

# A Study of Tagore's Pattern of Education: Independence, Perfection and Universality

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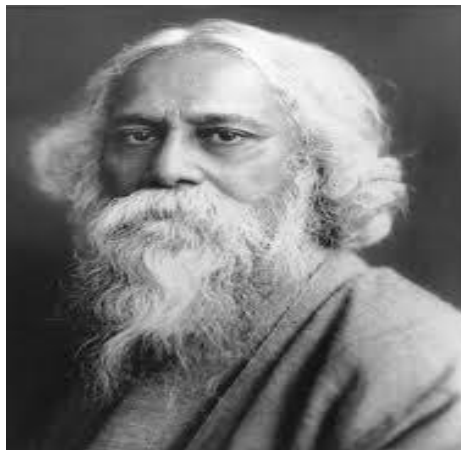
## Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore also known as Gurudev is a well-known Indian poet, novelist, dramatist, essayist, educationalist and social reformer. He had shown every indication of having a strong personality when he was a little child. As one delves deeper and deeper into Tagore's life and writings, it becomes clear that his educational system was mostly a reflection of his own philosophy. The four main schools of thought, naturalism, humanism, internationalism and idealism, are all combined in his philosophy. His thought illustrates how harmony with everything can lead to fulfilment. Tagore believed that education in his day was insufficient and that education should help people grow holistically and lead to the perfection of both individuals and society. The author attempted to provide a general discussion of Tagore's educational theories in this text.

**Keywords:** Rabindranath Tagore, Educational Thoughts, Indian Education, Santiniketan, Naturalism

## Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore was born into a distinguished and powerful Bengali Brahmin family on May 9, 1861, in Calcutta, West Bengal. He was Debendranath Tagore's youngest son and fourteenth overall. Rabindranath Tagore's liberal family background and the Upanishads' philosophy shaped his optimistic outlook on life and his love for people. Rabindranath received his education both at home and while traveling. He visited Europe frequently. After being accepted to a school in England, he quickly left to continue his education on his own.



*Image: Rabindranath Tagore (9<sup>th</sup> May, 1861- 7<sup>th</sup> August 1941)  
(Image Source: Google Images)*

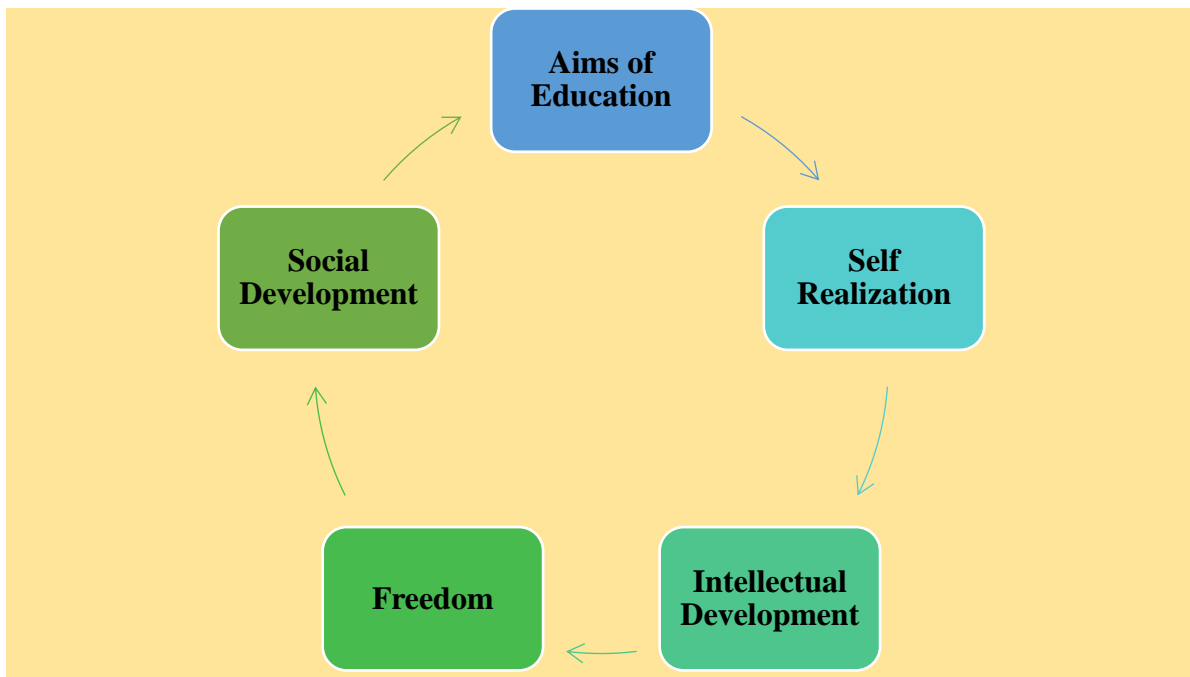
He started his educational experiment in 1901 after relocating to Santiniketan (meaning ‘*Abode of Peace*’). In this school, he experimented with his Upanishadic educational principles. He wrote the majority of his writing at Santiniketan and Shilaidaha. In addition to creating a creative and inventive educational system there, Tagore was able to use the school as a springboard from which to participate significantly in India’s social, political, and cultural movements through his works and his impact on both students and educators. Tagore dedicated a significant portion of his life to building the Santiniketan school (*Brahmacharyasrama*).



