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Mentoring the Sub-Conscious: Tagore's Perspectives on Music Education

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Abstract

This article delves into the educational philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore, as reflected through his life, works, and vision, particularly emphasizing his thoughts on integrating music into mainstream education and nurturing the sub-conscious mind. Drawing inspiration from lines in Gitanjali, which reflect Tagore's spiritual depth and universal appeal, the article highlights how his unique, self-driven approach to learning shaped his beliefs about holistic education. Despite formally abandoning school at the age of 14, Tagore emerged as a polymath and visionary, advocating for an education system that fosters creativity, emotional development, and inner freedom. Through an analysis of his unconventional journey and his establishment of institutions like Brahmavidyalaya, this study aims to uncover the deeper layers of his educational ideals, which challenge the rigidity of traditional pedagogy and advocate for a more intuitive and soulful approach to learning.

Keywords: Tagore, Gitanjali, education, music, sub-conscious mind, Brahmavidyalaya

Introduction

'Thou hast made me known to friends whom I knew not. Thou hast given me seats in homes not my own.' These lines from the Gitanjali, the famous creation of Noble Laureate Rabindranath Tagore stands as testimony not only of Tagore's undeterred faith in the Almighty but also of the numerous friends, well-wishers he manifested with his pure soul all along his glorious journey and the seats he owned in the hearts of millions of his well-wishers and followers all over the world, making him truly a 'Vishva-Kavi'.

Today, this incredible personality of Tagore is celebrated in the whole world and his countrymen take pride in the unparalleled knowledge and creativity he owned within himself. His charismatic personality captivated everyone who had the privilege to know him closely. Anyone who interacted with him would presume that his persona was due to some kind of high level of education from some esteemed educational Institution given the depth of knowledge he owned in almost every subject of life. But surprisingly Tagore,

"At the age of 14, in the year 1875 gave up going to school altogether... he was a born devotee of Saraswati, the Goddess of learning and the arts, though he refused to be led to her alter by any priest!"¹

says Krishna Kripalini in his educative book 'Tagore: A Life'. These vital lines by Kripalini do not miss to convey that Tagore was inherently a free soul. Nobody could motivate him to continue his schooling after few years as he refused to learn under pressure. He was an independent thinker and could not be convinced unless he resonated with the idea himself.

Tagore was a master at his craft. He had this creative, poetic spirit that always thought out of the box. In addition, since childhood, he was very sensitive towards his environment. The various schools in which Tagore was sent to brought him more agony than knowledge. This propelled him to introspect about the process and purpose of education. Therefore, he pursued a philosophy behind education and not adapt to any random system of preaching. He knew that India has been gloriously guiding the world as its 'Vishva-Guru' and so Tagore insisted that this 'badge of honor' continues to be intact and should not be snatched away by any external factors, come what may.

Hence, when India was facing 'cultural crisis' immediately post-independence, Tagore strived hard in spite of all, challenges to bring his students closer to Indian culture and tradition. As the present article especially focuses on Tagore's perspectives on music henceforth the same will be discussed in the light of sub-conscious mentoring of students by Tagore.

In the present article two important factors with reference to the subject cited above will be addressed, firstly the purpose behind introduction of music in the mainstream of education as per the vision of Tagore and secondly, the subtle process of imparting overall education especially music to the students which created strong impact in the young minds will be analyzed in the present piece of writing.

Compulsive Vs. Inclusive Education

Tagore very well knew the significance of music and the impact it has on its practitioner. But he also knew that compulsion may lead to repulsion i.e if the students are compelled to learn Indian music, then they may not want to learn music ever. Therefore, Tagore very subtly trained the students and developed in them a liking for Indian music by conducting informal sessions of 'get together' in his humble school 'Brahmacharya Ashram' at Santiniketan. The reason Tagore could grasp the psychology of the students was again due to his own childhood experiences during his schooling days. He had developed an acute aversion for Indian music as his assigned music tutor would insist in giving him musical lessons. He later on observed that those music lessons were so valuable but only if the method would have been more subtle than he would have certainly gained a lot of musical knowledge. He also mentioned many a times that he would love to listen and learn to music keeping himself in hiding or literally eavesdropping some musical sessions held at his ancestral Joransako Thakur Badi (Tagore's ancestral house). Such was his distaste towards formal music classes. But later on, he composed some eternal tunes taking inspiration from the compositions of the same music Gurus.

