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PEDAGOGY OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE¹

Until now, Rabindranath Tagore has been presented as a poet, writer and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature. There are no studies in Polish devoted to Tagore as a teacher and headmaster of private schools in Santiniketan, Sri Niketan or Visva Bharati. Limited information to that effect can be found in few articles and dictionaries. The aim of this article is to present a fuller overview of traditional and western education, Indian Renaissance in the 19th and 20th centuries India, and the pedagogical activity and creativity of Rabindranath Tagore, in relation to adult education and lifelong learning, excluding his literary output.

TRADITIONAL INDIAN UPBRINGING

The traditional way of education in ancient India has a very long history. Indian philosophical literature touches upon all the problems of life from metaphysics to the organization of social life and upbringing and is thus included in the texts treated as a source of Indian pedagogical thought. Among the oldest are the Vedic hymns, consisting of four parts: Rigveda, Jadveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda. Slightly

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later exegetical texts, or brahmans, were created, followed by the Upanishads. The Vedas, the ancient Holy Books, translate literally as Knowledge. Hence the conviction that science and holiness are not two poles of knowledge, but complementary disciplines. The language of teaching was Sanskrit, a sacred language, unknown to most Indians. In line with the spirit of India, the philosophy that constitutes the basis for education also determined the techniques and ways to better mankind².

In the Brahmin culture there was an interest in education and its aspects regulating the development of a collective life organized in four castes. According to Rigveda's interpretation, each caste was made from a particular part of the body of a cosmic being, Purusha, which determined their attitude to the ritual and the character of the activities performed in everyday life. The duty of the Brahmin, who grew out of the mouth of Purusha, is to study and perform ritual functions combined with exerting a magical influence on the minds, emotions and imagination of the members of other castes. His tasks included learning the truth, teaching and implementing the thoughts of the wise men. Purusha's arm gave rise to a caste of Kshatri, knights and rulers, who safeguarded the land and prosperity. The studies of Kshatri were functional and prepared for governance and warfare. In matters of understanding the laws of life, they sought advice from the Brahmans, who explained the regularities and ways of fulfilling the dharma³. The Vaishya caste, originating in Purusha's hips, led an economic life of craftsmen, merchants and farmers, and regenerated herself via education. The fourth caste, the Shudra, came from the feet of Purusha and performed menial work⁴.

The hallmark of the Hindu religion is the faith in the reproducibility of the cycles of the creation of the world and the concept of three births: the first birth is the birth of a child, the second time a person is born by initiation, and the third time a person is born after death, in a new incarnation, according to the law of karma. The conviction

² See Z. Krawczyk, *Rabindranath Tagore – poszukiwanie prawdy i piękna w teorii i praktyce wychowania*, Warszawa 1990, p. 36.

³ See *Ibidem*, p. 39.

⁴ See S. Wołoszyn, "Wychowanie i »nauczanie« w cywilizacjach starożytnego Wschodu", [in:] *Pedagogika. Podręcznik akademicki*, ed. Z. Kwieciński, B. Śliwerski, Warszawa 2004, p. 83.

about the journey of the soul and its new incarnations puts the whole Indian problem of education in a different context, unknown to the European reflection on human education. It is associated with the theory of merit and transmigration, a symbolic circle of a series of new incarnations that offer a person the chance to mature spiritually. The birth of a child is rife with chaos, lack of discipline and life at the biological level. During childhood, a person lives surrounded by unconditional love, often under the care of the servants, free from educational interventions and corrective pressures. The child, like the world of nature, develops despite the fact that nobody manages these processes. Its existence until the time of initiation is deprived of social and religious status. A child ends his or her existence as a natural human being when, at the age of eight, he or she moves from nature to the world of tradition and spiritual life in the process of initiation. Awareness, discipline, higher will and suffering will take part in its creation. Initiation therefore appears as the moment of spiritual birth, and those who have undergone the initiation are called double-born. A person then enters the Brahmaçarya period no longer develops freely but begins the life of an adult under the care of a guru, a philosopher who shares his experience and under his direction goes from disciplining the senses to disciplining the mind. Moral life gives man a chance to free himself from ignorance and to get closer to the truth, or Satya. Liberation from ignorance, from unfamiliarity with the laws of the universe, from anger and prejudice, according to Indian theory of education, is the content of improving the body and mind; and the soul which has not reached the knowledge will, after death, be reborn in another incarnation.

