"The fact that the world stirs our imagination in sympathy tells us that this creative imagination is a common truth both in us and in the heart of existence."

"THE POET'S RELIGION" IN CREATIVE UNITY

"The modern age has brought the geography of the earth near to us, but made it difficult for us to come into touch with man."

"EAST AND WEST" IN CREATIVE UNITY

1876

राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

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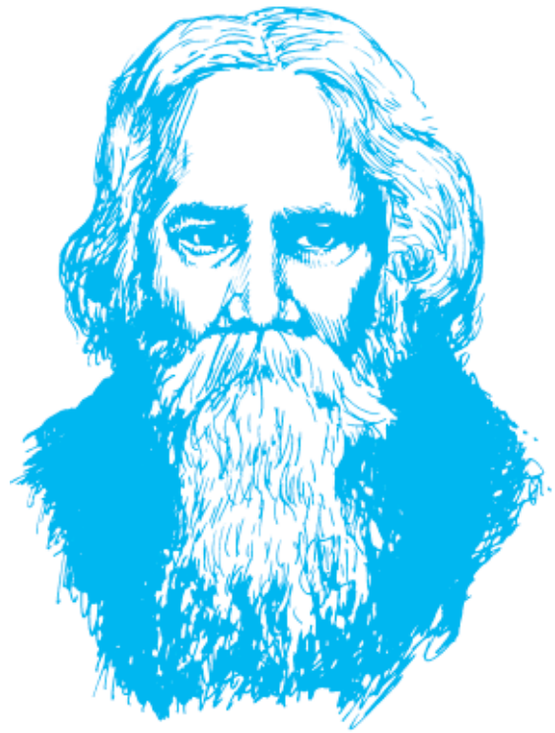
NCERT

Memorial Lecture Series

Rabindranath Tagore
Second Memorial Lecture
2009

BY Swapan Majumdar



1861-1941

"What India has been, the whole world is now. The whole world is becoming one country through scientific facility. And the moment is arriving when you must also find a basis of unity which is not political. If India can offer to the world her solution, it will be a contribution to humanity."

"Nationalism in India" in Nationalism

"Today we witness the perils which attend on the insolence of might; one day shall be borne out the full truth of what the sages have proclaimed: 'By unrighteousness man prospers, gains what appears desirable, conquers enemies, but perishes at the root'."

"Crisis in Civilisation" in Crisis in Civilisation and Other Essays

"In India, the history of humanity is seeking to elaborate a specific ideal, to give to general perfection a special form which shall be for the gain of all humanity; — nothing less than this is its end and aim."

"East and West in Greater India" in Greater India

"Science being mind's honesty in its relation to the physical universe never fails to bring us the best profit for our living. And mischief finds its entry through this backdoor of utility, and Satan has had his ample chance of making use of the divine fruit of knowledge for bringing shame upon humanity. Science as the best policy is tempting the primitive in man bringing out his evil passions through the respectable cover that it has supplied him. And this why it is all the more needed today that we should have faith in ideals that have matured in the spiritual field through ages of human endeavour after perfection, the golden crops that have developed in different forms and in different soils but whose food value for man's spirit has the same composition. These are not for the local markets but for the universal hospitality, for sharing life's treasure with each other and realising that human civilisation is a spiritual feast the invitation to which is open to all, it is never for the ravenous orgies of carriage where the food and the feeders are being torn to pieces."

"Ideals of Education" in Crisis in Civilisation and Other Essays

NCERT
MEMORIAL LECTURE SERIES

Rabindranath Tagore Second Memorial Lecture
Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneswar

AT
Regional Institute of Education, Bhopal

14 January 2009

SWAPAN MAJUMDAR

राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
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“With the unchecked growth of Nationalism the moral foundation of man's civilisation is unconsciously undergoing a change. The ideal of the social man is unselfishness, but the ideal of the Nation, like that of the professional man, is, selfishness. This is why selfishness in the individual is condemned while in the nation it is extolled, which leads to hopeless moral blindness, confusing the religion of the people with the religion of the nation."

"The Nation" in Creative Unity

Our Objectives

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) is an apex organisation, assisting and advising the Central and State Governments by undertaking research, survey, development, training and extension activities for all stages of school and teacher education.

One of the objectives of the Council is to act as a clearing house and disseminator of ideas relating to school and teacher education. We have initiated the current Memorial Lecture Series in order to fulfil this role and to commemorate the life and work of great educational thinkers. Our aim is to strive to raise the level of public awareness about the seminal contributions made in the field of education by eminent men and women of India. We expect that such awareness will set off a chain of discourse and discussion. This, we hope, will make education a lively subject of inquiry while simultaneously encouraging a sustained public engagement with this important domain of national life.

The memorial lecture series covers public lectures commemorating the life and work of nine eminent Indian educational thinkers and practitioners.

Title	Venue
Gijubhai Badheka Memorial Lecture	Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai
RabindranathTagore Memorial Lecture	Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneswar
Zakir Hussain Memorial Lecture	Regional Institute of Education, Mysore
Mahadevi Verma Memorial Lecture	Regional Institute of Education, Bhopal
B.M. Pugh Memorial Lecture	North East Regional Institute of Education, Shillong
Savitribai Phule Memorial Lecture	SNDT , Women's College, Mumbai

Marjorie Sykes Memorial Lecture	Regional Institute of Education, Ajmer
Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture	Presidency College, Kolkata
Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lecture	India International Centre (IIC), New Delhi

We invite men and women of eminence from academia and public life to deliver these lectures in English or any other Indian language. Our intention is to reach to large audiences consisting in particular of teachers, students, parents, writers, artists, NGOs, government servants and members of local communities.

The Annexrure 'A' (Memorial Lectures Series 2007-08) provides a summary of the nine lectures being organised under this Series of Lectures during the year 2007-2008.

In due course the lectures will be made available on Compact Discs (CDs) and in the form of printed booklets in languages other than English or Hindi in which it is originally delivered for wider dissemination.

Each booklet consists of two sections : Section one highlights the purpose of the memorial lectures and providing a brief sketch of the life and work of the concerned educational thinker and Section two gives the lectures in full, along with a brief background of the speaker.

Section 1 in this booklet has been contributed by Dr Pratyusa K. Mandal, Reader in History, Department of Social Sciences and Humanities at the NCERT. In this the writer Dr. Mandal illustrates the life and works of Rabindranath Tagore in context of his time and draws upon his seminal ideas on education which were intricately intertwined with his own experiences as a child and later as a public figure of eminence. Much has been said and written comparing Rabindranath's educational ideas with that of other makers of modern India. Avoiding any such comparison as odius and unnecessary, Dr. Mandal has instead focused on bringing out the unique features of

Rabindranath's ideas that is quite in fitting with the avowed objectives of this memorial lecture.

Professor Swapan Majumdar is delivering the second Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Lecture on 14 January 2009 at the Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneswar. The theme of his lecture is "Education as Empowerment: Twins in search of an Alternative Education.

In his lecture Professor Swapan Majumdar discusses how Rabindranath Tagore was an ardent activist for the cause of education. He discusses how he was throughout involved in experimenting and improving the existing system and pedagogical practices, thereby impacting postively on the quality of education. In the words of the speaker "for Tagore education did not consist of achievement alone. His ideal was to help create a complete man by making open choices and opportunites before the students and thereby letting them develop their latent talents." The second half of his talk dwells on the theme of empowerment as approached by two great minds of our times – Tagore and Gandhi, their search of the innermost truth and the amity of their visions.

We hope these lecture series will be of use to our audience as well as the public in and outside the country in general.

ANUPAM AHUJA
Convenor

Section 1
On Rabindranath Tagore
The Man and His Mind

Pratyusa K. Mandal

Rabindranath Tagore is one of those few iconic personalities whom the people of India hold very close to their heart. A literary genius and a humanist, he did not leave any facet of life untouched until it bloomed into an unforgettable creation of supreme beauty and charm. A people's bard, his heart never stopped wrenching at the sight of human misery. For this he would compose and stage drama and stretch out a helping hand to bring succour to the needy. A thorough nationalist, he would not brook any narrow sentimentalism coming in the way of universal human values. An uncompromising lover of freedom, he would be resolute in raising his voice even against trifle attempts at its stifling. He was the muse who could transfix the garrulous currents of river Padma in a notebook sitting on its bank. He remains as yet a gem of a man to be surpassed in whatever he did. Not surprisingly, the greatest tribute to him came from none else than the Mahatma in his own lifetime, who called him 'Gurudev'.

The Time Beacons

Born on 7 May 1861 to noble parents Rabi, as Rabindranath Tagore used to be affectionately called by members of his family and friends had exhibited astonishing signs of creative talents from his very childhood. Perhaps, the extraordinary circumstances of his birth were not least responsible for that initial germination and subsequent fruition of such creative potential.