Since the method of musical coaching didn't go well with Tagore's independent temperament therefore, he could never learn from those gurus and ustads who were specially designated as home tutors for Tagore to learn Indian music. Taking lessons from all his past memories Tagore decided to transform the method of imparting musical knowledge to his pupils at school. As a result, he could see positive changes in the students with regards to music education. Even the students who disliked music slowly started enjoying music classes and showed active involvement in musical activities.

Music Education as a Tool for Personality Development

Education is another word for preservation and propagation. Needless to say, that the preservation of Indian music on its own land could be very well served by its education,

right from elementary level to advanced stages. This phenomenon had been practiced in the ancient times in Indian education system where Lalit Kala was very much a part of educational curriculum. And this idea was appealing to Tagore and hence he endeavored to make Indian music a part of his educational curriculum.

Although music was already being taught in private circles; private circles as in 'Gharanedar Parampara/tradition' or schools of music. But this music was 'conservative' and came with a lot of limits and somewhat insignificant rules of its own which was hampering its growth. Everybody did not have a right of access to this kind of musical education. So, Tagore wanted to make Indian music education accessible to all through his school.

Besides, there was another purpose that propelled Tagore to include Indian music in the curriculum of his own humble school. It was based on subtle impact that Indian music carries within itself. Tagore believed that everybody need not be a musician after getting trained in Indian music instead our Indian music through its soft power has the capacity to enhance the positive tendencies within human psychology. Therefore, a student of music may be a scientist but a better one because of music. Research has already proved that music increases focus and concentration as it operates on a soul level, on a subconscious plane. Moreover, certain Ragas of Indian classical music has therapeutic and healing power which when practiced or even heard by developing brains have proven to have profound impact on the sub-conscious mind. Children who learn music are ethical and focused and do not give in to wrong ways of leading life.

Tagore's Endeavour towards Bringing Educational Transition

So much was his urge to 'free' his country from the snares of the superficial 'British education system' that without prior experience Tagore literally 'trespassed' in this lane of education for the upliftment of the Indian society. He himself admits,

"It is also a surprise to me how I had the courage to start an educational institution for our children, for I had no experience in this line at all. But I had the confidence in myself. I knew that I had profound sympathy for our children. And about my knowledge of psychology, I was very certain. I felt that I could help them more than the ordinary teachers." ²

He knew the power of young minds very well and so he focused more on the subconscious mind than the active mind. This fact is very well established in the following excerpt where Tagore clearly expresses his insightful method of imparting education to young minds,

"My idea was that education should be part of life itself, and must not be detached from it and be made into something abstract. I tried to arouse their (student's) interest in all things, in nature's beauty and the surrounding villages, and also in literature. I sang to them. I composed musical pieces, operas, and plays, and they took part in the performances. I recited to them our epics, and this was the beginning of this school...I knew the children's mind. Their sub-conscious mind is more active than the conscious one, and therefore the important thing is to surround them with all kinds of activities which could stimulate their minds and gradually arouse their interest."³

The above excerpt re-emphasizes the importance of subconscious mentoring by Tagore. The senses of an individual have direct coordination with the subconscious mind and the brain i.e. the intellect follows suit later on. A child who when imbibes with his senses collects his own set of experiences and memories which then propel him to be more creative and explore his surroundings without limitations. The child's curiosity allows him or her to experience more joy and light. Tagore also used the participative method of teaching the young pupils of his school which would make them understand their lessons better.

School of the Poet

Tagore perceived the arts to be an essential feature of education, believing that music, dance, literature, and other cultural expressions play a crucial role in personal growth and moral development. Through the arts, students gain self-expression and an understanding of cultural heritage, fostering a sense of identity and empathy.

