

ISSN 2519-6030



উত্তরা ইউনিভার্সিটি

লেখনী

ভাষা, সাহিত্য ও সংস্কৃতি বিষয়ক জার্নাল
Lekhani : A Journal of Language, Literature and Culture

প্রথম সংখ্যা, মাঘ ১৪২৩
Volume 1, January 2017

Uttara University

Dulali Rani Saha*

Santiniketan Versus Conventional and Didactic Schooling

Abstract - *There is a paramount importance of school education on the lives of individuals. Schooling transforms the personal qualities of individuals. Research shows that only high quality delivery can develop a child into a complete and whole human being. The transition into the school age years co-inside with a shift from an ego- centric way of thinking. Majority of Children get their education from traditional schools in any country. Conventional school system is not very different from the modern school system. In didactic method of teaching, the teacher gives instructions to the students and the students are mostly passive listeners. It is a teacher-centered and content oriented method of teaching. Sometimes, didactic instruction for young children may harm their intellectual, social, and emotional developments. One of the problems of modern school system is that they withdraw children from society and inculcate them with values and knowledge that make it difficult for them to return to their society. Due to over-industrialization of education, Rabindranath Tagore founded a school at Santiniketan of India. He clearly felt that what is needed is not any particular material object, not wealth or comfort or power, but awakening to full consciousness in soul freedom and the freedom of the life in God. Tagore created a form of authentic education that he believed to be true to the need of children growing up in rural India than conventional or didactic schooling.*

Keywords : Rabindranath Tagore, Education, Schooling, Shantiniketan.

*Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Uttara University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Introduction

Education is the culmination of facts, experiences, and thoughts. Schooling is a formal process generally associated with the institution of education. Education and schooling go hand in hand. Many people view these terms of education and schooling as same but there is a difference between these two. French philosopher Foucault states that the power elite in the classical age discovered the body as both "an object and target of power" and therefore sought to use state institutions, one of them being schools, to produce "docile bodies" that could be "subjected, used, transformed, and improved" (p. 136). In *Discipline and Punish* (1979), Foucault drew analogies between the creation of the prison and the social organization of the school system in the 18th century (Source: Justin Saldana 2013). Sometimes schooling can stand as a barrier to children's teaching, growing in wisdom and understanding, becoming educated in knowledge and virtue. Despite the long history of didactic triad— teaching, learning and content—there is a need for further analytical framework that shall integrate the three elements in the triangle and explore the relationship among them. This takes a brief look on traditional schooling at that time and which greatly influenced the idea of the unique school of Santiniketan.

Conventional Schooling

Conventional and didactic teachings are used to teach required theoretical knowledge. The teacher is the source of knowledge and the Knowledge is transmitted to the student through this method. It is content oriented and the students are mostly passive listeners. It does not satisfy the needs and interests of all students. It is a monologue process and experience of the students does not have a significant role in learning. In conventional schooling system child's life is subjected to the education factory, lifeless, colorless and dissociated from the context of the universe. It is devastatingly accurate assessment of what is going on. For industrialization to work, it needs uniformity. This is essential in industrialization so the bolts fit in with the next stage in the process. Any bolt outside that range is a

'defect' and be discarded or reworked to make it fit. So too in education, when some minimum test score is set as an acceptable level of progress. Any student falling below that level is considered a defect and a failure of the schooling process.

Tagore wrote a biting satire on conventional schooling called *The Parrot's Tale*. This showed how a parrot was to be 'educated'. It was locked in a cage, denied food and water and had theories written on paper rammed down its throat. He wrote: "But for us to maintain the self-respect which we owe to ourselves and to our creator, we must make the purpose of education nothing short of the highest purpose of man, the fullest growth and freedom of soul."

History of School Education

More complex civilization rose in the river valleys of Egypt and Babylonia. It was difficult to transmit knowledge directly from "person to person and from generation to generation". The school appeared as a place where reading, writing and learning can take place. Memorization was the method of learning and it was motivated by a fear of severe punishment. In Ancient Greece, city-states greatly varied in nature and it was true for the education as well. In Sparta, soldier-citizen was the focus of education. But the basic focus of education in Athens, was to produce citizens trained in the arts of both peace and war.

Ancient Roman education put emphasis on the effective speaker as good citizen. The Roman Republic became an empire, in 31 BC. Then the emperor was more powerful than the orator, thus the school lost their practical value. In the early Middle Ages, the elaborate Roman school systems disappeared. In Western Europe, the Clergy operated Cathedral, monastic, and Palace schools. The Renaissance, which began in the 14th century in Italy and spread to Northern Europe in the 15th and 16th century, revolted against the Middle Ages schooling system. Renaissance wanted intellectual, spiritual, and physical powers to enrich life as was done in Greece.

