

# DECOLONIZING PEDAGOGY FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

## Tagorean analysis of a case study

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### Introduction

Christian missionary education in the Global South is often considered as colonial by post-colonial patriots and also some academic scholars (Ball, 1983; Carnoy, 1974; Mackenzie, 1993; Pearce, 1988; Porter, 2008; White, 1996). However, some historians of South Asian education argue that missionary education in South Asia was not always coterminous with the colonial agenda. In fact, missionary educational work often was disruptive for the British Raj in South Asia. Missionary school teachers often empathized with the freedom struggle of native Indians. Missionary work can be critiqued as patronizing. But, the missionaries were also engaged in educating the subalterns of South Asian society and, thereby, often subverted indigenous power relations (Allender, 2014; Bara, 2000; Bellenoit, 2014; Seth, 2007; Spivak, 2004). The case study school<sup>1</sup> for this research was also a similar kind of subversive Catholic missionary institution.

The English-Irish order of nuns who set up the Delphine Hart School are known as the Jesuitess of the Catholic order. This is because the founding nun of the order wanted to set up a scholarly order for women following the Society of Jesus for men. The school is now part of a large global network of schools with several sister schools within India and abroad. Historical accounts of the school's work reveal that the school has been institutionally committed to the mission of social justice and equity from its very inception within the Indian subcontinent (Colmcille, 1968). However, due to government policy restrictions during colonial times, they were limited to providing only a small number of elite Indians access to their school. Moreover, the Jesuitess order also struggled under pressure from local elite parents for a more competitive standardized model of education, which often ran against the Jesuitess mission of imparting a more holistic model of education (Colmcille, 1968). Nonetheless, in postcolonial India the Delphine Hart School's work became known nationally and internationally for its innovative pedagogy, policy and practice to institute inclusive school culture, policy and practice (Bajaj, 2011; Chattopadhyay, 2015; Dabir, Rego, & Kapadia, 2011; Doggett, 2005; Greene, 1995; Stephens, 2003; Tembon & Fort, 2008).

This chapter will analyze the values-based inclusive pedagogical approach utilizing the twentieth-century Indian educational philosopher Rabindranath Tagore's humanist philosophy

of education to show how the transformational pedagogy to facilitate learning for all children at Delphine Hart School is connected with the history of progressive educational reform in the region and particularly with that of Tagore's theoretical ideas on education. Christian missionary education has been long critiqued as colonial in the critical literature. However, such a postcolonial analytical approach in engaging with Tagore's theoretical ideas on education to analyze ethnographic field data is taken because several religious and non-religious staff members at the school (including the school historian, Colmille, 1968) were deeply engaged with Tagore's pedagogic and creative work.

Therefore, in the next section of this chapter, I will first elaborate on Tagore's sharp critique of the prevailing system of education during his times and then elaborate on his main theoretical ideas on childhood and education. In doing so, I draw on Tagore's original writings on education scattered across numerous essays, speeches and creative work, as well as the work of scholars who have read and analyzed Tagore's work critically. After this discussion, I will analyze how the case study school's values-based pedagogic work within its postcolonial context is reflective of Tagore's theoretical ideas on education with regard to more child-centric, community-oriented and critical consciousness-raising decolonizing pedagogy.

### Tagore's humanist philosophy of education

Tagore's humanist philosophy of education is very much rooted in his own childhood experiences in schools during colonial India. As a highly sensitive and creative child, Tagore's sensibilities were hurt within the "factory-model" of schools (Tagore, 1906). He was probably the most famous school drop-out from South Asia, becoming the first non-European Nobel Laureate in literature and going on to build his own school. While talking about this school during a lecture tour in the United States, he affirmed that "I know what it was to which this school owes its origin. It was not any new theory of education, but the memory of my school day" (Tagore, 1917). As a highly sensitive and creative child, Tagore's experience of formal schooling was that of exclusion. The nineteenth-century industrial factory model of schools did not pay any attention to the individual learning needs of a child. He was primarily home-schooled in a personalized learning environment because of his privileged and learned family background. Tagore's inclusive educational experiments were conducted in the school he built in rural tribal Shantiniketan. This was located in colonial Bengal and, therefore, a product of the social and political upheavals during his times, as well as his own brief experience of formal schooling in both Bengali and English medium schools during colonial India.

