

2. “Home and the World”: Rethinking Global Citizenship Education From Rabindranath Tagore’s Perspective

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Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore was the first non-European Nobel laureate in literature from Asia. He received this honour during the British colonial rule over the Indian subcontinent, in 1913. This was a major recognition for a colonial subject from the Global South who had opted out of the colonial education system and chose to write literature in his native language, Bengali, when just a single shelf of European literature was considered far superior to an entire library full of literature in native languages from the Global South, such as Sanskrit or Arabic, according to Lord Macaulay’s 1835 “Minutes on Indian Education.”¹ However, though Tagore became famous globally as a literary figure, he spent much of his adult life building his own school at Shantiniketan, in rural Bengal. Later, Tagore also established the first-of-its-kind international university in modern India: Visva-Bharati (World-Minded Indian) University, at Shantiniketan. After over a century following the global recognition of his literary work, only recently, in 2023, was Shantiniketan incorporated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site for Tagore’s pedagogic reform work. This chapter presents Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophy of education and pedagogic practice that guided him to establish his school and university. Tagore’s ideas and educational experiments were far ahead of his time during British colonial India. Their purpose and efficacy were often misunderstood at the time. Scholars have also raised questions about the sustainability of these progressive ideas and practices by labelling Tagore as an idealist whose ideas are hard to institutionalise in practice. However, this chapter demonstrates how Tagore’s relational humanist philosophy of education and pedagogic practices are now more relevant than ever before, as our only home—all of planet

Earth—is facing a sustainability crisis. I draw on archival documentary evidence, Tagore's own writings, and the writings of scholars who have observed his work and written about it to argue how Tagore's pedagogic work during colonial British India was similar to the critical values-based perspective of global citizenship education (GCED) as discussed by critical GCED scholars. I further argue that the kind of world-minded, community-engaged responsible citizens Tagore was seeking to nurture in his school and university during British colonial India exhibit the characteristics of critical and compassionate *global citizens*. Hence, we can rethink GCED and competencies as enumerated by UNESCO (2014) from Tagore's perspective.

Introduction

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls

....

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake. (Tagore, 1913, p. 20)

The above lines from a poem by the first Asian Nobel laureate in literature, Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), demonstrate very well how Tagore sought to connect the home and the world, even while his countrymen were engaged in a freedom movement against British colonial rule to free their motherland. A humanist with a planetary consciousness, Tagore was against the man-made *narrow domestic walls* that the European concept of nation-state and citizenship signified. Hence, he sought to reform the education system by establishing his own school and university, where he launched a curriculum that integrated the 3H's—the head, the heart, and the hand—for community engagement and rural reconstruction, while also opening the minds of students to the world by teaching them multiple languages and engaging them in diverse cultural activities. This chapter discusses Tagore's philosophy of education and pedagogic reform work to demonstrate how it aligns with some of the policy recommendations in postcolonial India. The chapter further discusses how Tagore's philosophy of education and pedagogic practice aligns with India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 mandate for global citizenship education (GCED). It argues that engaging with Tagore's philosophy

of education and pedagogic reform during British colonial India can help rethink GCED from a colonial and postcolonial Global South perspective.

Tagore's Philosophy of Education and Pedagogic Praxis

The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence. But we find that this education of sympathy is not only systematically ignored in schools, but it is severely repressed. ... we are made to lose our world to find a bagful of information instead. We rob the child of his earth to teach him geography, of language to teach him grammar. His hunger is for the Epic, but he is supplied with chronicles of facts and dates. He was born in the human world, but is banished into the world of living gramophones, to expiate for the original sin of being born in ignorance. Child-nature protests against such calamity with all its power of suffering, subdued at last into silence by punishment. (Tagore, 1917, pp. 142–143)

The above lines written by Tagore express very well his agony as a child in schools during the colonial period. Born into a wealthy family of landed gentry during colonial British India, Tagore was a misfit at school as a child. He is probably one of the most famous school dropouts in the world. If not for his wealthy, educated family and his father, who decided to homeschool him, Tagore would have probably remained illiterate like millions of illiterates in his native country. As is evident from the above quote, Tagore's schooling experience as a child was painful. His difficult childhood experiences in the colonial schools shaped his relational humanist philosophy of education and pedagogic practice at later stages in his life. Although he was the first Asian to receive the Noble Prize for Literature in 1913 for his book of poems, *Gitanjali*, and became renowned as a literary figure worldwide, he spent most of his adult life building his own school and university to reform the mainstream colonial education system in the early 20th century. A noted Tagore scholar, Ketaki Kushari Dyson (1996) states:

He was a pioneer in education. A rebel against formal education in his youth, he tried to give shape to some of his own educational ideas in the school he founded at Santiniketan in 1901. There is no doubt that to some extent, he tried to revive the ancient Hindu concept of the place of learning as tapovana or a sacred grove, ... To his school he added a university Visva-Bharati, formally instituted in 1921. ... Through his work in

the family estates, he became familiar with the deep-rooted problems of the rural poor and initiated projects for community development at Shilaidaha and Patisar, the headquarter of the estates. At Patisar he started an agricultural bank in which he later invested the money from his Nobel Prize ... in the village Surul, renamed Sriniketan, adjacent to Santiniketan, he started an Institute of Rural Reconstruction... (pp. 14–15)

Tagore’s relational humanist philosophy of education and his pedagogic practice, therefore, emerged out of his own “embodied” experiential learning in the “factory-model” of colonial schools and in his family’s estates, where he learnt about and empathised with the misery of the rural poor, who were doubly subjugated to hardship under the local zamindars (landed gentry) and the British Raj (Mukherjee, 2021; Dyson, 1996). Despite coming from an urban, educated zamindar family, as a highly sensitive individual with a reformist zeal, Tagore did not just become familiar with the deeply rooted problems of rural communities through his work; he experienced an inner urge to do something about it.

A “Rooted-Cosmopolitan²” Fighting for Freedom Through Education

To do something about the misery of the people, Tagore sought to fight for freedom through education. But unlike other freedom fighters during his time, he did not undertake armed rebellion or even passive resistance by marching on streets unarmed. Tagore armed himself with his pen. He did not just write patriotic songs to inspire the freedom movement; he sought to break free from the subjugation and shackles of colonialism through education. He truly believed in the wisdom of the ancient Sanskrit saying—“सा वदिया या वमिक्तये” (Sa Vidya Ya Vimuktaye)—Education is that which liberates. As a result, he made education reform his life’s mission to fight for freedom of the mind and to gain knowledge to counter colonial social, economic, and political oppression. Education was armour for him to guard against racism, discrimination, and all forms of colonial oppression. Through education he sought to steer rural reconstruction and community development amidst darkness and despair among rural communities during the British Raj. In fact, Tagore (1928) once wrote:

Today, economic power has been captured by a small minority. But it has acquired this power only by accumulating the productive power of others. Their capital is simply the accumulated labour of a million of working people, in a monetized form. It is this productive power that is the real capital, and it is this power that latently resides in every worker... (p. 27)

The above quote, from an essay by Tagore, is part of a larger series of essays he wrote between 1915 and 1940, in which Tagore envisioned a world where the best of the East and the West would meet to stop exploitation and work together, driven by an ethos of cooperation, to establish a more just and humane world.

