



Tagore's Vision of Inclusiveness and Rethinking Education in Santiniketan

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Abstract

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's Santiniketan a place of 'natural-self' for devoting equitable and harmonious relationship between culture, nature and its aboriginal people, is considered as a pioneer in inclusive education, challenging rote learning. His concept of education was always focusing on integration and oneness despite of diversities, intensifying children's abilities in their own way. Though inclusion is not a very old concept for seeing all in one lenses, Rabindranath Tagore's ideas of Santiniketan has exemplified a more integral and sustainable form of education system in almost all the high schools of Bolpur, a small place situated about 162.1 kms from Kolkata, especially known for amalgamating culture, nature, literature, and indigenous traditions with education irrespective of its geographical locations, race and gender. The present study was a short of survey research done through descriptive statistics to study the school teacher's attitudinal views regarding inclusive education and its implications in schools. Results show that most of the school teachers had positive attitude towards inclusion of students with SEN in common schools. Teachers' attitudes were found to be influenced by the nature and severity of the disabling condition, training of the teacher, experience, gender and availability of support. This study highlights the need of providing training to teachers, adapting curriculum, fostering good attitudes, and holding teachers accountable.

Key Words: Inclusive Education, Teacher's attitude Towards Inclusion, Tagore's ideas on Inclusive Education,

Introduction

The teaching approaches of Rabindranath Tagore's educational curriculum at Santiniketan, focuses on his humanism, multi-cultural, and natural approaches. Tagore's philosophy of humanism is universal, analyzing the universal nature and creative existence of man. Naturalism is a spiritual system that separates nature from God, focusing on the 'natural self' or 'real self'. Santiniketan, established in 1863, aims to improve education beyond lecture halls and became Visva-Bharati University in 1921. Tagore's curriculum blends art, human values, and cultural interchange, aiming to create open-minded citizens and bring about social, political, and economic revolutions at local, national, and universal levels. Tagore's humanism is evident in his literary works, which emphasize the development of women and the poor people of Bangladesh. He

rejects the concept of hedonism and utilitarianism, believing in the intellectuality and morality of human beings (Swamy, 2012).

Naturalism aims for self-expression, individuality, and survival preparation in education. It advocates for inductive, spontaneous teaching methods, focusing on surroundings and children's freedom. Multiculturalism incorporates diverse perspectives, emphasizing the importance of living close to nature and embracing nature's values (Swamy, 2012).

The National Education Policy-2020 in India aims to coordinate the nation's education system, focusing on creative potential development, critical thinking, problem-solving, social, emotional, and ethical capacities. It aims for inclusive, equitable quality education, lifelong learning opportunities, and skillful human resources. This policy aligns with the vision of Rabindranath Tagore, an educationist and philosopher who believed in the need for a flexible education system to fulfill societal needs. The policy includes changes in course structure, duration, assessment procedures, and teacher training (Saha, 2021).

The National Education Policy-2020 aims to create an Indian education system based on Indian ethos, building India into a global knowledge superpower. The policy aims to ensure an education system based on memory to reflective level, promoting respect for fundamental duties and constitutional values. It also focuses on sustainable development goals (SDG4), promoting lifelong opportunities for all, and promoting vocational education. Rabindranath Tagore's vision of Visva-Bharati emphasizes environmental conservation, collaborative research, and multidisciplinary learning. Both policies aim to create an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, promoting environmental values and fostering a lifelong learning environment (Saha, 2021).

Rabindranath Tagore, the first Asian poet to receive the Nobel Prize in literature, founded a self-funded university and designed a curriculum that radicalized traditional institutionalized education in colonial India. His Visva-Bharati University at Santiniketan is considered a unique experiment in inclusive education that debunks rote learning and fragmented knowledge. However, the viability of Tagore's approach in the 21st century is open to debate. The National Policy of Education 2019 in India prioritizes mechanized socio-economic progress and utilization of human capital, focusing on universal access to high-quality and breadth education. Tagore's ideas and activities still offer a unique standpoint for thinking beyond the constraints of the controlled knowledge economy and the euphoria of nationalisms. The emerging need is to address perspectives on global education while underscoring the culture-specific and region-specific needs of local education. Tagore's texts can be analyzed to track how artistic practice, analytical thought, and educational institutions can be linked to move us beyond the myopia of nationalism, creating a space to rethink and even disrupt the increasingly powerful homology in which home, family, language, and nation have come to stand for each other to divide not unify (Dasgupta, 2020).