Tagore wrote his first critical essay on education, *Shiksar Herfer*, in 1892, published later by Viswa Bharati University in English as "Topsy-Turvy Education" (Tagore, 1892). In *Shiksar Herfer*, which was initially delivered as a speech in Bengali, Tagore, for the first time, critically reflected on his early educational experiences in both formal Bengali and English medium schools in Calcutta compared to English education in England. According to Tagore, while both the language and the content of education were integrally connected to English life and society, it was completely disconnected from the life of Bengali children during colonial India. Hence, it encouraged rote-memorizing rules of grammar and sentence structure more than critical thinking and understanding. Tagore argued that learning should be a joyous experience of mental and physical freedom for the child and that learning should be connected to the child's social and cultural environment. He also argued for a multilevel curriculum and well-trained teachers to stimulate critical thinking and creative imagination.

Tagore's critique of education during colonial India was also published in the Bengali essay, *Shiksha Shamasya*, meaning "The Problem of Education", in 1906. Offering his sharp critique of the system of education prevalent during colonial India, Tagore (1906, p.67) stated:

what we now call a school in this country is really a factory, and the teachers are part of it. . . . Later this learning is tested at examinations and labelled. One advantage of a factory is that it can make goods exactly to order. Moreover, the goods are easy to label, because there is not much difference between what the different machines turn out. But there is a good deal of difference between one man and another, and even between what the same man is on different days.

In his own artistic way through the medium of his satirical short story "The Parrot's Training",<sup>2</sup> Tagore scathingly critiqued the "factory-model of schooling" which promoted the pedagogy of "parrot's training" (Tagore, 1918). Paulo Freire (1993) critiqued a similar phenomenon as the "Banking system of education" within the Brazilian context. Tagore further argued how the schooling systems in Europe were an integral part of their society, "but the schools in [India], far from being integrated to society, are imposed on it from outside" (Dasgupta, 2009, p. 113).

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It is to be noted here that his educational experiences and later his educational experiments were also embedded within a colonial world of domination and oppression. During those busy times, the local elites were learning the colonial way of living in the world for materialistic gains in society. The subalterns of the society, on the other hand were engaged in violent freedom struggles due to rising socioeconomic inequality between the haves and the have-nots. Within this colonized-dominated society, "rote-memorizing" Western knowledge for material gains in society and moral corruption of the native population that were torn between traditional Indian beliefs and modern Western knowledge became a matter of great concern for not just nationalists but also for colonial rulers, as it has been argued by Seth (2007). Tagore was also a major critic of the practice of "rote memorizing", and although he was in favor of Western scientific education, he considered education in English language as a major problem encouraging "rote memorizing". Hence, he argued for early education in mother tongue and learning of multiple languages, including English, like he did in his home-school (Bhattacharya, 2009).

This was also a strong political protest during those times against the colonial attitude towards native Indian languages and literature. Lord Macaulay asserted in his ill-famous racist statement in the "Minutes on Indian Education" (1935) that: "a single shelf of a good European library [is] worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is indeed fully admitted by those members of the committee who support the oriental plan of education." Although Macaulay stated that he read English translations of literature written in Indian languages and consulted experts, his statements reveal gross ignorance and cultural misunderstandings, as he did not consider the intellectual work of indigenous intellectuals and scholars such as Iswarchandra Vidyasagar who, Spivak (2004) argues, "fashioned pedagogic instruments for Sanskrit and Bengali that could, if used right (the question of teaching, again), suture the 'native' old with Macaulay's new, rather than reject the old and commence its stagnation with that famous and horrible sentence" (pp. 551–552).

Ashis Nandy (1983) had argued that the dilemma of the postcolonial condition is that

colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all. In the process, it helps generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity

to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside, in structures and in minds.

