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## **Rabindranath Tagore's Philosophy of Education: A Study**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The philosophy of education of Rabindranath Tagore holds a unique place in the history of educational philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century since it combines humanistic values, spiritual outlook, and cultural grounding with a receptiveness to the world view. To Tagore education was not only a knowledge gaining process but a wholesome process of self-realization, unity with the nature, and development of imagination. His focus was on liberty of the mind, spontaneity in education and development of individuality under a community based structure. In contrast to the strict colonial system of education, Tagore saw education as an opportunity to free a learner of the limited frames and to open up to a universal consciousness. These ideals were manifested in his institution at Santiniketan in terms of the integration of the arts, literature and music with traditional and modern sciences, and in terms of locating learning in the natural environment. Another important educational point that Tagore brought forward concerned the ethical aspect of learning, which required that the real learning be made sensitive to humanity, social responsibility, and honour to cultural diversity. His philosophy, which was rich in the traditions of the Indian world and supported by his experience in the world cultures, presented

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a different paradigm of education which is still topical in the age of globalization and systematization. This paper is a critical analysis of the theoretical basis of the Tagore educational thought, practices he started and their long term contribution to change of education systems especially in regard to creativity, intercultural understanding and humanism. Finally, the vision of education Tagore possessed represents his understanding of the oneness of knowledge, beauty and humanity, which can teach us the lessons but which will always remain very important to the world that struggles to achieve unity and inclusiveness.

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### **Introduction:**

The poet, philosopher, educationist, and Nobel laureate, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) has a unique place in the history of Indian and world educational thought. His approach to education was not limited to the classroom setting as it went out to nature, art, creativity and life in general. With the colonial system of education that focused on memorization and discipline alongside the formation of clerks to work in the government, Tagore promoted a different vision aimed at setting the human mind free, developing imagination, and aligning human beings with the cosmos. He thought that, education should also result in self-realization, aesthetic refinement and moral accountability. His thoughts were practically realized through the formation of Santiniketan in 1901 and thereafter Visva-Bharati University in 1921 which was a representation of his vision of holistic education.

The philosophy of education Tagore developed was based on Upanishadic tradition of India mixed with his interaction with Western humanism and polished by his own creative genius. Education to him was not just a preparation of life but life, the awakening of mind and spirit to truth, beauty and goodness. The seminar paper is aimed at discussing the philosophy, goals and timelessness of the Tagore vision of education.

### **Objectives:**

The present study is guided by the following objectives -

To understand the philosophical foundations of Rabindranath Tagore's ideas on education.

To examine the aims, methods, and practices of education as envisaged by Tagore.

To analyse the role of nature, art, and creativity in his educational framework



To explore the contemporary significance of Tagore's educational philosophy in the globalized world.

### **Methodology:**

The present study on Rabindranath Tagore's Philosophy of Education is primarily qualitative in nature and follows a descriptive, analytical, and interpretative research design. Since the subject is rooted in the domain of philosophy, education, and literature, the study does not rely on empirical fieldwork but rather on critical engagement with existing texts, writings, and interpretations of Tagore's educational ideas. The primary sources, Tagore's own writing and secondary sources like journals, articles magazines etc. are used for these studies.

### **Philosophical foundations of Rabindranath Tagore's ideas on education:**

The concept of education as created by Rabindranath Tagore is on the border of philosophy, culture and humanism. His vision was not just pedagogical, but with strong undertones of the philosophical worldview, which aimed to unite a person with nature, society and the universe. To make sense of the philosophy of education of Tagore, it is necessary to refer to his larger intellectual orientation, which was influenced by Vedantic spirituality, Upanishadic wisdom, humanistic universalism and his encounter with Western liberal thought. Education to Tagore was not a solitary exercise of knowledge impartation but a complete process of making the most of the life. He planned the school to be a place where the natural creativity and freedom of spirit of the child would get the chance to evolve instead of being thwarted by a strict discipline.

Tagore was deeply affected by Vedantic idea of unity of existence and Upanishadic idea of self-realization, which had a potent impact on his philosophy of education. He attributed education as a way of enabling the learner to perceive the infinite in the finite, to identify the individual self with the universal spirit. This philosophic backdrop can be found in his focus on harmony with nature and development of inner freedom. To Tagore, gaining professional knowledge or learning facts was not the ultimate objective of education, but the creation of a wholesome person, a person who is able to appreciate aesthetics, have moral sensibility, and spiritual awakening. His ideas echo with the Upanishadic dictum *sa videyaya vimuktaye* or that is the knowledge that frees. This concept of liberation not only involved metaphysical transcendence but also emancipation of fear, dogma and intellectual prison.