*Left: Upasana Griha (Kanch Mandir), Right Top: Gurudev with Students, Right Bottom: Classes at Patha Bhavana  
(Image Source: Google Images)*

### **Educational Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore**

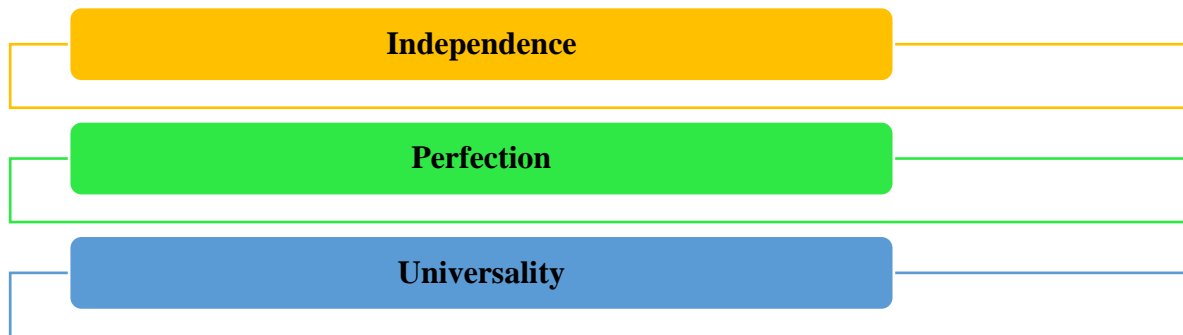
Rabindranath Tagore was more than a resounding leading Indian thinker of India in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. A prominent figure through his poetic brilliance, Tagore is known to India and the world as the winner of the 1913 Nobel Prize in Literature, the first non-westerner to be honored so. He was famous as an educator. The meaning of the word ‘*educator*’ is a teacher, a specialist in the theory and practice of education, an administrator of a school or an educational institution. Tagore was totally fit in all these frames. According to Rabindranath Tagore, the purpose of education is to help people understand who they are as whole individuals and to align education with life. Self-realization is what it is. He thought that education should aim to bring about this realization. The person who considers himself a human being first and foremost is a total man. His socioeconomic standing and place of birth are irrelevant to him. Instead, what is most important to him is his belief that he is a man first and foremost, regardless of his caste, faith, religion, or socioeconomic status.



*Image: Showing the Aims of Education According to Rabindranath Tagore*

A situation where the poor family develops an inferiority complex and the rich family grows up with arrogance is brought about by the prevailing social context. There is a wide space between the two as a result. Therefore, the self-realization-based educational process is crucial for developing harmonious relationships with people from all socioeconomic backgrounds. One must go through procedures that lead to this stage of being a complete man in order to achieve this fundamental identity of a human being; education is the only thing that can help with this process. There is no distinction between philosophy, life, and thought, according to Tagore. In addition, he thought that every human being had the capacity to develop into the universal soul, the superhuman being. His understanding of the universal soul is based on Upanishadic philosophy and the Gita. Ancient Indian philosophy served as the foundation for Tagore's thoughts. According to Indian tradition, self-realization equates to the realization of unification with God, and the souls of man and the universal soul are one. The foundation of self-education is self-realization, whose process is just as significant as education itself. More importantly, the teacher needs to believe in the universal self that lies behind his unique soul. All of those activities support the educational process by fostering a natural sense of contentment. Since contentment is a spiritual response, it differs from simple pleasure and satisfaction.