Beginning with Raja Ram Mohan Roy's path breaking endeavours at socio-religious reforms from about 1828,

when he established the Brahmo Sabha and in an organised way set out on a course of relentless campaign to rid the country of pernicious social customs like Sati and awakening his fellow men and women "from their dreams of error" through rightful acquaintance with the virtues of their scriptures. Bengal at the centre of a strong renaissance wave that was sweeping across the country had already galloped a long way to take the fervour on to its next higher plane by the time Rabindranath arrived on the scene.

That Ram Mohan had left a lasting imprint in the mind of Rabindranath is borne out by his own estimation of that towering prophet of modernism, a veritable bridge between the East and the West. In his resounding words, "Ram Mohan was the only person in his time, in the whole world of man, to realise completely the significance of the Modern Age. He knew that the ideal of human civilisation does not lie in the isolation of independence, but in the brotherhood of interdependence of individuals as well as nations in all spheres of thought and activity". This singular thought of essential "human unity" never took leave of Rabindranath's consciousness until he breathed his last in 7 August 1941. In the domain of educational thinking, likewise, he held on to the essence of Ram Mohan's earnest arguments for "a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction."

But unlike Ram Mohan, who had no precursor to look up to, Rabindranath in many ways represented the zenith of the nineteenth century renaissance spirit. Whereas in case of the former life began in Bengal and ended in Bristol, the latter journeyed throughout the world several times over and yet passed into eternity in the soils of his birth, in the present day city of Kolkata. At a philosophical level such truisms of life bear testimony to the missions of individual births.

Sprouting of the Seed

Even as Rabindranath was about twelve years old, he accompanied his father, the illustrious *Maharshi*

Debendranath Tagore for a Himalayan sojourn at Dalhousie. It was the kind of magical place, where his natural contemplative mind would soak itself not only in the profundity of the Upanishadic philosophy and the highly aesthetic works of Kalidasa, but also in the wondrous world of phenomenal subjects like history, astronomy and modern science. Away from the "grind of the school mill", it was here that he forever understood concretely what true freedom holds for the efflorescence of the human personality. Despite being a stern disciplinarian that his father was, he would never stand in the way of any of his progeny's natural expression of being. Rabindranath would later reminisce: "Many a time have I said or done things repugnant alike to his taste and his judgement; with a word he could stop me; but he preferred to wait till the prompting to refrain came from within. A passive acceptance by us of the correct and the proper did not satisfy him; he wanted us to love truth with our whole hearts; he knew that mere acquiescence without love is empty. He also knew that truth, if strayed from, can be found again, but a forced or blind acceptance of it from the outside effectually bars the way in." And so, with a mountaineer's spike in hand, he would wander about "from peak to peak" bemused at the resonance he had with the spectacle of nature.

Back at home, he could still conjure up those exalting experiences when put to task by his Bengali tutor and rendered into lilting verse scene after scene from Macbeth in his mother tongue. Further, fatigued by the "dismal class hours" in school, he composed his first ever solo poem, *Abhilash* (Yearning) with the footnote in the family journal *Tattvabodhini Patrika* merely describing the author as a twelve year old boy. In any case, the composition heralded the coming to an end of his formal schooling two years later.

Freed from what he subsequently described as a "combination of hospital and gaol," that is the school, Rabindranath found ample time and opportunity to delve

deeper into the realm of creativity. There already was a certain nip in the air of Bengal and in the family home existed a perfect setting for his creative impulse to ascend to its full glory. When he was all of fourteen, he recited his first patriotic poem in the Hindu Mela, then organised annually in Calcutta with liberal patronage from the Tagores. Being an event with political overtones, anything uttered from its platform was bound to make ripples in the public domain. So, his poem was published for the first time under his own name in the then widely subscribed Anglo-Bengali weekly, the *Anand Bazar Patrika.* It happened at a time, when the novels of Bankim Chandra Chatterji, then being serialised in the literary journal *Bangadarshan,* were already "taking the Bengali heart by storm."

This public attention was to further usher him on the path of creativity far more intensely than he could have previously thought of. And in his doing so his brother Jyotirindranath and sister-in-law Kadambari Devi did not play a less significant role. What was most encouraging for the budding poet was the "stimulating companionship," which the duo offered him, shorn of any big brotherly stance, in gay abundance.

This is a theme, which Rabindranath would come back to again and again in his reminiscences. "But for such snapping of my shackles, I might have become crippled for life. Those in authority are never tired of holding forth the possibility of the abuse of freedom as a reason for withholding it, but without that possibility freedom would not be really free. And the only way of learning how to use properly a thing is through its misuse." Thus Rabindranath's first long narrative poem *Banaphul* (The Wild Flower) came out during this time describing the tragic tale of a young girl Kamala, who sought refuse in death being denied the love by the conformist society that she so sincerely longed for.

The nationalist stirring of the period coupled with Jyotirindranath's romantic idea of regaining the country's

lost freedom through secret society parleys also roused him to dabble with satirical writing. The new Viceroy, Lord Lytton's pompous Durbar held in Delhi in 1877 coinciding with the tragic occurrence of a heart-rending famine in rural Bengal provided him with the perfect material for his first such satirical composition, which he read out to a large gathering of people again on the occasion of the Hindu Mela in that year.

His next spell of creative expressions came in the form of his first short story *Bhikarini* (The Beggar Maid), a historical drama in blank verse *Rudrachanda,* another long narrative poem *Kavi Kahini* and several other articles and translations all of which were published in the new literary monthly *Bharati* started by his brother Jyotirindranath. These effusive creations, in the words of his biographer Krishna Kripalini, spoke eloquently "not only of his genius but of that literary period in Bengal when the old forms and values were dead or dying and the new ones had yet to take shape with this new star." As a matter of fact, within the horizon of Bengal's literary world nothing at this stage captured better a mystical understanding of nature harmonised as it were by an amazing degree of scientific temperament than his *Kavi Kahini,* which only matched his quintessential love for beauty. Subsequently this triune would stand him always in good stead. But such was his love for the allegorical Vaishnava poetry of medieval Bengal that he could not resist the urge to pour out "his own vague yearnings in the same mould." Hence the work that was produced under the name *Bhanusimha Thakurer Padavali,* created such a genuine excitement among orientalist scholars of the time that the author's name in the poem semantically alluded to an imaginary fifteenth century poet, was taken to be true.

The Seed Takes Root

Despite the renaissance fervour of those days, it was inconceivable for any one, and least of all the family patriarch, to expect that a career could be made out of

literary pursuits and still fit into the family tapestry. Rabindranath's grandfather Dwarkanath Tagore was a man of fabulous resources, who "lived lavishly and entertained regally." His father Debendranath Tagore "was even more remarkable" being known popularly as the Maharshi. Of his 13 elder siblings the eldest, Dwijendranath was "a man of gigantic intellect;" the second one, Satyendranath was "the first Indian to break into the stronghold of the Indian Civil Service," from the third, Hemendranath he learned his first lesson which remained firmly etched in his mind; the fifth, Jyotirindranath "a genius of uncommon versatility" was the source of his inspiration, his sisters, both Saudamini and Sarala excelled in arts and letters. And, he was the fourteenth child. Naturally, the Maharshi was concerned about his future and therefore readily agreed to his elder son Satyendranath's suggestion that Rabindra should accompany him to England, where he could harness his "impetuous talents" to become either a civil servant like his brother or, if not that, at least a barrister.

It was on his way to England, at his brother's official residence at Ahmedabad that on the banks of river Sabarmati "the lonely boy read voraciously of English literature and through English of European literature." From this intellectual engagement a stream of critical essays and free translations from European authors ensued, which were all published in *Bharati*. Besides, works of celebrated European poets like Goethe and Dante also prompted him to ponder over the way people in the West looked upon life. Some of these witty observations found place in his writings of this time. On the issue of love, on which the medieval bhakti lore had always had a major influence on him, he observed: "They say, love is blind. Does that mean that to see more is to be blind? For love sharpens the eye and enlarges the understanding." Likewise, on a certain perception of beauty, he observed: "Our ancients said that modesty is woman's best ornament. But women put on so many ornaments that there is little room left for this one."

At a more technical level, these writings formed what can be supposedly stated as the first nucleus of his prose compositions invariably though these compositions remained always "overshadowed by his reputation as a poet." One more notable creation from this genius during this period came in the domain of music, which "lasted till the end of his life" and in due course came to be popularised as Rabindra Sangeet all over Bengal.

