EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH: Rabindranath Tagore was a great philosopher, poet, novelist, dramatist and a prophet. He was born on May 07, 1961 in Calcutta in an educated, rich and respected family. The responsibility of his education remained mainly on the shoulders of his father Mahrishi Devandranath Tagore. He provided Rabindranath with education of Sanskrit language, Indian philosophy and astronomy. For higher education, Rabindranath was sent to Bengal academy. Soon he was fed up with the rigid and lifeless education imparted there. Thus, he developed aversion for the prevalent dull education and he left the Bengal academy. In 1877, Rabindranath was sent to England for receiving education in law. There too he got fed up and returned to India without obtaining any degree. As such, Tagore got his education mostly at home through tutors and private readings. He had started writing articles for Bengali magazines very early in life. Gradually, love of learning increased by leaps and bounds in him and he wrote many stories, novels and poems which earned repute and appreciation for him. Rabindranath Tagore developed into a renowned poet, writer, dramatist, philosopher and painter soon that people began to address him reverently as Gurudev. In 1921, his school previously known as Shantiniketan ashram became a renowned university known as Vishwa Bharti University. The aim of this university was to bring about a synthesis of the East and West. For the development of Vishwa Bharti, he toiled ceaselessly and untiringly for twenty years and established his seat of worldwide reputation on stable foundations. Tagore died in 1941 and his death was mourned all over the world.

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Tagore’s philosophy of education conforms to his general philosophy. Factors which influenced Tagore’s educational philosophy were influence of home environment, love for nature, love for nation, his extensive visits abroad and influence of school environment.

The origin of Tagore’s educational theory was his own home life and the freedom he had experienced with it. Tagore’s brothers and sisters were poets, musicians, playwrights and novelists and thus, Tagore’s home was filled with the musical, literary and dramatic pursuits. As such Tagore got his education mostly at home by self-study. Education prevalent in the days of Tagore was rigid and lifeless
that it did not confirm to the needs of individual and demands of society. Hence, he
deadly opposed the current education and insisted that education should acquaint the
child with the voice and mission of individual as well as international life and achieve
a harmonious balance between all the factors being free from all compulsions and
restrictions.

Tagore recommended that education should be provided in the
company of Nature which will strengthen the ties between man and Nature. Both man
and Nature are the creations of one and the same God. He considered Nature as a
powerful agency for the moral and spiritual development of the child exerting a very
healthy influence upon the heart, mind and body of the child. Under the natural and
healthy environment, pupils can find a natural outlet for their capacities and great
chance of their development. He was of the firm view that education is a vehicle of
social reform. Hence, it should act as a life-giving current to modern society serving
in various ways. He advocated that education should be according to the realities of
life. Any education cut away from life is useless. Hence, any plan of education should
involve both nature and needs of man in a harmonious programme. ['Personality’
(1917), pp.113-120]

Believing in harmonious relationships of man with man, with
surroundings and international relations, Tagore advocated that a man through the
process of education should be able to come out as a harmonious individual in tune
with his social set of life. The highest education is that which does not merely give us
information but makes our life in harmony with all existence.

Tagore was not in favour of mere intellectual development. He
stressed that education should promote creative self-expression. He suggested that
creative self-expression can be promoted through subjects of life crafts, music,
drawing and dramatics. The environment of freedom given to the learner and then
creating situations for him will automatically make the learner to do something
original. ['Creative Unity’ (1922), p.200]

**Teacher:** Tagore gave a very important place to the teacher. He assigned an important
role to him in the education of child believing that only man can teach another man.
To him, the teacher is a Guru like ancient Indian Rishis who is to keep the students on
the right track by remaining a learner throughout his life. ['Towards Universal Man’
(1961), p.71] A teacher is to stimulate and guide but it is the child who is to choose
and react according to his natural inclinations. Believing in purity and innocence of
child, the teacher should behave with him with great love, affection, sympathy and consideration. Tagore also stated that the teachers and students are considered to be learners together, seeking truth and following the right path of pure simplicity as well as renunciation. The teacher should always be busy with motivating the creative capacities of children so that they remain busy with constructive activities and experiences. [‘Towards Universal Man’ (1961), p.200]

**Classroom Teaching:** Tagore did not approve the traditional methods of class-room teaching. He recommended those methods which provide knowledge of concrete situations. He favoured frequent excursions and tours, during which the pupils with their senses alert might observe and learn various facts of interest. Education must be given in geographical, historical, economic and cultural perspectives. In order to enable children to learn new things, it is necessary to maintain an educative atmosphere where children are not compelled to learn things from text-books, but from the natural surroundings which are most educative. [‘Doctrines of the Great Indian Educators’ (2004), p.116]