His humanistic worldview also influenced Tagore with his educational vision. He had the belief in the fundamental dignity of all human beings and wanted education that would develop this worth in them.



During his lectures which were later published in *Personality* (1917), he attacked the system of education that was forced by the colonial government on the people and was based on examinations but proposed an alternative education system that develops creativity and joy. Learning, he pictured himself as a process that develops out of life and not one that is independent of it. Based on this vision his school at Santiniketan was constructed which provided students with a chance to study in the open air under trees, experience closeness to nature and develop aesthetic sensibilities through music, art and literature. As he stated, “The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence” (Tagore, 1917/2003, p. 87). This insight captures the essence of his philosophical foundation—education must help individuals integrate themselves into a greater cosmic and social whole.

Another point that influenced the philosophical basis of the ideas developed by Tagore was the criticism of modern industrial civilization that he considered to be dehumanizing. His exposure to Western philosophers, especially to the Romantic poets, Wordsworth and others, and to theorists of educational reform, such as Rousseau and Pestalozzi, only strengthened his belief in the educational principle of being based on freedom, imagination, and in the natural development of the child. Nevertheless, as the individualism is the focus of Rousseau, Tagore combined it with the Indian spiritual tradition, focusing on universal peace. According to him, education ought to be in equilibrium between the inner freedom of the individual and the responsibility of the individual towards his or her society and the rest of humanity. This was reflected in his vision of Visva-Bharati, which was a spirit of universal humanism, a global village of students not bound by the borders of nation and race.

The philosophy of education by Tagore was practical and realistic. He was able to show its practice with experiments both at Santiniketan and later at Visva-Bharati where the curriculum encompassed not only the study of Indian culture and the global views but also the vocational education along with arts and sciences. His schools displayed the philosophical belief that the education has to be established but also open, developing a sense of self and also contributing to the general perspective. He strongly criticized rote learning which he considered as the killer of natural curiosity among children. Rather, he demanded an experiential, activity-based learning where the learner is an active participant not a passive learner. In a way, his thinking predetermined numerous progressive educational trends of the modern world.

The philosophical root of Tagorean educational thoughts is therefore based on the integrative vision- an effort to co-exist the spiritual and material, the individual and society, the national and the universal. This is because of his deep faith in the harmony of existence which is why he focuses on freedom, creativity



and harmony with nature. Meanwhile, his demand of the human dignity and his belief in the universal brotherhood show that he has a solid ethical basis. In his own words, “Education means enabling the mind to find out the ultimate truth, which emancipates us from the bondage of dust and gives us the wealth, not of things, but of inner light, not of power, but of love” (Tagore, 1924/2006, p. 112). This statement encapsulates the philosophical grounding of his thought—education must liberate, illuminate, and humanize.

In conclusion, Tagore’s philosophy of education is firmly grounded in Vedantic spirituality, enriched by humanistic ideals, and shaped by his engagement with Western liberal traditions. It stands as a unique synthesis of East and West, tradition and modernity, spiritual freedom and social responsibility. His educational philosophy continues to remain relevant in the contemporary world, where debates on mechanization, standardization, and alienation in education persist. By returning to Tagore’s vision, education can once again be seen not merely as training for livelihood but as a lifelong process of nurturing the human spirit in its fullness.

#### **Aims, methods, and practices of education by Tagore:**

The philosophy of education held by Rabindranath Tagore was highly based on his vision of an all-round and humanistic living where the aim of learning was not limited to the small sphere of formal education. To Tagore, education was not about preparing people to become professionals or to get information but was about the development of the mind, heart, and soul in harmony with the nature and the society. His teaching methodology included artistic sensibility, freedom of thought, integration of culture, which makes education a natural process, a process that developed in total individuality. He was against the hard and mechanical education systems at the then time where they were more focused on rote learning and conformity and he advocated a system that enhanced creativity, moral level, and aesthetic value.

Education, as Tagore saw it, was to fulfill the full development of the human personality through the integration of intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual sides of life. According to him, education should foster the imagination and creativity of the child so that learners can be able to relate with their inner being and the external world. He thought of this concept because he believed that each person is naturally gifted with certain potentials that should be nurtured and not repressed. He emphasized on the fact that education is not taught but develops inwardly, and blooms in the air of love, liberty and beauty. Tagore believed that education was one of the ways of achieving universal truth, harmony and compassion that would create a world that was based on cooperation and not competition.