(p. xi)

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Macaulay's (1935)<sup>3</sup> vision of Indian education was to reproduce "a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect". Indeed, Ghosh, Naseem and Vijn (2010) argue that "Colonial education did in fact produce a class of surrogates who helped the colonial administration in running India 'with only a handful of colonial officers'." Afro-French postcolonial thinker Frantz Fanon's (1967) work is particularly useful here in understanding how a native ruling class were reproduced in the colonies through education for governing the socially marginalized masses of population in the colonies.

Allender (2006, p. 283) argues that "education was not deliberately organized as a means of control" by the colonial rulers based on evidence gathered through historical research, particularly in the Punjab province (not Bengal) of colonial India. However, colonial subjectivity of the native elites cannot be denied. Collins (2007) argues that although he belonged to a native elite family, much of Tagore's theoretical ideas germinated out of this colonial relationship of domination as a colonial subject. According to Tagore, relationships of domination were harmful for both the oppressor and the oppressed. Collins (2007) writes,

it is this theoretical position, as well as Tagore's personal involvement in realising such goals, that makes him such a significant figure; both in terms of the intellectual history of colonialism and for the purposes of thinking about the relationship between East and West in the contemporary postcolonial period.

(p. 80)

As a visionary philosopher, Tagore was deeply concerned not just about increasing economic inequality but also cultural distance enhancing social inequality among the native Indian population during colonial India. Tagore's inclusive educational experiments at his school in rural Shantiniketan in the tribal district of Bolepur were, thus, an attempt to bridge rising socioeconomic inequality within the native Indian society during colonial India, as expressed in many of his writings. Hence, located within the vicinity of his school in rural, tribal Shantiniketan, Tagore built another school, Sriniketan, to promote and sustain tribal handicrafts, art and music education for the local tribal agrarian community, seeking to bridge the rural-urban and tribal-civilized divides (Dasgupta, 1998; Ghosh, Naseem, & Vijn, 2010).

Moreover, despite the rising anti-colonial sentiments against Western nations and Western education because of the colonial government's decision to divide Bengal along the religious lines to disperse the freedom movement, Tagore expressed hope for reconciliation while delivering a talk to teachers: "In the East there is great deal of bitterness against other races, and in our own homes we are often brought up with feelings of hatred. . . . We are building our institution upon the ideal of the spiritual unity of all races" (Dasgupta, 2009, p. 111). Instead of rejecting everything Western, as protest against the policy of divide and rule along religious lines in colonial Bengal, Tagore organized a mass *Raksha Bandhan*<sup>4</sup> ceremony among Hindus and Muslims in his school. He would also invite Western friends and scholars from around the world to live and teach in his school at Shantiniketan. His inclusive ideal of education was, thus, all-encompassing. He sought to bridge not just the increasing socioeconomic distance among the native rural and urban population along caste, class, tribal and religious lines, but also racial disharmony through his inclusive model of schooling at Shantiniketan. Needless to say that these ideas are considered extremely

relevant even in the contemporary world, as argued by a number of scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds (Bannerji, 2016; Bhattacharya, 2009; Ghosh, 2015; Ghosh, Naseem, & Vijn, 2010; Guha, 2013; Mukherjee, 2013; Nussbaum, 2006, 2010; O'Connell, 2003, 2010).

As a poet, philosopher and visionary, Tagore envisioned the ultimate goal of education to be intrinsic; in terms of the liberation of the mind of the individuals drawing on the spiritual gnostic definition of education embedded in old Sanskrit saying *Sa Vidya Ya Vimuktaye*, "education is that which liberates the mind" (Ghosh & Naseem, 2003). He sought to reinstate pride among the indigenous Indian population about their languages, cultures and heritage by reviving spiritual philosophical aspects through the education of those marginalized under colonial subjectivity and domination. His primary aim of education was to free their minds from all kinds of parochial thinking and fear, as Tagore wrote in one of his famous oft-quoted poems – "where the mind is without fear".

