

Relevance of Tagore's philosophy of education in postmodern era- a conceptual analysis

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Abstract: Tagore, a great intellectual of the 19th century is perhaps one of the best social thinkers and reformers that the world has ever seen. His views on every aspect of the individual and social life have profound impact even after century. In his thoughts, one can find the culmination of both eastern and western ideologies. In today's conflict ridden, complex society Tagore's ideas act as a panacea for numerous issues that encounter us. Postmodernism on the other hand refers to that period of history, which has witnessed new circumstances of life in society. It represents important social and cultural changes of the present day and rejects the claims of classical social thinkers about the universalistic ideas about individuals, society and the world. It establishes a highly pluralistic and diverse view about society with no grand narratives guiding its development. It suggests multiple quotations, cultural cross over and multicultural borrowing even in the field of education in general and society. In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyse the relevance of Tagore's philosophy of education in the postmodern era and how Tagore's ideas are still in conformity with the major tenets of postmodern educational philosophy. Plethora of writings is available on Tagore's philosophy and even on postmodernism. But very few attempts have been made on this specific arena. Therefore the paper entitled "RELEVANCE OF TAGORE'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION IN THE POSTMODERN ERA, A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS" has been designed with a view to analyze postmodern education and pointing out its essential similarities with Tagore's philosophy of education.

Keywords: Education, philosophy, postmodern

I. Introduction

'Tagore's idealism is a true child of India's own past and his philosophy is Indian both in origin and development'- Dr. S. Radhakrishnan

Rabindranath Tagore, a great philosopher of 20th century, was a visionary, social reformer, a poet who was a great preacher of Indian culture and tradition. He tried to spread the Indian ethos and culture to the progeny throughout the world. Tagore, who had a rare and a great personality, exhibited multidimensional ideas and which has relevance in today's world. He had been endowed with versatile genius and untiring zeal. His knowledge, The Soul, Nature and Man earned him a second name 'Gurudev' and as a politician, philosopher, social reformer and educator, he proved himself worthy of this title. He felt that man and nature have an original integration and hence he based his philosophy of life and education on this concept. Unlike most of the Western educators he was not only a theorist but a practitioner.

II. Tagore's philosophy: a general perspective

Tagore's philosophy reflects the blending of Western and Eastern ideas. He was deeply ingrained by the Vedas and Upanishads in one hand and on other hand, his thoughts represent the culmination of concepts and ideas which were the symbols of enlightenment. Human consciousness is the starting point of all philosophical inquiry. Tagore opined that the contradictions of human life provoke the quest for truth. Man is a finite-infinite being. He combines in him spirit and nature. "At one pole of my being I am one with sticks and stonesbut at the other pole of my being I am separated from all." As a link in the natural chain of events, man is subject to the law of necessity, as a member of the spiritual realm of ends, he is free. It is this contradiction which is encountered in science, art and morality that demands a solution. The individual aspires after perfect truth, perfect beauty and perfect goodness.

Tagore was an 'individualist' and 'naturalist'. He believed in the right and freedom of the individual to shape his life in his own way. But he ultimately wanted the unity of mankind. He said that in every one of us the Creator manifests in a unique manner and every individual tries to realize the Creator in his own way through which unity could be found not only amongst human beings but also between man and nature (Taneja & Taneja, 2004). According to Tagore, nature is the manifestation of the Creator (Brahma). Through its various forms, colours and rhythms the Brahma reveals Himself more clearly through nature than through man. He, therefore, wished human beings to have a close communion with nature and with its purifying and vitalizing influences.

“Experience of the spiritual world, religion as the right centre of life’s activities and the unity of thought and truth” was the keynote of Tagore’s great philosophy. There should be spiritual relationship between man and man. Tagore’s individualism, therefore, is compatible with the growth of social units. He encouraged the individual to reorganize the social groups on the basis of the individual’s spiritual worth. By that he never meant parochialism-intellectual, social, political and spiritual. He wanted the essential unity of the universe. He advocated internationalism but not economic or political internationalism. He wanted the spiritual bondage of the universe. Having faith in the fundamental unity of mankind he preached human brotherhood.