This ethos of cooperation guided all his work at the Shantiniketan school and Visva-Bharati University. He invited scholars and teachers from across India and around the world to study and teach at his school and university. During a lecture titled “Rabindranath Tagore in Germany – a literary journey of discovery” (Einstein Forum, Potsdam), as part of a Tagore and Einstein workshop on July 8, 2011, a noted German scholar and translator of Tagore, Martin Kämpchen, stated that:

In 1921 Tagore celebrated his greatest success in Berlin when he had to repeat his lecture on *The Message of the Forest* at the university on 2 June, because of the many people who could not find a seat in the hall had to be appeased with the promise of a repeat the following day. This was a lecture he gave in many places and described Tagore’s vision of a “world university” where representatives of different cultures would introduce each other to their own culture. At the end of the same year, 1921, Tagore founded the Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan. (Kämpchen, 2011)

The freedom for which Tagore was fighting through his pen and education reform work at Shantiniketan was a different kind of freedom compared to other freedom fighters during British India. His notion of freedom was not tied to a specific sovereign territory or geography. Though his patriotic songs spoke about his deep love of the motherland and expressed anguish about the shackles of colonial oppression binding Mother India and her children, Tagore was not a parochial nationalist. In fact, Tagore’s decolonial thinking saw the very concept of nation-state and nationalism as the root of many world problems during his lifetime that led the major European countries, America, and even an Asian country, Japan, to wage wars against each other.

Tagore considered *nation* a Eurocentric concept compared to the native Indian concept of *desh* (country). Tagore expressed his scepticism about the suitability of adopting this European concept of *nation* in the Indian framework, notably in two essays, “Nation Ki” (What is Nation? 1902) and “Bharatbarshiya Samaj” (Indian Society, 1902), the former elucidating the emergence of the Western concept of the “nation,” and the latter discussing the differences in the social and political structures of India and Europe, as well as the futility of replicating the foreign concept of the *nation* in India, which

had traditionally been a land of *no nations*. The following quote is from a letter addressed to his friend C. F. Andrews in London in 1928, in which Tagore also expresses his thoughts on nationalism and nation-state:

Our fight is a spiritual fight, it is for Man. We are to emancipate Man from the meshes that he himself has woven round him, ... these organisations of National Egoism ... If we can defy the strong, the armed, the wealthy, revealing to the world the power of the immortal spirit, the whole castle of the Giant Flesh will vanish in void. And then Man will find his 'swaraj'³. We, the famished, ragged ragamuffins of the East, are to win freedom for all Humanity. We have no word for Nation in our language. When we borrow this word from other people, it never fits us. (Tagore, 1928, as cited in Bhattacharya, 1997, pp. 60–61)

In his essay "Nationalism in India" (1918), Tagore opines that the real problem with India is not political, but social. Here he comes closer to Ambedkar's⁴ ideas on Indian society:

Our real problem in India is not political. It is social. This is a condition not only prevailing in India, but among all nations ... In finding the solution of our problem we shall have helped to solve the world problem as well. What India has been, the whole world is now. The whole world is becoming one country through scientific facility. And the moment is arriving when you also must find a basis of unity which is not political. If India can offer to the world her solution, it will be a contribution to humanity. There is only one history—the history of man. All national histories are merely chapters in the larger one. ...

The most important fact of the present age is that all the different races of men have come close together. And again we are confronted with two alternatives. The problem is whether the different groups of peoples shall go on fighting with one another or find out some true basis of reconciliation and mutual help; whether it will be interminable competition or cooperation. (Tagore, 1918, pp. 23–24)

In the context of the recent Russian aggression in Ukraine, continuing conflict between Israel and Palestine, political unrest in Sri Lanka and even in Bangladesh, these words from Tagore's essays appear so relevant even today. Tagore's decolonial thinking stressed that the true spirit of Indian nationalism is in its broad humanistic concern, rather than constrained political strategy. The spread of fanatic nationalism during the First World War might have

forced him to interpret and blame nationalism as an evil epidemic. Thus, he tried to subvert the popular idea of Eurocentric nationalism, which was more a political justification that encouraged grabbing other nations and their resources.

Tagore considered that alongside political freedom, the freedom of mind is more important. The Eurocentric notions of freedom have forced Indians to consider political freedom as an ultimate destination in the journey of the freedom movement. He thought that blind faith in Europe would instead increase our greed for possession. Therefore, we should give up this narrowness and be more comprehensive in our inward and outward expressions that extend freedom of the mind.

To read Rabindranath Tagore's lectures on nationalism, delivered in 1916 in Japan and in America, is to feel that he positively detested it. And yet he himself was, in his own characteristic way, an eminent Indian patriot. The target of his attack was the political nationalism of the West, by which he really meant Capitalist Imperialism.

Hence, in his essay "Nationalism in Japan," Tagore emphasised the ancient culture of Japan, more than its nationhood. As Amartya Sen (2008) pertinently observed, Tagore shared the admiration for Japan widespread in Asia for demonstrating the ability of an Asian nation to rival the West in industrial development and economic progress. But then Tagore went on to criticise the rise of a strong nationalism in Japan and its emergence as an imperialist nation. Tagore saw Japanese militarism as illustrating the way nationalism can mislead even a nation of great achievement and promise (Ohsawa, 2023). Tagore's scattered writings on nationalism and three seminal essays on nationalism are a bold, rational, and humane critique of the idea of "nationalism" which has caused so much misery in the world and continues to do so.

The singular strain (if at all there is one) which runs through Tagore's concept of nationalism over the years is that of universal humanism and multiculturalism. In speaking up against the Eurocentric notion of nationalism, Tagore voiced his protest against a self-ravaging system of politics and organisation that is detrimental not only to India or the East but also to all of humanity at large.

He advocated the importance of the national freedom movement (which might as well transcend into the international), but one with a constructive ideal at its core, rather than a "spirit of violence." This is very well expressed by Tagore in the following lines from a poem:

The Sunset of the Century

(Written in Bengali on the last day of the 19th century, in 1899)

1

The last sun of the century sets amidst the blood-red clouds of the West
and the whirlwind of hatred.

The naked passion of self-love of Nations, in its drunken delirium of
greed, is dancing to the clash of steel and the howling verses of venge-
ance.

2

The hungry self of the Nation shall burst in a violence of fury from its
own shameless feeding.

For it has made the world its food,

And licking it, crunching it and swallowing it in big morsels,

It swells and swells

Till in the midst of its unholy feast descends the sudden shaft of heaven
piercing its heart of grossness.

3

The crimson glow of light on the horizon is not the light of thy dawn of
peace, my Motherland.

It is the glimmer of the funeral pyre burning to ashes the vast flesh,—the
self-love of the Nation—dead under its own excess.

Thy morning waits behind the patient dark of the East,

Meek and silent.

4

Keep watch, India.

Bring your offerings of worship for that sacred sunrise.

Let the first hymn of its welcome sound in your voice and sing

“Come, Peace, thou daughter of God’s own great suffering.

Come with thy treasure of contentment, the sword of fortitude,

And meekness crowning thy forehead.”

5

Be not ashamed, my brothers, to stand before the proud and the powerful
With your white robe of simpleness.

Let your crown be of humility, your freedom the freedom of the soul.

Build God’s throne daily upon the ample bareness of your poverty

And know that what is huge is not great and pride is not everlasting.

(Tagore, 1918, pp. 117–119)

The above lines from Tagore's poem are illustrative of Tagore's faith in the cultural traditions of the East as harbingers of peace. As Kämpchen and Bangha (2015) wrote in the Preface to their book *Rabindranath Tagore: One Hundred Years of Global Reception*, "Tagore was convinced that India had something to offer to the world which no other country was able to give and which was encapsulated in his works, his lectures and in his personality. The Nobel Prize gave him the authority to speak up, and the intellectual and social elite of many countries realised the need to listen and to respond. Although a cultural or literary personality, Tagore emerged, as can be observed in this book, as an immensely *political* figure whose ideas inspired and moulded *social* movements in diverse countries in the twentieth century" (p. 15).