In September 1878, he finally sailed off to England with brother Satyendra, leaving far behind the roots of all his inspiration. Sea voyage for him was sickening. And, on arrival in London, sadly, what he found was a "dismal city", the like of which he had never seen before – "smoky, foggy and wet, and everyone jostling and in a hurry." This ominous observation coming from Tagore might have sent shock waves among many youth of his age aspiring to go to England in search of a better future. However, his *Yurop Pravasir Patra,* which he wrote from there for publication in *Bharati* captured a young Indian's candid observations on English life and manners of late nineteenth century and offer historically significant early specimens of literary prose in colloquial Bengali. Be that as it may, no sooner did he start appreciating the strength of English social life after staying there for a few months and particularly viewed from the perspective of a woman's role and status in it, he was called back home, mercifully for him to "the light of my country, the sky of my country." Thus that incessant lonely feeling of *pravas* came to an end.

The Blossom

Back at home in February 1880 Rabindranath poured himself out "in a cascade of songs" named *Sandhya Sangeet* (Evening Songs) and wrote his first musical plays *Kal Mrigaya* (The Fateful Hunt) and *Valmiki Pratibha* (The Genius of Valmiki) breaking down the longstanding barrier between the classical and folk idioms. Whereas the evening songs definitively bore "the unmistakable stamp of his genius," he did not shirk from even experimenting with a

few strands of western music in his two musical plays. As with every other experience of his life in this context too, he would later reminisce, "as the stream does not flow straight on but winds about as it lists, so did my verse … Freedom first breaks the law and then makes laws which brings it under true self-rule."

Public adulation followed this creative flow as before and so followed his desire to come out more emphatically into the public domain. In a public lecture on 'Music and Feeling' in Calcutta he successfully defended his thesis that "the function of music was to express what the words fail to express." That apart, Rabindranath's human concern also began touching those burning issues of the time that caused noticeable distress around the world. Thus in a scathing treatise he laid bare the monstrosity of Britain's opium trade in the then China. His first complete novel *Bou-Thakuranir Hat* (The Young Queen's Market) of this time too harboured a similar thought process.

A natural inheritor of prodigious spirituality both at home and outside, Rabindranath also had his first brush with a luminous experience of the self around this time. Later in life *The Religion of Man* became a natural outgrowth of this intense experience. Besides, with spiritual awakening there also flowed literary creations of a different kind. Those were at once replete with a certain sense of exultation and "a rediscovery of the wonder of this world and the joy of living." *Nirjharer Swapnabhanga* (The Fountain Awakes) and *Prabhat Sangeet* (Morning Songs) bore the surer imprint of that new mood. It was, as it were, the obsession with rational explanation of phenomena that was a characteristic fixation with his age, which no longer troubled his creative impulse. At any rate, the enterprise to search for meaning in nature had always appeared to him as meaningless. As he would later put it: "If someone smells a flower and says he does not understand, the reply to him is: there is nothing to understand, it is only a scent … That words have meaning is just the difficulty."

In the summer of 1883, at Karwar on the western seaboard, Rabindranath played out this contest between "spirit and life," between "truth and beauty," and "between reason and love" in his first ever poetic drama, *Prakritir Pratishodh* (Nature's Revenge). Thus, when he picturised in songs the myriad trysts of folk life in his *Chhabi O Gaan* (Pictures and Songs), glimpses of this metaphysical insight poured into his poetic narration. His outpourings in versatile prose also touched a vast array of issues ranging from the social to political and from the literary to philosophical.

Then there came *Balak,* another monthly magazine from the family stable, the pages of which were filled by his pen. This was a magazine for children. Not long before he had faced two most potent and yet opposing faces of life's truism – one was his marriage with Bhavatarini (renamed Mrinalini), and the other, his sister-in-law Kadambari's death under tragic circumstances. As he had earlier mused in his two most stirring poems, *Endless Life* and *Endless Death,* these two contrary events provided him with far deeper philosophical insight into the meanings of life and death – the process of embodiment and dissolution. Thereafter, as secretary of the Brahmo Samaj he wrote several essays dwelling on the theme 'Religion and Spirituality.' In those essays he could find the right space and context to objectively asses those myriad views and counter views, which surrounded the questions of whether western education augured well for the country or holding fast to the country's age-old heritage served it better. But in the end, as his biographer puts it: "His imaginative sympathy and understanding of human nature enabled him to appreciate the passionate partiality of both the outlooks and he himself entered the list only when he felt that justice and humanity were at stake." However, despite engagement with such disquisitory exercises, his sense of muse did not become torpid. Rather his poetic heart throbbed through many a sonnets and some translations of English and Japanese poems all of

which were published in a compilation named, *Kari O Kamal*.

His successive works came of his wider travels both within and beyond the shores of India and hence from a far larger canvas of human concern and civilisational enterprise. During this course he made his second visit to London in 1890 and in a letter to niece Indira wrote back: "Is man a mere machine made of metal that he should function in strict accordance with rules? So vast and varied is the mind of man, so many its hunger and so diverse its claims that it must now and again swerve and reel and toss. This indeed is what makes man human, the proof that he lives, the refutation that he is not a mere bundle of matter …One who has never known the turbulence of life, in whom the petals of the mysterious flower within have not opened, such a one may seem happy, may seem a saint, his single track mind may impress the multitude with its power — but he is ill-equipped for the life's true adventure into the infinite." Undoubtedly he was aghast at the way humanism was being trampled down by the so-called civilisation. And, thus "tired of the place" and even "tired of the beautiful faces" there, he decided to return.

Upon his return was published his famous collection of poems, *Manasi* (Of the Mind). If in one of these poems he captured the fateful capsizing of a boat going to Sri Jagannath at Puri and taking with it the lives of 800 pilgrims, in another he lashed out at the *"Banga Bir"*, the new-age heroes of Bengal who read all about the valiant acts of Cromwell and Mazzini but often chose at ease to rest at home with the deceptive thought that they "were as good as the best."

The Grass Beneath

Rabindranath's acquaintance with the grist and grind of people's life and the social and economic ills which had the country in its grip grew far more intimate as he was entrusted with the task of looking after the vast family estates in north Bengal and Orissa. His dissections of these

ills were later published under the title, *Chhinna Patra* and were translated into English as *Glimpses of Bengal*. Naturally, his writings from here on were to carry a much more rigorous "impress of maturity" notwithstanding tentalisingly creative outpourings like the beautiful drama *Chitrangada*, which he composed in 1891. This dominant mood was also exhibited upfront in his actions on the ground and pretty much dismissed the over-bearing public perception of him as only a romantic litterateur.

Being true to the people he loved so much, Rabindranath began experimenting with community development in right urnest. And then there was no looking back. He was acutely aware of the erratic nature of Indian seasons, and particularly, that of the monsoon. He was also aware of the unpredictable nature of Indian agriculture and arising out of it, the swings in the hopes and despair of the Indian peasant community. He was certainly not unaware of the basic exploitative nature of the colonial administration. He knew that for the drudgeries of life to be lifted, age-old dependence on nature couldn't be converted into another kind of deprecating dependence – that is to look up to the State for succour. So the fundamental premise on which he based his community development programme came to be "self-help and enlightenment."

While the first had to do with the economic reinvigoration of the life of an ordinary peasant, the second assumed far greater significance in his scheme of things. It occupied "his lifelong passionate interest," an interest that led him to "working out his educational experiments in Shantiniketan." In the words of his biographer, Kripalini: "He strove to build up, through social participation and service, a living communication between the students of his school, the budding intelligentsia who might become the active leaders of tomorrow, and the peasants rooted in the soil, the solid core of Indian economy and society. So long as the core remained unchanged India would remain static, whatever the seeming progress among the intelligentsia in a few big cities like Calcutta or Bombay."

Thus for half a century, from the day his father entrusted him the duty of looking after their family estates till he breathed his last, Rabindranath remained preoccupied with these twin tasks of uplifting rural life through the agency of Sri Niketan and bringing enlightenment to his people through the agency of creative education at Shantiniketan. Both these institutions were deservingly invested with not only what he received as Nobel Prize for his effervescent work *Gitanjali* in 1913, but also his unrestrained personal service and care as long as he lived.

It was not as if his passionate engagement with the life of Indian peasantry was all a mirage and there was nothing for the latter to offer him in return. On the contrary, in his engagement with them he found a form of literary expression that was as yet unavailable in the country. And it was the short story. As his biographer writes, "though the short story is now very popular with Indian writers, no one can be said to have equalled him in his art, much less surpassed him." In all fairness, from *The Post Master* to *The Kabuliwallah,* his stories portrayed so many oft-ignored though very fascinating characters from different planes of life that one wonders if these were real characters. Besides, in the dross of peasant life also Rabindranath found ample material to immortalise them in canvas.

However, for him the "joy of writing one poem far exceed(ed) that of writing sheaves and sheaves of prose." No wonder, the weight of experience in between brought a certain mystical sensibility to suffuse his poetry of this time. *Sonar Tari* (The Golden Boat), *Chaitali* (The Late Harvest) and *Nadi* (River) bear testimony to it.