Present paper is being framed with the objectives:

1. To analyze Tagore’s philosophy of education in the post-modern era.
2. To examine the relevance of Tagore’s philosophy of education in the post-modern era.

III. Tagore’s philosophy of education

Tagore’s philosophy of education conforms to his general philosophy. He approached life as a poet with a totality of vision. He was fully aware of education’s innumerable implications. “Education” he said, “is a permanent part of the adventure of lifeit is not like a painful hospital treatment for curing them (students) of the congenial malady of their ignorance , but it is a function of the health , the natural expression of their minds vitality”. To him the object of education is freedom of mind and spirit.

The three cardinal principles of his educational philosophy are-i) Freedom; ii) Creative self-expression; and iii) Active communion with nature and man. The genesis of the idea of freedom lies in his experience of the prevailing system of education. He spoke of the existing schools as being an “education factory, lifeless, colorless, disassociate from the context of the universe. Our education has taken us away from our natural surroundings. It is dissociated from social contexts. Education “divorced from the streams of life and confined within the four walls of the classroom becomes artificial and losses its value”. The primary work in his opinion was to bring the child’s mind in contact with nature.

Nature inspires the human beings differently at different stages of human development. “For the young child, Nature will become an unconscious symbol of super personal growth and evolution, something that need not be questioned and which provides an ever ready background for its dreams and its play. For the adolescents, Nature will become an object of either scientific or lyrical curiosity. The adult will see in her the soil on which his country and his people grow, the cultural and economic background of human existence.” Nature to him was the focus where the interests and aspirations of human beings meet. It is therefore, essential right only to know Nature but to live Nature. By this the man will attain the greater and deeper freedom.

Education in the academic sense of mere acquisition of knowledge or information never appealed to the comprehensive genius of the poet. To be real, education must be of the whole man, of his emotions and senses as much as of his intellect. Tagore’s educational philosophy was learning from nature and life. Tagore also attached great importance to Tapasya and Sadhana. Tagore emphasized such education which would help individual to earn livelihood.

Tagore’s role in the innovation of educational ideas has been eclipsed by his fame as a poet. He envisioned an education that was deep-rooted in one’s immediate surroundings but connected to the cultures of the wider world, predicted upon pleasurable learning and individualized to the personality of the child. He felt that a curriculum should revolve organically around nature with classes held in the open air under the trees to provide for a spontaneous appreciation of the fluidity of the plant and animal kingdoms and seasonal changes. He was one of the first in India to argue for a humane educational system that was in touch with the environment and aimed at overall development of the personality.

IV. Postmodernism and Tagore

Postmodernism is the philosophy which believes that truth does not exist or is unknowable. Truth is viewed as being relative to the culture. Post modernists believe that truth is defined by each individual culture. Truth is relative not universal. If truth is defined by each culture, then it is not real truth. Truth by its nature is universal and absolute. There is no relative truth. Post modernists replace the word “truth” with words like “perspective” “constructs” or “points of view”. They believe in describing how various groups see the world and opine that knowledge of truth cannot be presumed.

The transition from modern to postmodern saw the replacement of ‘meta narrative’ by the “local contexts and diversity of human experience”. Meta narrative, a distinguishing feature of modernity, encompasses modern science, religion, politics and culture.

Tagore lived ahead of his times both in life and thought. Tagore felt and saw the society and political turmoil of his times. His paintings with their mixture of representation and abstraction have now received long deserved acclaim. His essays ranged over literature, politics, culture, social change, religious beliefs, philosophical analysis, international relations etc. His prophetic vision and outlook brought him and his works

into present times. His works have brought a new significance to the issues confronting man in the metaphysical, social, and political spheres. Tagore succeeded in infusing a spirit of liberal humanism into the life of his times. He emphasizes the importance of man above all types of orthodoxy, narrow-minded, sectarianism, religion, parochialism and violence. Tagore believes that man belongs to two worlds, one which lies within him and the other outside. Education, economics, politics, religion, social life all are steps towards to explore this two worlds.