The exploitation of Mother Nature and the people that emerged with Capitalist Imperialism in the 19th century globalised in the 20th century. This has led all of us to the current Anthropocene Epoch we are now a part of in the 21st century, where our only home in the universe, Mother Earth, is crying for survival. Hence, I argue in this chapter that in the context of the sustainable development goals and the need for promoting global citizenship to tackle global challenges, it is once again necessary to be inspired by Tagore's *rooted-cosmopolitan* ideas, as they connect the home and the world through a sense of *cosmic consciousness*. As Kämpchen (2016) wrote:

Reading his poems, reading his essays we realize that from his adolescence onwards he was immersed in a consciousness which was capable of viewing what is small and seemingly insignificant as part of a greater Whole, and conversely, he was capable of viewing the Whole as made up of a multitude of interconnected smaller parts. This consciousness of continuously moving to larger generalities and back to the small and particular, this constant shift of perspectives, is a characteristic feature of his poems and songs. One song begins:

My freedom lives in all the lights across the heavens,
Every speck of dust, every blade of grass celebrates my freedom. (Pūjā
339, as cited in Kämpchen, 2016)

Since the very concept of "citizenship" has strong legal and political connotations and can be a problematic concept in many countries of the Global South with colonial histories, notably those that continue with a colonial tradition and even authoritarian governments, drawing on Tagore's ideas and practices to rethink GCED from the perspective of the postcolonial countries of the Global South, especially India, is useful. Tagore creatively connected the home and the world to teach participatory democracy and active citizenship

through local community engagement and rural development even as a colonial "subject" without citizenship rights. He creatively integrated the home and the world, as well as the head (cognitive), the heart (social-emotional), and the hand (behavioural) in his philosophy of education and pedagogic practice at his own school and Visva-Bharati University.

The 3H's: The Head, the Heart and the Hand

As a rooted-cosmopolitan, visionary thinker and, I would say, as a true *global citizen* of the 20th century, Tagore combined the 3H's—the head, the heart, and the hand—to understand and empathise with the plight of students and the rural poor to become engaged in real action for change. He created learning environments and pedagogical practices at his school that fostered close relationships and bonding between the student, the teacher, and the peer group, as well as coordination of the head, the heart, and the hands of the student for local community engagement and development. Tagore emphasised social-emotional learning and the behavioural aspect of education at his school, as much as the cognitive aspect.

Tagore once wrote that "... our education should be in full touch with our complete life, economical, intellectual, aesthetic, social, and spiritual; and our



Figure 2.1 *Upasana Mandir (Temple for Universal Prayer) (Rabindra Bhavan Archives, 2019)*

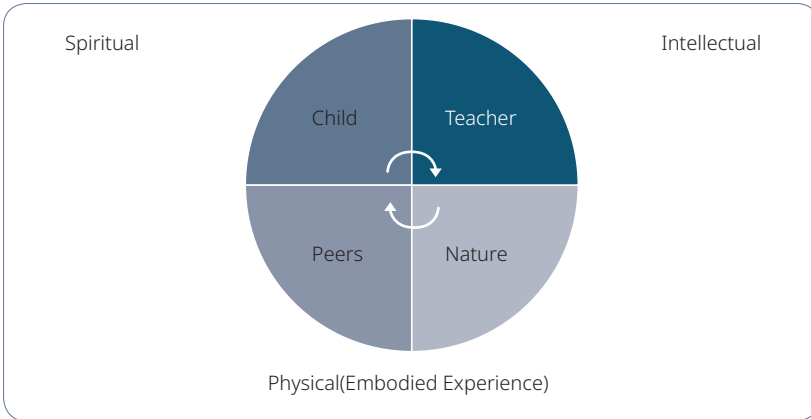


Figure 2.2 Tagore's Relational Humanist Philosophy of Education (Mukherjee, 2021, p. 9)

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 realise at every step how our training and knowledge have organic connection with our surroundings” (Tagore, as cited in Dasgupta, 2009, p. 148). He further emphasised that “when there came the separation of the intellect from the spiritual and the physical, the school education put entire emphasis on the intellect and the physical side of man. We devote our sole attention to giving children information, not knowing that by this emphasis we are accentuating a break between the intellectual, physical and the spiritual life” (Tagore, as cited in Dasgupta, 2009, p. 96).

Hence, Tagore envisioned a model of school and university that emphasised holistic development of the student, involving social and emotional learning and spiritual development alongside cognitive development as is shown in Figure 2.1. He worked to institutionalise a community-oriented pedagogy that emphasised praxis, or practical application of knowledge, for community development.

Figure 2.2 demonstrates Tagore's relational humanist philosophy of education, whereby both the intrapersonal and interpersonal relational aspects are of utmost importance.

Inclusive Learning Amidst a Natural Environment

Although he modelled his school after the ancient Hindu concept of Tapovana⁵—a sacred grove, or “ashram school,” surrounded by the natural environment—he redefined the concept of Tapovana as an all-inclusive space. All students, irrespective of their caste, class, religious, and gendered back-

grounds, studied at Tagore's school in close communion with nature. Class cohorts were small and had close relationships with the teacher and peers. Teachers would use examples from the natural environment, rather than textbooks, to teach about history, geography, math, and science. Even today, Shantiniketan school still follows this kind of pedagogy, as is evident from Figure 2.3.

This kind of community-oriented pedagogy with experiential teaching and learning amidst nature arose out of Tagore's own rejection of textbook and test-oriented pedagogy in the "factory" model of colonial schools, as expressed in one of his essays:

At half-past ten in the morning the factory opens with the ringing of the bell; then, as the teachers starts talking, the machines start working. The teachers stop talking at four in the afternoon when the factory closes, and the pupils then go home carrying with them a few pages of machine-made learning. 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. ... The schools are



Figure 2.3 *Open Air Classes (Rabindra Bhavan Archives, 2019)*

little better than factories for turning out robots. (Tagore, 1906a, as cited in Dasgupta, 2009, pp. 112–113)

The above quote reveals Tagore's critique of the assembly-line manufacturing of educated workers in schools to meet the needs of the colonial political economy during British India. As Europe was at the cusp of the First Industrial Revolution, schools in Europe were being designed in the model of factories to reproduce educated workers for assembly-line jobs in factories and the industrial sector. This school model was also imported to the Global South to reproduce clerks to do routine tasks in colonial government jobs. As a critical thinker and creative person, Tagore could see through the problems of such a school model.

However, even in the middle of colonial oppression and the nationalist freedom movement, Tagore envisioned a spiritual unity of the people of the world. He expressed hope of 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" (Tagore, as cited in Dasgupta, 2009, p. 111). He worked to institutionalise these ideas at his school and university at Shantiniketan and Sriniketan, where he pioneered community engagement and rural reconstruction in collaboration with compatriots around the world. 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)

In this way, Tagore sought to establish an inclusive model of school that would not turn out robots but human beings with flesh and blood, people who could think critically about the problems of this world, feel compassionately the pain of *others*, and act ethically to solve problems.

Do we not also need these kinds of human beings in the world today, who can think critically, feel compassionately, and act ethically? Is the GCED framework not also talking about nurturing such human beings in our educational institutions today in the 21st-century Anthropocene Epoch and the age of sustainable development? The answer to the above questions is obviously

"Yes." However, the problem is that Tagore's humanist inclusive philosophy of education and the pedagogic practices established by him have remained in the periphery of society even in the postcolonial period. The colonial structures of educational institutions are still dominant within the mainstream system of education. As Sriprakash (2011) argues based on her research in rural India: "... 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).

Indian Education Policies

Irrespective of the above-mentioned regressive colonial pedagogic practices continuing at mainstream schools, even in postcolonial India, there has been some effort to provide policy guidelines at the national level through successive national education policies and policies at the state level. Article 51 of the modern Indian Constitution states that India is committed to promote international peace and security by encouraging settlement of disputes through arbitration, maintain just and honourable relations between nations, and foster respect for international law and treaty. In fact, according to Panda (2005), the "National Policy on Education NPE (1986) and Programme of Action POA (1992) make a direct reference to the promotion of 'International Cooperation' and 'peaceful co-existence' as an important objective of education" (pp. 51–52). Yet the focus on decolonising Indian schools drawing on Tagore's ideas have been limited mostly to the promotion of education in the native mother tongue and curriculum focusing on the local context as opposed to the de-contextualised "topsy-turvy education" in English offered in colonial schools that Tagore critiqued in his essay *শিক্ষার হরেফরে* ("*Shiksar Herfer*," published as early as 1892 and later published in English by Visva-Bharati University as "Topsy-Turvy Education"). The postcolonial drive to indigenise the language and content of education missed the larger philosophical vision of Tagore to bring the "home and the world" together through holistic education and development of the child. The postcolonial Nationalist agenda to promote a strong Indian National identity through education in the mainstream schools overlooked the internationalist cosmopolitan vision and pedagogic practices of Tagore's school.