Rabindranath Tagore, a naturalist philosopher and author, significantly influenced the education system of India. His philosophy of education, based on his experiences, influenced secondary education in modern India. Tagore believed that children can learn effectively when in close contact with nature, and considered nature as a significant agent in the education process. His philosophy was influenced by his family's cultural richness and the less formal schooling he experienced in Calcutta (Mondal & Gayen, 2021).

Rabindranath Tagore's educational philosophy combines naturalism, humanism, internationalism, and idealism. He believed in the importance of learning in the natural environment and the harmony between man and nature. Tagore opposed the British education system, which he believed was artificial and limited to producing clerks. His philosophy has influenced the Indian education system, emphasizing Self-realization, less formal schooling, and focusing on more holistic development of the learner. He believed in engaging in co-curricular activities, intellectual and moral development, and social development for the learner to live in society (Mondal & Gayen, 2021).

Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is a global trend that aims to narrow the gap within different societal groups. It's a paradigm shift from mainstreaming and integration, focusing on promoting democratic ideals and social justice. Inclusive education aims to raise the standard of instruction for every student, considering social justice and human rights. It is morally necessary for society to ensure every child receives a quality education, equipping them with the knowledge and abilities necessary to contribute to society as adults. Educational equity is the study and realization of justice, fairness, and impartiality in education, focusing on accommodating and meeting the specific needs of individual people. The Indian government has initiated initiatives to provide equal access to education, addressing each child's needs and tailoring instruction accordingly. Ensuring equality and inclusion by giving marginalized and those of deprived groups the chance to participate in dominant educational system is one of NEP 2020's primary objectives.

Inclusive education is a new and widely recognized general education strategy in India, aiming to integrate the sensorial impaired, such as the blind and deaf, into the general education curriculum. This approach focuses on adapting the environment to accommodate the disability rather than treating it as a deficit. Inclusive education promotes a high-quality education by meeting diverse needs in a responsive, accepting, respectful, and supportive manner. It involves providing fully accessible information, environments, and supports, such as barrier-free environments and alternative media. It promotes equal educational opportunities and appropriate curricula and teaching methodologies. The concept of inclusiveness in Education is crucial for reducing exclusion and promoting integral learning environments.

UNICEF supports government initiatives to promote inclusive education systems for children with disabilities. The organization advocates for inclusive education through public outreach, awareness-raising, capacity building, and support for implementation. Inclusive education provides equal educational opportunities for disabled children, fostering a healthy social environment and relationship between disabled and normal children. It is essential for every country, as it increases learning abilities, promotes educational equality, and fosters learning and social competition. UNICEF also assists in monitoring and evaluating implementation.

Benefits of Inclusion

Inclusive education is a system that reopens schools to the diversity of students in their locality. It focuses on restructuring the culture and policies in schools to accommodate the majority of children with special educational needs. Inclusive practices include recognizing the diversity of students, enabling them to access course content, participate in learning activities, and demonstrate their knowledge and strengths. The practice involves understanding inclusion as a continuous process, strengthening participation of all students, teachers, parents, and community members, restructuring societal values, cultures, policies, and practices, providing an appropriate and accessible curriculum, training programs, and support for staff and students.

Inclusive education practices often rely on active learning, include improved social internationality, more rigorous education programs, friendships, general knowledge development, and higher salaries for graduates from inclusion programs. The arguments supporting inclusion or opposing it are different, but the benefits extend beyond children with disabilities.