The insistence on the freedom was one of the peculiarities of Tagore and his educational approaches. His pedagogy was flexible and child-centred as opposed to the restrictive classroom systems that existed in his time. He sharply held that children learn better in an environment of delight and liberty in comparison with being forcefully imposed upon. These ideas were reflected at his experimental school at Santiniketan, which did not believe in memorization and strict examinations. Instead, they were enticed to do activities like literature, music, drama and painting which helped them to make use of their creative instincts. Tagore also emphasized much on self-expression since he believed that education should help learners to express their thoughts and feelings as opposed to producing knowledge in a mechanical way. This was in line with his belief that education was to be used as a means of self-discovery so that people are made aware of themselves and yet be receptive of the world at large.

Tagore used nature as the major focus in his education. He considered nature as the best teacher and provided children with an atmosphere of beauty and harmony where senses and mind could develop. In Santiniketan, the classrooms were conducted in the open air, using trees, such that the learners could always be in contact with the natural world. This habit was based on the environmentally friendly theory of Tagore that nature provided curiosity, sensitivity and a feeling of unity with life. This approach was not only aesthetic but very philosophical since he held that studying in nature instilled humanity and reverence to the universe at large. Tagore was against the narrowness of education within four walls which he criticized as being artificial and narrow-minded in nature as it confined the human growth and imagination.

The other significant feature of the Tagore approach was that of the incorporation of art and culture in the curriculum. He thought that art school was not peripheral but central to human growth. Literature, music, and painting were never the adornment of intellectual training, but an essential resource of expression of the richness of human experience. In his own person Tagore as a poet, painter, and composer found the arts to be the key to the development of emotional balance and moral sensitivity. His argument was that artistic expression would enable the students to grow with empathy and learn to bridge the small boundaries of caste, class and nationality. Art therefore became a medium of personal perfection and interpersonal harmony.

Tagore also stressed a lot on internationalism and exchange of cultures. He was of the opinion that education should not only cater to the local or national interests but also must stimulate the learners to view themselves as a member of a bigger human community. His Visva-Bharati university was the product of this vision since he gathered scholars and artists worldwide to talk and study together. This



was in response to his view that there should be a knowledge that is universal and education needed to assist in breaking the separatory lines of race and nation. Through intercultural relativism, Tagore considered education as a way of enhancing peace and humanity.

For Tagore, therefore, education was not a mechanical training but a lifelong process of growth that involved the mind, heart, and soul. It was about building character, fostering creativity, and awakening a spirit of harmony with nature and humanity. He summed up his philosophy in poetic terms, noting that “The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence” (Tagore, 1924/2008, p. 14). His ideas remain relevant today, especially in an age where education is often reduced to technical training and exam-oriented systems. By advocating for freedom, creativity, cultural integration, and global outlook, Tagore offered a vision of education that continues to inspire reformers and educators worldwide. As he asserted, “Education means enabling the mind to find out that ultimate truth which emancipates us from the bondage of dust and gives us the wealth, not of things, but of inner light” (Tagore, 1933, p. 36).

To sum it up, educational philosophy of Tagore is a great endeavour to unite the intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth. His goal was to equip people, not only to economic productivity but also to a full life of meaning, ethical and creative value. In his approaches, which include freedom of learning, proximity to nature, combination of arts, and the development of internationalism, he aimed at developing holistic human beings who could coexist with themselves, with others, and with the world in general.

### **Role of nature, art, and creativity in his educational framework :**

The educational philosophy developed by Rabindranath Tagore, which is deeply based on his idea of the whole human development, has a tremendous impact on the focus on nature, on art and on the creativity. To Tagore, education was not the process of learning or memorizing but a process of self-realization and harmonious development when the imaginations of the student, emotional intelligence, unity with the natural world, etc. are cultivated. He felt that education environment has a strong influence on mind and soul of learners. In this context, nature is not merely a setting of the learning process but an important part of the educational process. The vision of education which Tagore had in his experimental school, Shantiniketan, was based on the idea that direct contact with nature develops the qualities of observation, reflection and wonder, which, in turn, are vital in the intellectual and emotional growth. Shantiniketan was intentionally designed to include its outdoor classrooms, gardens and open spaces to help students have a living relationship with nature and to experience the cycles of life, the changing of seasons and the



rhythms of the earth so as to cultivate ecological sensitivity and holistic world view. As Tagore articulated, “You can’t make children learn by forcing them; you have to awaken in them a sense of wonder about the world” (Tagore, 1992, p. 45). This perspective positions nature not only as a source of knowledge but as an integral medium through which learners cultivate curiosity, empathy, and aesthetic appreciation.

