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Educating the Heart and the Mind: Conceptualizing inclusive pedagogy for sustainable development

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Abstract

There is growing global consensus that inequality is making sustainable development goals unattainable. Social inclusion of the historically marginalized and equality of opportunity is crucial for sustainable development. Inclusive quality education for all is therefore considered as one of the three main targets for sustainable development according to UNESCO's Incheon declaration in 2015. This paper draws on an institutional ethnography of a globally interconnected old colonial school's inclusive pedagogic work in postcolonial India. The school's work has been much celebrated in existing research by academics, global donor agencies and also by the Indian government's Sarva Shikshya Abhiyan (Education for All) office. This paper analyses how the school conceptualized a distinct inclusive pedagogy to educate the hearts and the minds of children driven by local community needs for social inclusion within a context of extreme inequality. This paper argues that the school's conception of inclusive education addressing the diverse learning needs of children developed as a syncretic cultural formation drawing on its institutional mission for social justice, as well as indigenous history of educational reform and philosophy of community engagement. In doing so, this paper engages with the 'philosophy of context' and draws on the 'southern theory' of inclusive education as envisioned by Rabindranath Tagore, indigenous education reformer and Nobel Laureate poet activist during early twentieth-century colonial British India, who challenged both local and global inequality through his creative and educational work.

Keywords: inclusive education, sustainable development, philosophy of context, southern theory, Rabindranath Tagore, South Asia

Introduction

The case study school for this research is now part of a large global network of Catholic schools for girls operating in 24 countries and 6 continents. This paper argues how the inclusive pedagogic reforms instituted by the school were a syncretic

cultural formation which followed the unique institutional history of the particular Catholic order in India, as well cultural history of educational reform and progressive ‘philosophy of context’ (Peters, 2012) in the region where the school is located in India. This analytic and hermeneutic engagement is guided by evidence gathered through ethnographic research. The inclusive reforms have been already studied through Deweyian and Freirean analytical lens by other scholars who have studied the work of this school (Bajaj, 2011a, 2011b; Greene, 1995). This paper analyses the genealogy of these reforms in establishing inclusive pedagogy bridging social inequality for holistic education of every child through the critical ‘southern theoretical’ (Connell, 2007) lens of Rabindranath Tagore, as it is evident from his educational writings and experiments in his school in Shantiniketan,¹ which emphasized not just social inclusion and inclusive learning for all, but also youth social action—a model of education which combined the heart and the mind of children for community engagement and development. In the next section of this essay, I will first describe the context and the case study before engaging in theoretical discussion about Tagore’s Southern Theory of inclusive education and how it is useful to analyse and interpret the school’s inclusive educational work within a context of deep inequality.

The Hybridized Context

The context of Delphine Hart School² is a hybridized postcolonial context where historically ‘congeries of global and local interactions’ (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2006) shaped the history of the community, the social imaginary of the people and global network of connections for the school. The postcolonial city of Kolkata, where the school is located, was the colonial capital of British India, Calcutta. The city witnessed turbulent and violent geopolitical history of the region with hungry people pouring out of the rural villages to die on the streets of the city during the Bengal famine of World War II³. Thereafter, the city witnessed bloody communal violence during the partition of South Asia to form two nations—India and Pakistan in 1947, and later Bangladesh formed out of East Pakistan in the early 1970s.

These histories of conflict, violence and struggles did not just span for about 40 years since the early 1940s to the 1970s; it was preceded by freedom struggle against colonial rule for almost a century.⁴ This long history of conflict had depleted the economic resources of the region badly. Moreover, colonial policies had further enhanced the ideological and social divides among the indigenous elite population as argued by Mukherjee-Reed (2008) citing Indian historian Sumit Sarkar (1983) and Islamic liberation theologian, reformer and social activist, Ashgar Ali Engineer’s (1985) work among other sources. Mukherjee-Reed (2008, p. 60) further argues: ‘The [partition] movement, in this sense, was a clear response of the elite to the threats to the bases of their social power emerging from colonialism (Alavi 2002).’ As a consequence of this historic divide, the rising tide of refugees from East Pakistan and later Bangladesh in the postcolonial era compounded the social problems of poverty and homelessness in the region. According to one estimate as cited by Kumar (2009), 250,000 Hindus and as many Muslims migrated to India every year from Bangladesh (earlier East Pakistan) since 1951.

Delphine Hart School

Against the backdrop of this turbulent context, Delphine Hart School was established by the Jesuitess⁵ missionary order in 1857. Education within the Indian context has been historically very privatized and more so for the girl's education sector, since:

the education of women was not high on the agenda in Britain at that time, and the small resources to be devoted to educating England's Indian subjects were not be wasted on the lower classes or on women. Thus the earliest efforts at providing formal education for girls came from private agency- from the private initiative of colonial officials and most notably from missionaries (Seth, 2007, p. 137)

Though colonialism and missionary work are often conflated, not just within the popular social imaginary but also by comparative education scholars, such as Carnoy (1974); some historians of Indian education have argued with evidence about the wide diversity of missionary activities within colonial South Asia (Bara, 2000; Bellenoit, 2014). They argue that often missionary work was at loggerheads with colonial agenda.