Economic Thought of Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore was an activist by true nature either in literature or by uplifting rural areas through several ideas of reconstruction like setting up of cooperative bank, rural industries, rural health and education, grain banks, mechanization in agriculture, expansion in marketing and cooperatives, creating clean environment, reducing poverty and hunger. Tagore in one of his interview in 1919, entitled as "On Some educational Questions" explained "Education is in real scence is the breaking of shackles of narrowness ...the highest aim of education should be to help the realization of unity but not of uniformity. Uniformity is unnatural...A sound educational system should provide for the development of variety without losing the hold on the basic or spiritual unity (Das, 1996; as cited in, Quayum, 2016 p 3)

For Rabindranath education in real sense making of learner to 'a real human being' through education and turn him/her into human resource. According to Dane & Samy (2024) Rabindranath Tagore expressed his views that village-based mass education can play a great role in social and economic development and in minimizing mortality rate. He realized that most of the people were deprived of the light of education and for this they did not have confidence in themselves. That's why; they were not willing to take part in development activities. So, he observed, education had to be spread among all the illiterate people.

The economic thoughts of Tagore were influenced from the ideas of Raja Rammohan Ray, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Prem Chand Lal, Dada Bhai Naoroji, Gobinda Ranade, Ramesh Chandra Dutta, Horace Plunkett, Gavrilko Kojick, Dr. H.G. Timbers, Daniel Hamilton and Leonard K. Elmhirst. In the "*Sonar Tori*", he described the economic condition of the peasants, helmsman, temple, housewife, vividly which is as follows;

--- "*In the golden fields farmers are cutting Ripe pad, Small boats are sailing, Helmsman are singing in boat, bells are ringing in far temple, Housewives going to river brinks, Housemen walking on rural paths, Coming towards village hats.*"

Rabindranath believed that the poverty of the rural peasants can be eliminated by dint of increasing income and equal redistribution of income.

Rabindranath always felt that Indian economy is based on rural economics. He believed that colonial rule destroyed the rural economy through exploitation. He was observed the deprivation, exploitation by land lord, superstition, illiteracy and debt trap of poor peasants of India as well as of Bengal. He wanted to reform tenancy system of peasants, to feed the farmers from debt trap, to turn them into self reliance especially in education, health, crop cultivation and culture.

Rabindranath Tagore felt that without technological improvement Indian agriculture would not be improved. He sent his son with Santosh Majumder and Nagendranath Ganguli to America to learn agricultural degree. In 1909 Rabindranath with his son Rathindranath set up agricultural farm near Silaidaha in a vested land where he used modern equipments like tractor, thresher, seed, etc.

In 1922, Rabindranath set up "*Surul farm*" which is later become the Department of Agriculture. In Surul farm, livestock farming was introduced. Agricultural research was done here, he himself experimented to produce Chinese nuts, rice and chilly.

In 1928, Fishery education and training was introduced in Ballavpur and Sukhsayar where a south Indian expert started with bee keeping bringing out honey. In 1924, poultry farm was started in Sriniketan, which is followed by dairy farm and goatery in 1933.

To aim at expansion of agricultural marketing of agri-outputs, he introduced village fairs. In 1905 at Shilaidaha, the name of fair was "*Katyani Mela*" where songs of baul, kirtan, tarja, panchali were arranged along with selling of agri-products and handicrafts. In 1907, he also introduced "*Rajrajeswari Mela*" where Jagadindranath Roy of Maharaja of Natore and Acharya Jagdish Chandra Basu were present.

Rabindranath had strong vision in the sense that he introduced the "*Grain Bank*" to meet up emergency food crisis in times famine and other natural disasters so that poor farmers can take grains in terms of loan by which they can maintain livelihood and concentrate in other activities in agriculture. Now, it is transformed into FCI by which public distribution system is maintained.

In 1928, 15 July Rabindranath introduced "*Hallakarshan*" ceremony where he himself involved in ploughing which was accompanied with hymns, recitation, dance and songs. Elmhirst, Pandit Bidhusekhar Shastri, Nandala Basu were present there and helped Rabindranath in every sphere.