**Cardinal Principles of Tagore’s Educational Philosophy:** The three cardinal principles of Tagore’s educational philosophy are (1) Freedom; (2) Active communication with Nature and man; (3) Creative self-expression. Tagore felt that education divorced from the streams of life and confined within four walls becomes artificial and loses its value. Tagore believed in self-imposed discipline which is not imposed from outside but drawn out from within. [‘Foundations of Education’ (1987), p.282]

**Moral values and Ethics:** Tagore attached great significance to the moral values and ethics in education. Accepting the intellect of the people of West, it would be a great degrading to forget our moral wealth of wisdom. Stressing on the importance of mother-tongue, Tagore considered that foreign language makes the learner alienated and lifeless from the living world of freedom and joy. So, education should be intervened with life and society. According to him, there are three sources of knowledge: Nature, life and teacher. There should be a close coordination and harmony among these sources. [‘Encyclopaedia of Modern Educational Thought. Rabindranath Tagore: An Educational thinker ‘(2001), p.79]

**Brotherhood of Mankind:** Tagore gave a message of mankind, brotherhood, internationalism and service to humanity. A child according to him, should be given full freedom so that he may learn by Nature, love as well as affection. Education
should aim at harmony with our life and education i.e. existence. Tagore implemented all his views regarding education in his school called Shantiniketan which is opened in a natural surrounding i.e. natural environment. As a whole, Tagore’s main aim of education is to prepare the individual for the service of community. Rabindranath Tagore has been one of the topmost educationists of India. His name will ever shine like a star in the galaxy of the educationists who contributed handsomely to the cause of education.

**Educational Aims as propounded by Rabindranath Tagore:**

1. Education should aim to develop the child physically. Tagore believed that a healthy mind lives in a healthy body.
2. Education should enable the child to acquire the knowledge through independent efforts and critical examination of ideas.
3. Education should inculcate moral and spiritual values in children.
4. Chief aim of education should be drawing out all the latent potentialities of child.
5. Education should create self-discipline among teachers as well as children.
6. Education should aim at the attainment of inner freedom, inner power and enlightenment.
7. Education should not only train children to be effective farmers, clerks or craftsmen, but also develop them to be complete human beings.
8. Education should aim at development of a sense of social service in pupils and teachers.

PRINCIPLES OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS PROPOUNDED BY RABINDRANATH TAGORE: --- Following the first objective of the study (To delineate principles of professional ethics for teachers), the principles of professional ethics propounded by Tagore are stated in the following pages---

(1) Relationship between teacher and pupils: Tagore perceives that ideal teacher-taught relationship works as an instrument for smooth running of educational institutions. In his work ‘Personality’ (1971), he points out that healthy atmosphere of the schools ensures their smooth functioning. The functioning of autocratic authorities in schools only serves to spoil their atmosphere. Tagore in the said thought favours congenial atmosphere free of authoritarian and rigid imposition of disciplinary practices of teachers on students.

Favouring ancient Gurukul system of education, Tagore recommends ancient system of education in which teachers and pupils should live together as family members keeping sweet relationship among them. Tagore in ‘Towards Universal Man’ (1961) remarks that present schools and colleges provide orthodox Hindu learning and regard book learning as the most important part of education. The idea that the teacher and his pupils should live together has come down to the present day. The pupils should be surrounded by an atmosphere of culture and teachers should be dedicated to their vocation, living a simple life, without any material interest or luxury to distract their minds. Tagore in this passage desires that the teachers should be dedicated to their vocation. They should lead a simple life free from material luxury.

Emphasizing that natural environment is favourable for students; Tagore advocates that students and teachers should live together amidst the beauties of forests. If a school is to be built, it should be situated in a quite spot far from the crowded city having the natural advantages of open sky, fields, trees and the like. It should be a retreat where teachers and students would live together dedicated
to learning. Teaching should be in the form of discussion between teacher and student.

Comparing teacher with Shiva to destroy the ills of pupils, Tagore in ‘Letters to a Friend’ (2002) envisages, “True education is the power of miracle, the ideal of creation. Punishment and discipline imposed from outside are negative. The teacher is Shiva, having divine power of destroying the destructiveness; of sucking out the poison.” Tagore envisages in this regard that being the real maker of life of his pupils, the teacher should always be busy with motivating the creative capacities of children so that they remain busy with constructive activities and experiences. Tagore firmly stresses on self as well as natural discipline and teachers as well as students should share a common life in an inspiring atmosphere of creative ability.