According to the educational system of Tagore, art plays a central role in a transformational sense. He believed that the artistic expression, either in music or painting or dancing or literature, was a way of cultivating the inner mind of the students and developing imagination, emotionalism and moral judgment. The incorporation of art into education was not merely an extracurricular adornment to Tagore but also a fundamental principle because it helps learners to see the world in finer details and express experience beyond what language can do. Through artistic experiences, the students learn to be creative, judge aesthetically and also to balance their inner feelings with the reality around them. The examples of this philosophy are in the artistic work of Tagore himself; he wrote poetry, songs, and paintings, and they were his response to the subtlety of life, feelings, and nature itself. He asserted that “The aim of education is to enable the individual to unfold himself fully, to understand the meaning of life, and to be in harmony with the world around him” (Tagore, 1917/1997, p. 78). This statement highlights how art functions as a conduit for self-realization, ethical reflection, and the cultivation of a worldview where human experience is intricately linked to beauty, emotion, and insight.

In its sense used by Tagore, creativity goes beyond making art, but it is also a pedagogical principle that pervades all the learning processes. Education, according to him, ought to promote creative thinking, problem solving and boldness to venture into unexplored intellectual and emotional world. Nurturing creativity, the pedagogical approach of Tagore enables students to be active participants in the knowledge process and so challenge the norms and be creative without overpowering moral and aesthetic instincts. His schools were focused on experiential learning where observation, experimentation and expression were part and parcel to the grasping of concepts whether in science, literature or social studies. Creativity was not an individual achievement but a social, spiritual phenomenon, which encouraged a spirit of collaboration, taking into account others, and the ability to transform society. The liberty to innovate alongside the counselling of wise instructors enabled learners to combine creativity with discipline and molded them to be all-rounded people who can both see and contribute to the world in a useful manner.

Essentially, in Tagore educational system, nature, art and creativity are interwoven in a smooth philosophy that the learner grows in the intellectual, emotional, aesthetical and moral realms. In this



vision, education will be inner and outer adventure, where a connection with nature will develop sensitivity, expression is developed through a creative practice, and intellectual independence and creativity are cultivated. This holistic view is one that does not see learners as repositories of information, but they are living beings who can see beauty, think critically and live in a harmonious manner in their society and the natural environment. The educational paradigm of Tagore can still be heard in the modern pedagogical discussions, in which the inseparable unity of learning, imagination, and life is stressed.

### **Significance of Tagore’s educational philosophy in the globalized world:**

The educational philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore, which is based on humanism, creativeness and the complete creation of a human being, is still of significant value in the environment of a globalized world. Tagore did not only conceive education as a process of memorization and mechanical acquisition of knowledge, but as a way of developing the potential within each of us and creating a balanced connection between human beings, nature and the society. The focus of his model of education is to combine intellectual, emotional, and moral development in order to end up with individuals that are free-thinking, socially responsible, and culturally sensitive. In the modern globalized times, when technologies, cross-cultural relationships and socio-economic interdependence outline the human experiences, the principles of Tagore can be applied as the guideline on how to create global citizens and preserve the local cultural identity at the same time.

Among the most impressive features of the educational vision of Tagore is the main role of freedom in learning. According to him, education was to be enlightening by creating curiosity, promoting creativity, and letting the child discover the world at his or her own speed. According to Tagore, “Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man” (Tagore, 1917, p. 18). This perspective emphasizes the recognition of individual potential and the nurturing of innate talents, rather than imposing standardized measures of success. In the modern globalized society, where students are usually under a lot of pressure to fit into strict learning systems, this mode of thinking stands out quite well since it encourages individualized learning and acquisition of skills of critical thinking, which are vital in dealing with complexities of the world.

The relevance of Tagore insistence in learning by working with nature also has a long-term applicability. He claimed that a high level of interaction with the environment would create a sensitive, creative and wellbeing person. Nowadays, when the world is facing ecological crises and urbanization, such a form of learning experience should be integrated into the educational programs that can ensure the production of environmental conscious citizens in the world. This approach is truly indicative of a deep appreciation of



how human beings and nature are interconnected with one another Tagore saw this years ago and his philosophy is not only in sync with the current global concerns, such as sustainability and climate education. In putting upon the significance of experiential learning, arts, music, and culture, the philosophy of Tagore promotes the kind of education that transcends the utilitarian goals, and cultivates aesthetical sensibilities, empathy, and appreciation of culture.