In fact, Tagore's school and university have also become integrated with the mainstream system. His progressive rooted-cosmopolitan vision, peda-

gical practices, and community engagement work through the spread of *loksiksha* (mass education) lost their currency to keep pace with the teaching and testing-oriented mainstream system (Nussbaum, 2006; Sinha, 2017; Mukherjee, 2020). Even prior to independence from British colonial rule, there was indeed a major struggle between the visionary poet's vision in the 20th century versus the grounded reality during colonial British India. This has been documented well by a German Jewish scholar, Alex Aronson, who taught English at Tagore's school. As Aronson (1961) wrote:

I was at all times conscious of the tension existing at Tagore's institution between ideals and their realization, a tension which contributed not a little to the formation of prejudices, if they may be called thus, regarding Tagore's attempt to infuse new blood into Indian education. Such a bias does not necessarily constitute a disadvantage; it is merely the mirror of that fundamental conflict between utopia and reality which is an integral part of all those educational experiments based on some idealistic assumptions opposed to the social and psychological reality from which these assumptions originated. It goes without saying that such a conflict is liable to increase in magnitude in the course of time, until indeed there remains little significant relationship between ideal and practice any more. In such schools as this the "practice" has ultimately to adjust itself to the demands of the age. (pp. 386–387)

Within the postcolonial Indian context, citizenship education became more focused on Indian national identity formation to subvert the precolonial educational agenda when Macaulay's dictum about Indians, who would be Indian only in appearance but English in education, culture, and temperament, was prevalent. Moreover, the concept of Indian national citizenship itself has also been the subject of many contestations following the partition of the Indian subcontinent during independence in 1947 to create India and Pakistan, with Bangladesh later emerging out of East Pakistan, followed by the mass migration of people based on religious affiliations, a process that still continues to this today. Is it possible to educate for global citizenship within such a context?

Yet, now more than ever, we need critical thinkers and creative problem solvers to save the planet and all forms of life on Earth. We have now entered the phase of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and an age of planetary crisis, when the sustainability of planet Earth, our home, is being questioned by scientists around the world. Hence, the new National Education Policy 2020 in India for the first time talks about educating for global citizenship.

The Policy envisages that the curriculum and pedagogy of our institutions must develop among the students a deep sense of respect towards the Fundamental Duties and Constitutional values, bonding with one's country, and a conscious awareness of one's roles and responsibilities in a changing world ... [supporting] responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen. (Government of India, 2020, p. 6)

We can also find a strong interest in rediscovering Rabindranath Tagore's global vision in the Preface to the book *Reflections: Rabindranath Tagore's Educational Philosophy*, which was published under the aegis of India's University Grants Commission (UGC)'s Special Assistance Programme DRS (Phase-I) of the Department of Education, Vinaya Bhawan, Visva-Bharati, Shantiniketan, and written by the Director, Sabujkoli Sen (2017), in their preface:

There could be none in India parallel to Rabindranath Tagore who dared to discontinue his school education as a rebel child against colonial education and later founded Visva-Bharati to practically experiment and demonstrate that an indigenous method of education in the spirit and culture of Tapovan of India is not only possible but quite potential and promising without being ever obsolete and outdated. ... At the same time he has never imagined a system of education confined to the narrow domestic walls ... In fact his grand vision of 'Universal Man' is over and above all kinds of short sighted nationalism, narrow nationalistic fundamentalism and extreme sentimentalism. Unlike others, he wanted to make Visva-Bharati a cultural hotspot where two streams of knowledge from east and west can merge and people from all over the world can make their home in a single nest. (Sen, 2017, para. 2)

Hence, I argue in this chapter that it is extremely relevant today to reflect on Tagore's philosophy of education and pedagogic practices during colonial British India with a rising nationalist freedom movement, as well as religious and racial tensions. The kind of world-minded, action-oriented, responsible citizens that Tagore envisioned to nurture at his school and university could provide a framework to rethink GCED from within the context of postcolonial India. As a creative person, a progressive, critical thinker, and a visionary educational reformer, Tagore could see far ahead of his own time. The factory model of schools, which were a product of the First Industrial Revolution in Europe and were transported to the former colonies of the Global South, are

redundant today in the Global North and to some extent in the Global South, which is still going through the process of transitioning from an agricultural to industrial economy in the middle of myriad contemporary sustainability challenges.

Tagore's philosophy of education and practice could also be beneficial for similar contexts of the Global South, where postcolonial nationalist *social imaginary* and a sense of national identity and belonging is very strong, as was evident from the UNESCO Bangkok study in 2019. Similar contexts in the Global South include India's neighbouring countries—Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Rabindranath Tagore wrote the national anthems of India, as well as modern-day Bangladesh (once part of the Bengal Province of British India and then East Pakistan between 1947 and 1971). The fact that the majority of international students at Visva-Bharati University⁶ in contemporary times come from Bangladesh is a testament to the continuing cultural influence of Tagore in Bangladesh. His work has also inspired the national anthem of Sri Lanka, since the anthem was written and composed by Ananda Samarakoon between 1939 and 1940 while he was Tagore's disciple at Visva-Bharati University. At the same time, Tagore's cultural influence extends the sovereign boundaries of India as the first Nobel laureate in literature from Asia. While discussing Tagore's contemporary relevance, Bangladeshi-Australian academic Muhammad A. Quayum (2020) writes:

Rabindranath Tagore is a legendary figure in world literature, highly acclaimed not only within India and Bangladesh, wherein his native Bengal lies, but in other regions of Asia and beyond. The first non-European to receive the Nobel Prize in 1913, he has been dubbed variously as *Biswakabi* ("world poet"), an "eagle-sized lark" (Roman Rolland), "a votary of Truth sensed through Beauty" (qtd. in Guha), the "flower and fruit" of the Bengal Renaissance (C.F. Andrews, in Das, Vol III: 222) and a progenitor and protagonist of the Asian Renaissance (Ibrahim 21). Ramachandra Guha describes him as one of the "four founders" of modern India (Guha); Albert Schweitzer called him "the Goethe of India" (Kripalani 295); and Ravi Shankar, a legendary musician himself, believed that had Tagore "been born in the West, he would now be [as] revered as Shakespeare and Goethe" (qtd. in Sen, "Poetry and Reason"). In a personal letter to his daughter, Indira Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru described Tagore as "a great writer and artist" (qtd. in Guha), while in his book *The Discovery of India*, he went on to praise the iconic poet as "India's internationalist *per excellence*." (Nehru, 1946, p. 403, as cited in Quayum, 2020, p. 1)

Therefore, rethinking GCED from Tagore's perspective has the potential of broader acceptance and application of his ideas and pedagogic practices in contemporary times, though they have remained outside the mainstream of postcolonial Indian education up until now. However, before we delve deeper into the ways in which we can rethink GCED from Tagore's perspective and the challenges associated with it, let us first discuss some of the recent academic literature on GCED and let us consider the critiques of the concept.

Academic Debates on Global Citizenship Education

Citizenship education in every country has been part of civics education bounded within the framework of nation-states. However, over the past couple of decades, especially since the adoption of the Sustainable Development goals and framing of the GCED framework by the UN and other global organisations, there has been widespread interest in diverse countries around the world to educate for global citizenship. Policy documents and public discourse on education have become abuzz with statements about the need to educate for *global citizenship* without any clarity about how to do it and what it takes to educate students to become *global citizens*. Some scholars have argued that the concept has been alive since the fourth century BCE, when Diogenes, a Greek Cynic philosopher, proclaimed "I am a citizen of the world" (Appiah, 2007; Miller, 2013; Nussbaum, 1997, as cited in Massaro, 2022, p. 99).