In the process of upbringing, the student sat next to the guru and listened to the words of the Vedas, the teachings about the creation of the world, the gods, the history of Indian civilization and learned about upbringing, psychology, medicine, logic, language, mathematics, and the art of social life⁵. In individualised education, the teacher paid special attention to the development of the student's mind and consciousness, which were to bring him closer to understanding the laws of model reality and universal reality created by the Absolute⁶.

⁵ See Z. Krawczyk, *Rabindranath Tagore – poszukiwanie prawdy i piękna w teorii i praktyce wychowania*, op. cit., p. 43–44.

⁶ See *Ibidem*, p. 115.

In India, prior to the colonial conquest, there was no cult of inventiveness or scientific progress, and intellectual activity was directed towards philosophical and religious speculation. The Brahmins did not create a rational and critical intellectual tradition, but preferred comments over original research. Lack of enthusiasm for novelty was a result of the social order; wealth did not change the fate of man as much as spiritual knowledge, virtue and a righteous life. The glamorisation of work, so characteristic of Europe, was unknown. One only tried to do what he or she was destined to do by virtue of being born in a given caste, and the caste order was conducive to passivity and reconstruction⁷.

The emergence of unorthodox religions in India, such as Buddhism and Jainism, did not bring about radical changes in the social role of knowledge and education. However, these religions promoted teaching in monasteries, which became the primary centres of religious knowledge. The presence of Islam in northern India dates back to the 11th century, but the Muslim rule did not introduce any changes in the situation of education. Madrasas and Koranic schools were introduced, which offered religious education exclusively to boys.

THE COLONIAL PERIOD

In the 19th c., India faced two concepts of man, two worldviews: Brahmin and English. Indian philosophy with its concepts of the micro world, man and goals of lifegoals collided with European humanism, developing natural sciences oriented towards action and rebuilding of social and economic life. In the foreground were such qualities as positivist thinking and scientism, sharp opposition to metaphysics and preference for broadly understood experimentation, all of which were new for Indian society⁸.

In the first period of British colonization, the conservative orientation prevailed. The English did not care if the Indians would get to

⁷ See J. Kieniewicz, *Kerala. Od stanu równowagi do stanu zacołowania*, Warszawa 1975, p. 146–147.

⁸ See Z. Krawczyk, *Rabindranath Tagore – poszukiwanie prawdy i piękna w teorii i praktyce wychowania*, op. cit., p. 55.

know European culture. They knew that familiarity with it could lead to changes in the mentality of the indigenous population and trigger unforeseen consequences. In 1792, the director of the East India Company said: "We lost America as a result of our own madness, accepting the establishment of schools and colleges. We should not repeat this act of madness towards India"⁹. This orientation was supported by European orientalist, who wanted to preserve the Indian community intact, which also involved a policy of tri-religious tolerance.

The liberal orientation began to emerge as of 1815. The British began to see the need for change in Indian society. Missionary schools were allowed to be established. In 1818 the first Indian college for Indians was opened in Serampora¹⁰. The activity of Christian missions, the establishment of various types of schools led to the popularization of the English language and as a result to an intellectual revival. Learning about the classical European culture, the Indians became aware of its value. Occident, i.e. pro-European groups, consisting of representatives of higher castes, maintained close contacts with the colonists and adopted the conviction imposed by the English about the superiority of European culture. The European models imposed on them were easily assimilated by education. Conservative groups, on the other hand, preferred the traditional way of life and were hostile towards everything European¹¹.