These were also the days of surging nationalism. But every patriotic rumbling in India used to be mercilessly crushed by the ever-so-suspicious foreign regime. In 1898 a Bill against Sedition was brought in the Council to gag the rising chorus of nationalism. But forever a champion of personal freedom and political liberty, Rabindranath could not have reconciled to the idea of this Bill becoming

an Act. Therefore, with a deep sense of outrage, he called for its immediate withdrawal in a public lecture entitled, *Kantharodh* (The Throttle) at Calcutta. Besides, he also helped raising funds for the defence of Lokmanya Tilak in a case that accused him of sedition. Then his natural instinct for the humanitarian cause too led him to assist Sister Nivedita in organising relief for the plague affected people of Calcutta.

However, these were smaller renderings at the service of his motherland in comparison to what he did during this period of crisis in terms of his contribution to the cause of national resurgence through his *Kathas* (Ballads) and *Kahanis* (Tales). In the years to come this engagement with the cause of national freedom was only to grow, be it on the issue of the Partition of Bengal in 1905 or the tragic massacre of innocent men, women and children at Jalianwalabagh in 1919 or for that matter during the Non-cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movements of the 1920s and the 1930s. But what he essentially championed was not of a variety that can be confused with any self-serving or jingoistic sentiment, as he was a living witness to all those horrendous sins that had been perpetrated by nation states across the world in the name of self-love. His sense of India, to quote a few lines from a hymn he sang through his principal protagonist in *Gora,* was of a more inclusive, exulted kind.

It read:

> "Awake my mind, gently awake
> In this holy land of pilgrimage
> On the shore of this vast sea of humanity
> that is India.
> Here I stand with arms outstretched
> to hail man — divine in his own image —
> and sing to his glory in notes glad and free.
> No one knows whence and at whose call
> came pouring endless inundations of men
> rushing madly along — to lose themselves in
> the sea:

Aryans and non-Aryans, Dravidians and Chinese,
Scythians, Huns, Pathans and Moghuls —
all are mixed, merged and lost in one body.
Now the door has opened to the West
and gifts in hand they beacon and they come —
they will give and take, meet and bring together,
none shall be turned away
from the shore of this vast sea of humanity
that is India."

The Mind that Matters

As a child Rabindranath's natural curiosity to know the world in which he lived had suffered immeasurably at the hands of those who tried to educate him. In a household that was humming with all kinds of activities, it was but natural for the fourteenth child of a generously expanding joint family to be relegated to the sidelines of its attention. He had thus been left almost to the care of what he later termed as "servocracy." The one who was appointed to feed him would be happy if he ate less and the other in charge of keeping him engaged would in the first opportunity make good while leaving him alone in a room. It was not that he grudged the lack of family attention. For him it was indeed a blessing in disguise. He could then revel at the marvels of the nature's ways "through the venetian shutters of the window he would gaze below" and play with his own imaginations. The only problems he had to put up with were however the tyrannical elementary lessons, which the tutor at home was ever so eager to impart him. Going to school like other children from the family thus appeared to him as a possible option that could bring outings from home. But the first school, Oriental Seminary, where he went to as a toddler, left him with only bitter memories of physical disciplining and how not to study. All that he would remember of this early experience later was about "how much easier it is to acquire the manner than the matter".

The second school, which he went to, likewise turned out to be abysmally abnormal in its treatment of children, though ironically it was named Normal School. Whereas the first school excelled in various "ingenious methods of punishment", this one specialised in a routine that had little to cheer about. There was no respite even at home from megalomaniac tutors. They came one after another like scheming characters in a play as it were to change his world of consciousness. The only joyous experience through all these miseries was his initiation into the actual world of learning by his elder brother Hemendranath, who insisted on grooming the children's inherent potential through their mother tongue. The net result of it all was not only that he realised how fruitful this approach was as a child, but also that how worthwhile it was socially and culturally after he had advanced well into his life and had begun experimenting with children's education at Shantiniketan. As he wrote later in his remarkably candid style: "Learning should as far as possible follow the process of eating. When the taste begins from the first bite, the stomach is awakened to its function before it is loaded, so that its digestive juices get full play. Nothing like this happens, however, when the Bengali boy is taught in English ... While one is choking and spluttering over the spelling and grammar, the inside remains starved, and when at length the taste is felt, the appetite has vanished."

Then there came the most exciting experience of his childhood while accompanying his father to the high Himalayas, particularly those first few days, which they spent at Shantiniketan on their way. Left largely to his own, there grew in him the natural instinct to compose verses and join the Maharshi in reading "select pieces from Sanskrit, Bengali and English literatures" during the day and reciting hymns in the evening. Such was the keenness in adhering to this routine even at Dalhousie that upon his return he could sing extempore the whole of the Valmiki Ramayana in Sanskrit at the request of his mother at her "open-air gatherings on the roof-terrace in the evening."

The long term effect of it was such that despite the insistence of the elders at home to tie him down to the school regimen, he dropped out of it altogether. In the words of his biographer: "The tutors soon found to their cost that while it was easy to take the horse to the water's edge, it was not easy to make it drink."

Rabindranath's childhood experiences in the company of his father had a very soothing and lasting impact on his mind. It had welled up in him the visions of young disciples chanting Vedic hymns in the presence of inspired *rishis* in those ancient hermitages, which nestled quietly in the midst of nature. With five children and in the prime of his life now, he thus resolved to realise that vision in his father's retreat at Shantiniketan. In this attempt, to use his biographer's words again, he sought to "replace the soulless and mechanical system of education which the British rulers had imported from their Victorian slums by a new and creative one in which both teaching and learning would be pleasurable."

Very receptive to the creative impulses from his childhood, he was quite eager from the very beginning to encourage his pupils in the school to develop natural abilities in an ambience of tender felicity and learn by doing things themselves rather than relying on teachers, who in turn must not indulge in hurling lessons at them from high platforms "like hailstorms on flowers."

Rabindranath always knew nature to be the best teacher. Therefore, moving away from the contemporary practice of erecting walls both metaphorically as well as practically around children, he earnestly began the practice of holding classes in the open with trees to provide the shade and the distant horizon to provide the ingredients of learning for children. In an environment so surcharged with the raw elements of nature, education could take place both in arts and sciences naturally.

Education for Rabindranath had to be rooted in the soil where it germinates and hence a symbiotic relationship had to be nurtured between what is being learnt in the

school and what is there to be learnt from outside it. Ruing the fact that contemporary educational institutions in the country in their keenness to imitate the West had been encouraging a culture of "foolish display" of borrowed etiquettes and knowledge, he passionately emphasised on the utility of extension activities and community service. This for him formed the basis of all education — a creative continuum between life and learning. And therefore his clarion call to the people was to prepare for a system of education that "should be in full touch with our complete life, economical, intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual," and in which institutions should be located "in the very heart of society, connected with it by the living bonds of varied cooperations." He did not have the slightest doubt that "the best and the noblest gifts of humanity cannot be the monopoly of a particular race or country." Therefore, he would urge everyone to "give up for ever the habit of swearing by Europe," and find out "what ideal has long been admired and cherished by our countrymen and what means should be adopted to inspire the heart of our people."

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Section 2

Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Lecture

Education as Empowerment : Twins in Search of an Alternative Education

Swapan Majumdar

Abstract

Of the multi-faceted activities of Rabindranath Tagore, education had been the corner-stone. He was not only a visionary and philosopher of education, he was at the same time an ardent activist for the cause of education. He stands unique also as a writer on education which extends from creative to critical constructive writings on the subject. On the other hand, he even sacrificed personal family property to give his ideas a tangible form.

Tagore's first effort in setting up a family school started at Sialadh in 1898. In the same year, in keeping with the stipulation of the Trust Deed willed by his father Devendranath Tagore. Tagore's nephew Balendranath started a *Brahmacharyasrama* in Santiniketan. It was a very short-lived enterprise. In 1901, Tagore moved to Santiniketan and revived the school which passing through a process of reforms was made into an eastern university, Visva-Bharati, in 1921. In 1924, he added a new school, *Siksha-Satra* for the depraved section at Sriniketan, among the cluster of faculties.

Tagore was constantly engaged in experimenting and improving the pedagogic quality and system practised in his institution. His other worry was to collect adequate finance to sustain it. Many fellow travellers throughout the world came forward to help him in different ways. It was truly an essay negotiating with western modernism on the one hand, and colonial education system, on the other.

For Tagore, education did not consist in achievements alone. His ideal was to help create a complete man by making open choices and opportunities before the students and thereby letting them develop their latent talents. Generation of *Atmasakti* or self-reliance for him was not conditioned by anti-colonial excitement, it was the result of all out self-disciplining in life.