Devoting his whole mind and spirit to the service of his students, Tagore expresses his views in ‘Towards Universal Man’ (1961) that a teacher should do his earnest attempts to teach the students at his best capacities. He should not become a tradesman having no affection, regard and devotion for his students. Teachers who are able to rise above financial consideration by virtue of their inner worth should be elevated to the position of the Guru. He can put life into his pupils with his own life and make them happy with his affection.

Attaching great importance of co-operation among students and teachers, Tagore in ‘Creative Unity’ (1922) strongly suggests, “Institutions should be a perpetual creation by the co-operative enthusiasm of teachers and students, growing with the growth of their soul; a world in itself, self-sustaining, independent, rich with ever renewing life, radiating life across space and time, attracting and maintaining round it a planetary system of dependent bodies. Its aim
should lie in imparting life breath to the complete man, who is intellectual as well as economic, bound by social bonds, but aspiring towards spiritual freedom and final perfection.” Tagore favours that teachers should make efforts for social as well as spiritual development of students.

Going further in the previous work, Tagore emphasizes, “A teacher can never truly teach unless he is still learning himself. A lamp can never light another lamp unless it continues to burn its own flame. The teacher, who has come to an end of his subject, who has no living traffic with his knowledge, but merely repeats his lessons to his students, can only load their minds; he cannot quicken them.” Tagore, in this thought desires teachers to be ever learners. He also remarks that teachers and students should live their complete life together, dominated by a common aspiration for truth and a need of sharing all the delights of culture. Teacher’s role is significant because through his guidance, the talents and capacities of students are developed.

Advocating that relationship between teacher and pupils should be friendly in nature; Tagore gives high place to teacher for educating the child. Tagore believes that only man can teach another man i.e. teacher and pupil and regards the relationship between two as most important medium for human development. Cenkner expresses Tagore’s views in ‘The Hindu Personality in Education’ (1976) by saying that real teaching is a gift, sacrifice, not a manufactured article of routine work as it is a living thing, it is the fulfillment of knowledge for the teacher himself. Tagore according to him points out that education is bosom of nature, through the mother tongue, under the fatherly care and in the friendly association of the teachers. Tagore also stresses that the gulf which ordinarily exists between teachers and pupils should be bridged by true spirit of friendship and brotherliness.

Tagore in ‘The Religion of Man’ (1931) while describing true position of a teacher among students states that a teacher is the infinite ideal of man towards whom the students move in their collective growth. They find their ideal of father, friend and beloved among teachers.

Going further in the same source, Tagore has a clear knowledge about the educational implications of adolescents and in his schools, he adopts necessary principles and special measures to keep off the problems arising out of the emotional maladjustment of the adolescents. In the transition period, the students become very much sensitive and tender dealings make them happy. In such period,
the pupils sometimes become tumultuous but where the teacher-taught relationship is natural and sweet, these disturbances are swept away like refuges in flood water.

Highlighting the idea of partnership between teacher and taught, Tagore, stands stated that education is a joint venture of both the teacher and the pupil. He adds to his statement believing that the pupils share the experiences of life with his teacher but it is the teacher who selects the desirable experiences to expose before the pupils and to guard them against the undesirable ones.

Tagore considers teachers to be of paramount importance in any scheme of education. He desires teachers to help young children to grow on their own as a gardener helps the young plants to grow. Tagore wants his students to acquire a scientific temper, to stimulate constructive doubt, the love of mental adventure, the courage and longing to conquer the world by enterprise and boldness in thought and in action.

Following principles of professional ethics of teacher emerged from Tagore’s educational philosophy:

1. Teachers should be dedicated to their profession.
2. Teachers should be embodiment of moral, mental and spiritual values.
3. Teachers should always remain learners.
4. Teachers should have feeling of brotherhood and fatherhood.
5. Teachers should make all possible efforts for the creation of an environment in which their pupils have no difficulty in receiving education.

6. Teachers should make special efforts to make students creative learners.

7. Teachers should make efforts to inculcate a scientific temper in students.

(2) **Relationship between teacher and teacher**: Tagore, a great humanist believes in love for humanity. In educational institutions, he wants to create the atmosphere of mutual brotherhood and love for mankind resulting in establishing good relationships. Emphasizing the harmony to be established in all human relationships, Tagore in ‘Towards Universal Man’ (1961) expresses his views by stating that in educational institutions, faculties have to be nourished in order to make their imagination fit for world which belongs to art and to promote and strengthen the human relationships among teachers.

Chakrabarti in his work ‘Rabindranath Tagore – A Miscellany’ (2006) expresses Tagore’s views that Tagore strongly advocates the development of creative spirit of individuals in a natural and cordial atmosphere. Such atmosphere among teachers proves to be beneficial for effective functioning of educational institutions.

