. The ideal school, according to Tagore, should be established away from the turmoil of human habitation under an open sky and surrounded by vistas of fields, trees, and plants. Living in a forest was also associated with austere pursuits and renunciation. The vast background of nature represented a grand perspective against which all objects, all feelings assumed their due proportions. He also referred to the significance of educating feeling as distinct from educating the senses and the intellect. The word 'forest' used in this context, he explained, was not dense jungle, but Tapovana, the forest clearing. Indian

national educational system should try to discover the characteristics of the truth of its own civilization. The truth is not commercialism, imperialism or nationalism, but rather universalism. Its aim was to develop individual personality by the means of harmonious interaction and union of the spirit with the environment.

### **Medium of Education**

The medium of education discourse also became an important point pertaining to Tagore's idea. The use of English in education prevented assimilation of what was taught and made education confined only to urban areas and the upper classes rather than rural areas. Therefore, if the vast rural masses were to benefit, it was absolutely essential to switch over to the use of Bengali in the context of Bengal at all level of education. Tagore believed that without knowledge pattern of rural living and an effort by the school to revitalize rural life, academic learning would be incomplete. And this is the reason behind the establishment of his own university, popularly known as Visva Bharat. Tagore stressed on the unnaturalness of the system of education in India, its lacks of links with the nation and its management, which was in the hands of a foreign government. The working of the government, its court of law and its education system were conducted in a language completely meaningless to the majority of Indians. He contrasted the situation in India with what he had seen in the USSR and in Japan, where the governments had been able to educate their people within a very short time. He argued that to educate India's entire population and restoring the flow of culture from the educated classes to the rural population would not come about unless the mother-tongue was adopted as the medium of teaching.

### **Education as a Means of Peace**

Another point from the British education result that Tagore had also criticized was the fact that the British educational process failed to develop attitudes and the spirit of inquiry. Moreover, it divided Indian people into two classes: those who received British education and those who did not. The former, comprising everyone taking from the wealthy, educated, and English speaking class living in cities and towns, whilst

the latter remained almost everyone living in the countryside. Tagore wanted science to be taught along with India's own philosophical and spiritual knowledge at Indian universities. Because science without constraint of self-knowledge leads to an endless desire for material goods and well-being, and the meaningless pursuit of the instruments of war and power, which are often the origin of conflict among nations and the source of suppression of the weaker by the stronger. That is why both spiritual and scientific knowledge are considered by Tagore as equally important. About the place of religion in education, Tagore said: "Nature and human spirit wedded together would constitute our temple and selfless good deeds our worship."

### **Tagore's Contribution to Modern Education**

Tagore was fully dissatisfied with the prevalent system of education at that time and called the schools as factories of rote learning. Then he advocated the principle of freedom for an effective education. He said that the children should be given freedom so that they are able to grow and develop per their own wishes. A man through the process of education should be able to come out as a harmonious individual in time with his social set up of life. Relevance of Tagore's educational thoughts in Indian education. Tagore is critical of prevalent system of education which lays more emphasis upon bookish learning. The intellectual aim of education, according to him, is a development of intellectual faculties which should be developed through education. There are power of thinking & of imagination. The visionary's great educationist in Tagore solved the problem of today as far back as 50 years. Economic forces compel the teachers of today to look for pupils but in the natural order of thing it is the pupil who should look for the teacher the teacher-student relationship designed by Tagore is a model in this context.

### **Implications**

The present article attempted to explicate the main themes of educational & philosophical contributions of Rabindranath Tagore, his concept of humanism that can be cultivated through education with emphasis that the systems advocated by him have solutions to

modern day educational problems of India as well as the whole world. The electric understanding of Tagore's philosophy has great relevance for academicians , administrators, policy makers ,researchers, & policy makers who can use these principles or building of nation, brotherhood reduce unemployment and discrimination in educational other opportunities 'being practiced even in face of vibrant Indian constitution& legal system.

### **Conclusion**

Education is continuous process of learning and existence of present is always in shoulder of past and ultimately from present it will be passed on to the future. Thus it is concluded that the teaching methodologies of Tagore are still have relevance and great applicability in the present era of education system being practiced in our country and even around the globe. Establishing educational institutions almost nature is instrumental in bringing about change in the learning atmospheres which may play significant role in developing creative mind and facilitate nation building with highest harmony, productivity, happiness & flourishing of all being in the citizens of the great Indian nation that has a great source of knowledge.

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