According to *The History of Education*-Edited by: Robert Guisepi : In the 17th century philosophers, too, were beginning to develop theories of learning that reflected the new scientific reliance on firsthand observation. John (Johann) Amos Comenius (1592-1670), his own observations of children led him to the conclusion that they were not miniature adults. He characterized the schools, which treated them as if they were, as "the slaughterhouses of minds" and "places where minds are fed on words." Rousseau developed the idea of student-centered learning. He believed that the child is innately good but that all social institutions, including schools, are evil, distorting the child into their own image. Rousseau's observations and their educational ramifications were a complete reversal of the educational theories and practices of the 1700s. ... Rousseau, however, believed that the child differs from the adult in the quality of his mind, which successively unfolds in different stages of growth. "We are always looking for the man in the child," he said, "without thinking what he is before he becomes a man."

19th Century Europe and United States, the German educator Froebel (1782-1852) wanted his school to be a garden where children unfolded as naturally as flowers. Like Pestalozzi, he felt that natural development took place through self-activity, activity springing from and sustained by the interests of the child himself. The kindergarten provided the free environment in which such self-activity could take place....For Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841),...education must be based on psychological knowledge of the child so that he could be instructed effectively (Source: *The History of Education*- Edited By: Robert Guisepi).

There is a touch of mysticism in Tagore's philosophy of education. But his mysticism is healthier than that of Froebel's who limited it only to childhood. Tagore brought their mysticism to the level of realities of life and included in it all the stages of education. It is in this respect he was ahead of Pestalozzi experience, that is, elementary and pre-elementary stages of educative experience. Tagore was a naturalist but his naturalism was not a narrow one.

It was a sort of means to spiritualism which he wanted to develop among the boys (Source: Dreamsea Das 2014). He felt that man and nature have an original integration and hence he based his philosophy of life and education on this concept (Source: Sreeparna Bhat-tacharjee 2014).

Practical Aspects of Tagore's Theory

Tagore did not write a central educational treatise, and his ideas gleaned through his various writings and educational experiments at Santiniketan....the roots of his intellectual creativism and emotional make-up lie in the Upanishads...the religious atmosphere of the Brahmo Samaj (Source: Dreamsea Das 2014).

Tagore's educational theory was put into practice in his school at Santiniketan. Santiniketan founded by Rabindranath Tagore in 1901 and located about a hundred and fifty eight kilometers northwest of Kolkata in Bengal's rural hinterland, which represents the distillation of Rabindranath Tagore's life, philosophy and greatest works through his lifetime and the continuing legacy of his unique model of education and internationalism through a living institution and architectural ensemble. He said, "The character of good education is that it does not overpower man; it emancipates him" (Tagore, 1351 B.S., p.62 as quoted in Radha Vinod Jalan Dissertation)

Tagore tried to present a wider choice of subject matter and activities to his students and by doing so he intended to present an integrated education — education as an expression of intellectual abilities, aesthetic abilities and most of all an education which was related to life also...Schedule at Santiniketan was drastically different than what Tagore had experienced in his childhood and that was one of the reasons he tried to create an atmosphere in his school, here freedom flourished, creativity got a special recognition and students as well as teachers together participated in the process of learning (Source: Radha Vinod Jalan, Dissertation).

Hirendrenath Datta describes his philosophy as Concrete Monism. It is monism because reality is conceived as one, and it is concrete because the one reality is not an abstract principle negating completely the reality of the many, but is a concrete whole, comprehending the many within its bosom....He tried to give India an educational system which can meet the spiritual and natural needs of human beings....This idea of Rabindranath gave birth to "Santiniketan" (abode of peace) an Ashrama style educational institution in which he provided education based on the principle of freedom, natural trust, co-operation and joy (Source: Dutta, Hirendranath 1941).

Rabindranath's educational philosophy was not a system in the prevalent sense of the term system. A system formulated by modern day pedagogies with rules and regulations and ready-made method in which teachers are taught how to teach particular subjects and prepare lessons and text books within set paradigms. According to Anderson, "The greatest opportunity for learning in the Open System... is found in infancy and the pre-school years when there are few environmental demands, no curriculum and little systematic teaching. It is at this period of no curriculum and little pressure that the greatest and most rapid learning takes place and that creativity is most universally manifest. The Open System permits originality, experimentation, initiative and invention; it constitutes the propitious environment for creativity" (Anderson, 1961 as quoted in Radha Vinod Jalan, Dissertation). While criticizing the revealing curriculum in the schools of India, Tagore mentioned its unrealistic nature, non-congruency, too many books and very little or no creativity, no imagination. In his school, he tried to get rid of these problems.

