

## Contribution of Rabindranath as a follower of Sanskrit education

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of education, as Rabindranath Tagore sees it, is to give a sense of one's identity as a total man and to bring education in harmony with life. He believed that self-realization was the goal of education. A total man is the one who thinks of himself first and foremost as human being. Rabindranath was conscious of the educational environment of Asrama, learning from the dramas of Kalidasa and verses of Upanishadas, Vedas, Gita and its impact on the overall mental and spiritual development of students though restricted to privileged sections of society only. Rabindranath was highly influenced by the basic principles and structure of thought rooted to Upanishadas and Gita specifically as true essence bearer of three fundamental principles. The first principle states the importance of wisdom in controlling senses by overcoming egoistic ignorance to achieve self-purification of inner soul. The second principle is to achieve a sense of identity with the universe. The third principle is to see God in one's own self. The personal experience of universal consciousness and of God is made possible by the combination of three processes namely Salutation and Submission, Integration and Service and Execution. According to Rabindranath, Education is a process for growth of mind and soul, establishing a community of spirit with man and nature. This educational process must aspire for the entry into the vast universal life and seek their fulfilment and rewards in its experiences. The Education is a process of self-purification for the pupil through the application of three principles namely freedom, inclusiveness and universalization. Rabindranath, born into family of a rich and intellectuals, though not having any formal education, but had undergone through Vedic literature like Upanishada, Puranas, Great epics etc., classic Sanskrit literature under the watchful eyes of Debendranath Tagore. His deep appreciation of Sanskrit literary works is reflected in his work of criticism, entitled "Prachin Sahitya". His building of educational institutions like Santiniketan and Viswabhararti reflects this ideology only. According to Rabindranath, the Gayatri mantra appears to signify the identity of the person in sync with nature and universe. The Upanishadas also have left a binding impression over the poet reflected in some of his works. The great epics Ramayana and the Mahabharata, Puranic literature, Dharmashastra all have seemed to enter his soul. The poet is indebted to classical Sanskrit literature specially Kalidasa in terms of concepts of dualism.

**Keywords:** Rabindranath Tagore, Upanishadas, principles, Sanskrit

### Introduction

According to Rabindranath, "Education means enabling the mind to find out that ultimate truth which emancipates us from the bondage of dust and gives us wealth not of things

but of inner light, not of power but of love. It is a process of enlightenment. It is divine wealth. It helps in realization of truth”.

Education, according to Tagore, is the all-round growth and development of the individual in harmony with the universal, the supreme, person who has in himself the various levels or planes of consciousness and experience corresponding to man’s physical self, life, mind, and soul. This universal man holds within himself all that Man has been, is and will be in future.

Tagore knew about the educational environment of the Ashrama, its way of life, teacher-student relationship and such other things from the dramas of Kalidasa, from the opening and closing verses of some of the Upanishads in which accessions like congregation of students, commencement of studies, convocations etc. have been referred to and glimpses are obtainable of the high ideal that prevailed and the effort that was made to carry it out. Besides, Ashrama education was not what in modern times we call ‘secular’, it was intended exclusively for persons of higher castes and noble birth. This practice raises many questions to one’s mind in this regard.

All the great men who have in modern times helped in bringing about the revival of the lost Indian traditions have been influenced by the Upanishads and the Gita. We shall discuss here about our three great pioneers: Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. We shall see that the basic principles and the structure of thought of each of them can be traced to the Gita. Of course, the influence of the Upanishads is very strong on all three. And if we examine the subtle distinctions between the streams of thought represented by the Gita and the Upanishads respectively, we shall see that Tagore, like Rammohan Roy and Maharshi Debendranath before him, was wholly imbued with the message of the Upanishads. And yet the Gita really is the essence of whatever is there in the Vedas and the Upanishads, a compilation of the most fundamental principles to be found in them. So, it will be convenient to state the three universally accepted principles of education by reference to Gita and then proceed to find out the special inclination, the flair of each of the three persons.