Noted Indian critical theorist, Spivak (1994), who studied in a missionary school in immediate postcolonial times in Calcutta as a child, has also testified that:

By the time I was going [to school], most of the teachers were tribal Christians, this is to say, Indian subalterns, lower than rural underclass by origin, neither Hindus nor Muslims, not even Hindu untouchables, but tribals- so called aboriginals- who had been converted by missionaries (p. 274).

This is a great testimony from a noted scholar about the subversive work of some of the Christian missionaries among subaltern indigenous communities within the colonial Indian context. It can be argued here that in many ways some of the missionary activities within the South Asian context were similar to the missionary activities in Latin America, which gave rise to Liberation Theology in the 1950s–1960s (Berryman, 1987; Brown, 1993; Clarke, 1998).

The case study school also bears the legacy of a unique transnational history with regard to its origin. A German Priest, who served as an apostolic in the Bengal province of British India and later settled in Australia, took initiative to bring the Jesuitess nuns from Ireland to setup schools in the Bengal region for minority poor Catholic girls there. They were mostly daughters of poor Irish and English soldiers, and some mixed-race descendants of Portuguese, French and other Europeans with Indians (known as Eurasians⁶ during colonial times). Due to great deal of sectarianism among the European Christian communities, the Anglican colonial British government was apparently indifferent about the education of this population. (Nolan, 2008) Therefore, though the schools were set up to serve a marginalized population within the colonial context, nonetheless, they were racially exclusive because they served a specific Catholic (mostly European) community within the colonial Indian context.

However, through the course of its long history, the schools run by the order of Jesuitess went through waves of changes in their admissions policy to become progressively more inclusive of Indian children from all backgrounds. From being racially segregated, the schools became progressively racially inclusive of Indian children. Interestingly, though the schools were originally envisioned to serve the poor Catholic girls in the region by the German Priest, over the passage of time, the schools became exclusive in terms of social class stratification of the student body. This was because of 'injustice in the educational policy' as affirmed by the Jesuitess school historian, Colmcille (1968), since schools would be provided generous funds by the colonial government only if 'they catered for a class whose standard of living was considerably higher than that of the average Indian family' (p. 280). Therefore, separate free schools for the poor Indian girls would be operated to meet the social justice mission of the institution. This has been well documented by Colmcille (1968) in her historical account of the school's work.

Changing Dynamics for Social Inclusion

In the immediate postcolonial era, the free schools were closed and Jesuitess schools kept a small percentage (about 20%) of their seats reserved for poor Catholic girls, corresponding to their Catholic mission for social justice and were mostly engaged in educating the daughters of native middleclass and social elites from Hindu, Muslim and Anglo-Indian families. However, following the turbulent postcolonial context of the 1970s, Delphine Hart School particularly changed its admission policy since the late 1970s. Over three decades since late 1970s, the school had been serving the needs of large numbers of poor students irrespective of their religious background. According to existing literature on the school's work, 50% of the total student body comes from very poor socioeconomic backgrounds (Bajaj, 2011a; Chattopadhyay, 2015; Doggett, 2005; Greene, 1995; Jessop, 1998). It is to be noted here that this policy along with several other policies and practices were changing over the three years period of my ethnographic fieldwork due to various constraints in recent years (Mukherjee, 2015). However, there is enough evidence to demonstrate that prior to the recent changes; the school has been strategically utilizing range of financial, intellectual and human resources through its global Jesuitess network to meet the needs of the large body of underserved disadvantaged students admitted in their school. The school was also engaging with various local community outreach programs for social equity and human rights.

In 1994, the school became a recipient of UNESCO NOMA Prize for spreading literacy in the region. The school Principal also got invited in several education conferences to deliver workshops on values education and staff transformation seminars for inclusive pedagogy nationally and internationally, contributing to national and regional policy debates on school leadership. Since the mid-1990s, a number of independent academic studies and studies by global development agencies have been studying, celebrating and citing the work of this school for addressing a range of issues regarding inclusive education and development in the region. The school's work has been studied as a model of best practices for values driven low cost-effective

schooling because of its optimal use of resources in a study funded by DFID (Jessop, 1998). It has been studied through the critical lens of Deweyian ‘experiential learning’ for community engagement among students by Greene (1995). Its work has been studied through gender critical lens by Doggett (2005). It has been also studied through Freirean critical lens for its values-based ‘critical consciousness’ raising human rights education by Bajaj (2011). Most recently, Chattopadhyay (2015) has studied the work of the school as a successful example of purposive social inclusion, where middleclass girls are active stakeholders for the education and welfare of the girls from subaltern backgrounds.