Vision of Tagore

Rabindranath initially sought to realize the intrinsic values of ancient education in India. The school and its curriculum, therefore, signified a departure from the way the rest of the country viewed education and teaching. Simplicity in externals was a cardinal principle. Classes were held in the open air in the shade of trees where man and nature entered into an immediate harmonious relationship. Teachers and students shared the single integral socio-cultural life. The curriculum had music, painting, dramatic performances and other performative practices. Beyond the accepted limits of intellectual and academic pursuits, opportunities were created for invigorating and sustaining the manifold faculties of human personality (As cited in Visva-Bharati Santiniketan, Prospectus 2024).

Visva-Bharati University at Santiniketan is an unique experiment in inclusive education that debunks rote learning and fragmented knowledge. Through Tagore's literary and non-literary texts, it is possible to explore how artistic practice, analytical thought, and educational institutions can be linked to move beyond nationalism and create a space to rethink and disrupt the homology of home, family, language, and nation. The emerging need is to address global education perspectives while underscoring the culture-specific and region-specific needs of local education. The school's curriculum emphasized the innovations in integrating individuals of diverse backgrounds into a larger framework and devising economic policies that emphasized social justice and narrowed the gap between rich and poor. Tagore's novels, stories, and dramas are obsessed with the need to challenge the past and promote a balanced, holistic, and inclusive approach to education. "Tagore hated every school he ever attended, and he left them all as quickly as possible. What he hated was rote learning and the treatment of the pupil as a passive vessel of received cultural values. Tagore's novels, stories, and dramas are obsessed with the need to challenge the past." (Nussbaum, 2012).

Tagore initially envisioned a school for children at Santiniketan, Patha Bhavana, to educate them about world history and culture. However, within two decades, he announced that Santiniketan would grow into Visva-Bharati, an international university for studying and understanding cultures of East and West. After Rabindranath was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913, he was exposed to various cultures and people worldwide. By 1917, he self-clarified the idea of a center of Indian culture at Santiniketan, which would provide a coordinated study of different cultures, emphasize the importance of music and fine arts as means of national self-expression, and be a center of intellectual and economic life. By participating in all major spheres of Indian life, the institution would gain a representative character and engage with the rest of the world (Visva- Bharati Santiniketan, 2024).

Tagore, a skeptic about British-administered Indian universities, believed in a complete education that should be in touch with our complete life, including economic, intellectual, aesthetic, social, and spiritual aspects. He believed that true education involves realizing how our training and knowledge connect with our surroundings. (Das, 1996)

Tagore believes complete education requires bringing together all cultures, races, and genders, regardless of geographical location. He believes Visva-Bharati University can provide inclusive education by coordinating the study of Vedic, Puranic, Buddhist, Jain, Islamic, Sikh, Zoroastrian, and European cultures in a central learning center. This approach will enable assimilation and promote cultural understanding (Dasgupta, Chakravarti, & Mathew, 2013).

Tagore's political novel, *Char Adhyay*, critiqued the swadeshi movement and armed struggle, while his social novels focused on gender. Despite these gender-centric narratives, Tagore's inclusive spirit was crucial for disseminating unfettered knowledge, leading him to establish exclusive educational institutions.

Gora, a Hindu fundamentalist, transforms from a bigoted and fundamentalist to a liberated and secular individual, asserting that the world is one family. He asserts that there is no conflict among Hindu, Muslim, and Christian society in him. Gayatri Spivak, in her book, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, warns that linguistic diversity can curb globalization and that the humanities and qualitative social sciences will become peripheral in society. Rabindranath Tagore and other public and transformative intellectuals believe intellectual and cultural freedom is essential for consolidating universal humanism

(Spivak, 2013, p. 26).

Tagore's agenda aims to decolonize Western knowledge paradigms in India by promoting an alternative education system that includes interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, trans disciplinary, inter sectionality, and critical diversity studies. This inclusive approach can strengthen knowledge systems and replace binaries and monoliths with inclusive knowledge paradigms and policy.

Visva-Bharati Central University at Santiniketan has shifted from a private sector to a public education sector, redefining its idealistic priorities of education as a nurturing platform for an inclusive internationalist outlook. The hegemonic control of economic and cultural globalization has led to job-oriented education becoming the sole priority. In the twenty-first century, the Tagorean paradigm of an "unconventional University" may be ironic, as it focuses on the teacher as a transformative intellectual and education as a practice of freedom.