Additionally, the vision of education proposed by Tagore is more focused on the development of humanistic and global perspective. In his opinion, the purpose of education was to broaden the consciousness of a person beyond the national or local sphere and promote the sense of respect to cultural diversity and universal values. He stated, “The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence” (Tagore, 1917, p. 25). This principle is particularly pertinent in today’s globalized world, where intercultural understanding, tolerance, and ethical responsibility are crucial for addressing international conflicts, social inequalities, and humanitarian challenges. Promoting empathy towards the world and ethical thinking, the ideas introduced by Tagore can effectively correspond to the opportunities of the modern global educational systems, including the focus on sustainable development as a part of education provided by UNESCO or global citizenship education.

Moreover, the philosophy of Tagore emphasizes the role of creativity, arts and cultural involvement in the education. Such a focus is becoming indispensable in a globalized world, where knowledge economies are placing more and more importance on innovation and intercultural competence. A curriculum that fosters artist city, inquisitive approach and rumination helps in offering individuals with the ability to act in adaptive methods to a world environment that evolves at an extremely high rate. Also, as the particular cultural values are used in fusion with the global approach, the educational model created by Tagore promotes the feeling of belonging and identity, so that the globalization process does not result in the homogenization of cultures instead of creating the intercultural dialogue and mutual respect.

To sum up, the relevance of the educational philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore in the world of globalization may be seen in its eternal emphasis on the comprehensive development of a human being, personal freedom, cultural responsiveness, and universal awareness. His ideas present a powerful education roadmap that is both localized and global by developing a creative, empathetic, and ethically responsible approach to education. In modern times when technology, the environment, and cultures are becoming highly problematic, Tagore vision has become the pathfinder and has shown that education can



produce not only intellectually but also morally, socially and creatively responsive individuals. Therefore, his philosophy is still used in the quest to establish learning institutions that are a balance between individual development, social prosperity, and global interconnectedness.

### **Conclusion:**

The philosophy of education formulated by Rabindranath Tagore can be described as the reflection of the vision that is beyond usual frames of pedagogical concepts of the harmonious development of personality in the view of nature, society and the inner world. Tagore was a very humanistic thinker in his approach to education; he aimed at developing intellectual capability and also moral sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spiritual awareness. The second element of his philosophy is the idea that education is a liberating/joyful experience and that it should foster curiosity, imagination, and creativity instead of strict formations and rote learning. Tagore placed learning as a participative and life-affirming activity as opposed to passing of knowledge by promoting an education which addresses the natural instincts and inner aptitudes of the child. His dislike of traditional education, which tends to focus on study and test-based performance, is the manifestation of his belief in making people not just literate but also thoughtful, understanding, and sensitive in their perception of the world and human experience. His school of experiment at Shantiniketan is a practical achievement of his ideals of education. The classroom in this setting is also carried out into the nature, and the learning experience is combined with artistic, musical, and creative expression. In this way, one can see the belief of Tagore that the natural world and art-related interaction are the keys to the holistic growth of the learner. Students are motivated to discover, ask questions and imagine which allows them to think independently and develop the imagination. The intertwining of education, aesthetics, nature and creativity in the framework proposed by Tagore also creates a sense of wonder, moral sensibility and inner understanding of the interconnectedness of life. This hands-on and humanistic methodology guarantees the learners not just as individuals, but as socially responsible creatures who can also empathize, work as a team, and have a significant interaction with the community they live in.

Moreover, the philosophy of education that Tagore proposes focuses on developing the freedom and self-expression. He suggests an education that will enable children to discover their underlying potentials in the hands of mentors that encourage thought and innovation as opposed to instilling uniformity. In the concept of Tagore, education cannot be considered out of life; it involves in the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development at the same time. It is a holistic process, which creates a balance between intellectual inquiry and emotional richness, learning and ethical growth, personal growth and social duty.



In this way, education is made a revolution that does not only change the way the brain works but character, sensibilities and view of the world by the learner.

To sum up, the philosophy of education developed by Rabindranath Tagore is a very elaborate model that cannot be left behind in the modern context. It causes educational systems to focus on humanistic beliefs, creativity, and holism development instead of mechanistic learning. Incorporating nature, art, and experience in the educational process. Tagore saw an alternative version of education emancipating the spirit and developing both imagination and ethical and socially conscious individuals. According to his philosophy, the goal of education should be the full development of human potential in a reconciled way with the world to help in the development of a more human, caring, and considerate society. The vision of Tagore still leads the educators and intellectuals all over the world and reminds us of the fact that true education is not only the matter of the information, but the cultivation of life, character and consciousness in their utmost manifestation.

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