The school’s work was also cited as one of the successful case studies in the Indian Government’s Sarva Sikshya Abhiyan (Education for All) publication (MHRD, 2011). Prior to that, in 2007 the school’s Principal was awarded the fourth highest civilian award by the Indian Government. The school’s work was publicized as operating like a central hub for ‘social transformation’ coordinating the community outreach programmes like the spokes of a wheel in collaboration with donor agencies, such as the UNICEF, Institute for Human Rights Education, Save the Children, Indian Government’s Sarva Sikshya Abhiyan (Education for All) Office, Union Ministry of Women and Child Welfare and several other corporate beneficiaries. The school became engaged in coordinating several community outreach projects to share resources with neighboring village schools, provide teacher’s training for a range of para-teachers, as well as government school teachers, develop curriculum for human rights education and also established satellite schools for migrant children in the brickfields situated towards the outer-fringes of the city of Calcutta and among fishing communities in a neighboring Indian state.

Evidence from this research shows that, even prior to the global discourse on EFA and inclusive educational reform in the 1990s, the school has been instituting inclusive reforms driven by local community needs. The school’s ‘Ripples and Rainbow’ booklet states:

Started in 1979 at [Delphine Hart School], a school already in existence since 1857, this experiment was born of a certain uneasiness felt at being part of a formal school system imparting ‘quality education’ to a privileged few, while millions of their less fortunate peer group get virtually nothing at all.

With the rise in the global discourse on EFA for social inclusion and Human Rights Education, the school appeared to be utilizing these global discourses strategically to promote its own work nationally and globally by gathering consent from local parents, making middleclass girls and their parents active stakeholders for the education of marginalized subaltern girls⁷ within the hierarchical Indian postcolonial society for inclusive development. As Reinke (2004) had argued following research on indigenous education in Mexico, the rise of the global discourse on Education for All since the 1990s was actually benefiting the inclusive work that the school had already begun about a decade ago driven by the local needs of the community.

However, within a context of deep inequality and deeply rooted social class biases reinforced by the influence of class prejudice driven Victorian England, how was this

possible? Why was ‘a certain uneasiness felt’ by the Delphine Hart School community members, unlike most missionary/convent English-medium schools within that context imparting ‘quality education to a privileged’ few? There is no doubt that the inclusive pedagogic reforms were driven by local needs following the turbulent political history and changes in the political economy of the region. However, I argue here that the progressive reforms for social inclusion at the Delphine Hart School since 1979 were also a product of the institutional history of the Jesuitess order, transformational school leadership and progressive cultural history of educational reform in the region. They were happening at the intersection of institutional context, institutional beliefs and school leader’s core beliefs, as Harris and Johnston (2010) argued while theorizing values-based school leadership.

The progressive changes at the school to institutionalize inclusive educational reforms were, therefore, not happening within a cultural vacuum. The intercultural experiences of key-actors within the school were crucial in conceptualizing the school’s distinct philosophy of engagement to educate the hearts and the minds of children making middle class girls active-stakeholders in the education and empowerment of their less privileged peers for equality and sustainable development. Besley and Peters (2011) cite Bohm et al., (1991) stating that, ‘Dialog ... enables inquiry into, and understanding of, the sorts of processes that fragment and interfere with real communication between individuals, nations and even different parts of the same organization’. (p. 5). Here, it should be noted that the historic legacy of progressive social and educational reforms in the region was also a product of the colonial history of the region and intercultural dialogue between the colonizer and the colonized over centuries. This argument will be further expanded in the following section.

Bengal Renaissance

The Bengal region of India in particular holds the legacy of several progressive social reform movements since the early nineteenth century, known as the Bengal renaissance following the global heritage of the European enlightenment. A number of educated Indian men took lead in promoting progressive social reforms in the region during this time, which included negotiating with the British governors to impose ban on ‘suttee’⁸ (widow burning), promote widow remarriage and education of women in particular. These men were part of the indigenous social reform movement, popularly known as the Bengal Renaissance. During this time, the Brahma Samaj⁹ and several schools for girls were established. First Indian Nobel Laureate poet and indigenous education reformer, Rabindranath Tagore’s grandfather and father were also part of this movement.

