

Rabindranath Tagore and his ideas

May 14, 2019

Manifest Pedagogy

Rabindranath Tagore as a personality is ever relevant with his universal ideas. He was in news recently due to the Jallianwallah Wala Bagh incident centenary observations. More importantly his ideas on Nationalism have become even more prominent with ideas of Nationalism and Patriotism being pulled into every single topic today!

In news

158th Birth anniversary of Tagore

Placing it in the syllabus

Modern Indian history: Personalities

Dimensions

- Rabindranath Tagore's role in the freedom struggle
- Role in Jallianwala Bagh & His letter
- His ideas on Nationalism and patriotism
- His views on education
- His ideas on cosmopolitan citizenship(his conversations with Gandhi)

Content

Rabindranath Tagore's role in the freedom struggle

India's National Movement for freedom was accompanied by a large wave of social, educational and economic awareness

throughout the nation. Tagore, one of the foremost thinkers in the country at the time spent time in building educational infrastructure. A man of true talent, his contribution to the freedom movement is significant. Following are the events that are evident in showing his contributions to the freedom struggle;

- **His role during Bengal partition:** In 1904, the Viceroy of India Lord Curzon announced that the Bengal province would be divided into two parts. The British government was worried about the social integrity among different communities in Bengal and wanted to divide and rule. During this time Rabindranath Tagore wrote the song Banglar Mati Banglar Jol (Soil of Bengal, Water of Bengal) to unite the Bengali population. He started the Rakhi Utsav where people from Hindu and Muslim communities tied colourful threads on each other's wrists. In 1911, the two parts of Bengal were reunited.
- **Literary works as weapons:** Tagore, unlike most of the other freedom fighters of his time, exposed the depravity of the British rule by chronicling all his adversities with British imperialism through poetry and literary works. He wrote most of his pieces in his mother tongue, Bengali, to be later translated to cater to his vast audience. **He used his literature as mobilization for political and social reform, hence allowing other nations to be aware and further apply international pressure to Britain to be accountable for its actions.** He documented everything that would expose Britain's true intentions in India.
- **Role in Jalianawalabagh:** The Jallianwala Bagh massacre even in its centenary year brings out the same vivid experience of trauma felt on April 13, 1919. The incident completely altered the political scenario and composition of India fighting against the British government. The event caused many moderate Indians loyal to the British rule to abandon their loyalty to embrace

nationalist values and grow distrustful of British. Many freedom fighters and political leaders were influenced by the incident too. **Tagore's actions against the cruel act also awakened the non-violent stand against the colonial rule.**

Tagore during the time of the massacre was 'Sir' Rabindranath Tagore (knighthood conferred in 1915) and had been a Nobel Laureate for six years. On receiving the news about Jallianwala Bagh, he tried to arrange a protest in Calcutta (now Kolkata) and finally **denounced the knighthood as an act of protest** with a repudiation letter to Viceroy Lord Chelmsford dated May 30, 1919.

His ideas on Nationalism and patriotism

- Tagore in his lectures at the Imperial University (now Tokyo University) urged to aspire for the 'higher ideals of humanity' rather than accept what he called as the 'organized selfishness of Nationalism'.
- He also added the equally severe admonishment that one should never "gloat upon the feebleness of its neighbours." For Tagore, importantly enough, the idea of India was a moral project that needed to engage with its own deep and troubled history of **"social adjustment.**
- In other words, for Tagore, **the idea of India was to realize its civilizational possibilities and potential rather than to allow it to inhale the "fumes" of "patriotic bragging."**
- In 1908, Rabindranath Tagore wrote a letter to his friend, A M Bose, and said, "Patriotism can't be our final spiritual shelter. I will not buy glass for the price of diamonds and I will never allow patriotism to triumph over humanity as long as I live."
- Throughout his life, Tagore remained deeply critical of nationalism, a position that pitted him against Mahatma Gandhi.
- Tagore argued that when love for one's country gives way

to worship, or becomes a “sacred obligation”, then disaster is the inevitable outcome.

- Tagore thus considered the idea of nationalism as being profoundly alien to the Indian psyche and the subcontinent’s many pasts.

His views on education

- As one of the earliest educators to think in terms of the **global village**, Rabindranath Tagore’s educational model has a unique sensitivity and aptness for education within multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-cultural situations, amidst conditions of acknowledged economic discrepancy and political imbalance.
- Rabindranath did not write a central educational treatise, and his ideas must be gleaned through his various writings and educational experiments at **Santiniketan**. In general, he envisioned an **education that was deeply rooted in one’s immediate surroundings but connected to the cultures of the wider world**, predicated upon **pleasurable learning and individualized to the personality of the child**.
- He felt that a **curriculum should revolve organically around nature** with classes held in the open air under the trees to provide for a spontaneous appreciation of the fluidity of the plant and animal kingdoms, and seasonal changes.
- In Tagore’s philosophy of education, **the aesthetic development of the senses was as important as the intellectual**—if not more so—and **music, literature, art, dance and drama were given great prominence in the daily life of the school**.
- In keeping with **his theory of subconscious learning**, Rabindranath never talked or wrote down to the students, but rather involved them with whatever he was writing or composing
- In terms of curriculum, he advocated a different

emphasis in teaching. Rather than studying national cultures for the wars won and cultural dominance imposed, **he advocated a teaching system that analyzed history and culture for the progress that had been made in breaking down social and religious barriers.**

- Tagore's educational efforts were ground-breaking in many areas. He was one of the first in India to argue for a **humane educational system that was in touch with the environment and aimed at the overall development of the personality.** Santiniketan became a model for vernacular instruction and the development of Bengali textbooks; as well, it offered one of the earliest coeducational programs in South Asia.
- One characteristic that sets Rabindranath's educational theory apart is **his approach to education as a poet.** At Santiniketan, he stated, his goal was to create a poem 'in a medium other than words.

His ideas on cosmopolitan citizenship(his conversations with Gandhi)

Following are the conversations between Tagore and Gandhiji just after world war one;

Tagore said that,

(Published in piece titled 'The Call of Truth' in Bengali in Pravasee first and later in Modern Review)

- 'The time, moreover, has arrived when we must think of one thing more, and that is this. The awakening of India is a part of the awakening of the world. The door of the New Age has been flung open at the trumpet blast of a great war.
- The foundation of modern, that is Western, civilisation was shaken; and it has become evident that the convulsion is neither local nor temporary but has traversed the whole earth and will last until the shocks

between man and man, which have extended from continent to continent, can be brought to rest, and a harmony be established.

- From now onward, any nation which takes an isolated view of its own country will run counter to the spirit of the New Age, and know no peace.
- From now onward, the anxiety that each country has for its own safety must embrace the welfare of the world. For some time the working of the new spirit has occasionally shown itself even in the Government of India, which has had to make attempts to deal with its own problems in the light of the world problem. The war has torn away a veil from before our minds.
- What is harmful to the world, is harmful to each one of us.
- Nevertheless it would be wrong to come to the decision that the working of self-interest alone is honest, and the larger-hearted striving is hypocritical.
- In this morning of the world's awakening, if in only our own national striving there is no response to its universal aspiration, that will betoken the poverty of our spirit.

Gandhi's reply on Internationalism/cosmopolitan citizenship

(Published in piece titled 'The Great Sentinel' in October 1921, in Young India, as a response to 'The Call of Truth')

- Indian nationalism is not exclusive, nor aggressive, nor destructive. It is health giving, religious and therefore humanitarian.
- India must learn to live before she can aspire to die for humanity. The mice which helplessly find themselves between the cat's teeth acquire no merit from their enforced sacrifice.'