In accordance with Tagore's theory of self-education, the teacher must adhere to the three following guidelines:



*Image: Showing Guiding Principles of Tagore's theory of self-education*

### 1. Independence

Tagore was an advocate of total freedom, including freedom of thought, contentment, choice, emotions, knowledge, behavior, and worship. However, the pupil must exercise balance, harmony, and a calm disposition in order to attain this freedom. The student gains the ability to differentiate between things like right and wrong, natural and superficial, relevant and irrelevant, permanent and transitory, universal and individual, etc., through this process. The learner can then turn to self-guidance after being able to make this distinction and establish a harmony and synthesis in what is right, natural, relevant, permanent, and the genuine element he has received. Because it involves self-control and acting on one's own logical impulse, this independence should not be confused with a lack of control. Since the ego controls the person's senses, intellect, emotions, and all other abilities, there is no risk of the individual deviating from his path after this degree of freedom has been attained.

### 2. Perfection

In order to achieve perfection, the learner must make an effort to cultivate every facet of his personality as well as all of the natural talents and abilities that he possesses. Thus, academic learning is more than just passing tests and gaining degrees or certificates that allow him to support himself. The development of the child's personality is the only goal of education, and this can only be achieved when all facets of the personality are valued equally, with no one component being overemphasized or neglected.

### 3. Universality

The essential component of a persistent belief in the universal soul that is within him is implied by universality. Therefore, it is crucial to distinguish between the universal soul and one's own soul. In addition to looking within oneself, one can look for this global soul in all aspects of the natural world. Knowledge, worship, and action are the means by which this search is accomplished. It gets simpler to move forward after this understanding of the global soul is attained. The motto that Tagore chose for Visva Bharati was *Yatra Visvam Bhavatyekanidam*, which means "where the whole world can find a nest".

### Suitability of Rabindranath Tagore's Educational Thoughts in Indian Setting

Therefore, it is clear from the aforementioned principles that independence, perfection, and universality are the goals of Tagore's educational model. The teacher fosters an atmosphere that allows the student's individuality to flourish freely, flawlessly, and without limitations.

Tagore outlined the following educational tenets that are best suited for our nation:

1. Our own cultural traditions ought to be the foundation of any educational process. According to him, a tree cannot be freed from the soil's enslavement.
2. One's mother tongue must be used as the medium of instruction. All Indian leaders made repeated

references to this, and Tagore brought it up in front of the Saddler Educational Commission in 1917. Although this idea has been reiterated numerous times since independence, our society has not succeeded in achieving this fundamental goal in education.

3. Children’s education in the natural world was highly valued by Tagore, who claimed that nature was our best teacher
4. Learning a trade and working should be connected to education. Mahatma Gandhi reiterated this idea on numerous occasions and stressed the value of crafts and economic self-sufficiency as key components of educational policy
5. The educational process should be one of self-discovery, and free creation.
6. The Guru-Sishya Ashram style of education was greatly appreciated by Tagore. In this, he shares Sri Aurobindo’s belief that “soul-to-soul contact” between a Sisya and a Guru is the most crucial educational approach.
7. The school ought to be an essential part of society. All of our intellectuals agree with this viewpoint, including Lord Curzon, who also gave rural elementary schools a lot of weight.
8. The arts and crafts that deal with human emotions should be connected to intellectual education.
9. Playing and the joy it offers should be incorporated into the educational process.
10. Human brotherhood should be understood as a result of education. Interestingly, the Navodaya Vidyalayas (NPE 1986) also discuss the importance of fostering national unity by bringing together children from various regions, castes, and cultural backgrounds.