This intellectual history of the region also influenced some of the Jesuitess nuns and teachers working in the school. This includes the school historian, Mother Mary Colmcille. Historic archival data gathered as part of the ethnographic case study of the school show that the school staff and leadership had been engaged in serious intercultural dialog with the native indigenous spiritual traditions outside of the Catholic order and the intellectual history of the region. They have been engaging with progressive indigenous social reform traditions by recruiting teachers trained in the Brahma

tradition of schooling. Moreover, some of the Jesuitess nuns and school staff have been particularly engaged with the literary and pedagogic work of Rabindranath Tagore. The Jesuitess school historian, Mother Mary Colmcille was particularly enamoured of Tagore's progressive social reform ideas drawing on indigenous myths and historic characters expressed through creative art. She was also a teacher of Bengali and produced several plays and dance dramas created by Tagore with strong message for social inclusion and reform during school functions.

Hence, in the following section of the paper, I will expand on Tagore's 'southern theory'¹⁰ of inclusive education. Tagore's pedagogic reform in his experimental school during colonial India sought to address the diverse needs of learners as against the colonial 'factory-model' (Tagore, 1906) of schooling during his times. As a famous school dropout, Tagore's educational theory was based on his own experience of schooling. During a lecture tour in the US, Tagore stated openly that, 'It was not any new theory of education, but the memory of my school-days ... For it has given me knowledge of the wrong from which the children of men suffer' (Tagore, 1917). Moreover, Tagore gave emphasis to holistic education of every child, which also involved intercultural education and community engagement for sustainable development. This kind of pedagogic approach has been referred to as 'education for fullness' by Mukherjee (2013).

'Southern Theory' and 'Philosophy of Context'

'Southern Theory' is a sociological term established by Raewyn Connell (2007), who argued for the inadequacy of applying theoretical formulations from Northern European countries to analyze sociological problems and data from Southern postcolonial countries. It highlights the global politics of knowledge, since the global South has been historically treated as a data mine, while the global North has been associated with the intellectual work of generating theory. In many ways, Connell's (2007) arguments move beyond Chakrabarty's (2007) arguments in 'Provincializing Europe' about the inadequacy of established theoretical formulations within Western academia to properly understand social phenomenon in complex postcolonial contexts and suggests that 'theory too must be deimperialized', as Chen (2010) argued. Connell (2007) begins with a critical examination of the hidden assumptions driving the work of several established social theorists from Euro-American background to emphasize the need to study the work of intellectuals from Southern postcolonial contexts in order to develop better understanding of the problems within these contexts. Hence, I argue here that Peters (2012) arguments about 'philosophy of context' drawing on Wittgenstein's notion of epistemic contextualism and importance of language is useful in engaging with Tagore's 'southern theory' of inclusive education. It is useful for both analytic (ideological) and hermeneutic (affective historical) engagement with ethnographic data to analyze the case study school's inclusive pedagogic work to institutionalize education for all. More so because it is evident that the school historian, as well as several teachers at the school, were philosophically influenced by Tagore's ideas and engaged with his creative work in the local language. Most significant of them is the school historian Mother Mary Colmcille (1968), as noted earlier. Therefore, in the following sections of this

chapter I will engage with Tagore's writings on education and society theoretically to analyze the school's inclusive pedagogic approach to educate the hearts and minds of students.

Tagore's 'Southern Theory' of Inclusive Education

Tagore's theoretical ideas on education developed from his own experience of being a misfit in colonial 'factory-model' (Tagore, 1906) of schools and his deep observations of education systems abroad and comparative reflections on the needs of Indian society. Here are Tagore's main theoretical ideas as, I have gleaned from reading series of essays (originally in his mother tongue Bengali) written by Tagore since 1892 and reading the work of scholars who have read and analyzed Tagore's work (Bannerji, 2016; Bhattacharya, 2013; Collins, 2007; Dasgupta, 2009; Ghosh, 2015; Ghosh, Naseem, & Vijh, 2010; Guha, 2013; Jalan, 1976; Mukherjee, 2013; O'Connell, 2003, 2010; Pridmore, 2009; Saha, 2013; Samuel, 2011; Tagore, 1892, 1906, 1912, 1917, 1929, 2008):

- Education is a relational process between the child, teacher, peers and nature (environment).
- Child's Experience is central to the educational process.
- Curriculum and pedagogic approach should revolve around the child's aptitude and ability.
- Teacher's role is central to the pedagogic process in nurturing creativity and critical thinking (as against preparing kids for tests by rote-memorizing school textbooks).
- Education for the whole-child, which 'nourishes the heart and the intellect' (Tagore, 1906)—involving social and emotional learning—as well as for vocation (livelihood).
- Education should be community-oriented and should foster values of cooperation as against competition.
- Education should also foster intercultural learning to promote global consciousness to counter hatred based on cultural misunderstandings.