Founded by missionaries, the schools educated people concerned with the ideas of progress, where the personal role model of a gentleman was more valued than the personality model focused on self-observation, meditation on the sense of life and oriented towards self-improvement. In the late 1820s, a radical orientation began to emerge that sought to modernise India according to the European model. The British Crown needed junior clerks and junior officials to become their tools for managing the Indian Empire. There was no need to educate scientists or engineers, and typically general humanistic knowledge was sufficient for the British administration. The Committee of Public Instruction, established in 1835

⁹ R. N. Sharma, R. K. Sharma, *History of Education in India*, New Delhi 2004, p. 85.

¹⁰ See S. Łodziński, *W dążeniu do równości*, Warszawa 1993, p. 78.

¹¹ See Z. Krawczyk, *Rabindranath Tagore – poszukiwanie prawdy i piękna w teorii i praktyce wychowania*, op. cit., p. 22.

and led by Thomas B. Maculay, compiled a report which laid the groundwork for the educational policy. Macular wrote:

I therefore propose that we replace their ancient education system, so that they think that everything foreign and English is better for them than their own, until they lose their sense of self-esteem, their own culture, and become what we want them to be: a truly dominated nation. [...] We must make every effort to create classes that are translators between us and the millions we govern; a class of people with Indian blood and complexion, but with English tastes, opinions, morale, and intellect¹².

The Universities of Mumbai, Calcutta and Madras established in 1857 were branches of British universities and their unified programmes were adapted to the requirements of the University of London. There was then no separate education system in India, and the British did not try to distinguish between the way of education in Britain and beyond within the empire. Nor did the British see the need for the creation of primary schools. Parents wishing to educate their children employed private teachers. The British administration would not spend money on primary education and did not do anything about it until the end of its rule¹³.

On the other hand, the English, contributed to great socio-economic reforms. They built hundreds of factories, developed the railway network and brought drinking water to the cities. It was a period of industrial and social revolution. The British encouraged the rulers of independent principalities to introduce reforms along the lines of the British model and after a while they annexed them. The British failed to implement Wood's 1854 reform. Its main objective was to extend education to the whole of Indian society by introducing a dual education system. In villages, teaching was to take place in traditional schools in local languages, with lessons schedules, curricula and textbooks were to be Western. Education was to remain secular and neutral. Its financing was to be based on compulsory payments levied from the population. By allowing private initiative, Wood's reform became

¹² R. N. Sharma, R. K. Sharma, *History of Education in India*, op. cit., p. 85.

¹³ See D. Rothermund, *Indie. Nowa azjatycka potęga*, Warszawa 2010, p. 228 (English edition: D. Rothermund, *India: The Rise of an Asian Giant*, Cambridge 2009).

a strong incentive for the development of private schools. However, it did not lead to the development of education in rural areas due to the lack of subsidies from the administration budget. People could not afford to send their children to school at the cost of losing their jobs, which has not changed to this day. In 1882 the Education Commission, also known as the Hunter Commission, was established. They pointed to the need to maintain caste and religious divisions in education, favoured a ban on teaching the untouchables and the creation of a separate school organization for Muslims. This led to even greater nationalist and religious tendencies, which began to emerge in the field of education¹⁴.

The conquest of Bengal by the British caused a sudden change in the position of Hinduism. Under Muslim rule, the Hindu religion was barely tolerated. For the English, both Hinduism and Islam were pagan religions, but because the Campaign had no religious interest, Hinduism gained an equal position for the first time in 500 years. Many Hindus called for a return to the sources of Hindu civilization and culture. One of them was Rammohan Roy, a social and religious reformer, father of the Indian Renaissance, founder of Hindu College, founder of the Brahmo Samaj movement. Fascinated by European ideologies, he tried to uncritically graft everything Western onto Indian soil. He developed a programme for the reconstruction of Indian society, eliminating outdated forms of morality such as sati, child marriage and the caste system.