Methodology

Method: Descriptive Survey Method has been selected keeping in view the nature and demand of the study.

Population: High School teachers were the population of the study.

Sample: 82 High school teachers from the schools of Santiniketan were the sample of the study.

Sampling Technique: Simple random sampling was used to select high school teachers.

Tools Used:

1. Teachers Attitude Scale towards Inclusive Education standardized by Dr. Arti Anand and Dr. Vishal Sood
2. Researcher developed a self made questionnaire based on RPwD Act2016.

Construction of Self Made Questionnaire: The researcher decided to develop a questionnaire as this kind of questionnaire is not available in the market. Researcher followed several steps in the process of constructing the questionnaire.

Step 1: After discussion with supervisor researcher decided to develop ask questionnaire ewith three point rating scale along with a blank space for remarks.

Step 2: On the basis of expert's opinion items of the questionnaire was modified and arranged according to sequence. After this arrangement again the questionnaire was presented before the expert for opinion.

Step3: On the basis of expert's opinion again mini modification of the questionnaire was made. Step 4: After mini modification, the questionnaire was finalized for data collection.

Procedure of Data Collection: After preparation of the questionnaire the researcher wanted to go to the high schools of Santiniketan for data collection. Researcher first went to Headmaster/Headmistress of different Schools for permission of data collection. After getting permission from the headmaster/headmistress, the researcher build rapport with the teachers present there and then gave questionnaire to each teacher for data collection. Researcher read the instructionsloudlybeforetheteachersstartedtofillupthequestionnaire.Aftercompletionofthe questionnaire, the researcher collected those questionnaires from teachers. Thus, data was collected.

Techniques used for Data Analysis: For interpretation of standardized questionnaire, statistical Analysis is done using SPSS i.e. Mean & S.D. For interpretation of self-made questionnaire, percentage is calculated and interpretation is also made from the remarks they have written.

Objectives:

- To study the attitude of high school teachers towards inclusive education.
- To study the inclusive practices in high schools of Santiniketan.
- To explore the difficulties faced by teachers while implementing inclusive education in regular schools.

Research Questions:

- How teacher develops his understanding as Inclusive practitioner?
- What are the inclusive practices in high schools of Santiniketan?
- What are the difficulties faced by teachers for implementing inclusive education in regular schools?

Findings

Table 01: Attitude of High School Teachers towards Inclusive Education

Level of Attitude	Percentage
Extremely Favourable	6
Most Favourable	15
Above Average Favourable	59
Moderate Attitude	13
Below Average Unfavourable	7
Most Unfavourable	0
Extremely Unfavourable	0