However, such progressive model of child-centered community-oriented pedagogy which focuses on holistic child development involving social and emotional learning is mostly neglected within the rigid curriculum and test-result oriented performative system of mainstream Indian education even today. The adverse effect of such a system is acknowledged very well by the long-serving Principal of Delphine Hart School since the late 1970s. This is evident from the following quote from an interview:

Many of the schools are rife with competition. Competition means that the child who gets the highest marks gets the best prize every year. This makes the parents also rabid. Now they want their children to get the first prize. So, the first thing I have to tackle is this children being pitted against each other for competition. Now when you get rid of that and bring in the idea of the community values, not competitive values, then you have already practically won the battle. Because if you have these competitive values

when people are competing for half a mark, they are not going to stay back in the afternoon to help a poor child. They want to get their marks. They want tuition. But, when you remove that, then you compete with yourself. You strive for excellence at the level of your own potential, not someone else's. And, this relieves the children of a lot of pressure because they don't have to measure up to come first. They can all get the prize if they work hard enough. You will find a year after that the children will be willing to work for other children because the pressure is off them.

—Sister Valentine

This competitive model of modern schooling system emerged within India during Victorian colonial times. Growing up as a sensitive child within the progressive home environment of his Brahma family, Tagore was deeply influenced by western enlightenment ideals as well as the philosophical ideals of the ancient Indian, Upanishads¹¹. However, Tagore was a complete failure within nineteenth-century colonial 'factory-model' of schools, which he later critiqued in several of his essays and his famous satirical short story- 'The Parrot's Training'¹². In a talk 'To Teachers', he strongly critiqued the fact that 'the child's life is subjected to the education factory, lifeless, colorless, dissociated from the context of the universe, within bare white walls staring like eyeballs of the dead' (as cited in Dasgupta, 2009, p. 108). He dropped-out of a number of English medium and Bengali medium schools. He was primarily home-schooled and later went on to establish his own co-educational school in rural tribal region of colonial Bengal, Shantiniketan.

The school was established as an alternative model of schooling attentive towards child's learning needs and abilities, contrary to the mainstream colonial factory-model of nineteenth-century schooling. Moreover, Tagore's 'socially inclusive school (also aimed to bridge social divide across gender, race, ethnicity, tribe, caste and religion with a conscious pedagogy to educate the heart and the mind' (Mukherjee, 2014). This all-encompassing inclusive vision of schooling to bridge social divide stems from an important empathic and egalitarian theoretical position taken by Tagore, as Collins (2007, p. 80) writes:

Tagore develops in his later writings and in his correspondence a particular type of anti-colonial agenda that evinces as much concern for the coloniser as for the colonised. He is unwilling to see the colonial situation as framed solely by the conflict of interest between the colonizer and the anti-colonial nationalist. Colonialism, Tagore would later argue, has been responsible for the subjugation of not only colonised peoples, but also Western civilisation itself, for it is colonialism that has led it away from its highest ideals. Resistance to colonialism should take the form of remedying the laws of both coloniser and colonised. 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.

This was a very radical progressive philosophy within a colonial context of domination and discrimination, as it has been observed by several scholars in recent years (Dasgupta, 1998, 2013; Ghosh et al., 2010; Nussbaum, 2006, 2010; O'Connell, 2010). It expressed Tagore's ability to empathize also with plight of the colonizer/oppessor, as he considered relationships of domination were harmful for both the one who dominates and the other who is dominated. Hence, he emphasized egalitarian relationships as against dominating power relationships. This egalitarian relational principle was also embedded in his pedagogic project. One of the most critical readers of Tagore's work, Hogan (2003), used a Sanskrit and Bengali word 'sahrdaya'¹³ to describe Tagore, since he was thinking and writing about equal human rights (manusher odhikar¹⁴) within the colonial Indian context of domination even prior to the international legal convention on human rights as Spivak (2002) suggested.

In the 'Pedagogy of the Heart' Paulo Freire (1998) wondered, 'if the majority of progressives had already understood that social transformation only really takes place when most of society takes ownership of it and takes the initiative to expand its social radius of acceptance' and the fact that, '(w)hen transformation is more or less imposed and its implementation is not followed by any effort or explanation about its reason for being, what results is blind obedience, immobilization, passivity, and fear. It may also lead, someday, to uprising' (p. 275). As Freire's 'intellectual forerunner' (Ghosh et al., 2010) within the Indian context, Tagore understood similar need to expand the 'social radius of acceptance' through socially inclusive democratic education.

This need to expand the 'social radius of acceptance' inside the school for its ripple effect outside in the society was also understood by the former principal of Delphine Hart School and some of the staff in the school, who came from inside the Jesuitess order and outside the order from indigenous Brahmo model of schooling established by Tagore's ancestors. An acute awareness of historic injustices and exploitation marked the conversational interviews with each of the prime actors in the school, who lead the inclusive transformation of the school since the 1979. This is overtly evident from the following quote from an interview:

Everywhere you go you have the same big schools- these big elite schools. Everywhere! You don't find any place without them. And, everyone feathering the nest of well-off kids and then those kids will go on to later become leaders of the country and possibly bigger exploiters than those that were there already. I mean why all this exploitation continues? ... Because, the people who are doing it are coming from that same insensitive class, because they have never been sensitized as children.