Postmodernists believe that one can never have any direct access to reality. Every representation of reality is an interpretation that is influenced by the experiences, values and attitudes of the person. Every definition of reality, any identification of meaning is always a construct. There can be no one truth or one accurate form of knowledge. Men's personal self can make itself meaningful in relation to its own soul. Tagore's vision of "the complete man" has affinity with such postmodernist idea

Tagore's concept of society and state and his preference to society, in all its diversities marks him as a postmodernist. He emphasized the diversity and heterogeneity of the civil society. He repeatedly wrote and spoke of it and in his own way tried to foster it by experimenting with institutions, which would serve as the foundation for the superstructure of civil society. Tagore believed that village reconstruction was a more fruitful activity for the purpose of the real deliverance of the Indian people. For him, it was only man who was important. For Tagore, people should be able to live and reason in freedom. His attitude towards politics and culture, nationalism and internationalism, tradition and modernity, can be seen in the light of this belief.

V. Analysis of postmodern elements contained in Tagore's philosophy of education

The postmodern elements contained in Tagore's philosophy of education can be analyzed only when one goes through all the aspects of education as discussed below.

5.1. Postmodern education

Education is the way to relate to the world, to experience, understand and attempt to change the world and to understand ourselves and our relations with others. In postmodern education, knowledge is not a set of propositions but means of how to live, to listen, thus how to learn. It is the means of interpreting the reality and one's achieving his/her own rights. The aim of postmodern education is not to depend on a single right, single type of discourse but to create pluralist, participating education environments which are in search of new language systems and new interpretations. According to Tagore, education is meant for all round development of the individual. Education can develop a new pattern of life, culminating in the realization of universal man who is the ultimate reality. Education alone can teach people to realize their oneness with other individuals of the universe leading to the harmonious development of the personality.. Tagore's concept of education is still relevant in postmodern era, which he proposed approximately hundred years ago.

5.2. Objectives of postmodern education

The main important objective of postmodern education is-

1. to understand the postmodern worldview.
2. to understand the impact of postmodernism on contemporary education.
3. to recognize and understand the postmodern approach to history and other academic disciplines.
4. to recognize postmodern methodology.

5.3. Post-modern curriculum

Postmodern curriculum is process-oriented. It lays emphasis on the development of higher order thinking skills and foster creativity. Curriculum strategies address learner differences. The school curriculum should provide all students with essential life-long learning, experiences for whole development in the domains of ethics, intellect, physical development, social skills, and aesthetics according to individual potentials so that all students can participate actively by conferring responsibility to the society, the nation and the world.

Curriculum, according to Tagore, was to develop the complete man. For this a curriculum based on activities and broad experiences in real life situation is necessary (Kathleen, 2003). This view of Tagore is still relevant in postmodern age. A postmodern curriculum which adopts an open vision will undoubtedly help us to attain the goal.

5.4. Postmodern teaching method

According to postmodernism, teaching method should be task-based and project-based. As a result, learning is specific, technical, holistic and creative. A learner is being trained to solve problems using logic and proof. Learners are being educated in understanding problematic situations and in framing desired outcomes using values ethics, theory, and a faith claim that any curriculum has an underlying learning by product. Tagore emphasized on activity method, debate and discussion method, heuristic method, etc. by which students express

their inner potentialities and create new knowledge. This view of Tagore is relevant in postmodern era where teaching method should be based on learning by doing.

5.5. Postmodern medium of education

According to postmodernist, children should be taught in their mother tongue and with English as a second language. Tagore also emphasized the same point in his scheme of education, which will help an individual to bring together the language and thought. He advised that mother tongue should be used for imparting basic education (Ray, 1981). This view of Tagore on medium of education is still found relevant in postmodern era because man can freely express his thought in his mother tongue.