Collins (2012) argues that Tagore's theoretical ideas were born out of his experience as an indigenous intellectual within the colonial Indian context and also from native *Upanishadic* ideals of "unity in diversity". While Kathleen O'Connell (2010) argues that Tagore drew much of his educational ideas from early Buddhist centers of learning at *Nalanda*, *Taxila* and *Vikramshila*, the indigenous idealized models back in the early third and fourth centuries B.C. which created a broader educational paradigm emphasizing scholarship, hospitality, cosmopolitanism and a harmonious relationship with the local community. Scholars from around the world would come to study in these ancient Buddhist universities. However, over the years, through waves of military invasions and colonial experiences, this development was disrupted. For the first time in the early twentieth century, Tagore sought to revive this Buddhist tradition in his school and in the university that he established, *Viswa Bharati* University (literally meaning the "Global Indian University").

Bhattacharya (2009) argued that Tagore's opposition for the practice of rote-learning in formal schools and his ideas regarding early education in the mother tongue, education of children and adults of both sexes and of a modern Indian university as a place for higher learning, in addition to his views on course structure, certification and even distance learning, were extremely innovative and way ahead of his time during colonial India. Drawing on Tagore's notion of freedom in education, Guha (2013) argued that within this technologically mediated rapidly changing world, Tagore's notion of child-centric education, encouraging their natural curiosity, close relationships with the natural environment, creativity and imagination can foster innovative thinking and prepare them for the challenges of the changing environmental conditions around them. It also offers the possibility of an inclusive pedagogy to meet the learning needs and abilities of all children.

Tagore also sought to bridge gender gaps within Indian society through education. In several of his operatic dance dramas<sup>6</sup> and literary writings, Tagore gave life to strong female characters and encouraged women to pursue knowledge equally as the men in his school. In a 1915 essay titled *Strisiksa*, meaning "Woman's Education", Tagore wrote, "Whatever is worth knowing is knowledge. It should be known equally by men and women, not for the sake of practical utility but for the sake of knowing" (Tagore, as cited in Jalan, 1976, p. 13). It was quite a radical and progressive decision during the early twentieth century to set up his school as a co-educational, gender-inclusive institution. While exploring various progressive ideas of Tagore at length by quoting from his satirical short story "The Parrot's Training" and his use of arts in education, Nussbaum (2006, 2010) especially emphasized how Tagore used dance forms for women's liberation and democratic participation during a time when women from "genteel" families would not be allowed to participate in public life. Singing and dancing were arts practiced by

*bajaarer meyechele* or *baaji*, meaning “woman of the *bazaar* or market” (i.e., courtesans, similar to the Japanese *geisha*). However, Nussbaum (2006, p. 8) writes:

When I talked to late Amita Sen who danced in Rabindranath Tagore’s dance dramas, first in his progressive school in Shantiniketan and then to the Kolkata stage, I see the revolutionary nature of what Tagore had done for young women in particular, urging themselves to express themselves freely through their bodies and to join with them in a profoundly egalitarian play. The scandal of this freedom, as young women of good family suddenly turned up on the Kolkata stage, shook convention and tradition to their foundations.

Nussbaum (2006, 2010) not only argues about the revolutionary nature of Tagore’s educational ideas for women within their historical context during colonial India, but also argues about the relevance of Tagore’s educational ideas alongside John Dewey’s ideas for contemporary concerns about education and democratic citizenship within the United States and around the world. This is especially relevant given that neoliberal policy imperatives are privileging certain kinds of technical education for the nation’s financial success and marginalizing humanistic education which, in effect, is creating barriers for social inclusion of the marginalized in schools and in the larger society.

### Decolonizing pedagogy

Comparing Tagore’s theoretical ideas on education with emancipatory ideas of Freire, Fanon and Gramsci, Bannerji (2016, p. 28) writes that:

The broader consciousness-raising goal of pedagogy, the essential purpose of education for Rabindranath lies not only in teaching literacy, facts and skills, but in enhancing the self-awareness which helps to link the self with the other, with society and the individual with the world.