There are three phases in the development of the Indian Renaissance. The first one is connected with the activity of Roy and Brahmo Samaj and is characterized by fascination with all things western. The second stage, linked to Arja Samaj's activity, is a reaction to the previously revealed European influences and an emphasis on pride in everything Indian. The third stage is characterized by a great synthesis of European and Indian ideologies; its representatives were Vivekananda and Tagore. There were two doctrinal tendencies in this period: liberal and democratic, and different approaches to the issue of liberating a country from colonial occupation. Since the 1880s, Indian nationalist ideology opposed the British colonial rule. All Indians, regardless of

¹⁴ See S. Łodziński, *W dążeniu do równości*, op. cit., p. 80–81.

religion, caste or region of origin, became aware of the “alien” nature of the white sahib ruling their country as soon as they came into direct contact with the new rulers. At the same time, the popularity of the idea of social equality, women’s rights and access to education that characterized the West was on the increase¹⁵.

The resurrection of the knowledge of Indian history awakened and strengthened the understanding of Hinduism. The resurrection of Sanskrit led to the rereading of the great works of Mahabharata and Ramayana. The long-forgotten history of Chandragupta and Alexander the Great (Sikandra) was discovered and the inscriptions from the times of Asia were deciphered. The Hindus realized that they can be proud of their national heritage.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE – LIFE AND PEDAGOGICAL OUTPUT

Rabindranath Tagore was born on 7 May 1861. At the end of the 17th century, his ancestors abandoned their family estates and moved to Govindpur, which in the future was to become one of the districts of Calcutta. Over the years, thanks to trading and banking activities, the Tagore family became the owners of many properties in India. In particular, they profited greatly from their cooperation with the increasingly powerful East India Campaign. Rabindranath’s grandfather, Dwarkanath Tagore, violated the religious ban imposed by Hinduism and travelled overseas to Europe, where he died in 1846 during a tour of London at the age of 52. Dwarkanath Tagore was one of the most prominent and active representatives of the Indian intelligentsia, supporting Roy in his efforts to reform Indian society¹⁶. He was also highly valued by the colonial administration and court circles, which was reflected in Queen Victoria’s knighting him, an honour he did not accept. Also Rabindranath’s father, Devendranath, was an ardent supporter of the Brahmo Samaj movement¹⁷. In 1863 he established the

¹⁵ J. Justyński, *Myśl społeczna i polityczna renesansu indyjskiego od Rama Mohana Roya do Rabindranatha Tagora*, Warszawa 1985, p. 254.

¹⁶ See N. Jha, “Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941)”, *Prospects. The quarterly review of education* 1994, Vol. xxiv, p. 603.

¹⁷ Society of Brahman Worshippers.

ashram, a meditation centre called Santiniketan (Peaceful Place), 100 kilometres away from Calcutta¹⁸. While the Tagore family was deeply entrenched in Hindu and Muslim traditions, they did not spare resources for the development of Western education, including tertiary education institutions, where they could study natural sciences and medicine. This particular situation in the Tagore house explains the combination of tradition and modernity characteristic of the Rabindranath's attitude to life. Devendranath Tagore was one of the main activists in the emerging Bengal community. He studied at the same English-Hindu school as Rammohan Roy and was greatly influenced by him. He was well versed in both European and Indian philosophy. Thanks to his strength of character he gained the nickname Maharshi, i.e. the Great Seer.

Rabindranath was his youngest, fourteenth child¹⁹. The other kids were also comprehensively educated; they played musical instruments, wrote poetry, novels and dramas, which was rare at that time²⁰. His parents didn't show much interest in him. His mother was always busy running the house and his father spent all his time travelling across India. His upbringing was then mainly the responsibility of the servants²¹. The father cared for the harmonious development of his sons' talents and hired private teachers to teach them at home. Rabindranath's brother also took care of his comprehensive development, mainly teaching him his native Bengali, which was neglected at school. In later years Rabindranath attended the Bengali high school, founded by Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, where he loved especially the Bengali language and literature. He was also sent by his father to English schools, but did not like their style of teaching and the English language itself. His favourite books, apart from the Mahabharata and Ramayana,

¹⁸ See D. Rothermund, *Indie*, op. cit., p. 228.

