

UNFULFILLED DREAM

Tagor Model For School Education Still Relevant

By ALOKENATH SENSARMA

Rabindranath Tagore's Brahmacharyasram later renamed Path Bhavan in 1925 was established on 22 December, 1901. It will complete 100 years of its existence this year. It started its journey with five students — Rathindranath Tagore, Gourgobinda Gupta, Premkumar Gupta, Ashok Kumar Gupta and Sudhir Chandra Nun — and three regular teachers, Reba Chand, Jagadananda Roy and Shibdhan Vidyarnab apart from Brahmabandhab Upadhyay and Tagore himself.

Development of innate faculties

To explain the motive behind the foundation of the school, Tagore writes, "I suppose this poet's answer would be that, when he brought together a few boys, one sunny day in winter, among the warm shadows of the tall straight sal trees with their branches of quiet dignity, he started to write a poem in a medium not of words". [The prime moving force that compelled Tagore to establish the Brahmacharyasram is the restlessness of his creative mind. Tagore experts have also identified the reasons: conflict between romantic life of imagination and the life of action and sacrifice; the unhappy experience of school; the rigid routine of home education programme; his journey to the Himalayas with his saint-like father at the age of eleven; the enlightened family environment; the acquaintance with Sanskrit literature and Upanishads; his visit to England at the age of 17; the Sudder Street experience of "the vision" at the age of 20; the socio-political conditions in India then and the Shelaidaha experience.

Education is the instrument fashioned by men to achieve life's goals. Tagore observes, "He who sees all being in his own self and his own self in all beings, he does not remain unrevealed, that should be the motto of our Indian educational institutions". Tagore wrote "Siksar Herpher" in 1892 which was his first major writing on educational problems and delivered the convocation address to Gurukul Kangri in 1941, his last public utterance on education. By then he was not the same person if we take into account the change that had come over him. There are distinct phases of Tagore's evolution, namely, the Brah-

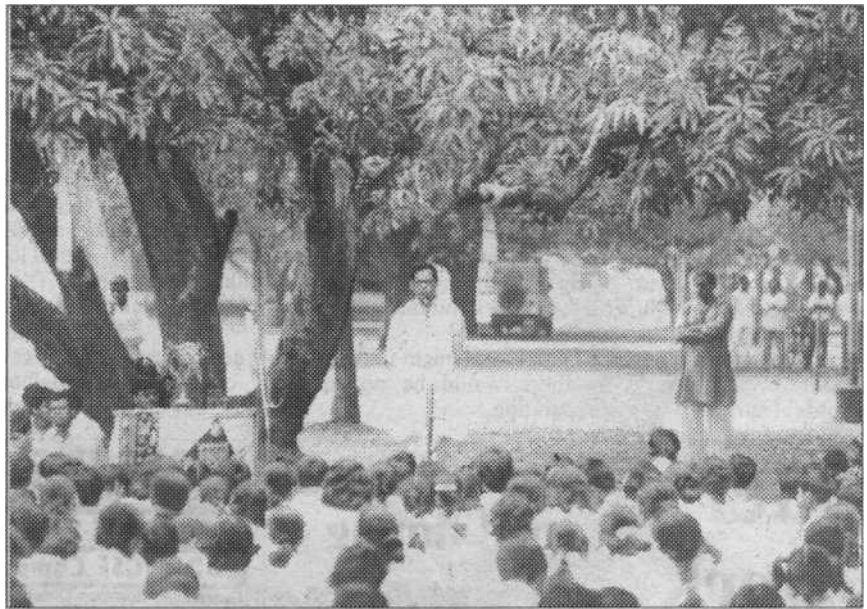
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macharyasram or "turning back to past", nationalism, internationalism, cosmicism and loka-siksha. Tagore emphasised different aims of education on different occasions.

In the words of Professor GH Thomson: "It will obviously be better to ask first, what are the aims of education, and afterwards inquire whether these aims can be subsumed under one which includes them all". Professor HB Mukherjee writes,

the process could attain complete manhood. He performed this experiment for 40 years from 1901 to 1941 with commitment and dedication sacrificing part of his literary activities and accepting financial constraints. This made him earn the distinction of being one of the greatest experimentalists in education the world has ever seen.

At the time of selecting activities for complete manhood, Tagore has taken into



"Although at different periods, in different contexts, he (Tagore) emphasised different ideas (as being) of fundamental importance, there is one strain of thought which we may observe running through all his educational utterances and activities either in bold, clear outline or in subtler concealed forms. It is the ideal of the development of all the innate faculties of an individual leading to an all-round, harmonious development of his personality". This state of harmonious development is the state of complete manhood.

Selection of activities

Tagore's originality in the field of education lies not in his aims but in the selection of activities. He prescribed a set of activities so that children going through

consideration the organic wholeness of human individuality, economic self-sufficiency through self-employment and development of human faculties. Some of the prominent activities and conditions are: instruction through mother tongue—scope of free reading other than textbooks — not for examination but for pleasure and joy; freedom of work; practice of simplicity, austerity but not poverty; self-help, self-discipline, cooperative living, respect for guests, elders and women; a close contact with nature, teachers and society; learning Bengali, English, social studies, mathematics, science, gardening, craft, music, dance, drama; participation in games, daily prayer, campus cleaning and participation of elected students in self-government. In a nutshell, the steps to-

wards complete manhood may be described as love and freedom leading to creative work that produces joy. The state of unadulterated joy is the state of complete manhood.

Peace and joy

The present system of education is instrumental in the advancement in science and technology and has brought physical comforts to a few but it has failed to bring the peace and joy for which all of us are striving. That is because of the defects in our school education system. Our information-centred, non-creative school education system has failed to generate self-employment, develop a proper value system or devise a mechanism for reducing tension and discontent. Its consequences are alarming: unemployment, corruption, dishonesty, terrorism, disrespect for women and elders and adult tension.

The final result is lack of peace and joy. We have no choice but to change our school education system. Tagore's model of education is the only well experimented model in hand. Its relevance must be assessed before it is adopted.

The aim of Tagore's model is harmonious development of individual faculties. In present day conditions, its relevance can be established from psychological, intellectual, spiritual and social factors. Only harmonious development ensures proper development and leads to eternal joy or 'anandam'. It helps generate self-employment opportunities, develop proper value system which can kill social evils like dishonesty, corruption and terrorism.

The present school education system has failed to produce the desirable results. The time has come to switch to Tagore's alternative model which is based on well established principles of child and social psychology. It is not the panacea but has immense potential for producing a new social order.

So if Visva-Bharati, the state and central governments and intellectuals come forward to make an honest attempt to fulfil Tagore's dream, it will be the highest tribute the country can pay to the poet in the centenary year of that experiment. Otherwise we may have to wait till a foreign country adopts this model and puts its own stamp on it. We will then have to borrow it as a "foreign product".