Through Visva-Bharati Tagore was also trying to negotiate the East-West relations seen from the vantage of the East. That too was aimed at a reconciliation of the best features of the two cultures. In the process Tagore had also been trying to create alternative spaces for cultures of creativity – the ultimate ideal of education for Tagore.

The second half of the paper deals with the theme of empowerment as approached by two great minds of our times – Tagore and Gandhi. Their approach routes may be apparently different, they might also have differences in opinions and positions, yet the innermost truth they had been seeking in their educational enterprises underlines the amity of visions.

Education as Empowerment : Twins in Search of an Alternative Education

We all know, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was essentially a poet. We usually think, poets are driven more by emotion rather than by reason and consequently are weak in essaying discourses. Tagore was an exception on all counts to this common belief. His writings on education: its pedagogic philosophy and applied apparatus in particular have been providing food for thought no less for the present day education scientists. For example, no poet of Tagore's eminence from Aeschylus to Eliot has ever cared to compile primers for the tiny taughts – and that too in three languages, namely, Bengali, English and Sanskrit as Tagore did. It proves beyond doubt his anxieties and concerns for the cause of education. It may seem ironic that the fled-school student had set up a school itself that organically grew into an international university. Yet it also

explains the compulsions he realised for changing – or at least make an effort to do so – the then prevalent colonial education system in our country.

The long line of illustrious thinkers on education that includes Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, Grundtvig and Dewey in the West and Vidyasagar in his own country tried in their own inimitable ways to modify the system, but none like Tagore endeavoured to question the basic premises that lie at the back of the system itself. He wrote number of articles on education almost spanning his whole creative life besides publishing several books, addresses, monographs, pamphlets and very many letters containing gems of thoughts on the subject. Even he ventured to write a scathing sarcastic story on the theme of tyranny of forced education, a classic of its kind, "The Parrot's Tale". And above all, by the time he barely crossed two scores of his life, he was busy setting up a residential school at then a remote suburb away from Calcutta. For the sake of nurturing a faith, he spared not selling his wife's ornaments and attending to all sorts of teething problems of the new found institution.

The Poet's father, Devendranath Tagore stipulated in the Trust Deed of the Santiniketan *Asrama* to set up a school on the traditional lines of *Gurukul Parampara*. Accordingly, Balendranath, Tagore's nephew, brought into existence the *Brahmachary asrama*, the precursor of *Patha-Bhavana*, the school modelled after the *Tapovana* style of education of ancient India. After a brief life, it was reborn as it were in 1901 under Tagore's supervision. The revival of the ideals of the Brahminic past was soon to be found too restrictive for his own ideas. The rechristened *Brahma Vidyalaya* also could not satisfy him until he arrived at a non-connotative name, that is, the Santiniketan School. In between, the primary and the secondary sections were also called the *Purva-Vibhaga* and the *Uttara-Vibhaga*s respectively. When other *Bhavana*s came up within the fold of Vishva-Bharati (1921), it was given a faculty status and was renamed as *Patha-Bhavana.*

Vishva-Bharati which Tagore himself dubbed as an 'Eastern University', chose '*Yatra visvam bhavatyeka nidam*' ('Where the world meets in one nest') as the institution's motto. Twenty-three years' experience in school education made him realise the urgent need for pragmatic education and its dissemination among the rural masses and led Tagore once again to venture in establishing a new school, with a new vision altogether, one for the destitute and the weaker sections of the society, *Siksha-Satra* in 1924.

Tagore's initiation in educational institution building had begun in 1898 at Sialdah. It was not indeed a school in the formal sense but a coaching home organised for the tuition of his son and a few more from among the poor subjects' children of the estate. The mission continued till his death. In spite of some common and constant features running through the phases, the venue shifted along with the group of teachers to Santiniketan in 1901. Though there had been no temporal discontinuity, a close observer may not fail to notice the inherent changes it had passed through under the leadership of Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya to Manoranjan Bandyopadhyaya, down to Ramananda Chattopadhyaya. The name of the school also changed from *Brahmacaryasrama* or *Brahmavidyalaya* to *Purva-Vibhaga* and *Uttara-Vibhaga* and thereto *Patha-Bhavana*, suggesting significant shifts in ideology as well: the quasi-religious overtones being removed gradually.

Tagore was simultaneously praised and derided for the absence of a well-defined structural system in his institution. It was in fact a cantilever pattern of education comprising the School *i.e.*, the *Sisu-Vibhaga* and the then *Vidya-Bhavana* or the Research Division. Now if we recollect the very lay out of the school compound during Tagore's lifetime, we would find the research library located at the very centre with two sprawling playgrounds adjacent to it. Classes were held all around in the open air. The seats of teachers were fixed and students were given five minutes time to move from one class to another, thus

having an opportunity to break the monotony of continuous classes as well as to refresh their spirit. The idea was that the little boys would observe the senior scholars spending the whole day at the library, which will be an implicit instance to emulate for them. Nor would the scholars feel distracted by the fun and frolics of the boys; their juvenile enthusiasm would help them relate their study to life and reality – an existing reality Tagore would never lose sight of, particularly in the rural Bengal suburb. He knew full well the uneven standard of the students. As a possible remedy he improvised a system of mobility among them depending on their merit in a given subject. One who was advanced than the rest was allowed to attend the higher class; another who was just the reverse was asked to take lessons in the lower class and make up the deficiency. Apart from the regular curricular study, it was obligatory for every student to take lessons in fine arts – be that music or painting or craft. The range of options in elective subjects had no compartmentalisation: arts and science subjects could be opted for simultaneously. It was designed to bring out the latent potentiality of a student as also to let him find for himself the area of his interest. It resulted not only in a reduction in number of total drop-outs on the one hand, on the other it also served as a process of talent search. The most important feature, however, was his decision to do away with the practice of examinations that bred according to him an undesirable tension arising out of a break neck competition.

The basic philosophy underlying the removal of exams was to create a space for the students which would be free from torture of a suffocating process of accumulation and reproduction. Study for the students, he thought, must be as much an enjoyment as the games are for them. As and when they would learn how to derive pleasure from studies or practices of any other arts up to their taste, their learning would turn creative. For Tagore, creativity did not mean earning an authority in any field of expression.

It was essentially an awakening of the mind – an awakening not merely of the hunger for knowledge, but of an awareness of belonging to a social setting – micro and macro at the same time. Even in a text like *Santiniketan*, which many educated readers think to be a compilation of religious sermons, we come across an article entitled *Jagaran* (Awakening). This awareness of mind can neither be attained nor created by gathering or disseminating information. It can grow only through human contacts. The realisation of the ideal of education rests on this spirit of togetherness, another recurrent theme in the cosmology of Tagorean thought.

If we analyse the motivations that may have driven an artist in life to become an activist in education, we shall find that something more profound than mere philanthropy, a vision or a philosophy must have been working deep in him. That the classes were – or even are still – held at these schools in the open air in a mango orchard or a Bakula grove in the natural ambience are, but their external features though learning in the nearest proximity of Nature must have had something far more deeply interfused in such a notion which may seem anachronistic to many today. That it is not so, may be exemplified if we try to re-live the ideas and ideals of its founder closely.

In his celebrated essay *A Poet's School*, Tagore tells us: "The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence." The pronouncement needs elaboration. 'Information' is most certainly a part of education. But it remains to be collected rather than to be created. Collection is not a faculty of the mind or intellection; it is a matter of habit, of cramming, of collation, of putting things together. The so-called good students excel in the exams because they have a knack for gathering information and of course displaying it coherently. This tendency leads to showmanship and competitiveness. And competitiveness when turns out to be intense and aggressive, takes

recourse to make everything subservient to itself, ceasing it's bond with all extant living organisms around oneself. The fundamental object of education then, according to Tagore, would be to substitute competition by collaboration between Man and Man, Man and Nature, between Man and every other object, animate or inanimate. This generates Love which lies at the root of all creativity. Education for Tagore hones this culture of creativity.

Such realisation often tends to be abstract. Tagore would also have run the risk of being too elusive and non-ethereal had he not tried to translate his ideas in concrete terms and to give these a form and shape through the discipline and process of practical training. He was explicit in incorporating these aims and objects while formulating the Memorandum for Vishva-Bharati:

> *To study the Mind of Man in its realisation of different aspects of truth from diverse points of view. To bring into more intimate relation with one another, through patient study and research, the different cultures of the East on the basis of their underlying unity. To seek to realise in common fellowship of study the meeting of the East and the West, and thus ultimately to strengthen the fundamental conditions of world peace.*

The idea and institution of Vishva-Bharati, what Tagore considered the greatest achievement of his life, was virtually a culmination of that ideal imprinted on his mind at an early age. He obtained a first-hand experience of western culture since the late 70s of the 19th century and studied the western society not as an outsider tourist would do, but as an insider to whom both the naïveté and the complexities, merits and demerits of it were far more exposed. He was certainly averse to the modish modernism of western poetry of the early 20th century, but the quintessence of modernity never disenchanted him. And for Tagore modernity did not consist in the deployment of a mere device or style, a technology of language and form, on the contrary it guaranteed a freedom of choice in determining one's course of action or shaping a view of

life. Political freedom was not unimportant to him, but freedom of mind was of much greater import. Assertion of one's individual identity was a matter of value for him, but of greater consequence was how that individuality was to be related to the society at large. The most seminal premise of this idea was contained in his concept of *Atmasakti* formulated as early as 1901. I consider this concept as the driving force of all that Tagore did in his efforts to translate such ideas into practice.