Tagore really had no fixed curriculum in mind. His emphasis on ideals of life and his aim — his institution's aim — to achieve them made the curriculum of the school a unique curriculum. He believed in the flexible and dynamic character of curriculum and relied on the ideals that inspired its adoption. Hirendranath Datta wrote, "It was to be borne in mind that there was nothing extra-curricular in Gurudeva's scheme of education. He had no curriculum of studies as such. He had, instead, a curriculum of life. The emphasis all the time was on learning to live rather than on living to learn" (Datta, 1957, p. 38).

Tagore's Perspective of Education and Schooling

Tagore never wrote down his complete philosophy of education. He provided glimpses. "My School" (1916) is the first and perhaps the most comprehensive writing by Tagore on his school at Santiniketan. In a lecture he gave in America called 'My School' he said – “The young mind should be saturated with the idea that it has been born in a human world which is in harmony with the world around it. And this is what our regular type of school ignores with an air of superior wisdom, severe and disdainful. It forcibly snatches away children from a world full of the mystery of God's own handiwork, full of the suggestiveness of personality. It is a mere method of discipline which refuses to take into account the individual” (Source: Internet).

He also mentioned in his lecture, “It is a manufactory specially designed for grinding out uniform results. It follows an imaginary straight line of the average in digging its channel of education....So my mind had to accept the tight-fitting encasement of the school which, being like the shoes of a mandarin woman, pinched and bruised my nature on all sides and at every movement....The cause of it is this, that man's intention is going against God's intention as to how children should grow into knowledge....The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence. But we find that this education of sympathy is not only systematically ignored in schools, but it is severely repressed” (Source: Internet).

Tagore had different views of education. 'Siksar Herpher' is Tagore's very first writing which enunciates explicitly some of his fundamental educational thoughts... eloquently pleads for a system of education conducted in congenial surroundings and in a manner surcharged with the spirit of joy. It argues that the ultimate aim of education should be the all-round development of an individual for harmonious adjustment to reality... 'Siksar Herpher' was considered the first really comprehensive and competent criticism of the educational system of the country at that time (Source: Ravi Singh and Sohan Singh Rawat 2013).

In the article 'Purvaprasner-Anubritti', he argued, "it is necessary to remember that if we place education in the hands of the government, they will attempt through that education to fulfill their own interests and not ours. They will so arrange that a farmer may remain only a farmer in his village; they will not bother to make him a true citizen of India. We can impart education according to our desire only if we take education in our hands. It is absurd both to beg and to order" (Rabindra Rachanavali, V.XII, p. 516 as quoted in Ravi Singh and Sohan Singh Rawat 2013).

First important writing in this direction is "Tapovan"(Jan,1910)—Forest. In this article for the first time, Tagore introduced a new idea of the education of feeling (Bodher sadhana) and he distinguished it from the education of the senses and the education of the intellect. This education of feeling consists of the realization of man's bond of union with the universe through the spirit, through the soul, through the deeper intuition of feeling (Source: Ravi Singh and Sohan Singh Rawat 2013).

The book *Russia-r-Chithi* (May, 1931) —Letters from Russia, possesses considerable value as a forceful exposition of some of the most fundamental aspects of Tagore's socio-political philosophy and the objects that impressed Tagore from educational points of view....He criticized their uniform pattern of educational product, sacrificing individual needs and interests for the collectives (Source: Ravi Singh and Sohan Singh Rawat 2013).

Conclusion

School gives heterogeneous society commonness and this was the purpose of the school from the beginning. The school is connected to the society. There are evidences that examination results tend to be better where non-didactic teaching methods are used. The rationale for avoiding didacticism appears entirely reasonable. Tagore's views on every aspect of personal and the social life have profound impact even after century. His success lies in the fact that he did not try to control directly the ideas, feelings and values of the children but imaginatively designed an environment and a program of activities

and experiences that invites the desired response. There must be an adequate provision to selfless activities, co-operation, love, fellow feeling, and sharing among the students in educational institutions. Perhaps, time has come to re-think for further improvement as the world-wide unrest damages the changes.

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