Based on empirical accounts of teachers and classrooms in the United States and Asia that really focus on nurturing global citizens, Dill (2013) identified two main approaches to GCED: a global competencies (economic skills) approach and a global consciousness (ethical orientation) approach. Goren and Yemini (2017) synthesised the arguments in the existing literature on GCED in K–12 schools across several countries by drawing on Oxley and Morris's (2013) typology to distinguish between types of global citizenship conceptualisation based on *cosmopolitan* and *advocacy* approaches. While the cosmopolitan approach incorporates four distinct conceptions of GCED—the political, moral, economic, and cultural—the advocacy approach incorporates four other conceptions, that is, the social, critical, environmental, and spiritual. They further analysed the research literature to state that the approach of UNESCO towards GCED is advocacy-based, whereas the approach of the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) and international schools is that of the cosmopolitan approach. UNESCO's advocacy-based approach towards the promotion of global citizenship is also

quite evident from the following statement:

Global Citizenship Education will help to connect the global and the local dimensions, synchronizing national educational policies to the global policies advocated by the United Nations. The sixty-ninth session of the United Nations Assembly set 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets demonstrating the scale and ambition of a new universal post-2015 development agenda. For global citizenship education, goal 4.7 is most relevant: “By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.” (Torres, 2017a, pp. 8–9)

Massaro (2022) extended the systematic literature review of research on GCED in the higher education domain to also engage with the critiques of global citizenship as a Northern concept, especially since much of the literature is coming from the English-speaking countries of the Global North and led by the United States. Since the citizenship rights and duties are generally exercised within the sovereign boundaries of nation-states, Massaro (2022) highlights the conceptual and practical challenges of educating for global citizenship. He referred to Bowden (2003) to highlight the importance of the phrase “think globally, act locally” (p. 359) for global citizens.

Systematic literature review of research on GCED conducted by scholars, therefore, reveals that there is a lack of uniformity in the definition and understanding of GCED across different regions of the world and that there is a need for more research in non-English speaking countries and from the Global South (Goren & Yemini, 2017; Massaro, 2022; Singh et. al., 2023). Hence, it is critically important to rethink the concept of global citizenship and the pedagogical components of GCED from the Global South and non-English speaking perspectives. Torres (2017b) also argues for a need to move beyond the “cosmopolitan elite” to take a more critical approach towards conceptualising global citizenship from the perspective of those who are “struggling to make sense of global citizenship education and education for sustainable development” (p. x).

As a result, this chapter’s engagement with Tagore’s philosophy of education and pedagogical experiments in his Shantiniketan school is an attempt to fill that gap. Moreover, since Tagore’s Shantiniketan school and Visva-Bharati

University were listed by UNESCO in 2023 as a World Heritage Site, I seek to rethink GCED based on the core competencies or characteristics of a global citizen that UNESCO (2013) enumerated, moving beyond narrowly defined global competencies as economic skills.

During UNESCO's two landmark meetings in 2013, it was established that GCED has a critical role to play in equipping learners with "*competencies to deal with the dynamic and interdependent world of the twenty-first century [emphasis added]*" (UNESCO, 2014). Even if GCED is offered in different ways and in different contexts, regions, and communities, it was agreed upon that global citizens would exhibit some core competencies. Here we can also refer to them as characteristics. These competencies are:

- an attitude supported by an understanding of *multiple levels of identity*, and the potential for a '*collective identity*' which transcends individual cultural, religious, ethnic or other differences;
- a *deep knowledge of global issues* and *universal values* such as justice, equality, dignity and respect;
- *cognitive skills to think critically, systemically and creatively*, including adopting a multi-perspective approach that recognizes the different dimensions, perspectives and angles of issues;
- *non-cognitive skills* including *social skills* such as empathy and conflict resolution, communication skills and aptitudes for networking and interacting with people of different backgrounds, origins, cultures and perspectives; and
- *behavioural capacities to act collaboratively and responsibly* to find global solutions for global challenges, and to strive for the collective good. (UNESCO, 2014, p. 9)

At the very core of *competencies*-based curriculum and assessment in the 21st century is the need to move out of the purely cognitive knowledge-centred curriculum and assessment to a mode of education and assessment that puts an emphasis on the *praxis*, or practical application, of knowledge. We can see from the list of global citizens' core competencies listed by UNESCO (2014) that there is strong focus on social-emotional and behavioural capacities in terms of collaborative responsible action alongside a sense of critical and creative thinking coupled with an ethic of care and empathy for *others*.

I argue here that these are indeed the characteristics of *critical global citizens*, rather than narrowly focused measurable competencies of *global human resource*, as critiqued by many academic scholars, such as Bosio (2023). Based on his empirical research on the perceptions of GCED in higher

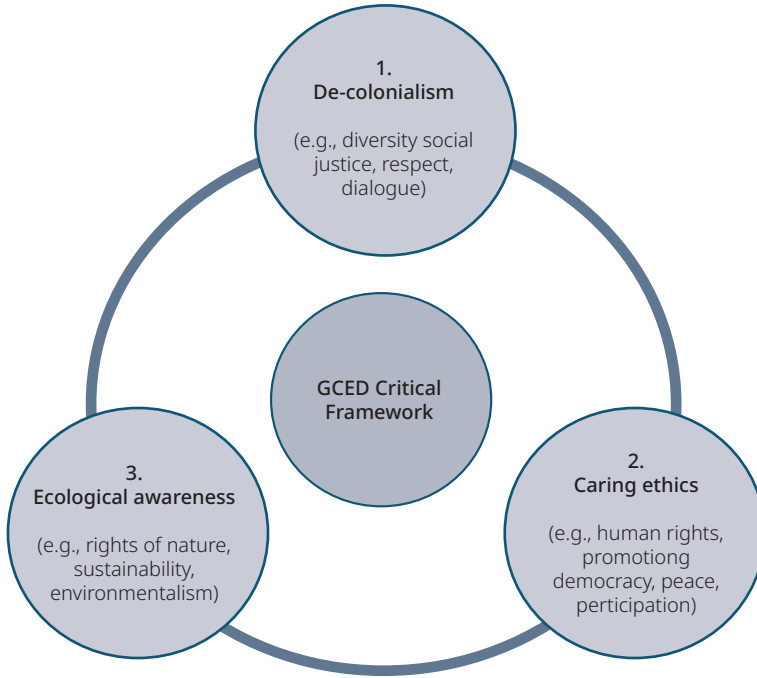


Figure 2.4 GCED Critical Framework (Bosio, 2023, p. 3)

education among senior educators from three countries of the Global South, as well as the literature on critical pedagogy and social justice, Bosio (2023) developed the GCED critical framework to highlight that GCED in the Global South contexts is rooted in critical pedagogy and social justice seeking to decolonise teaching and learning with a strong ecological awareness and ethic of care for *others*, as demonstrated in Figure 2.4.

Thereafter, Bosio and Waghid (2023) further refined the GCED critical framework to include a fourth pillar (or dimension) of GCED, Humanity Empowerment, as is shown in Figure 2.5, to develop the framework of GCED for critical consciousness development.