- Sister Valentine

Such a deep awareness of systemic social injustices by prime actors in the school because of their 'embodied' experiences coupled with a range of historic, cultural and political influences lead the school to conceptualize its distinct philosophy of engagement for the upliftment of the 'subalterns' of the local community. It also helped the former school Principal, Sister Valentine along with few other teachers in the school to design a relational values-education curriculum titled 'We are the World' in ten-part

series based on a balanced approach towards heart and head values drawing on the principles of ‘Golden Rule’ from all major Indian religions, including Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Jainism, Judaism and Christianity. The curriculum is critical about different kinds of socioeconomic inequalities within the contemporary Indian society and deals with issues such as discrimination against girl child, caste-based discrimination and religious discrimination. In order to teach this curriculum, they also developed a five-step reflective teaching methodology involving both individual and group activities. This curriculum has now been adapted as the official Human Rights curriculum in the region and being disseminated to other schools. This values-based approach of Delphine Hart School has been studied and theorized by Bajaj (2011) along with the work of some other schools in India as Human Rights Education for transformative social action with an underlying ‘radical politics of inclusion and social justice’.

Tagore was also extremely critical about the ills of indigenous Indian society during colonial times, just as he was critical about imperialism. Hence, he set out to reform education by establishing his own school where children’s ‘minds (will be) without fear’¹⁵, and they would learn from the spiritual, artistic and scientific traditions of both eastern and western civilizations. Tagore prioritized a more ecologically conscious child-centred pedagogy for educating world-minded citizens in his school in rural Shantiniketan back in the early twentieth-century colonial India; as against commercialism, imperialism and blind nationalism (Bannerji, 2016; Dasgupta, 2009; Mukherjee, 2014; O’Connell 2010). Dasgupta (2013) writes: ‘Rabindranath was seeking a world which has moved on from nationalism, patriotism, statism, and also capitalism- capitalism, because of his insistence on the best technology for Viswa-Bharati without the greed of profit ... Indeed, my research on a history of Shantiniketan-Sriniketan-Viswa Bharati has led me to believe that this education was a vision and an exercise in inclusion and variety, with its driving faith in the idea of a civilizational ‘meeting’ of the world’s races for an intercultural dialog crafted through knowledge of history and the arts’ (pp. 280–281). This humanist philosophy of education and vision for intercultural understanding is best expressed in Tagore’s essay ‘The Poet’s School’ in 1929:

The minds of 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 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.

Conceptualizing Inclusive Pedagogy

Education by nature is a relational process according to Tagore. The child learns best through his relationship with teacher, peers and the environment. Hence, creating a socially inclusive education system involving intercultural education and paying attention towards the individual learning needs of every child was most important according to Tagore. As stated earlier in this article, this relational philosophy of education

A Tagorean Relational Humanist Philosophy of Inclusive Education

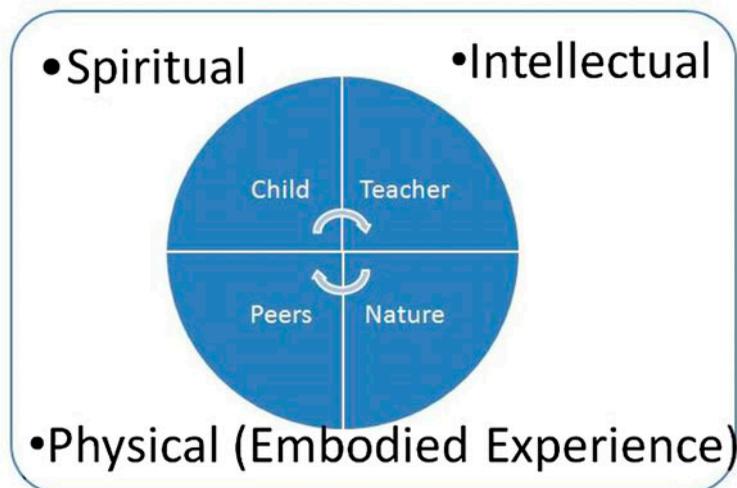


Figure 1: Tagore's relational humanist philosophy of inclusive education

emerged out of Tagore's own schooling experience as a child, as well as his subjective observations of the world around him as a child and as an adult during colonial India. As a 'rooted cosmopolitan'¹⁶, Tagore believed in the interconnectivity of life on earth. He also knew that the only way to move beyond parochial nationalism especially within the colonial context and all kinds of discrimination based on nationality, gender, race, ethnicity, caste, class, etc. was through inclusive education.