¹⁹ R. Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, says: "Shortly after my birth my father took to constantly travelling about. So it is no exaggeration to say that in my early childhood I hardly knew him". All quotations after: R. Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/22217/22217-h/22217-h.htm> (available: 30.02.2020).

²⁰ Dwijendranath was a Bengali musician and poet, Satyendranath took part in the Bengali national movement and was active for the abolition of Pardah, or a system of female seclusion. Swarnakumari is considered as the first Bengali female writer.

²¹ See B. Grabowska, B. Śliwczyńska, E. Walter, *Z dziejów teatru i dramatu bengalskiego*, Warszawa 1999, p. 86.

included works by Spencer, Gibbon, Shakespeare's tragedies and novels by Dickens, Thackeray, Shelley, and Byron²².

Rabindranath gave up formal education and at the age of 14 began to take private lessons at home from specially employed governors. In his memoirs, he describes the reluctance he felt during his childhood towards private teachers, learning venues and memorization. Instead of wasting his time in class, he preferred to give in to his dreams, look out the window, hide in the nooks and crannies of his home and spin his fantastic stories²³. He hated English lessons, which he considered extremely boring: "Providence, out of pity for mankind, has instilled a soporific charm into all tedious things. No sooner did our English lessons begin than our heads began to nod"²⁴. That is why he attached so much importance to language. He believed that India would not preserve its own cultural identity by using English and postulated learning in folk languages.

His childhood experience allowed him to formulate his own theory of upbringing. His concept was based on the idea of liberating students from household chores, giving them time after school as a form of creative detachment from reality²⁵. As a child, Tagore did not have much time for himself because his day was full of school duties. Learning began before dawn with gymnastics, followed by lessons in literature, mathematics, geography and history. After school, in his free time from encyclopaedic learning in the European style, he learned wrestling, drawing and singing. This will affect the construction of the curriculum and the choice of content in the Santiniketan school²⁶.

Since his earliest years Tagore tried to break free from the constraints imposed by the school²⁷. Science was associated by him not

²² See J. Justyński, *Mysł społeczna i polityczna renesansu indyjskiego od Rama Mohana Roya do Rabindranatha Tagora*, op. cit., p. 229.

²³ See A. Chaudhuri, *On Tagore. Reading the Poet Today*, Pieterlen 2012, p. 148.

²⁴ R. Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, op. cit.

²⁵ See A. Chaudhuri, *On Tagore*, op. cit., p. 147.

²⁶ See R. Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, op. cit.

²⁷ See *Ibidem*. He writes: "I had started a class of my own in a corner of our verandah. The wooden bars of the railing 31 were my pupils, and I would act the schoolmaster, cane in hand, seated on a chair in front of them. I had decided which were the good boys and which the bad—nay, further, I could distinguish clearly the quiet from the naughty, the clever from the stupid".

with assimilation of knowledge, but with self-improvement and change in the quality of life. When he was 12 years old, his father took him to Santiniketan and during this short stay Tagore took Sanskrit and astronomy lessons and studied the Hindu scriptures, which became the seed of his views on upbringing. The memory of the closeness and tenderness of his father during his teaching in Santiniketan, absent in Calcutta, evolved in later work with Rabindranath's pupils after 1901²⁸.