If we would now reflect upon Tagore's philosophy of education and practices, we would be able to identify that his thinking about education and the practical work of education reform aligns with GCED in terms of the critical consciousness development framework, with a strong focus on praxis in the form of local community engagement. He was indeed far ahead of his time. In the middle of rising nationalist sentiments during the freedom movement from British colonial rule, Tagore was seeking to nurture future citizens of the world with a cosmopolitan identity and world-mindedness valuing human rights,

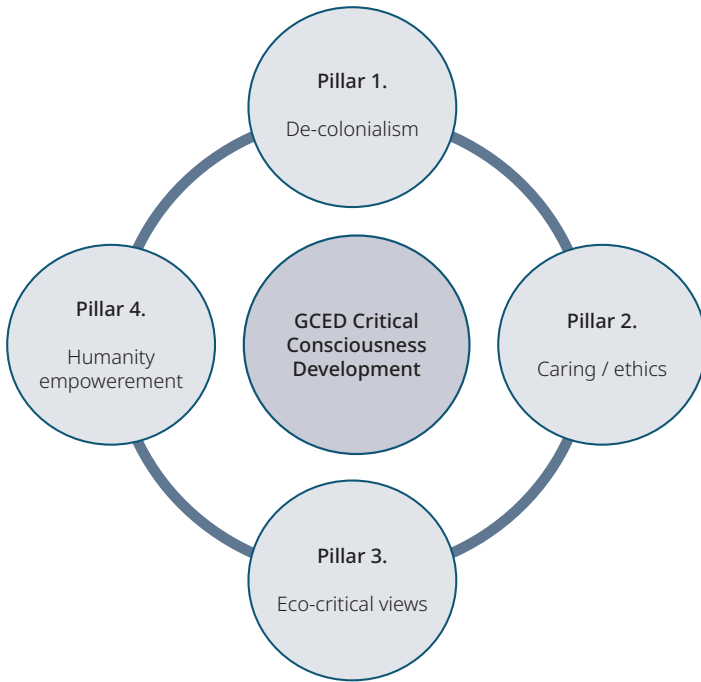


Figure 2.5 GCED for Critical Consciousness Development (Bosio & Waghid, 2023, p. 19)

diversity, social justice, and respectful dialogue while being rooted in their own cultural context. Through his relational humanist philosophy of education and pedagogic practices, he was seeking to nurture a sense of collective identity for all students and teachers in his ashram school and university who exhibited more than just a strong sense of ecological awareness. They were also relationally connected to the *natural environment* and community of *humans* through an ethic of care for *others* (Mukherjee, 2011). As Bosio and Waghid (2023) argued while describing the framework of GCED for critical consciousness development, Tagore was seeking to nurture eco-critical views and humanity empowerment with respect to interpersonal, personal, and socio-political development. Situated within colonial India, and observing the Imperial Capitalist destruction of the natural environment and human values, Tagore placed great emphasis on engaging his students in local community development.

Local *community development* and *rural reconstruction* was integrally embedded within the curriculum of his school and university, quite distinct from the larger mainstream education system, where rote-memorising academic knowledge and testing the retention of static knowledge in memory

for placement in colonial government jobs was prevalent. A 1949 Films Division-funded documentary titled *Shantiniketan: The Abode of Peace* provides historic evidence of Tagore's philosophy of education and pedagogic experiments in Shantiniketan alongside Tagore's own writings on education and writings of several Tagore scholars over the years (Sinha & Samarth, 1949; Dasgupta, 1998, 2009; Mukherjee, 2020, 2021). Hence, we can see that Tagore's philosophy of education and pedagogical approach combined both the *cosmopolitan* and *advocacy* approach of GCED. However, is it possible to also rethink the learning outcomes of GCED, in the form of core competencies as enumerated by UNESCO through Tagore's perspective? The following section of this chapter seeks to find an answer to this question by engaging deeply with the pedagogic praxis aspect of Tagore's educational philosophy.

Rethinking Global Citizenship Education From Tagore's Perspective

Tagore was no professional educationist. All his pronouncements on education start with the assumption that education is not a profession, but an art. He himself came to education by way of his poetry. Intuition and experience rather than scientific investigation showed him the need for educational reform. It was the poet in him that demanded a creative approach to childhood. In other words, only as a creator, a dreamer, and by no means as a psychologist or a sociologist, did Tagore attempt to turn educational practice into a meaningful process leading to successful integration of the individual in society ... From the foregoing it becomes obvious any purely academic approach to Tagore's educational ideals is bound to be misleading. His statements on education scattered throughout his work read indeed like poetry. Although modern educational science has proved them to be true, they have no scientific pretensions. They make use of a literary rather than an educational terminology ... To speak about Tagore's educational ideals in the terminology of scientific publications in the West would indeed be a contradiction in terms. (Aronson, 1961, p. 385)

It might appear from the quote above from Alex Aronson (a German Jewish English teacher who worked closely with Tagore at his school and university in Shantiniketan) that it is probably a futile exercise to try and rethink GCED from Tagore's perspective, especially since the learning outcome of GCED is supposed to equip learners with specific skills, knowledge, and behaviours

that are considered by policymakers and educators as measurable *competencies*. However, in the following sections of this chapter, I will discuss how we can rethink GCED and global competencies or characteristics of *critical global citizens* as enumerated by UNESCO (2013) from Tagore's perspective.

Collective Identity. According to UNESCO (2023), Santiniketan was "... [e]stablished in rural West Bengal in 1901 by the renowned poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore, Santiniketan was a residential school and centre for art based on ancient Indian traditions and a vision of the unity of humanity transcending religious and cultural boundaries. A 'world university' was established at Santiniketan in 1921, recognizing the unity of humanity or "Visva Bharati". Distinct from the prevailing British colonial architectural orientations of the early 20th century and of European modernism, Santiniketan represents approaches toward a pan-Asian modernity, drawing on ancient, medieval and folk traditions from across the region." (para. 1)

As is evident from the quote above and as was discussed earlier in this chapter, at the heart of Tagore's philosophy of education and pedagogic practice was the cooperative principle and a sense of collective identity as a citizen of the world. To overcome the subjugation of being a colonial "subject" without the rights of being a free citizen in British India, he aspired for world citizenship and felt at home in the world, wherever he travelled. He saw himself as a son of Mother India who was a citizen of the world.

Tagore sought to nurture a similar kind of rooted-cosmopolitan identity among young minds at his own school and university that he literally named "Visva-Bharati" (world-minded Indian) University in Shantiniketan. He invited scholars from around the world to reside and teach at his residential school and university. He created an inclusive learning space at Shantiniketan (abode of peace) for students from diverse religious, caste, class, gender, and national backgrounds. The following quote from a noted Tagore scholar from Germany, Martin Kämpchen (2012), about Alex Aronson, a German Jewish English teacher at Tagore's school who came to India as a refugee during the Nazi regime, is evident of the inclusive culture that Tagore was able to establish within Shantiniketan:

Santiniketan provided Aronson a "shelter from chaos and disintegration", as he would later write, from the political and social turmoil of Europe which was embroiled in the Second World War, as well as of India. It created for Aronson the ideal setting for concentrated and creative work

as a teacher, researcher and academic writer...

In his letters and in his autobiography, he never tired of expressing his gratitude to the Santiniketan community for the warmth and affection he received. In one of his early letters to me, Aronson wrote emphatically, “The hospitality I received there goes beyond all praise. It is something I shall never forget and for which I shall be forever grateful.” (Kämpchen, 2012, paras. 3–4)

Similar sentiments were expressed by many scholars, artists, and students from various parts of India, as well as from England, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Japan, China, and other countries whom Rabindranath Tagore attracted to come to Visva-Bharati University in Shantiniketan to translate into reality his vision of a global centre of cultural study and educational exchange between 1919 and 1924. Bhattacharya (2017) writes:

As is well-known Tagore had in mind three objectives for Visva-Bharati: to unite the different streams of culture in India and to link them all with the global civilization of mankind; to create opportunity for the generation of knowledge i.e. research, not merely its distribution, i.e. teaching; and thirdly, to connect the above endeavours with living reality through the application of knowledge to the daily life and work of common people outside of Shantiniketan. He took it upon himself to exhort repeatedly the ashramites and the larger public to respond to his invitation to bring his concept of Visva-Bharati into reality. (p. 55)

In the 21st century, we talk a lot about globalisation and an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world because of “neoliberal” economic globalisation. However, as a decolonial thinker and a visionary, Tagore deeply believed in the ancient Sanskrit saying अयं नजिः परो वेत गणना लघुचेतसाम् । उदारचरतानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् ॥ (“Mine and not mine is a classification of the narrow-minded. For a noble soul, the entire world is family”) from Chapter 6, Verse 83, of the *Maha Upanishad*. Hence, the home, Bharat, and the world, Visva, were both interconnected and interdependent historically and philosophically for someone like Tagore. It was possible to think, feel, and act as a citizen of the world, or a *global citizen*, while being an Indian. Tagore promoted this sense of collective identity at his school and university among his students and teaching staff.