### **The three principles are as follows:**

First, to gain an awareness of one’s own self, that is, reveal through self-purification of the innermost being, the ‘person’ within. By controlling the senses, conquering lust, anger, greed etc. and dispelling egoistic ignorance by means of jñāna of wisdom, one may help the effulgent being within to manifest itself. This soul is there in everybody like fire hidden behind smoke or a dust covered mirror: ‘धुमेनार्शते वन्हिर्थाद मलेन च’ 11

This ignorance must be destroyed by knowledge and then this knowledge shines out naturally even like sun:

‘अज्ञानेनावृतं ज्ञानं तेन मुह्यन्ति जन्तवः।2

ज्ञानेन तु तदज्ञानं येषां नाशितमात्मनः।

तेषामादित्यवज्ज्ञानं प्रकाशयति तत् परम्। ‘3

As a result of this process the people may gain equality and detachment and become स्थितप्रज्ञ (स्थितप्रज्ञ) firmly stationed in wisdom:

“यः सर्वत्रानभिस्नेहस्तत्तत् प्राप्य शुभाशुभम्।

नाभिनन्दति न द्वेष्टि तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता॥” 4

The second principle is to reach through this self-awareness a sense of identity with the universe, to cross over to the domain of Universal consciousness when the purified inner self is uncovered, spontaneously sees all living things within itself and itself within them:

“भूतस्थमात्मान सर्वभूतानि चात्मानं।

ईक्षते योगयुत्कामा सर्वत्र समदर्शिनः॥” 5

The third principle is to see God in one’s own self and in everybody else as also to see everything in God:

ईश्वर सर्वभूतानां हृद्देशोऽर्जुन तिष्ठति॥” 6

The specific discipline through which this personal experience of the universal consciousness and of God is made simultaneously possible is combination of the three processes.

i) Salutation and submission

ii) Interrogation

iii) Service and execution: सेवा - the processes, which indeed may be more

familiarly termed devotion: भक्तिः, knowledge: ज्ञान and works = कर्म।

The Gita describes quite a few distinctive processes of yoga, but among them these three are the most important and indispensable. Vivekananda, Tagore and Sri Aurobindo – all three of them tried to combine and harmonize these three yogic processes:

“तत् विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया।7

येन भूतान्यशेषाणि दक्ष्यस्यात्मन्यथो मयि॥”

So, one who does all these three things adequately will be thereby enabled to see the universe within one’s oneself as also within God.

The rhythm and impact of these three movements are indeed discernible in all the so-called spiritual or secular aspects of life. The first two of these have been recognized by all educationists, western and eastern, although there is some difference in the manner of their acceptance of these principles. The third principle had a place in educational thought of the catholic educationists of Europe.

The three modern Indian leaders have accepted these three principles could be carried out in practice only by applying in a harmonious way the methods involved in the three yogas of ज्ञान, कर्म and भक्ति as described in the Gita.

Rabindranath Tagore approaches education, as he approaches life, as a poet, with a totality of vision, an incomparable awareness of its innumerable implications. Education, according to Tagore, is a process through which the mind can grow and reach out of itself and establish a yoga, a community of spirit with man and nature. Necessarily therefore, Tagore also emphasizes character, but in a different manner. Tagore wants an educational institution to be a place “where we can work together in a common pursuit of truth, share together our common heritage and realize that artists in all parts of the world have created forms of beauty, scientists discovered secrets of the universe, philosophers solved the problems of existence, saints made the truth of the spiritual world organic in their own lives, not merely for some particular race to which they belonged but for all mankind.”

Apart from these intellectual aspects of education, Tagore includes art not as a special attainment but as an integral part of education.

Before trying to evaluate Tagore's experiment it is necessary to have before us a precise formulation of his educational concept and aims, which is attempted below:

This education demands of all who want to take advantage of it an swerving faith in a higher, vaster life which has its foundations in unity, harmony and peace. Both teachers and students participating in this educational process must value above everything and aspire for a new birth into this Bhūmā (भूमा), this vast and Brhat (बृहत्), this universal life and seek their entire fulfilment and reward in its experiences. They must believe in benign and just dispensation of worldly things, in some power or desire in working out and helping the process of individual and universal growth and evaluation. As a result of this trust all possibilities of competition and conflict of wrong aims and objectives and narrow ego-centric movements should cease. It is the duty and privilege of the teacher to show by personal example how one can live this high life in peace undeterred by the fume and fret of the common world, the forces of strife and dissension which it has persuaded itself to accept inevitable.