Quoting Tagore’s own words, she further affirms that:

We cannot remove the causes of our suffering from the outside, they have to be eradicated from within. If we wish to do that there are two tasks. First, to educate the common people of the country and connect their consciousness with all peoples of the world – detachment from the world has made their consciousness rustic and insular. They have to be lifted into the proud sphere of the humanity as a whole . . . The other [task] is in the area of livelihood. They will have to be united with the world’s humanity [in this] and their labour connected with that of others.

(Bannerji, 2016, p. 25)

While colonial pedagogy and resistance to colonialism were seeing the rise of rabid parochial nationalism, Tagore saw a philosophical vision of spiritual unity of all human races. This philosophical vision is also embedded in his decolonizing pedagogic project in his school located in rural tribal Shantiniketan. He strongly believed in the emancipatory power of education on the human mind. Territorial decolonization, or *swaraj*, as espoused by Gandhi and other prominent freedom fighters, was therefore meaningless for Tagore without the freedom of the mind from all parochial shackles, including the shackles imposed from outside by colonialism and the

shackles arising out of the roots of Indian society. This reading of Tagore is also supported by two of the most critical readers of Tagore: Hogan (2003) and Radice (2010).

Both Hogan and Radice are quite critical as they discuss ambiguities in Tagore's ideas and his own privileged positioning within the Indian context with regards to certain issues, yet both of them agree that Tagore was, on principle, opposed to any kind of segregation based on nationality, class, caste, race, religion, ethnicity or gender. He viewed inclusive education for all as the only means through which segregation, discrimination and prejudice can be eliminated. This socially inclusive philosophy of education fostering principles of cooperation and care for the "other", is referred to as the "politics of Otherness" by Hogan (2003) based on the values of *sahrdaya*, meaning a person with a compassionate heart in Sanskrit and Bengali. For him, the ultimate goal of education was freedom – liberation of the mind for inclusivity, equality and reciprocity. Even his creative writings had a pedagogic purpose, as Radice (2010) argues that Tagore was "never not an educator".

Hence, Tagore's philosophical vision of education also aimed for reconciliation across colonial racial and cultural barriers through education. His relational model of schooling based on the principles of cooperation thus involved building a strong meaningful relationship among the teacher, the student, the peers and the environment (Mukherjee, 2017). Although Tagore strongly critiqued British Imperialism and the capitalist colonial exploitation of India, he appreciated the literature and culture of the West and its tradition of liberal humanism. Hence, in his essay "A Poet's School" (1926) Tagore wrote:

The minds of the children today are almost deliberately made incapable of understanding other people with different languages and customs. The result is that, later, they hurt one another out of ignorance and suffer from the worst form of the blindness of the age. . . . I have tried to save our children from such aberrations, and here the help of friends from the West, with their sympathetic hearts, has been of the greatest service.

(Tagore, 1926, as cited in Dasgupta, 2009, p. 83)

His decolonizing pedagogic project was very much ontological as well as epistemological. Bannerji (2016) rightly concludes,

Rabindranath's pedagogy of decolonization nurtures this social process of being and provides possibilities for the emergence of the truly 'human' in us and the creation of a 'humane' society. This pedagogy thus opens the door for an aesthetic, ethical and critical philosophy and method for the birth of such a new person and a new society.  
(p. 54)

It is to be noted here that even as he offered a sharp critique of colonialism through his writings and work, Tagore was far from being an orientalist, and he equally critiqued various indigenous inequities and dogmas, including religious ones.

As an educator, he laid more emphasis on "praxis," or just ethical action, rather than preaching. Tagore's humanist philosophy of education and his efforts to institutionalize it in his school at Shantiniketan back in the early twentieth-century context of colonial British India therefore demonstrates an alternative historical trajectory of child-centric socially inclusive education in early twentieth-century colonial India. His philosophical model of inclusive education for the development of the whole child is, therefore, very useful in enhancing Southern theoretical understanding of inclusive education. Chakrabarty (2007) discussed at length the somewhat

artificial divide between the analytic and hermeneutic traditions “central to modern European social thought” (p. 18). However, I argue here, as I have argued in my doctoral thesis, that engaging with Tagore’s educational ideas allows for both analytic (ideological) as well as hermeneutic (affective historical) engagement with issues of inclusive education, particularly within the Indian context.

