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Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy of education and its influence on Indian education

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A B S T R A C T

Rabindranath Tagore believed that the aim of education is self-realization. He himself was a poet and a saint, who had, through his imagination and insight, realized the universal soul in himself and in nature. He believed that this realization was the goal of education. Because the universal soul is the root of our own soul, man's aim in life is to reach that universal soul of which all human beings are parts. The evolution of nature is consciously or unconsciously driving us towards this universal soul, a process that can be assisted by education. Even if it is not assisted, the progress towards the universal soul will continue, but then individuals will be deprived of self-realization. It is thus evident that Rabindranadh educational philosophy is an adjunct of his general philosophy of life. He believed that every human being is one who has potentialities of progressing towards the Super human being, the universal soul. His conception of the universal soul bore clear imprint of the Gita and Upanishadic philosophies.

Introduction

Principles of Self-Education

Self-education is based on self-realization and the process of self-realization is as permanent as that of education. What is most important in this is that the students must have faith in himself and in the universal self-underlying his own individual soul. All those actions, which provide a natural sense of satisfaction and

contentment, will promote the educative process. This contentment is the reaction of the soul, and hence not the same as mere satisfaction and pleasure. In following Rabindranadh concept of self-education, the students had to follow the following three principles.

Independence

Rabindranath believed in complete freedom of every kind for the students, the freedom of intellect, decision, heart knowledge, action and worship. But in order to attain this freedom, the educator had to practice equanimity, harmony and balance. Rabindranath interprets independence as normalcy or the fact of being natural. In other works, when intelligence, feeling and determination are naturally distributed, it can be said to be a state of freedom. This independence is not to be confused with the absence of control, because it is self-control, it implies acting according to one's own rational impulse. Once this level of freedom has been achieved, there is no danger of the individual straying from his path, because his senses, intelligence, emotional feelings and all other powers are directed by his ego.

Perfection

The second active principle underlying self-education is that of perfection. Perfection here implies that the students must try to develop every aspect of his personality and all the abilities and power with which he has been endowed by nature. Hence, the aim of education is not merely passing examinations, acquiring degrees and certificates of merit and ultimately achieving economic self-sufficiency through pursuing some profession. The sole aim of education is development of the child's personality, which is possible only when every aspect of the personality is given equal importance, when no part of the personality is neglected and no part is stressed undesirably.

Universality

Development of the individual remains imperfect and incomplete until he acquires

as abiding faith in the universal soul, a part of which exists inside himself. And for this, it is necessary to identify one's own soul with the universal soul. Thus, education exists not in simple development but it inheres in literally a rebirth in which the individual rises above the limitations of his individual personality and loses this individuality in the inherits of the universal soul. One can search for this universal soul not only within oneself, but also in every element of nature and of one's environment. It is evident from the foregoing account that the aim of Rabindranath's pattern of education is independence, perfection and universality. In the process of education, the educator creates an environment in which the child's personality undergoes a free, perfect and unrestricted development.

Aims of Education

According to Rabindranath, the aim of education is self-realization. According to him, this realization by every one is the goal of education. Self-realization, according to Rabindranath, means the realization of the universal soul in one's self. Man's aim of life is to achieve this status. It is a process, which cannot be realized without education.

Integral Development

Defining the aim of education, Rabindranath says, "The fundamental purpose of education is not merely to enrich ourselves through the fullness of knowledge, but also to establish the bond of love and friendship between man and man." This is the humanistic aim of education in Tagore's philosophy. His approach to ultimate reality as integral. He believes in an inner harmony between man and Nature and God.

Physical Development

Like Vivekananda, Rabindranath condemned the prevalent system of education, which partially exercised the intellect only to the entire neglect of the body. According to Rabindranath, "Education of the body in the real sense, does not exist in play and exercise but in applying the body systematically to some useful work." It is hence that he so much emphasizes games in school education. Pointing out the value of physical activities in the child's education, he says, "Even if they learn nothing, they would have had ponds, plucking and tearing flowers, perpetrating thousand and one mischief's on Mother Nature, they would have obtained the nourishment of the body, happiness of mind and the satisfaction of the natural impulses of childhood." Almost all contemporary Indian philosophers of education, including Gandhi, Vivekananda, Dayananda and Sri Aurobindo, besides Tagore lay emphasis upon the importance of setting educational institutions in natural environment so that the students may learn by their touch with Nature.

Mental Development:

Besides the physical aim of education, Tagore equally lays emphasis upon the mental aim of education. Like Vivekananda, he is critical of the prevalent system of education, which laid sole emphasis upon bookish learning. To quote Rabindranath, "We know the people of books, not those of the world, the former are interesting to us, but the latter tiresome." In fact, the intellectual aim of education, according to Rabindranath, is the development of the intellectual faculties which should be developed through education these are – the power of thinking and the power of imagination. Education,

which puts too much stress on memory and too little on imagination and thinking.

Harmony with Environment

In the end, the aim of education according to Rabindranath, is the harmony of the students with the environment. The student should know his environment and create harmony with it. To quote Rabindranath, "True education consists in knowing the use of any useful material that has been collected to know its real nature and to build along with life a real shelter for life." This is particularly true about the rural education Education should imbibe his cultural heritage and should be able to use it in his interaction with the environment.

Earning Livelihood

Thus, about the aim of education, Tagore's approach is realistic. He however, does not favour the utilitarian aim of education. This is his utilitarian aim of education. This is his objection against the imposition of British system of education upon India. He says, "Knowledge has two departments: one pure knowledge, the other utilitarian knowledge. Whatever is worth knowing is knowledge. But Rabindranath does not ignore the earning of livelihood aim of education. He appreciates the practical bias in Western system of education. Therefore, he says, "From the very beginning, such education should be imparted to them (village folks) that they may become practically efficient in all respects for earning their livelihood." While he is critical of the British system of education which wanted to create clerks out the Indian educated people, he emphasizes that the real aim of education is to develop men and women who may be able to fulfill the needs of the country.

Multisided Aim

The above discussion concerning the means of education according to Rabindranath makes it clear that his is a multisided attack on this problem. He is against any one-sided aim of education. He is a humanist. A humanistic aim of education requires a multisided approach.

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