Tagore believed,

"The child's mind is extraordinarily aware of his environments and receptive to sense-impressions. He imbibes with his limbs and with his senses long before he learns with his brain. He must therefore, be provided with an environment which will stimulate and feed his curiosity and make his introduction to the world around him easy and joyful."⁴

Impact of Informal Lessons while Teaching

Recent discoveries and researches state that the body listens to the instructions of the mind. But this phenomenon has been practiced since ages in our culture and is not new to our tradition. The various sanskaras performed in the Hindu tradition and some other traditions of the world while the child is still in the womb directly points out to the subtle but powerful impact of the subconscious mind. It is as if the sub-conscious gets tutored much ahead of the arrival of the physical body.

So, Tagore based on this concept started training his pupils at his Brahmacharya Ashram at Santiniketan. He took informal interactive sessions with the children in the form of storytelling, recitation from Upanishads, simple music sessions etc to gently usher the sub-conscious minds of the students into the depth of education and culture. Tagore was not following the regular pattern of education system because of his own experience of childhood when education was forced upon him as a child. He understood well that this attitude of 'forcing' education could be such a big 'red flag' for the young aspirants of education. Therefore, as though Tagore with a purpose of revisiting his own childhood and created his own 'Santiniketan', an abode of universal education where he ensured that knowledge exists without limits and creativity never disowns a person. He did not impose the lessons but proposed the knowledge through informal discussions where children enjoyed learning and lessons became immortal.

Conclusion:

When India was going through a cultural transition just pre and post-independence, it was education which was in dire need of 'originality' and had to be reconnected to its roots because the British system of education was a total mismatch for our society. During such a challenging phase, Tagore through his 'Brahmacharya Ashram' started his own school

with a view to introduce the education which will suit the Indian needs and temperament, moreover it was based on the ancient Gurukul Education System of the Rishis.

Presently, India is again undergoing a transition period. Previously Tagore had to strive hard to fight against the contemporary society to un-follow the British education system as it was totally unworthy for Indian society.

“Rabindranath Tagore’s educational ideas emerged within the context of colonial India and the socio-cultural movement known as the Bengal Renaissance, which was characterized by intellectual, cultural, and social reforms. During this period in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, India was under British rule, and its education system was largely designed to serve colonial interests. British educational policies emphasized rote learning, rigid discipline, and vocational training aimed at producing clerks and administrators who would support the colonial administration. This approach neglected India’s rich cultural heritage, spiritual values, and the holistic development of individuals, fostering instead a sense of inferiority and alienation among Indians. The school he founded at Santiniketan, and later Visva-Bharati University, was a direct manifestation of this vision, combining traditional Indian values with a progressive, holistic approach that aimed to develop students as whole individuals in tune with both nature and their cultural heritage.”⁵

The above excerpt rightly points out the background which inspired Tagore to initiate reformation in education. However today, we have come full circle and history is repeating itself. We have to renew our own education system from the snares of its inefficiency. Time to time introspection; region wise implementation will be certainly useful instead of executing a common pattern of education in this huge country which has numerous dialects, innumerable social conditions, changing topography and so on and so forth. This survey may take few years but the output won’t disappoint.

Today, Hindustani classical music or Indian classical music is a distinctive subject in many colleges and universities of India where students are supposed to learn advance level of Shastriya Sangit. But a quick reality check will be certainly beneficial here to all the aspirants as well as mentors of this discipline. Introduction of informal sessions with a view to make the classes participative and inclusive in approach may be useful especially for the students of Indian classical Music. Cross-cultural exchange programs within students as well as faculty members may be encouraged within universities and colleges which will promote this subject of performing arts beyond boundaries.

In a nutshell, Tagore who was a poet first and later an educationist, innately believed in giving subtle nudges to the sub-conscious of young minds before pouring in loads of information into their highly fertile minds. Tagore held that education is all inclusive and must not be separated from life. For him, the aesthetic development of senses was as important as the intellectual and so Tagore emphasized on the inclusion of music, literature, art and dance in the main stream curriculum of education.

Furthermore, Visva-Kavi Rabindranath Tagore cherished the method of informal tutoring and therefore encouraged the process of mentoring the sub-conscious minds of his students ensuring that the lessons remain engraved in the psyche of the students and never get brushed off in the waves of time.

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