**Relevance of Tagore’s Educational Ideas**

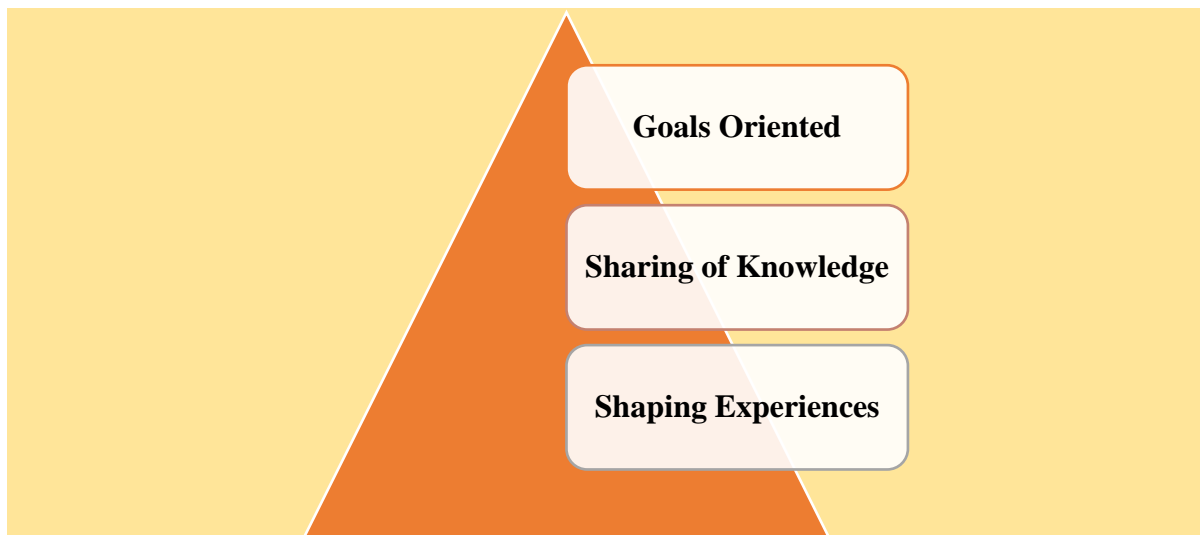
According to Tagore, the primary barrier to India’s development and the source of all of its issues is a lack of knowledge. Tagore had harshly criticized the western approach to education in India, which placed a strong emphasis on placement in British government offices and enterprises in India. Given the oversaturation of the civil service and the reality that most graduates were unable to find white-collar positions of any kind as the student grew. However, the moment had arrived when Tagore advocated for a change in the goals of academic education and so presented his own remedial concept.

He contends that if academic study is only considered a means of obtaining employment and material and financial gain, it becomes dull and purely mechanical. To guarantee the goal of becoming a complete man, education should serve as a tool for earning a living, but more significantly, it should raise awareness of human identity, which leads to harmonious relationships with others. It indicates that the goal of education is to teach us how to live a meaningful life in relation to those around us (Halder, 2023).



*Image: Classes Conducted at Patha Bhavana, Santiniketan  
(Image Source: Google Images)*

This does not imply, however, that education is unrelated to survival; rather, it should be focused on goals that go beyond simple practical ones. We should be able to comprehend the circumstances we find ourselves in and develop appropriate attitudes about them through academic study. Our attitudes are shaped by our experiences in our living circumstances, which include our relationships with our families and the socio-political environment. Because if we cannot relate to the situation we are in, education is really pointless.



*Image: Showing Tagorean Views of Focus of Education*

Therefore, it does not inspire our ideas, nor does it nurture our emotions and imaginations, if we are unable to connect with the environment in which we live. The existing educational system, which places too much emphasis on memory and too little on imagination and thought, was attacked by Tagore.

Tagore emphasizes the pointlessness of merely studying, a viewpoint advanced by Nietzsche and other western educational theorists. He went on to condemn any educational system that focuses only on acquiring knowledge with no further goals in mind. Tagore aims to raise our awareness of the perils of a typical educational system, which is a dry scholarship that promotes the learning of static concepts without making any meaningful contributions to our lives. The application of theories and concepts to real-world situations must be seamless. Developing and fostering our beliefs, feelings, and imaginations should be the goal of education since they allow us to analyze, appraise, and adopt positive attitudes regarding our experiences in the environment we live in. This belief explains why Tagore disapproved of an educational system that placed an excessive emphasis on theoretical knowledge. For example, politics may teach us about the democratic process, but it cannot be useful if it does not result in prosperity for the populace.