His model of education for the whole child involved the conscious raising of the child for becoming aware of various existing inequalities of the world (both global and local). Tagore believed that the pedagogic process should also liberate the learner from the shackles which bind the mind. As Edward Said (1993) and particularly Ghosh, Naseem and Vijn (2010) have argued, much like the French–Algerian postcolonial theorist Franz Fanon, Tagore was much occupied with the thought of the colonization of the mind. In 1921 INhis essay “The Call of Truth”, Tagore, as quoted by Bhattacharya (2001, p. 84) wrote:

I have said repeatedly and I must repeat once more that we cannot afford to lose our mind for the sake of any external gain. . . . we must refuse to accept our ally the illusion-haunted magic-ridden slave mentality that is at the root of all poverty and insult under which our country groans.

Therefore, he took utmost care in creating inclusive learning spaces within his school at Shantiniketan, where spiritual, artistic and creative wealth were given more importance than material wealth within the colonial context of extreme economic deprivation, especially in rural India. This is also evident from the memory of a rainy day and leaky roofs narrated by the resident painter, Benodbehari Mukhopadhyay, at Tagore’s school, which Chakrabarty (2007, pp. 171–172) recounted in his book *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*.

Moreover, believing in the philosophy of cultural confluence and syncretism, Tagore was against any rigid definition of culture with a capital C: “What is needed is eagerness of heart for a fruitful communication between different cultures. Anything that prevents this is barbarism” (Tagore, as quoted by Collins, 2007, p. 1). According to the creative artist in Tagore, getting stuck in the “dreary desert sand of dead habits” was perhaps the worst way to look at culture and tradition. Hence, he was also a major critic of the Gandhian nationalist idealization of Indian society and Orientalist cultural stereotypes of the noble savage, which ignored the indigenous inequities of patriarchy, caste and class. Ghosh and Naseem (2003) have argued, quoting from Narvane (1977), “To him the modern person was not one who turns one’s back upon tradition but rather one ‘who interprets it creatively and rationally’” (p. 5). Therefore, his ideas about culture and tradition were dynamic and fluid, which demanded constant reflection and change to meet the needs of time. As a visionary philosopher, Tagore pondered the dangers of cultural nationalism as a tool to counter the colonial imagery of backward India.

It is to be also noted here that, unlike Gandhi, Tagore was not opposed to science and technical education, but he was critical of the excesses of mechanization and scientific progress for development, especially because of the devastation it caused during the World Wars. Hogan (2003, p.22) states that his ideas were “born out of the unprecedented terror of the twentieth century”. Although he was initially optimistic about Western scientific education and promoted such education in his school, he was deeply moved by the devastation of the World Wars and in his essay “Crisis of Civilization” conveyed that the most necessary aspect of any civilization is not just scientific industrial progress, but self-reflexivity, criticality and above all sympathy, which are aspects developed through a more humanistic education. Hence, like Purakayastha (2003), I argue that Tagore’s decolonizing pedagogic approach was based on his



philosophical humanist vision and values as a “rooted-cosmopolitan” (Appiah, 2005) beyond the rivalry and competition of Western notions of nation-state.

### **“We Are the World”**

I argue in this chapter that similar values are also embedded in the “We Are the World” values education curriculum developed by one of the long-serving principals of Delphine Hart School, along with some of the school staff. Once the case study school began providing access to larger numbers of children (i.e., 50% of total admissions) from disadvantaged backgrounds (including homeless children), the school staff realized that it was not enough to provide access. In order to educate and empower these children, it was important to create inclusive learning spaces. In order to help all the children learn, the school needed to adopt a different pedagogic approach.