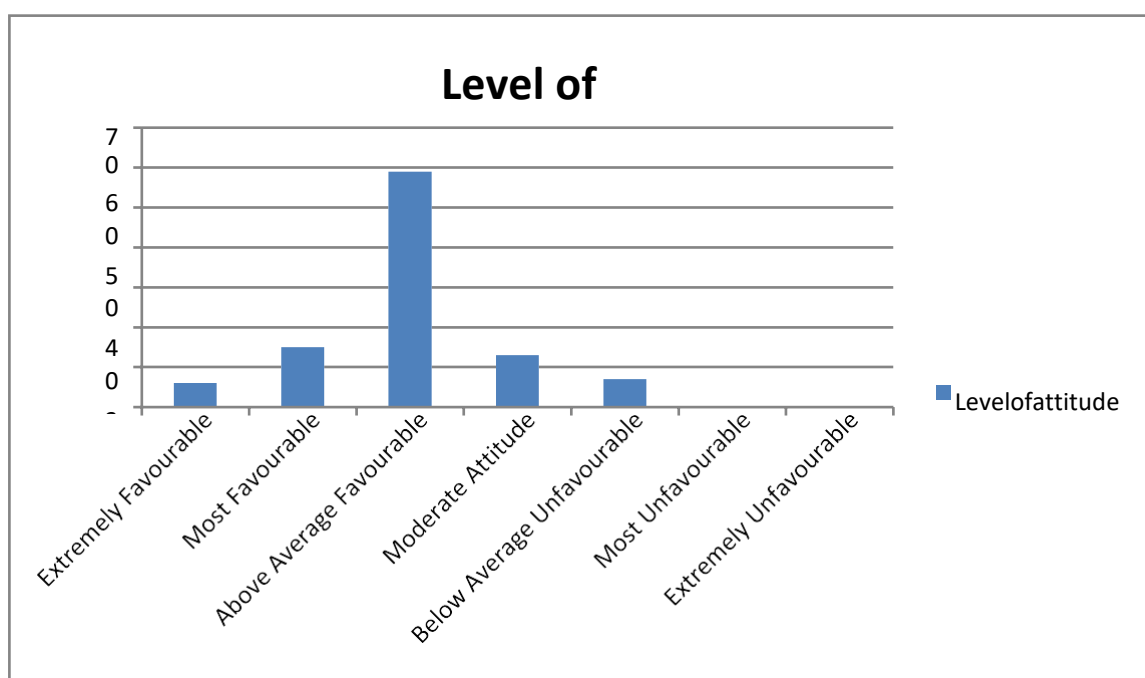


Fig.1: Level of Attitude of High School Teachers

From the findings it was very clear that only 6% of teachers had extremely favorable attitude towards Inclusive Education, 15% teacher had most favorable attitude, 59% of teachers had above average attitude towards inclusive education, 13% had moderate attitude and 7% of teachers had below average attitude. None of the teachers had negative attitude. It can be said that the staff members in the school were utilizing maximum time for the enhancement of students learning and teachers were modifying teaching strategies as per the needs of special children. As per Rabindranath Tagore's instruction the schools were made to develop an eco-vocational approach for the students with special needs of school for providing both ways services of identity-cum economic development to the students. Though the schools had no specific infrastructure facilities for such children, teachers and other school staffs definitely working for a change in their ways of teaching strategies and transaction procedures. In some cases teachers were demanding for proper periodical training of staff members in sign language and Braille usages for understanding and satisfying diverse needs of children. In the case of girl's students the nature of disability practices may be more hazardous but gender never be a potential criteria for judgment for some of the teachers too, what Tagore had also practiced in his Ashram school of Santiniketan. Dasgupta (2020) rightly stated in one of his articles about 2019 prospectus of Tagore's Visva-Bharati University,

“Visva-Bharati is a pilgrimage for education and culture. It reflects Tagorean ethos of making being. It is a hallowed place of learning cradled in the serene environment in the lap of Nature, where Rabindranath founded a school for children at Santiniketan, and it was around this nucleus that the structure of an unconventional university

[emphasis added] developed through careful planning and meticulous execution of those ideas and ideals (As cited in Visva-Bharati Santiniketan, 2019, p 6)

Conclusion

As Bengal at a large was facing huge downfall of socio-economic conditions and political confrontations in one or other ways in pre-independent India, Rabindranath Tagore, the intellectual leader, was mostly focusing on economic independence of rural Bengal through his ideas of rural reconstruction and eco-vocational model of economic support. Education never be politicized or overburden for any children where they feel free to understand their own potentials along with challenges to overcome. Thus according to Quayum, (2016) Tagore's answer lies in looking to life from a moral point of view and in understanding that in spite of our differences we are all part of an organic whole. Children should be made to understand this, and be exposed to different cultures in a positive way while they are still young, so that they can see the differences in cultures, not in a spirit of antagonism but in a spirit of cooperation and mutuality, and realise that underneath all the differences same spirit pervades in each one of us ... (p 10). So with all the effort the study had reflected well the ideas and ideals of Rabindranath Tagore through the existing school processes of Bolpur Santiniketan where teachers were highly energized to contribute. But in some cases both teachers and administration were facing challenges of special resource persons, Braille books and ramp and also regular periodic training to meet the student specific needs. Moreover, Tagore's principles of Education followed in High schools of Santiniketan certainly help to mitigate the weaknesses of present education system.

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