Aronson (1961) discussed at length how the school and Visva-Bharati University in Shantiniketan grew organically and nurtured students’ cognitive and social development based on *the principles of self-reliance and volun-*

tary co-operation among students and staff coming from different classes of society and even different regions of British India. After students acquired *emotional integrity and wisdom* through education in their mother tongue, which included playful activities amidst nature during early ages in school, they were put face to face with the economic and social realities of their own country through active local community engagement, and then with foreign cultures and foreign ways of life through the studies of foreign languages and literature (Bhattacharya, 2013; Dasgupta, 1998; Dasgupta & Guha, 2013; Ghosh, 2012, 2017; Mukherjee, 2021; O'Connell, 2010, 2017; Sinha & Samarth, 1949; Roy, 2017; Tagore, 1906a, 1906b, 1917b). This helped to nurture a sense of integrated collective identity based on native ethnic linguistic identity, a consciousness of social, economic, and environmental issues of their own country, as well as a global consciousness as a citizen of the world.

Universal Values. Universal humanist values were the foundation of Tagore's philosophy of education. The establishment of his school, and later Visva-Bharati University, were also founded on these values. In a letter written to his son Rathindranath in 1916 from Los Angeles, California, Tagore wrote:

I have it in mind to make Shantiniketan the connecting thread between India and the world. I have to found a world centre for the study of humanity here. The days of petty nationalism are numbered- let the first step towards universal union occur in the fields of Bolepur. I want to make that place somewhere beyond the limits of nation and geography- the first flag of victorious universal humanism will be planted there. To rid the world of the suffocating coils of national pride will be the task of my remaining years. (Tagore, 1916, as cited in O'Connell, 2017, pp. 82-83)

Indeed, Tagore devoted the remaining years of his life to establish Visva-Bharati University as a non-sectarian centre for international cooperation at a time and age when universities were very much embedded within the fabric of nation-states and nation-building through education, which was top of the agenda at most universities in Europe and North America, while those established in the colonies of the Global South were intended to reproduce educated professionals to work as colonial civil servants and meet the needs of the colonial political economy. The Universal humanist values based on which Tagore established his school and Visva-Bharati University are further expressed in the following speech he delivered around 1917:

I have in mind not merely a University- that is only one of the aspect of

our Visva-Bharati, - but I hope this is going to be a great meeting place for individuals from all countries who believe in our spiritual unity and who have suffered from the lack of it, who want to make atonement and come into human touch with their neighbours ... As I wanted this institution to be inter-racial, I invited great minds from the West. They cordially responded, and some have come permanently to join hands with us and build a place where men of all nations and countries may find their true home, without molestation from the prosperous who are always afraid of idealism or from the politically powerful who are always suspicious of humans who have the freedom of spirit. (Tagore, as cited in O'Connell, 2017, pp. 86–87)

The curriculum, pedagogy, and campus environment of Shantiniketan were all guided by these Universal humanist values that yielded some truly notable alumni, including Nobel laureate economist Amartya Sen, renowned filmmaker Satyajit Ray, who won many international awards, and someone who is known as the “Father of Modern Indian Sculpture,” Ramkinkar Baij, among many others.

Critical Thinking. Critical decolonial thinking from within the postcolonial contexts of the Global South often runs the risk of being orientalist in its own way. However, Tagore was an exception in this respect. Even when he was seeking to reform education during British colonial India by going back to India's roots and reviving the model of ashram schools in the Tapovan (sacred grove), he was critically conscious of the problems connected to ancient ashram schools and the fact that they were exclusive schools for the sons of priests, kings and noblemen.

Hence, he established his ashram school as an inclusive learning space for students from diverse socioeconomic, gender, and religious backgrounds. He sought to reinvent the ancient traditions and indigenous customs to meet the needs of his time. He also sought to inculcate such critical thinking among his students so that they could also critically reflect on their own history and reinvent the past for a better, more inclusive, and prosperous future. Critically conscious of the deep divisions of caste, class, and gender within contemporary Indian society back then, Tagore saw rural community festivals, fairs, and even popular entertainment such as *jatra* (plays) and *kirtan* (devotional songs) as a pedagogic opportunity where “the rural society could interact with modernity, where the home and the world could meet” (Sen, 1917, p. 94). Tagore states in his essay “Swadeshi Samaj”⁷ (Local/Indigenous Society): “In these festivals the community forgets all its narrowness: to open its heart to a process of sharing and donating is its main occasion” (Tagore, 1908, p. 12).



Figure 2.6 *Ananda Mela, a Celebration of Gandhi's Birthday (Gandhi Jayanti), at Visva Bharati University Campus on October 2, 2024*

Even today, Visva Bharati University maintains this tradition by organising annual fairs, such as Ananda Mela (Fair of Happiness), organised on Gandhi Jayanti (Gandhi's Birthday), a national holiday celebrated on October 2 every year, where the students sell food and crafts items they made by themselves to raise funds for rural community development. Many people from Shantiniketan and Sriniketan (irrespective of socioeconomic backgrounds) gather on campus for this fair to eat food, buy handicrafts, and enjoy themselves.

Tagore was equally critical of the ills of his native Indian society as he was critical of colonial oppression and subjugation. His creative writings, in the form of essays, short stories, plays, and novels, give voice to his critical thoughts about his own home and the world. Sen (2017) discusses at length

how Tagore used cultural events, such as village fairs, *jatra* (village plays performed open-air), and “dance-dramas” (indigenous operas), to raise the critical consciousness of his students about the various injustices and inequities of indigenous society (See Figure 2.6).

He authored and produced dance-dramas such as *Chandalika* and *Chitrangada* to highlight injustices related to caste and gender. His novels *Ghore Baire* (Home and the World) and *Gora* shed critical light on the complexities of urban Indian society during colonial times and the struggles of individuals in a society caught up in the radical nationalist freedom movement. As Radice (2010) wrote, “Tagore was an educator in everything he wrote and did” (p. 41). Though much of his poetry is read through the lens of mysticism in the West and even in many Eastern countries, even his creative writings were expressions of his critical thinking as a pedagogue on the problems of individuals and the world. Through his creative work and critical arts-based pedagogy, he sought to stir the critical thinking of the students in his school and university.

Empathy & Intercultural Communication. Empathy and intercultural communication were also at the core of Tagore’s arts-based and place-based critical pedagogy that he sought to establish in his ashram school and university. Students were made to care for each other and care for pet animals inside the ashram school campus. During lunchtime, students were made to take turns to serve each other food and clean up after lunch. Through the teaching of foreign languages and literature, as well as Indian languages and folk literature, Tagore sought to promote intercultural communication, understanding, and peace. The 1929 prospectus of Visva-Bharati University stated that:

College students are expected to become familiar with the working of existing institutions and new movements inaugurated in different countries of the world for the amelioration of the social conditions of the masses. They are also required to undertake a study of international organizations so that their outlook may become better adjusted to the needs of peace. ... The aim of this education is to ensure that they students should, in thought, emotion and action, attain truth and achieve the fullest development in all the various manifestations of the human spirit. (Visva-Bharati Bulletin No.12, as cited in O’Connell, 2017, pp. 89–90)

As is evident from the above lines taken from the prospectus, the Visva-Bharati curriculum, therefore, emphasised empathy, intercultural communication, international understanding, and peace. It is one of the earliest working

models of international education in modern times where a global identity has been championed over a narrow nationalist one, as argued by O'Connell (2017).