*Image: Singha Sadan is a roofed bell and clock tower building built in 1927, and is still used to regulate the timings of daily routine for the ashram in-mates.*

*(Image Source: Google Images)*

### **What Made Tagorean Educational Thoughts Important in Indian Scenario?**

Tagore's innovative educational concept is mostly forgotten today, despite the fact that his ideas are highly renowned in India. Although he wrote a lot of educational concepts, Indian schools have yet to adopt them. According to Tagore, we should start teaching pupils well at a young age if we wish to provide them with a proper education. However, this is not the case in India, where primary school teachers lack the necessary training for their positions. He claimed that their only job was to mistreat students because they were not proficient in either Bengali or English. Tagore was instrumental in educating the public about the fundamentals of education and the function of educators in society. Sidney Hook, like Tagore, wrote on education and its social function: *"Education is the one that plays a certain integrative role within its culture and in this sense a good education will formally be the same in every culture"* (Hook 1946). Rabindranath Tagore was not in favor of modern education. He wrote, *"A boy in this country has very little time at his disposal. He must learn a foreign language, pass several examinations and qualify himself for a job in the shortest possible time. So, what can he do but cram up a few text books with breathless speed? His parents and his teachers do not let him waste precious time by reading a book of entertainment, and they snatch it away from him the moment they see him with one."* (O'Connell, 2003)



*Image: Classes Conducted at Patha Bhavana in the Lap of Nature  
(Image Source: Google Images)*

Students carrying a lot of books and baggage to school, something Tagore disapproved of. Tagore observes that a student's parents place a heavy burden of books and luggage on him or her from the very beginning of the student's life. He wrote, "*From childhood to adolescence and again from adolescence to manhood, we are coolies of the goddess of learning, carrying loads of words on our folded backs*" (O'Connell, 2003). It deprives education of joy. He supported easy education, which includes education through literature, art, music, and the outdoors, among other mediums. According to him, the books we read don't paint a clear picture of our families and society. Additionally, he believed that our education was leading us down a path of captivating deception.

With good reason, Tagore referred the Indian schools as factories. According to what he wrote, the factory opens in the morning with a bell ringing, and then the machines begin to run as the teachers begin speaking. When the factory closes at four in the afternoon, the teachers stop talking, and the students take a few pages of machine-generated learning home with them (Mondal, 2023).

There is no one volume that contains Tagore's ideas on education. It can be found in all of his expressions. His own experiences served as the primary source of his views. He claims that the reason our current educational system is so poor is that it prevents us from developing our capacity for creativity and critical thought (Sar & Maity, 2024).

According to Tagore, the primary barrier to India's development and the source of all of its issues is a lack of knowledge. It is true that the fundamental goals of the educational system in our nation – such as encouraging creativity, freedom, joy, and an appreciation of one's cultural heritage – were utterly disregarded. Because English being the primary language of instruction at the time of Tagore, Indians were split into two groups. First, those who were educated, and second, those who weren't. He put a lot of effort into making India's educational system better. He gradually turned his focus from rural development and children's education to university education and the development of the nearby villages as one of the university's responsibilities (Saha & Maji, 2012). His goal was to create a different kind of



schooling. He sought to expose the unnaturalness of our nation's educational system, its lack of national ties, and the fact that it was run by a foreign government. The majority of Indians were unable to understand the language used for government operations, court proceedings, and the educational system. The primary reason for the public's awareness was the absence of mother language usage (Biswas, 2022). Because of his passion for the natural world, Tagore supported using natural components in his teaching at Santiniketan. Rabindranath Tagore was one of the first educators to consider the global village, and his educational model has a special sensitivity and suitability for teaching in multiracial, multilingual, and multicultural contexts, even in the face of recognized political and economic imbalance (O'Connell 2003).

### Conclusion

Ultimately, it should be mentioned that Rabindranath was a live example of the kind of reciprocity and innovative communication that he promoted. He fought for a world where different voices were encouraged to engage with one another and to resolve differences within an overarching commitment to peace and mutual interconnectedness. His vision of culture was not static; rather, it promoted new cultural fusions. His giving nature and his efforts to dismantle all boundaries provide us with an example of how multiculturalism can coexist inside a single human personality and the kind of person that education should aim to produce.

In many respects, Tagore's educational initiatives were revolutionary. He was among the first in India to advocate for an environmentally conscious, compassionate educational system that focused on the whole person's development. In addition to providing one of the first coeducational programs in South Asia, Santiniketan became a model for vernacular education and the creation of Bengali textbooks. Visva-Bharati and Sriniketan's founding sparked innovative initiatives in a number of areas, including as pan-Asian and international cultural interaction and models for mass and higher education that are uniquely Indian.

Rabindranath Tagore's approach to education as a poet is one feature that distinguishes his educational theory. His aim at Santiniketan, he said, was to write a poem in a medium other than words. Because of this poetic vision, he was able to create an inclusive educational plan and a special curriculum for learning about nature and creative self-expression in an environment that encouraged cross-cultural interaction.

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