5.6. Postmodern teacher

Postmodern education focuses on construction of knowledge so the classrooms are more student-centered where there is provision for social interaction, independent study, expression of creativity, and different learning styles. There students create knowledge and learn by his own experiences and the teacher acts mainly as a facilitator. According to Tagore, a teacher should behave with children with great love, affection and sympathy. Teachers provide/create conducive environment in his class for students to engage useful and constructive activities and learn by experiences.

5.7. Postmodern student

Postmodern learners and teachers have differentiated roles. The learner is encouraged to find personal meaning from the learning and the teacher is allowed discard the mask of authority modelling the life-long learning value of postmodernism. The learner must be secure in their own self-identity. This secure self-identity is needed in order for learner and teacher to maintain personal integrity in the face of this unclear, relative, disruptive postmodern life. According to Tagore, education is a bi-polar process where students and teachers play their respective roles. He emphasized on child active mind to learn experiences through freedom and vastness and promoted child-centric education (Minocha, 1981).

5.8. Postmodern school

Schools are a place to foster learning where students inundate with authority and rules of schooling. School must allow students to bring their culture and experiences to each new learning experience. Language and cultural differences have transformed the postmodern school. For successful learning to occur in a postmodern era, constant evaluation of knowledge should take place. According to Tagore, a natural harmonious, free, open and simple atmosphere should be provided to the children of school. Tagore's concept of school has relevance in post modern era because school is a place where learning should take place according to the needs of the children. For the creation of new knowledge, schools provide their students free atmosphere which is most essential for the postmodern students.

Thus, after going through all the elements of postmodern education it is inferred that Tagore's philosophy of education in postmodern era bear relevance to each other.

VI. Relevance of Tagore's philosophy of education in postmodern era

Tagore was the Renaissance man of modern India – the bridge from an Indian cultural traditional education system. Tagore did not write his educational philosophy in particular. They are dispersed in his writings and educational experiments at Shantiniketan. He visualized nature as the real teacher but associated to the cultures of the wider world, predicated upon pleasurable learning and individualized to the personality of the child (Tripathi, 2011). His principle of education in Indian context is “all educational processes should be based in our own cultural traditions”. He emphasized that the medium of instruction must be through one's mother-tongue. Tagore's concept of school was based on Gurukul system. He placed great importance on children learning in natural environment and said that nature herself is our greatest teacher. Tagore believed that the educational process should be one of self-discovery and free creation.

Tagore believed that school should be integral to society and intellectual education should be linked with the arts and crafts which deal with human emotions. This is why his curriculum included music and literature. Tagore comprehends that we are an integral part of cosmic infinity. Therefore, our education should also involve spiritual or religious education. He emphasized in incorporating western values, science, and knowledge, within an Indian cultural, educational structure that would liberate us from poverty and ignorance. Tagore stressed the technical side of education. The emotional and the practical aspects of experience have to be connected, so that the growing child should be able to realize nature on both the levels of intuition and understanding (Gupta & Ray, 2009).

Tagore's educational ideals have been agreed by other educationists and many of his innovations have now become part of general educational practices, but his special role lay in the emphasis on harmony balance

between materialism and spiritualism in total development of personality. Talking about the crisis of education, Tagore said that a child should be permitted to read books. Our education system is lifeless as small children are burdened with piles of books. Tagore said that from childhood to adolescence and again from adolescence to manhood, we are coolies of the goddess of learning, carrying loads of words on our folded books. The core of Tagore's educational philosophy was learning from nature, music and life. This is the reason why his education is easily acceptable by human mind. The visionary in him solved the problem of today's century earlier. The problems of modern education are attendance, use of other unfair means and discipline etc. It is more certificates oriented, irrelevant of intelligence and correlation with nature. These problems were solved by providing freedom which is not applied in classrooms.