The other point that deserves to be remembered is that, it will be nothing short of foolishness on our part to believe that Tagore's thoughts were like a monolith ever since he engaged himself in the process of opinion formation. Quite late in life – in a different context though – he frankly admitted, 'I have changed my opinion; I have been changing them constantly.' This, I don't think had been a Voltairesque ploy for Tagore to find an excuse to escape. In fact, in him was a restless mind that yearned for ceaseless move towards perfection. He never took his views as impeccable, nor did he think himself free from errors or even misjudgements. And that is why he kept on correcting, honing and developing them again and again. I would even venture to say that the ideal too was not immutable for him; an effort to reformulate them from time to time had caused many misgivings among his associates, yet he never gave up. His entire life is an explicit example of such protean changes on both the planes.

Tagore's experiments in education may perhaps be best analysed in respect of his other constructive and creative activities – not counting the literary for the time being – namely in experiments with rural reconstruction, creating environmental awareness or innovative festivities – some apparently diverse and disjointed projects – projects, of course, not in the management sense of the term – under the megalith of education. And all these were experimented in the hothouses of Santiniketan and Sriniketan. Tagore's search for alternative models of cultures of creativity obviously began with his literary and musical

compositions. To begin with, it was primarily a matter of establishing one's distinctive features of identity clearly distinguishable from his predecessors and contemporaries. Gradually, it turned out to be his sole self: spontaneous and uncontrived.

The idea of institution-building was but an extension of the same urge. The urge, again, was compounded by the necessities arising out of the compulsions of the colonial situation. Tagore's early association with the Congress ended rather prematurely with the exposure to the Moderate and the Extremist divisions within the party. Curzon's partition of Bengal got him intensely involved in the anti-partition movement only to be disillusioned by the militancy of bomb, burning and boycott in the aftermath. These also made him feel the exigency with greater gravity to build up an alternative model of education distinct from that of the colonizers almost as a means to qualify to stand in equal terms with them. Of course Tagore had started his Santiniketan experiment before all these events, but I believe, the impact of these experiences completely changed his approach to education. The gradual shift from a mode of education modelled after the Upanishadic Brahmoism to a secular, self-reliant and at the same time artistic and comprehensive education was conditioned simultaneously by the forces of this nation-wide crisis and his very personal shattering experiences of a series of bereavements that stood him as a solitary man left to justify his ways and means only to himself.

For Tagore, the ostensible alternative to the western education was not to jump for indigenous education as a matter of reaction. He was certainly not a nationalist of that breed. All he wanted was to pay back the masters in their own coins. But he would hasten to insist that it must reach the masses and find the roots in our own soil. In 'Saphalatar Sadupay' [*Atmasakti*; *Bangadarsan*, Caitra 1311BS (March-April 1905)] his call was simple though covered with a somewhat sentimental metaphor:

Hopeless laments won't do. We shall have to strive for what we ourselves can do. … Necessity impels us to take upon ourselves the responsibilities of our education. I know well that it will not be a stone replica of the huge Oxbridge model to be enshrined in our educational establishments; their infrastructure will be befitting that of the poor. … But the living Goddess Sarasvati seated on the hundred-petal lotus of our reverence, would dispense like a Mother the nectar to the children unlike the wealth-proud merchant-wife giving away alms to the beggars from the high balcony.

It would inevitably be an alternative education for the poor yet without any trace of poverty in thought. Such alternative education would obviously desist from creating a class of subalterns in the colonizers' employment hierarchy, but would do all it could to generate an ambience of righteousness which would ensure the structuring of a civil society and that again as an alternative to the nation/state build up after the western pattern and superimposed on us.

Tagore was not satisfied with creating alternative spaces theoretically, he immediately wanted to have these implemented in practice. It was out of this anxiety that Tagore after running the school at Santiniketan for more than two decades decided to set up another school at Sriniketan at a distance of only three kilometers. Could the distance be the only reason for such a move? Perhaps not. He knew from experience that the middle or upper middle class boarder students of Santiniketan almost refused to mix up with the day scholars from Sriniketan, Surul and the adjoining villages. This was symptomatic of temperamental differences between the city and the village, affluence and poverty. Tagore wanted his second school to cater to the needs of the surrounding villages. They were trained in vocational arts: from carpentry to weaving, husbandry to harvesting. The community now comprised of students drawn virtually from the same class – both economically and socially. They were asked to extend

camp services to the villages on school holidays, instruct the villagers in the rudiments of health and hygiene and the like. The Sriniketan experiment so impressed even the senior members of the community that Tagore introduced without late an adult education programme where the school students served as prime reciters or *Sardar Paduyas*. The success was greeted with the enthusiasm of the rural people. It also helped them initially to earn a few rupees during the harvesting and later on by selling their artifacts at the *Silpa Mela* also introduced by Tagore and exclusively organised by the Sriniketan students. It developed an organisational skill among them as well. Sriniketan realised what Tagore envisaged as complete education. But the apathy of the Vishva-Bharati authorities relegated the set up to the second fiddle soon after Tagore's death.

> *A cry has been raised in our country: We shall have nothing to do with Western Science – it is Satanic. This we, of Sriniketan, must refuse to say. Because its power is killing us, we shall not say that we prefer powerlessness. We must know that power in order to combat power, power is needed; without destruction cannot be staved off, but will come all the faster. Truth kills us only when we refuse to accept it.*

Tagore might not have accepted the superficialities of modernity, but would have never denied the truth of modernity.

As late in his life as in 1925, Tagore was almost obsessed with the idea of Mass Education. Men and women of the country who were depraved of basic education in their childhood either for economic reasons or for belonging to remote areas were planned to be brought under an education scheme under the aegis of the New Education Fellowship. As early as in 1917, Tagore contemplated of bringing out a series of books on basic areas of knowledge with a target readership of non-Matriculates of those days. The idea of educational extension programme also inspired him to set up the *Lokasiksha Samsad* which was designed to expand the network of literacy and basic education in

the country. The *Samsad* in this way simultaneously became a council for adult education, mass education as well as distance education through correspondence. In order to make the project complete in all respects, he also initiated a series of books called *Lokasiksha Granthamala* and himself contributed the first book on physical sciences to it. The basic intention of the scheme was to reach out to would be students in their own home environment rather than forcing them to reach the school. Introduction of exam and study centres throughout the country was also one of the innovative aspects of the system conducted by Vishva-Bharati.

For Tagore, education was most certainly a means of empowerment and yet much more. His vision of a complete man was not a philosophical idea. For him, completeness consists in one's readiness to face any situation with equal poise and weather it. The modern man in the western sense might have some faculties more developed than the others, thus causing an imbalance that could seriously upset him and his actions. Modernity is circumscribed in terms of temporal frames. Tagore's alternatives are not chained in time and space. In spite of a more logically plausible formulation of a principle of education conducive to the growth of a mind that would make a man complete, many of Tagore's experiments in alterity have failed – or better be said, we have made him fail – the full potentials of his ideas still remain to be fully explored.

Tagore, like his other illustrious fellow traveller Gandhi, may have failed apparently – or better to say, as we have spared no pains to make them fail – the potentials of their experiments are still not exhausted. The unfinished results are no testimony to the fallibility of their visions.

II

Both are called *Asrama*s. As originally conceived, one was planned to be a meeting place of religious believers of different orders, the other to be a centre of social service among the untouchables living around the place. Today

they represent the rudiments of basic education as envisioned by two almost contemporary personalities living in the same country. In one, the library holds the centre stage, in the other, it is the prayer square. The playground is laid out adjacent to the library in one, in the other it is beyond the cluster of huts composing the establishment. Apparently both look like traditional *Asrama*s, but certainly are not rehashes of the heritage *Vidyapith*s. Both the institutions include a combination of the *Kala-Bhavana* and the *Sangit-Bhavana*. I am talking about Tagore's Santiniketan and Gandhi's Sevagram.