Therefore, beginning in the 1980s, the Delphine Hart School principal, Sister Valentine, along with some of the teaching staff who were either her students in other Jesuitess schools or from an alternative indigenous reform tradition of Brahmo schools, developed a 10-part series of child-centered and critically reflexive values education curriculum. The series of textbooks was published and distributed by Orient Longman (now Orient Blackswan), a renowned school textbook and academic publisher in India, and were in wide circulation among the English medium schools by the 1990s. The 10-part series of “We Are the World” (classes 1–10) textbooks provides values-based active citizenship education for schoolchildren. The series was first published in 1989 and revised in 2005 as the third edition.

The lessons in the books are designed in a way so that they help children to reflect on their personal growth, see beyond themselves in the context of society, explore their inner spirituality and contribute their share to society. The units in the series deal with pressing social issues within the Indian context, such as discriminations based on caste, class, religion and gender. Each unit is designed in such a way so as to allow room for dialogue, classroom discussion and critical reflection among students. A five-step methodology of teaching was developed which involved individual work, group work and peer-to-peer learning as children in the classroom would be divided into small groups of children with mixed ability and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The series begins with a preface from the authors affirming the rights of every child as well as values of social responsibility. The books also include illustrations and quotes from great social, political and educational leaders, such as Gandhi and Tagore, among many other modern Indian thinkers. This practice-oriented values education curriculum and critical consciousness-raising pedagogy upholding the rights of every child while instilling community values for just social action reflects the Jesuitess school’s philosophy of education. This philosophy is explicitly stated in the school’s 1971 constitution:

Our goal is to form women alive to the needs of our world, with the knowledge which gives them power to act, and motivated by the love which gives them purpose and wisdom in their action. The education of girls from every social background has to be undertaken so that there can be produced not only women of refined talents but those great souled persons who are so desperately needed by our times.

*(p. 29)*

Although it refers to only the holistic education of girls from diverse social backgrounds, I argue that this inclusive philosophy resonates with indigenous education reformer Tagore’s inclusive philosophy and practice of education in his school in Shantiniketan, where he sought to build a model of holistic education for every child according to his or her needs and abilities.

Education in Tagore's school in rural tribal Shantiniketan with students from diverse backgrounds also involved social and emotional learning within the natural environment for ecological consciousness of the child and not just academic learning (Dasgupta, 2009; Ghosh, Naseem, & Vijn, 2010; O'Connell, 2003, 2010). Tagore, as cited in Dasgupta (2009, p. 148) wrote,

our education should be in full touch with our complete life, economical, intellectual, aesthetic, social, and spiritual; and our educational institutions should be in the very heart of our society, connected with it by the living bonds of varied co-operations. For true education is to realize at every step how our training and knowledge have organic connection with our surroundings.

In his talks to the teachers, Tagore, as quoted in (Dasgupta, 2009, p. 108), strongly critiqued the fact that "the child's life is subjected to the education factory, lifeless, colourless, dissociated from the context".

However, unlike the school Tagore built in rural tribal Shantiniketan, located in the heart of a busy overcrowded congested city, the children of Delphine Hart School had little opportunity of any contact with nature and greenery. The school, therefore, designed a program to make the school students take responsibility to keep the environment of their own school clean by declaring domestic cleaning staff a holiday once a month and getting the schoolchildren engaged to keep their school and surrounding neighborhood clean. Within the Indian context, where the social norm is that the children of *Bhadrolok* (genteel) families study in neat and clean English-medium schools to do white-collar jobs and hire uneducated *Chotolok* (literally "small people", see Bando-padhyay, 2004, p. 129) to do cleaning work for them, this was indeed a radical approach of environmental education to teach children to clean up after themselves and also to instill the values of equality. *Bhadro* in Bengali and Hindi literally means "civilized" and *lok* is a person. Cultural sociologists claim that the *Bhadrolok* is "a Bengali urban intelligentsia that emerged in the crucible of colonialism" (Roy, 2003, p. 8). However, within Delphine Hart School, just as the homeless disadvantaged children would keep their rooftop home inside the school and bathing rooms clean, the girls from middle-class families would also clean their classrooms and school toilets and paint the walls of the school building. This was not just to keep the school environment clean, but also to give expression to their artistic self by drawing images of flowers, trees and greenery on the walls of the school, while the school is actually located in the middle of a concrete jungle!