Collaborative & Responsible Action. As stated earlier in this chapter, Tagore's relational humanist philosophy of education had a strong component of praxis. For Tagore, the head and the heart needed to combine to guide collaborative and responsible hands-on action. The Institute of Rural Reconstruction was founded in Sriniketan in 1922. Through this institute, Tagore hoped to bring the students and teachers of Shantiniketan closer with the daily life of the common people through the activities of this new institute. Thereafter, Tagore began to emphasise the need to spread literacy and education to the masses, especially in rural areas. The genesis of community engagement in higher education in India relates to the establishment of Sriniketan and Visva-Bharati University (Bhatt et al., 2023).

Under the direction and editorship of Tagore, Visva-Bharati took the responsibility of publishing a series of books in Bengali and various subjects of scientific and general interest, written specially in a simple language for general readers. Roy (2017) quotes from the general introduction to the *Lok Siksha Granthamala (Mass Education Book)* series by Tagore, where he wrote:

The purpose of this undertaking is to disseminate among the common people of Bengal all subjects worth learning. Accordingly, special attention has been given to the point that the language used should be easy and, as far as possible, free from technical terminology yet care has also been taken that the writings may not suffer from the poverty of the subject-matter. Most persons do not get the opportunity of receiving education requiring much expense and time and following difficult methods through arduous paths. That is why the light of knowledge falls on a very limited part of the country. The country can never advance along the path of freedom carrying the burden of such colossal ignorance. The most essential thing necessary for making the intelligence alert and free of stupidity is the cultivation of science. This matter has been specially kept in view in undertaking our publications. (Roy, 2017, pp. 182–183)

Thereafter, Tagore published the first book on science in 1937 and several other books on scientific, cultural, literary, and historical subjects. Needless to say, such an initiative from a poet is quite commendable. Alongside the *Lok Siksha Granthamala* series, Tagore began publishing another series of books called *Visva Vidya Samgraha (World Knowledge Collection)* to popularise global knowledge at an affordable cost for the local community—and in the

local language—for the purpose of community development. Along with mass education, he sought to bring back joy and happiness into rural village life by organising country fairs and cultural events. Roy (2017) quotes from Tagore to emphasise this: “Our object is to try to flood the choked bed of village life with the stream of happiness. For this the scholars, the poets, the musicians, the artists have to collaborate, to offer their contributions” (p. 183). He further quotes from the last speech delivered by Tagore at the Institute of Rural Reconstruction, Sriniketan, in 1939 to highlight Tagore’s vision for collaborative and responsible action for community development—a community that had been suffering from poverty, economic deprivation, and misery in life because of colonial oppression. Tagore envisioned that the work he had begun would be taken forward by others in the Shantiniketan-Sriniketan community to create ripple effect across India.

... I cannot single-handed bear the responsibility for the whole of India. I shall conquer only one or two tiny villages. For that one must win their minds and gather the strength for working together with them. The task is not easy. It is a hard uphill journey. But if I can liberate two or three villages from the bondage of ignorance and incapacity, then on a small scale an ideal would be established for the whole of India ... We must liberate these few villages in every respect so that all may receive education, a breeze of joy may blow once again, songs and music, recitation of epics and scriptures may fill them, as of yore. Mould just these few villages in this way and I shall call them my India. Then alone real India will be ours. (Tagore, as cited in Roy, 2017, p. 184)

Indeed, Visva-Bharati continues to play a leading role as an Institution of National Importance. We can observe reflection of Tagore’s ideas in the recent initiatives of the Indian government, namely, Swacch Bharat (Clean India) and Unnat Bharat Abhiyaan (Developed India Mission). In recent times, Visva-Bharati University has adopted 50 more neighbouring villages under the Unnat Bharat Abhiyaan for community engagement and development. This was also reported in the *Visva-Bharati University Annual Report 2017–2018* (Visva-Bharati, 2018).

Conclusion

Bosio and Waghid (2022) began a critical discussion that brought contemporary academic debate about Southern Theory to GCED, especially because

much of the theoretical and empirical literature on GCED emerges out of North America and Western Europe. In this chapter, I have engaged with Tagore's philosophy of education and pedagogic practice to extend Southern theoretical understanding of the concept of GCED and the core competencies of a critical global citizen. By drawing on documentary archival evidence, Tagore's writings, and the writings of Tagore scholars, I have demonstrated how Tagore connected the home and the world (local and global) both conceptually and through the pedagogic practice in his school and university during British colonial India, as well as its contemporary relevance. Thereafter, I have discussed how postcolonial Indian national education policies have selectively drawn on Tagore's educational ideas because of strong nationalist social imaginary. I have discussed some of the academic debates about the definition and meaning of GCED and its learning outcomes enumerated in the form of global competences. I further discussed how the learning outcome of GCED has been described in terms of five core competencies by UNESCO (2014) and how they align with the characteristics of *critical global citizens* as discussed by Bosio (2023). Finally, I have demonstrated how we can draw upon Tagore's educational philosophy and pedagogic practice to rethink GCED for critical consciousness development (Bosio & Waghid, 2023) and the five core competencies as enumerated by UNESCO (2013) from a postcolonial Global South perspective.

As Pieterse (2001) argued:

Theory is a distillation of reflections on practice into conceptual language so as to connect with past knowledge. The relationship between theory and practice is uneven: theory tends to lag behind practice, behind innovations on the ground, and practice tends to lag behind theory (since policymakers and activists lack time for reflection). A careful look at practice can generate new theory, and theory or theoretical praxis can inspire new practice. (p. 2)

In this chapter, I have carefully looked at Tagore's philosophy of education and pedagogic practices to theorise GCED from a postcolonial Global South perspective. Let us hope that Tagore's theoretical praxis will inspire new practices in schools and universities to nurture *critical global citizens*. Tagore was a visionary thinker and education reformer whose work was often misunderstood during his lifetime. Scholars have critiqued that over the years Tagore's school and university have been losing focus on progressive reforms and becoming part of the mainstream system of Indian education (Nussbaum, 2006; Sinha, 2017; Mukherjee, 2020). But, now more than ever, Tagore's

philosophy and pedagogic practices are relevant for nurturing a sense of collective identity, universal values, critical thinking, empathy, intercultural communication, and collaborative and responsible action for environmental protection and peace. We need to collectively take responsibility to fulfil Tagore's vision for sustainable development of India and the world.

Notes

- 1 See: <https://home.iitk.ac.in/~hcverma/Article/Macaulay-Minutes.pdf>
https://english.washington.edu/sites/english/files/documents/ewp/teaching_resources/minute_on_indian_education_1835_by_thomas_babington_macaulay.pdf
- 2 The term “rooted-cosmopolitan” was adopted from philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah’s (1997) work in my previous article written on Tagore’s “rooted cosmopolitanism” (Mukherjee, 2020).
- 3 ‘Swaraj’ means self-rule. “Although the word Swaraj means “self-rule”, Gandhi gave it the content of an integral revolution that encompasses all spheres of life” See more: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swaraj>
- 4 Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was the chair of the drafting committee of the modern Indian democratic constitution.
- 5 This ancient concept of schools has been much critiqued, with these schools seen as exclusive places of learning imparted by learned Brahmins (priests and scholars) only to upper caste males, especially the Brahmins and Kshatriyas (warriors & royals).
- 6 This empirical reality became evident to the author of this chapter while conducting field research recently in Shantiniketan for another project on international students in India.
- 7 ‘Swadeshi Samaj’ means local or indigenous society. This essay was a response by Tagore to Gandhi’s call for the “Swadeshi movement” in 1905 to inspire the production and use of local/indigenous goods as a political response to fight against the colonial agenda of taking raw material out of India and selling expensive foreign goods to the local community. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swadeshi_movement

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