b) Education, on the individual levels, implies a process of self-purification, that is rejection of all narrow and selfish desires and motives. The pupil must learn and apply three functional principles of self-education: i) freedom ii) fullness or inclusiveness and iii) vastness on Universalization. And through all these a way of life should be evolved and maintained which should give the society its unity and unique character and enable it to function as a living organism, affecting and being affected by new forces with which it may come into contact and automatically propagating its values and standards, its attitudes and dynamism of action. The small, self-contained, self-creating society should not only co-exist with other social groups and collectivities but be able to make its own contribution and affect the course of development not only of these groups but of humanity.

### **Influence of Sanskrit on Rabindranath:**

Before taking up the impact of Sanskrit on Rabindranath's works, we should add a few words about his upbringing. Born into a family of intellectuals, artists, and musicians, he had his early training directly under his saintly father, Devendranath who was advanced intellectually, morally, and spiritually. Rabindranath was averse to formal education. But endowed with a capacious intellect, he dived deep into English and Sanskrit, besides Bengali. Quite early in age, he becomes familiar with the Vedic-literature, Particularly the Upanishads, the Great Epics, Puranas, especially Bhagavad Gita and with the gems of classical Sanskrit literature, prose, poetical and dramatic literature. He imbibed the Sanskrit ideas of renunciation, the omniscience and omnipotence of the supreme soul. His humanistic ideas were, to a great extent, molded by Upanishadic concept of the single supreme soul underlying the entire creation.

Sanskrit has influenced Rabindranath in various ways – the finer and complex aspects of concept and virtue apart from the comparatively direct aspects of vast world of words, Chanda Sastra, and Alankara Sastra. His mind and soul were not confined within smaller boundaries, so he was able to extract many concepts from Sanskrit literature. It was quite natural that Sanskrit literature had influenced him in different layers in different periods of time.

His deep appreciation of Sanskrit literary works is reflected in his work of criticism, entitled "Prachin Sahitya". Inspired by hermitage-culture of ancient India, he built up 'Santiniketan' which was an emporium of universal culture. ('यत्र विश्वं भवति एकनीडम्' - 'Yatra Visvam bhavati ekanidam')

Rabindranath has referred to or mentioned the Vedic Gayatri mantra in various contexts, e.g., in his works, called Santiniketan, Manuser dharma, Utsarga and his article Bhakta etc. The meaning of Vedic Gayatri mantra, suggested by the poet, is this: the same peace pervades the earth, firmament and the region of the luminaries, on the one hand, as well as our consciousness, on the other: we meditate upon this force in the universe as also in our intellect.

The term 'bhur bhuvah and svah' are conventionally called 'Mahavyahrtis' (The great mantras that are pronounced). The poet however, explains 'vyahrti' as aharana' (gathering) of a special kind. According to him, the mantra appears to signify the gathering of those above regions within oneself. So that the person concerned realizes his identity with them.

The poet has rendered into Bengali (sometimes in prose, sometimes in verse) some of the Vedic texts. The Upanishads appear to have left an abiding impression in his mind. He has freely quoted, translated, or discussed Upanishadic passages in his writings. Some of these are – Iso-9, Kena-1.4, Katha-1.2.1, svetasatara III.20, Chhandgya - VIII. 4.1, porhadanyaka - 1.3.28 etc.

The great Epics Ramayana and the Mahabharata seemed to have entered his soul. The puranic literature also exercised considerable influence on Rabindranath. The Smrti or Dharmasastra was designed to regulate society and politics. To classical Sanskrit literature, prose, poetry and drama, Rabindranath's debt is immeasurable. The poet's indebtedness to Kalidasa is the greatest. In the poet's songs, included in the puja and prem parts of Gitavitan, the idea of dualism finds expression. As we shall see, a genius as he was, he, in many cases did not accept the conventional interpretation of the ancient texts but gave his own interpretation.

### Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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