Tagore was also extremely critical of the mechanization of the teaching–learning process during colonial India and emphasized that it was important to reconnect the head and the heart, since the child learns best through a relational process and physical activity. He wrote—'If we at all understand the needs of the present day, we must see that any new schools 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' (Tagore, 1906 cited in Dasgupta, 2009, p. 114). According to Tagore, the child is relationally connected with the peer, teacher and the natural environment. Hence, the teaching–learning process should always take this into account. Any disruption or discord in these relationships is bound to affect the child's learning. Similarly, he saw the child's spiritual, intellectual and physical embodied self are also interconnected (see Figure 1). Hence, education should nourish all these aspects of the child's ontological being for holistic development, so that education becomes a life-long process and not limited to the few hours in the school.

Similar vision of education involving the education of the heart and the mind of students can be found in the 1971 constitution of the Jesuitess institute in India, which specifically stated that:

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)

A 1991 booklet on the school's vision, philosophy and policy further states that the progressive policies of the school 'followed naturally from our philosophy'. (p. 10) This philosophy of the school as stated in a school publication after a meditation retreat held at Dhyan Ashram, Calcutta, also reads very similar to the ideals of Christian liberation theology which grew in Latin America:

We recognize and strongly affirm that the special thrust of our Institute becomes credible in India today when our schools are centers where a preferential love of the poor is lived out both in attitudes and structures. In cherishing the most deprived of His people, and enabling them to take their place with dignity among the others our schools become places where truly the Glory of God is manifested. (p. 8-9)

A deep concern for the poor 'subaltern' population and rising inequality within the indigenous society of colonial India can be also observed in Tagore's essays, stories, novels and also artistic poetic writings. The following quote from Tagore expresses this concern in the most eloquent way and critiques the dominant cultural practices of chanting and singing within the larger Indian society as superficial, rather than spiritual:

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads!
Whom do you worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut?
Open your eyes and see your God is not before you!
He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking stones.
He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust.

-Tagore as translated from Bengali by Amartya Sen (2011)¹⁷

Tagore's critical awareness about increasing inequality during colonial India and culturally embedded social problems of the elites of Indian society spiritually disconnected from the suffering masses inspired him to build his own school in rural tribal Shantiniketan, rather than in his native city of Calcutta.

Within the extremely hierarchical and socioeconomic class, caste, gender and religion divided Indian society, where indigenous hierarchies got further reified because

of new hierarchies born out of the rigid social class divided Victorian England, most children coming from well-off families (particularly studying in English-medium missionary schools) generally never touch the lives of poor children, unless they go into their houses as domestic servants, who are often treated very badly like slaves. By bringing these children into the heart of the school, by making them peers to socialize with children from well-off families, making them stand up and lead assemblies in front of other school children; the inclusive pedagogic approach of Delphine Hart School began breaking down all barriers. Since middleclass children, their parents and school staff became active stakeholders for the education of the marginalized; people began to see that these poor children are just the same as everybody else. Moving beyond the ‘deficit ideology’ often used to rationalize the failure of the marginalized, they began to see that these children only lacked the opportunity, social network and mentoring which children from well-off families receive through family.

The most striking element of conceptualizing such an inclusive pedagogy to educate the heart and the mind of children is that the development was organic and bottom-up. The policy changes in the school were led by a long-serving empathic school Principal, who served the institution for over 30 years. However, its demand came from students and several school staff following the rape of a little homeless girl outside the gates of the school, despite strong opposition from a section of school staff and parents. Moreover, the community-oriented personal values of the school principal coming from an impoverished background of rural Ireland during World War I was also a major driving force for change as it is also evident from the following quote:

I grew up in Ireland. During my very early years the war in Europe was raging in the 1939–1940. I saw the Jewish children being smuggled out to Ireland. I saw condition they were in. And, Ireland was not an affluent country. It was a very poor country. During the winter there in 1940s when there was snow on the ground and it was bitterly cold, I sat with children who were without shoes beside me in the desk So when I see poor men here carrying heavy load, I see my own people.

The above quote is also a good example of the power of human empathy which can override differences based on race, nationality and social class location. I argue here that the last sentence in the above quote from the former school Principal express similar ‘sahrdaya’ sentiments which characterized much of Tagore’s literary writings and also pedagogic work as argued by Hogan (2003).