It is therefore not surprising that within the decades since the 1990 first world conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien and the establishment of the Indian country office of *Sarva Shikshya Abhiyan*, the work of this school became an attractive indigenous model of inclusive school reform to both the global development agencies and the Indian government. The values education curriculum was also adapted as the official Human Rights Education curriculum and was translated into other local Indian languages for dissemination in the Eastern region of the country, when the Institute for Human Rights Education (IHRE) chose to partner with Delphine Hart School as its Eastern regional center. This curriculum is now being promoted by the Indian government's "Sarva Shikshya Abhiyan" Office to train teachers in government schools about the need for a values-based approach to education for all as a human right.

## Conclusion

Decolonizing pedagogy addressing the individual learning needs and abilities of the child, while connecting the child's learning with the social world is very important to achieve the goals of education for all and inclusive sustainable development. The social consciousness raising of the

values–education curriculum “We Are the World” and the pedagogical approach developed by the school are therefore very reflective of Tagore’s theoretical ideas on education, which sought to nurture both individual learning needs and ability, as well as instill community-oriented “heart values” with competitive “head values” (Mukherjee, 2017). Tagore (1906) wrote in the essay “The Problem of Education”:

If we at all understand the needs of the present day, we must see that any new school founded by us fulfill the following conditions: that their courses are both lively and varied, and nourish the heart as well as the intellect; that no disunity or discord disrupts the minds of our young; and that education does not become something for those few hours when they are at school.

(pp. 68–69)

However, Tagore’s holistic philosophy of education and inclusive model of schooling have been by and large neglected by the mainstream system, even in postcolonial India. The colonial structures are still dominant within the mainstream education system. Sriprakash, (2011) argues based on her research in rural India that

learning (is) largely understood as knowledge assimilation (the acquisition of the syllabus) rather than knowledge construction. . . . The strong classification of the syllabus, as a significant aspect of the performance-based system which remained in place, did not support a more democratic approach to knowledge acquisition.

(p. 303)

Although Tagore is much worshipped as the *Kabi Guru* (Poet Teacher), most of the Indian schools still follow a colonial model of “parrot’s training”, using a rigid curriculum and pedagogy which is detrimental for the free development of a child’s mind and inclusive of all children with diverse learning needs. Within a context like this, an apparently colonial missionary school’s inclusive pedagogic work is a unique case in many ways. Understanding the indigenous educational reform traditions that influenced the school’s distinct conceptualization of inclusive education within its context is, therefore, useful to think about in ways in which a more democratic approach towards teaching and learning can be designed in schools within similar contexts of colonial assimilation, subjugation, negotiation and resistance.

## Notes

- 1 The names of the school and the research participants have been anonymized according to the research ethics protocol of the University of Melbourne.
- 2 See: [www.tagoreweb.in/Render/ShowContent.aspx?ct=Stories&bi=4A57AB73-A4A0-40D5-551D-9502E9CD11FD&ti=4A57AB73-A4A0-4FB5-251D-9502E9CD11FD](http://www.tagoreweb.in/Render/ShowContent.aspx?ct=Stories&bi=4A57AB73-A4A0-40D5-551D-9502E9CD11FD&ti=4A57AB73-A4A0-4FB5-251D-9502E9CD11FD)
- 3 See: [www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt\\_minute\\_education\\_1835.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html)
- 4 A traditional Hindu ceremony for tying a sacred thread of protection on the wrist of a brother by a sister.
- 5 The *Upanishads* are ancient Indian transcendentalist texts. More than 200 *Upanishads* were orally composed and later written down around the sixth century B.C. They present a unifying cosmology behind the apparent diversity of not just life on earth but the universe. Tagore adapted those ideas to suit his needs in colonial India as he was deeply concerned with increasing socioeconomic inequality, environmental degradation and disharmony related to racial, religious and gender divides within the colonial Indian context.
- 6 These dance dramas drew stories from ancient mythologies and rural folk traditions of *Jatra* (travelling dramatic performance team, also known as *nautanki* in Hindi).

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