Following ideals emerged from Tagore’s educational thoughts regarding teacher- teacher relationship:

1. Teachers should have cordial relationship with each other.
2. Teachers should work with mutual respect.
3. Teachers should go by love and affection in establishing human relationships.
4. Teachers should work with proper team spirit.
5. Teachers should set example of their work and conduct for others.

(3) **Relationship between teacher and community**: Tagore advocates that teachers play a vital role in the development of society by bringing desirable social changes by providing proper education. Tagore in ‘Towards Universal Man’ (1961) perceives the relationship of teacher and community believing that education being the most important factor is an atmosphere of creative activity in which the work of intellectual exploration may find full scope. Our education should be in constant
touch with complete life, i.e. economic, intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual aspects. He is also of the opinion that schools should be at the very heart of society, connected by the living bonds of varied co-operation. True education includes training and knowledge having an organic connection with our surroundings.

Highlighting the importance of generating spirit of human relationship, Tagore believes that the pupils should be trained by the teachers in such a manner that they might be able to understand the other people of community so as to respect them and not to hurt the feelings of others. The teacher should have feeling to maintain good relationship with all members of the community.

Stressing upon the desire for mutual co-operation and social reconstruction, Tagore appeals for healthy and sound relationship between teacher and community. He in ‘Creative Unity’ (1922) states, “Indian culture should not only be the centre of the intellectual life of India, but the centre of her economic life also. Teachers must cooperate with the villages around to cultivate land, breed cattle, spin clothes, and press oil from oil seeds. It must produce all the necessaries, devising the best means, using the best materials and calling science to its aid. Its very existence should depend upon the success of its industrial activities carried out on the cooperative principle, which will unite teachers and students and villagers of the neighbourhood in a living and active bond of necessity. This will give a practical industrial training, whose motive force is not the greed or profit.” Tagore’s above said idea therefore proves beneficial for the social upliftment and social-reconstruction purposes. This may inculcate cooperation among teachers, students and community at large.

Motivating the teachers and students towards community welfare activities, Tagore in ‘Letters from Russia’ (1960) addresses, “Teachers and students both must give full expression of the sense of responsibility of people’s welfare and of self-government that they claim for the whole country. Here, the management must be combined with self-government of the students and the teachers. When all activities reach perfection within this organization, solutions of country’s problems will be found out. The teachers and the students should go to the villagers to teach them and explain to them how to keep clean and do things intelligently. Often, they may live among them, produce plays and tell them about the country’s condition.” Here, Tagore strongly recommends that Indian community at large may benefit when the problems of about all the villages are solved out intelligently with the help of
Going further in the same work, Tagore in ‘Letters from Russia’ (1960) advocates that the teachers should share the common life with the community life. In the sports and festivals, the teachers and students should fully cooperate with community. It should be like a nest in which students themselves cooperate in building with their own life, with their love, with their daily work and their play. He envisages that activities of the school can be so planned and organized by the teachers so that the community may get benefit through their welfare schemes.

Tagore believes that social change is difficult to achieve without proper and rational education of the masses. Dhiman expresses Tagore’s views in ‘Foundations of Education’ (1987) that a teacher should plan and organize the activities of the school with the help of community resources so that they may closely be connected with the emancipation of the community’s ills and disorders. Teacher’s role in relation to society assumes significance as he provides opportunities to pupils to draw inspiration from their own folk, literature, traditions and their own vernacular. Tagore struggles to implement his social ideals and strive to build up a social structure through education. He tries to revive the ancient Indian ideals of education and combine what is the best in western arts and sciences.

Going further in the previous source, Tagore asserts that the society is not giving the necessary education to the young ones for meeting the individual and social needs. The schools and colleges get detached from the society and there is no relation at all between the schools and the community. He strongly advocates to break this isolation and tries to give a social direction to education which is the need of hour. Tagore in this connection opines, “The value and dignity of the country outside the schools and the colleges must not be forgotten. A natural bond between education in the schools and colleges and the country outside them is immensely necessary.”

At Shantiniketan, under the environment of the ashram; the pupils find the best opportunity for their physical, intellectual and spiritual development. Being members of their school community, they learn their lesson of citizenship in a large society and the activities of the school are planned and organized by the teachers to closely connect pupils with society by having opportunities of drawing inspiration directly from their own folk literature, traditions and also receiving instructions through the medium of their own
vernacular.

Teacher-community relationship should be characterised by the following ideals:

1. Teachers should create good human relationships in society.
2. Teachers should have knowledge of economic and social problems of society.
3. Teachers should co-operate community to solve various problems.
4. Teachers should be dedicated to the welfare of society.
5. Teachers should work for community sanitation.
6. Teachers should respect ancient Indian culture.
7. Teachers should provide adult education to society.