VII. Critical analysis of postmodern education in context of Tagore's philosophy of education

The present education system is joyless, colourless, painful, lifeless etc, which are not produced to desired outcomes. It may be appropriate at this time to look at some of the modern great educationist of the past century and re-examine their educational ideas and thoughts for their relevance today. The main focus of the India's current education system is a means to future employment creates an obsession with passing examinations, which in turn forces textbook-centered teaching. Learning has little relevance to student's lives and interests today and thus is not enjoyed and valued as an end in itself. With success attributed solely to science and technology skills, development of creativity are artistic skills are mostly disregarded.

A key concept in Tagore's model is that of promoting a "narrative imagination" – the nurturing of creativity, empathy and diversity. For him, one of the central skills needed for a democratic society was the ability to imagine and to see things from varied perspectives. Starting the learning process with a textbook rather than with those things close to a child's heart had much to do with the endless desire for material goods and wellbeing and the meaningless pursuit of the instruments of war and power. Education needs to nurture students' souls and its purpose is not just employment but more importantly personal fulfilment and self-improvement. The inability to empathize with others viewpoints is a key cause of apathy, oppression, racism, violence, and war in today's world. Tagore said that, we may become powerful by knowledge but we attain fullness by sympathy which is not only systematically ignored in schools, but it is severely repressed.

Tagore would want teachers to teach their students to critically examine all beliefs, traditions and statements and to accept only those that stood the test of reason, rather than blindly accepting them on the basis of authority. He used education as a tool for social change by making young people rational, independent thinkers rather than blind followers of rituals and traditions.

The heart of Tagore's philosophy is promotion of freedom of the child. Tagore insisted on an environment devoid of fear for students to have the confidence to express their thoughts freely and believe in their own learning ability as the fear of making mistakes prevents an individual from being free to venture a new thought, to experiment, to ask questions, to be creative and innovative. Thus, he opposed to any form of corporal punishment.

Tagore considered the lack of education to be the main obstacle in the way of India's progress and it is the root of all problems. The basic objectives of any worthwhile national education system should be promotion of creativity, freedom, joy and awareness of country's cultural heritage.

VIII. Implications

8.1. For Educational System in the Postmodern Era

1. The educational policy and programmes can be developed in tune with Tagore's educational thoughts to fulfill the demands of postmodern era.
2. The objectives of education should be decided on the social rules and related aspects for a dignified life.
3. An educational framework may be developed for rural education which could be more effective for rural reconstruction and to fulfill the requirements of rural society in the postmodern global world.
4. The educational thoughts of Tagore will be more effective for establishing culture of peace and a society based on knowledge and equality.
5. A revolutionary change in educational system can be initiated when the ladder of education emphasizes on the freedom of the individual to shape his life in his own way based on his creative capacities.
6. The role of education is more significant than any other social sub-system like polity, economy etc.

8.2. For Curriculum

1. The curriculum should lay emphasis on the development of higher order thinking, skill, and fostering creativity.
2. The experienced based curriculum may be developed in tune with the educational thoughts of Tagore as far as work experience community work, constructive work, and training of manual skills etc.

8.3. For Teachers

1. The Tagore should focus on a more student-centered environment in classroom where opportunities for social interaction, independent study, the expression of creativity as well as provision for different learning techniques should be made available.
2. The Tagore can improve themselves in more efficient and effective from with the use of the thoughts of Tagore.

8.4. For Students

1. The students could improve themselves with the quality of real urge for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, social outlook and become conscious about their own self-identity.
2. Students can understand their responsibilities for social reconstruction and participate in this movement.

IX. Suggestions for further research

1. A study on the need of incorporating the educational thoughts of Tagore in the present globalised system of education should be done in the further research.
2. A comparative study of the philosophy of education of Tagore and other postmodern western thinkers like Derrida, Lyotard may be a scope for further research.
3. A search study may be pursued on the impact of postmodern philosophy in the present Indian educational thoughts.
4. A study on the need of vocational education in the postmodern era based on the ideals of Tagore may be a field of further research.
5. Postmodernist interpretation of philosophy of education with reference to Tagore can also be area of further research.

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