In 1878, at the age of seventeen, Rabindranath was sent to London to study law. However, after eighteen months, at the request of his father, he returned to India without completing his studies. In 1882 his first book in the Bengali language *Sandhya Sangeet* was published. By 1890 he had written many articles, poems and novels, highly appreciated by critics. In 1883, at the age of 23, he married 10-year-old Bhavatarini²⁹, who was half-illiterate. In 1890 he made his second trip to Great Britain. After his return he took over the supervision of the family estate. In 1886 his first daughter was born, in 1888 his son and in 1891 his next daughter. In total Tagore had 5 children³⁰. In 1892 he wrote his first major essay on education in India titled "The Mismatch of Education", where he criticised colonial education and the school system³¹. He was overwhelmed by the terrible economic status and living conditions of inhabitants of rural areas. The villagers should feel the strength, and the only way to achieve this is through adult education. Independence of the rural community, local initiatives undertaken by themselves and a courageous leader may lead to the improvement of their living conditions. Only life-long education was an instrument on the road to social change. As a landowner, Tagore began to introduce the basics of education for his employees. To this end, he founded a school for adults on his property in Seliadah³², where he also sent

²⁸ See A. Chaudhuri, *On Tagore*, op. cit., p. 148.

²⁹ Throughout his life, Tagore loved his tragically deceased sister-in-law, Kadambari, who committed suicide. He dedicated as many as 6 books to her. During his lifetime he never dedicated a book to his wife.

³⁰ See B. Grabowska, B. Śliwczynska, E. Walter, *Z dziejów teatru i dramatu bengalskiego*, op. cit., p. 86.

³¹ See S. Bhattacharya, "Classics with Commentary: Rabindranath Tagore on School and University", *Contemporary Education Dialogue* 2004, 1, p. 259, <http://ced.sagepub.com/content/1/2/258.citation> (available: 30.02.2020).

³² Eastern Bengal, now Bangladesh.

his own children. It was his first educational experiment. He also organized a hospital which cared for the inhabitants of nearby villages. Tagore himself called this period in his life “Sadhana”. It was a time of reflection, self-improvement and preparation for active social life. Later educational experiments will be based on the experience he gained from the educational project in Seliadah³³. It was then that Tagore understood that education through life must attempt to teach the art of life. The knowledge needed by adults must not come from outside, and education programmes adapted for adults must focus not only on the communicative function of language, but also on learning to draw on one’s own experiences. He believed that the transfer of practical professional skills and lifelong learning could be the most cost-effective form of learning. Weaving, spinning, haberdashery and ceramics have always been associated with the lowest castes in India. The knowledge and skills of the rural population have never been recognised as valuable by the higher castes. Tagore tried to change this situation by introducing numerous educational programs³⁴.

At the same time, Rabindranath’s nephew attempted to open a school in Santiniketan (Peaceful Place), which propagated the idea of Hinduism. He prepared a study programme and erected buildings, but his death in 1899 interrupted the project. Only two years later did Tagore decide to continue his nephew’s work and in 1901 he left the Seliadah estate and moved with his family to Santiniketan, which he had visited as a child with his father. On December 22, 1901, on the anniversary of his grandfather’s accession to Brahmo Samaj, the official inauguration of his new school took place. The school attempted to reconstruct the traditional model of education, aimed at sustaining the philosophy and art of life³⁵. It was based on the principles of the traditional forest school (ashram), where dedicated wise men and spiritual guru teachers gathered. In an inaugural speech called “Pratisthadvaseer Upadesh”, he defined the school’s ideological program as a pursuit of truth and beauty, as the tuning of young people’s characters to the fullness of life and

³³ See N. Jha, “Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941)”, op. cit., p. 605–606.

³⁴ See A. Bhattacharya, *Education for the People. Concepts of Grundtwig, Tagore, Gandhi and Freire*, Boston 2010, p. 52.