Tagore's Santiniketan school was started in 1901, Gandhi's Sevagram in 1937. But their preparations started earlier– Tagore's at Sialdah and Gandhi's in South Africa. It must be accepted without much hair-splitting that the two savants' primary reputation did not rest on their philosophies of education, nor did they ever strive for formulating a regular philosophy either. It grew from their hands on enterprises in devising a workable model for themselves. Yet if both the poet and the activist shared one common anxiety, it was most certainly for education. Living as they did in a colonial situation, the alterity of their ideologies are often attributed to their anti-colonialist, hence anti-British, attitude. It is commonly believed that these tenets are etched out to experiment on possible alternatives to the model provided by western education system. I believe, both were in search of a new dispensation in education – not buckled by the state aid, neither western in toto, nor oriental in and out. It aimed at a happy and simultaneously judicious combination of the two. The most interesting points, however, were the proportion between the western and oriental elements in their thoughts and actions on the one hand and the third factor of their original contribution on the other. But such bare simplifications blur the complexities as well as the originality of their positions.

Let us accept at the outset that both Tagore and Gandhi were exposed to the best possible western education

available at their times. Because of his family background, Tagore perhaps had a deeper involvement with the heritage of our culture than Gandhi's. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the fact that Gandhi perhaps had a greater understanding of the ground realities prevailing in the country at that point of time. No poet of Tagore's eminence from Aeschylus to Eliot ever cared to compile primers for the tiny taughts – and that too in three languages, namely, Bengali, English and Sanskrit; Tagore did. No activist of Gandhi's standing from Plato to Russell would ever care to set up basic primary schools as Gandhi did. The school system in the scheme of both the thinkers, again, was erected on a theistic foundation. Both had in their own individualistic ways drawn up schemes for extension of it's field of operation among the rural and down-trodden people as well.

Education – the highest and the noblest form of it – did not consist in the scale of preferences of Tagore and Gandhi in acquisition of information alone; according to them, it would succeed only if it could make our life harmonise with all possible situations of life, with multiforms of meaningful living. Most certainly would they admit information as an essential part of education, but would hasten to add that it is more a faculty of collection rather than of creation. Any act of gathering – be that material or abstract – does not enrich the power of the mind, it is more a matter of habit. It brings about a proclivity towards competitiveness, putting up a resistance, as it were, against the fundamental object of education, that is, cooperation between man and man, man and nature, between man and every other phenomenal object, animate or inanimate. Such a realisation often tends to be abstract and elusive. Almost parallely, they had involved the students in what we call today social welfare schemes. The concept of *Palli Punargathana* or Rural Reconstruction in Tagore and *Gramodyoga* in Gandhi were based by and large on similar social values. But the volunteer corps or *Vrati Balaka*s in the former system were also required to document the basic

statistics on the living conditions of the people in the adjoining villages they covered. Tagore and Gandhi did not stop short at theoretical formulations; they did their best in translating their ideas into practice – refining their positions time and again, but never completely drifting away from the quintessence of their respective visions of ideal education.

Knowledge, says the proverb, is power. Education – a Tagore or a Gandhi would argue – does of course ultimately lead to knowledge and hence to power. But the attainment of the ultimate is not obtainable for all. There are at least three stages to reach this state: *Patha* (Learning), *Siksha* (Education) and finally *Vidya* (Knowledge). *Bodhi* (Wisdom) or *Jnana* (Enlightenment) is beyond yet dependent on these previous stages. Tagore and Gandhi would rather think of empowerment through education in two different ways. For Tagore, true empowerment lies in the awakening of the self, aware enough to decide for oneself the oughts of life: the duty, the desirability and the good. We shall have to accept that Tagore does not seem to be concerned with the basic problems of opportunity to education. A confirmed pragmatist as he was, for Gandhi creating a truly congenial ambience of and an open avenue to education was the foremost of the problems to negotiate with.

Historical evidences force us to admit that Tagore's and Gandhi's intended students come from two different cultural and economic strata altogether. This also partly explains the debate between them regarding the need and justification for introducing possibilities to earn during the students' years of learning. Gandhi's *Nai Taaliim* created a space for earning by simple investment of one's labour and thus decide for one's possible future means of livelihood. He knew full well that academic merit could not be expected among the majority of the students. As a result of his experiences at Santiniketan, Tagore also perhaps realised the necessity of imparting honest labour but not linked with direct personal earning. Interestingly

enough, *Seva* or cashless service to the less fortunate people around occupies perhaps more an important place in Tagore's second school, *Siksha Satra* at Sriniketan than in his first, *Patha-Bhavana* at Santiniketan, and in Gandhi's second school at Sevagram than in his first at Sabarmati.

Tagore and Gandhi believed in disciplining the mind. But the concept of discipline had different connotations for them. In Tagore's *Patha-Bhavana* and *Siksha Satra* and Gandhi's Sabarmati and Sevagram, the entire responsibility of self-governance was delegated to the students. They were to devise means to deal with any situation that would come their way – be that misbehaviour of a fellow student or the maintenance of health and hygiene in the *Asrama* and its vicinity. Teachers were around watching the team work, but would hardly interfere ever. Yet, if asked to underline the difference between Tagore's and Gandhi's conditions of nursing the budding minds of the students, I would dare say, it was the emphasis on the values of Beauty and Duty, respectively, in their order of priorities. I would never say so in absolute terms but relatively. In other words, aesthetics and ethics divided their domains. But are the two really so opposed to each other? Ethics when properly practiced in life developes on aesthetics of its own, similarly as aesthetics when freed from individualistic confines, produces almost an ethical value. When Tagore wanted to have his students trained in such a way that one could appreciate the play of colours and notes of music and distinguish between one medium or scale and another, the aesthetics of appreciation would structure an autonomous hierarchy of its preferences and values which, in turn, would be no less ethical. Gandhi would advise his disciples to turn their back to every evil of life, to abstain from saying, seeing or hearing anything ill. If honestly pursued, it would produce an equilibrium of aesthetic enjoyment of comparable distributions of emotions. Gandhi, on the other hand, would endeavour to elevate

human beings from their baser instincts. Tagore, on the other hand, was firm in his belief that the number of the good always exceeds that of the bad. These not only indicate differences in their visions of life, but also reflect their very own individual personality types that complement one another mutually and vindicate two processes of edification of the mind.

Empowerment, according to Tagore and Gandhi, then would follow two different tracks: one through humane and aesthetic empathy and the other through economic and moral rearmament. For Tagore, the end of education consists of a wholesome blossoming of the faculties of the mind and the body through learning, work and service, in obtaining what he terms as *Atmasakti*, in achieving 'a rhythm of life'. It is evident that such an optimum student will participate in the greater arena of social life, both as a role model as well as through one's services to the cause of the society. In other words, Tagore emphasises on the inner or the mental empowerment of the student. Not that in Gandhi's scheme of things the mental aspects are relegated, but for him the social responsibility of the student, one's readiness to sacrifice self-interest for the sake of it along with the achieving economic self-sustenance perhaps are of greater consequence.

Students' activities in their schools included indeterminable creative energy, quantifiable productive pursuits as well as social service and self-governance programmes. Learning and work, they would argue, must go hand in hand and necessarily be related to the prevailing social system. It is often glibly remarked about Tagore that a poet as he had been, he lacked pragmatic attitude to various systems of life, education in particular. In repudiation of such a position, I take the liberty to quote a letter of Tagore in extenso written to his friend C.F. Andrews from Agra as early as 05 December 1914:

> *I was surprised to read in the Modern Review that our Bolpur boys are going without their sugar and ghee in order to open a relief fund. Do you think this is right? In the first place, it is an imitation of your English*

school-boys and not their original idea. In the second place, so long as the boys live in our institution they are not free to give up any portion of their diet which is absolutely necessary for their health. For any English boy, who takes meat and an amount of fat with it, giving up sugar is not injurious. But for our boys in Santiniketan, who can get milk only in small quantities, and whose vegetable meals contain very little fat ingredients, it is mischievous.

Our boys have no right to choose this form of sacrifice – just as they are not free to give up buying books for their studies. The best form of sacrifice for them would be to do some hard work in order to earn money; let them take up menial work in our school – wash dishes, draw water, dig wells, fill up the tank which is a menace to their health, to the building work. This would be good in both ways. What is more, it would be a real test of their sincerity. Let the boys think out for themselves what particular works they are willing to take up without trying to imitate others.

A number points ensue from the observation: (1) any sort of imitation is to be discarded; (2) sacrifice is good but not at the cost of health; (3) to serve, earn and sacrifice the earning for a greater cause; and (4) let the students devise their own original modes of social service.

Gandhi, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with the *Buniyadi* that is primary and secondary school education, collegiate or higher education does not come within his immediate purview. His basic inclination is most certainly directed towards vocational education that begins with the *Takli* and leads upto the gospel of the *Charkha*. Obviously, the community of students, Gandhi had in mind, turned up from a section economically weaker than the one Tagore was to deal with in his school. The former's idea of *Svaavalamban* (Self-reliance) was basically a means to meet the expenses of education of oneself, at the same time he did not consider imparting a kind of training in doing one's own work as much as of nurturing the softer sentiments through music lessons in any way an inferior assignment.