Conclusion

Sachs (2014) writes, ‘Sustainable Development targets three broad goals for society: economic development, social inclusion and environmental sustainability ... The goal of social inclusion is unfinished business in almost all parts of the world’ (p. 219). While discussing the exclusion people experience around the world because of gender, race, indigenous identity and sexual orientation. he also highlights the fact that ‘in modern economies, class is another possible barrier to social inclusion’ (p. 220). The bottom-up organic model for social inclusion across class barriers led by social action

of young middleclass girls therefore appear to be a good ‘resource of hope’, as Raymond Williams (1989) had argued. It is evident from this case study research that such a model of education can organically emerge within specific contexts led by community needs, youth social action and supportive school leadership. The historic colonial elitist design can be also changed through more democratic pedagogic models attentive of the diverse needs of learners and diversity of student body. However, since schools as social institutions are generally in a state of change ‘driven by social, cultural and economic shifts and policy agendas.’ (Thomson, Lingard, & Wrigley, 2012), sustainability of such a model is a big challenge as, I have observed through the process of my own research-related fieldwork (Mukherjee, 2015).

Even Tagore’s inclusive school in Shantiniketan has a chequered history as observed by Radice (2010), and it remained towards the outer-fringes of the mainstream modern Indian education system, which emerged during British colonial times. How to sustain democratic inclusive pedagogic models based on philosophies of engagement to educate the heart and the mind across social divide for sustainable development? This is probably the most important question in the twenty-first century. However, the case study school and its conception of inclusive education show that local needs can inspire the establishment of inclusive schooling environment driven by supportive school leadership to educate the hearts and the minds of children. It shows that it is possible to conceptualize inclusive pedagogies through intercultural dialog and engagement with ‘philosophy of context’ and ‘southern theory’ arising out of the complex colonial encounters in the global south.

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Notes

1. Shantiniketan meaning ‘abode of peace’ was located in the rural tribal region of the Birbhum district of undivided colonial Bengal. It is now in the Birbhum district of the state of West Bengal, India.
2. The name of the school and research participants has been anonymized following the research ethics protocol of the University of Melbourne.
3. In recent times, Indian scholars have debated over the exact cause of the famine, though Joseph Lelyveld quotes economist Amartya Sen’s (2010) reply to the editorial debate in *The New York Review of Books* to suggest that it was actually ‘British imperial policy of confusion and callousness, which had disastrous consequences’ See: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2011/feb/24/bengal-famine/>
4. Most British and Indian Historians consider the freedom movement against colonial rule in India began with the Revolt of 1857. See: http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/indian_rebellion_01.shtml
5. The particular Catholic order of Nuns is generally known as the Jesuitess, since their founding Mother superior wanted to follow the scholarly Society of Jesus for men, the Jesuits.
6. See: literature on ‘poor white’ community during British India by Arnold (1979), Hawes (1996) and Stoler (1989).
7. Girls from scheduled caste, scheduled tribe, Muslim and backgrounds of disability are some of the most excluded children within the Indian schooling context, according to macro statistical data (both national and international). See India Exclusion Report 2014.

8. This cultural practice within the colonial Indian context has been analyzed at length by Spivak (1988) from a feminist perspective in her seminal essay—Can the subaltern Speak? While postcolonial ethnohistorian Chakrabarty (2007) has critiqued the transition of the woes of women as ‘suttee’ and widows from the private to the public sphere during colonial times as the ‘birth’ of the modern colonial subject.
9. See: Brahma Samaj meaning Reformist Society <http://www.thebrahmosamaj.net/history/history.html>
10. ‘Southern Theory’ is a sociological term established by Connell (2007), who argued for the inadequacy of applying theoretical formulations from Northern European countries to analyse sociological problems and data from Southern postcolonial countries.
11. The name Upanishad has been variously interpreted. Many claim that it is a compound Sanskrit word Upa-ni-shad, signifying ‘sitting at the feet or in the presence of a teacher’; while according to other authorities it means ‘to shatter’ or ‘to destroy’ the fetters of ignorance.
12. See: <http://www.tagoreweb.in/Render/ShowContent.aspx?ct=Stories&bi=4A57AB73-A4A0-40D5-551D-9502E9CD11FD&ti=4A57AB73-A4A0-4FB5-251D-9502E9CD11FD>
13. A ‘sahridaya’ person is someone who can feel for other people by emotionally being in the other person’s shoes. However, these feeling and emotions are not irrational, since a ‘sahridaya’ person shares deep feelings with another person based on knowledge. See Abhinavagupta (1990) as cited by Hogan (2003).
14. See: Spivak (2002, p. 29) The Bengali word ‘Manush’ means human and ‘odhikar’ means rights.
15. See: Tagore’s famous poem from his Nobel winning volume of poems ‘Gitanjali’- Where the mind is without fear: <http://allpoetry.com/poem/8516621-Where-The-Mind-Is-Without-Fear-by-Rabindranath-Tagore>
16. This is how Purkayastha (2003) has read Tagore drawing on Kwame Anthony Appiah (1996) definition of the term, as someone who was rooted in his own cultural identity as a Bengali son of Mother India.
17. See: <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/books/magazine/89649/rabindranath-tagore>

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