Main is baat ke liye bahut hi utsuk hoon ki dastkari ke jariye vidyaarthi jo kuch paidaa kare, uski kimat se sikshaa ka kharch nikal aaye, kyonki mujhe yakin hai ki des ke kadoron bacchon ko taalim dene ke liye sivaa iske dusraa koi raasta nahin hai।... Aap log yah bhi samajh lijiye ki prathmik sikshaa ki is yojanaa me saphaai, aarogya aur aahaarsastra ke prarambhik siddhaanton ka samaaves bhi ho jaata hai। Isme bacchon ki vah sikshaa bhi saamil samjhiye, jise ve apnaa kaam khud karnaa sikhenge aur ghar par apne maan-baap ke kaam me bhi madad pahunchaayenge। Main chahungaa ki unke liye sangit ke saath lazimi taur par aisi kavaayad aur kasrat bagairaa ka intzaam ho jaaye, isse unki tandurusti sudhre aur jivan taalbaddh vane। ("Gandhiji kaa udghaatan bhashan", Devi Prasaad sa., Nai Taalim ka sandes, Nai Dilli: Gandhi Shanti Pratishthaan, 1988, p 9).

Jivan taalbaddh in Gandhi is unmistakably reminiscent of Tagore's *Jivaner Chanda* (p.133). It is also interesting to note that Sabarmati school did not have Sangit or *Kala-Bhavanas*, but in Sevagram these two were integral parts of the *Asrama*. Gandhi was most certainly inspired by Tagore's Vishva-Bharati.

Following this inaugural declaration of Gandhi's Wardha Scheme or the *Nai Taalim* (*Harijan*, 11 December 1937), Tagore admitting of Gandhi's practical genius quipped in strongest words:

As the scheme stands on paper, it seems to assume that material utility, rather than development of personality, is the end of education in the true sense of the word may be still available for a chosen few who can afford to pay for it, the utmost the masses can have is to be trained to view the world they live in the perspective of the particular craft they are to employ for their livelihood. It is true that as things are, even that is much more than what the masses are actually getting but it is nevertheless unfortunate that even in our ideal scheme, education should be doled out in insufficient rations to the poor, while the feast remains

reserved for the poor. I cannot congratulate a society or a nation that calmly excludes play from the curriculum of the majority of it's children's education and gives in its stead a vested interest to the teachers in the market value of the pupil's labour.

(*Vishva-Bharati News*, Jan. 1938, p 53. New Education Fellowship Conference, Calcutta).

If Tagore assessed the question of students' earning depriving themselves of their play-time and paying for the teachers' honoraria, Gandhi was no less pained to negotiate the wider question of being declassed as an upshot of academic attainment.

Tagore, we shall have to admit, was not much aware of such evilsome social backlash of a philanthropic enterprise!

Tagore and Gandhi even though did not demean learning English as it was the language of the colonisers thrusted down our throat, both of them felt that education through mother-tongue was most certainly better suited for creating a confidence in articulation as much as in generating conviction of thought. And building self-assurance is an unfailing key for empowerment. Both of them realised that creating an ambience of self-reliance is not confined to the extent of the school-going children alone, even the adults require to be administered booster doses to bring back their self-possession. The *Lokasiksha* or Mass education programme organised by Tagore and the *Uttar-Buniyadi* projects of Gandhi had almost polygenetic growth, though the *Aryanayakams* – Asha and William – were most certainly the connecting links between the two establishments of Wardha and Bolpur, one basic difference in attitude distinguished the both, in turn. While Gandhi relied more on imparting lessons in certain particularities of applied social sciences, Tagore wanted to initiate the masses in elementary sciences not merely for the sake of their contents so much as for the very fact that such exposures would make the mind alert and intelligence free from illusions.

About the Speaker

Professor Swapan Majumdar

Professor Swapan Majumdar is currently, Director, Culture and Cultural Relations and *Adhyaksha*, Rabindra-Bhavana,Vishva-Bharati. He is an Honorary Director, Eastern Regional Translation Centre, of the *Sahitya Akademi*, in Calcutta and Vice-President: Comparative Literature Association of India, at New Delhi and Founder-Trustee, Kolkata International Foundation.

Professor Majumdar was earlier a Professor of Indian and Comparative Literature, at Jadhavpur University. He was awarded the Kalidas Nag Memorial medal for culture studies. In 1968 he completed his masters in Comparative Literature and was a rank holder, standing first in his batch. He has written extensively and some of his well known publications include *Rabindra-Granthasuchi*, Calcutta, National Library, *Comparative Literature; Indian Dimensions*, Calcutta: Papyrus; *Sat Dasaker Theater*, Calcutta, Dey's Publishing. As a researcher, Professor Majumdar has to his credit a number of published works including "Reception to & Impact of Shakespeare in Bengal", "Annotated Tagore Bibliography", and "Nehru and Indian Literatutre". He has edited more than a dozen texts of literary excellence and is editor Books and Literary Pages, *Aaj Kaal*, Calcutta, *India News*, Embassy of India Fiji, *Jadhavpur Journal of Comparative Literature*, Jadavpur University. *Vishva-Bharati Quarterly*, Vishva-Bharati. Professor Majumdar has worked with Professor Abu Sayeed Ayyub, Editor, *Quest and with* Jyotirmay Datta, Editor, *Kolkata.* He is an academic Consultant, National Library, Calcutta. Professor Majumdar also has the distinction of serving the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India as a First Secretary (Culture) and Director, Indian Cultural Centre, Embassy of India in Fiji.

Annexure

Memorial Lectures 2007- 2008

NAME	DATE	VENUE	SPEAKER	THEME	CHAIRPERSON
Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lecture	17 January 2007	India International Centre, New Delhi	Prof. Christopher Winch, Professor Educational Philosophy and Policy, Kings College London, U.K.	Individuals, Workers or Citizens Reflections on the Limits of School Based Educational Reform	Prof. Mrinal Miri Former Vice-Chancellor NEHU, Shillong
Zakir Hussain Memorial Lecture	19 January 2007	Regional Institute of Education Mysore	Dr Radhika Herzberger, Director Rishi Valley School Chittor Andhra Pradesh	Religion, Education and Peace	Prof. B.L. Chaudhary Vice-Chancellor Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur Rajasthan
Mahadevi Verma Memorial Lecture	17 August 2007	Regional Institute of Education Bhopal	Prof. Karuna Chanana Former Professor at Zakir Hussain Centre of Educational Studies School of Social Sciences, JNU	Women in Indian Academe; Diversity Difference and Inequality in a Contested Domain	Prof. R.S. Sirohi, Vice-Chancellor, Barkatulla University Bhopal
B. M. Pugh Memorial Lecture	11 March 2008	Laitumkhrah Women's College Shillong	Shri Ratan Thyiam Chairperson, Chorus Repertoire Theatre Shillong	Theatre Language and Expression	Prof. T. Ao Dean, School of Humanities, NEHU Shillong

NAME	DATE	VENUE	SPEAKER	THEME	CHAIRPERSON
Marjorie Sykes Memorial Lecture	8 April 2008	Jawahar Rang Manch Lohagal Road Ajmer	Ms. Medha Patkar Social Activist	Socialisation vs. Politics of Education	Prof. M.S. Agwani Former Vice-Chancellor, JNU
Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture	2 July 2008	Dorozio Hall Presidency College Kolkata	Shri Manoj Das International Centre of Education Sri Aurobindo Ashram Pudducherry	Education for a Faith in the Future	Prof. Sanjib Ghosh Principal, Presidency College, Kolkata
Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Lecture	19 July 2008	Regional Institute of Education Bhubaneswar	Prof. N.R. Madhava Menon, Member Commission on Centre State Relations	Realising Equality of Status and Opportunity: Role of Government, Judiciary and Civil	Professor Chandra Sekhar Rath Eminent Writer
Gijubhai Badekha Memorial Lecture	Dropped due to ill health of Speaker	MIDS, Chennai	Prof. U.R. Ananthamurthy *Gyan Peeth* Awardee	Society Learning to be a Writer in the School of Life	Prof. S. Janakrajan Officiating Director MIDS, Chennai
Savitribai Phule Memorial Lecture	12 December 2008	Maniben Nanawati Women's College Vallapi Road, Vallapi West, Mumbai-56	Dr. T. Sunderaraman Director, State Health Resource Centre Chhattisgarh	School as a Centre for Health Promotion and Health services: The case of conversion between health and education sector	Professor Vidhu Patel Professor and Head Director, PGSR SNDT Women's College Churchgate, Mumbai