³⁵ See Z. Krawczyk, *Rabindranath Tagore – poszukiwanie prawdy i piękna w teorii i praktyce wychowania*, op. cit., p. 144.

the universe³⁶. Tagore referred to three basic elements characteristic of a forest school: lack of dualism in terms of knowledge, friendship with all and fulfilling duties. He isolated his school from the accidental influences of society and cultivated the multiple connections between the lives of his students and the values of spiritual culture³⁷. In addition, he supplemented science with elements of modern knowledge in the field of natural sciences and humanities. The study was conducted in Bengali and treated as the main means of communication, although the boys came from different parts of the country and belonged to different castes. Initially, only five boys from families known to Tagore along with his son attended Santiniketan, and after a few years the number of students increased to several dozen. The school was a boarding school; all the students lived together and living a harsh life, and until her death in 1902 Tagore's wife was a "mother" to all the pupils. They got up at 5 a.m., the boys cleaned their bedrooms and started the day with morning ablutions. Then they went for outdoor gymnastics. After gymnastics, they prayed and contemplated for 15 minutes. Then they went for breakfast. Learning began at 7 am and took place in the open air. The pupils usually worked independently under the supervision of teachers. After lunch the lessons lasted until 5 pm. The curriculum included Sanskrit, Bengali, English, Mathematics, Astronomy, History, Geography, Nature, and Music. In the afternoon the pupils played football, took part in village activities or read poetry loudly. They also took part in field and garden activities. After evening ablutions and prayers, the pupils had free time and went to bed at 10 pm³⁸. The school was divided into three sections (high school, junior high school, elementary school), and the pupils gave them their own names. They could move from group to group, depending on their own skills. Therefore, a system oriented towards individualised development of pupils was adopted. Out of five teachers, two were Catholic, one was the son of a teacher from England. The teachers were prepared to work at the University of Calcutta or in teacher seminars run by missionaries. What they learned there was aimed at sustaining colonialism and proved to be useless in Santiniketan. Therefore, only young teachers were employed as it was easier to

³⁶ See *Ibidem*, p. 135.

³⁷ See *Ibidem*, p. 159.

³⁸ See *Ibidem*, p. 222.

change their teaching habits³⁹. Students were not charged any fees all bills were paid by Tagore. His fame grew and so did his royalties. In November 1913, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature, thanks to which the school could develop. The school was supported by the maharaja of Tripura; Tagore also sold all his wife's jewellery and the right to publish his works.

In 1905, the National Commission for Education asked Tagore to prepare a programme of educational reforms. A year later he presented his own concept of national education, organically connected with the life of the nation, generally accepted Hindu ideals and traditions⁴⁰. He supported the Swadesi movement calling for a boycott of English goods and the exclusive use of local products. For several years he travelled around the world, visited the United States, Europe and Japan⁴¹. On 3 June 1915 the British government knighted Tagore, which title he gave up after the Amritsar massacre in 1919. These international experiences had a profound impact on his vision of education and he decided to complement it with contacts with other cultures. He noticed that narrow nationalism pushes one towards a path of conflict. According to Tagore, what distinguishes Indian culture is not commercialism, imperialism or nationalism, but universalism, the unity of the soul and the environment⁴².

His vision of an ideal school was implemented in the Visva Bharati⁴³, a centre of Indian culture established in 1921. The university was only a loose, its organization lacked precise regulations and norms. Tagore's concept was to build a bridge between nations, between east and west, between south and north. People from all over the world and of all ages could study there⁴⁴. Tagore opposed blind imitation

³⁹ See *Ibidem*, p. 165.

⁴⁰ See *Ibidem*, p. 191.

⁴¹ By 1934, Tagore had visited Europe, Ceylon, China, Japan, Argentina, Egypt, Singapore, Malasia, Java, Bali, Thailand, Indochina, Persia, Iraq, Canada, United States, and Russia.

⁴² See P. Parmar, "Rabindranath Tagore's Views on Education", *Language in India* 2011, Vol. 11/1, p. 228, <http://www.languageinindia.com/jan2011/tagoreparmar.html> (available: 30.02.2020).

⁴³ See Visva-Bharati, A Central University and an Institution of National Importance, <http://visvabharati.ac.in/> (available: 30.02.2020).

⁴⁴ See S. Bhattacharya, "Classics with Commentary: Rabindranath Tagore on School and University", *op. cit.*, p. 260.

of the Western style of teaching, Western buildings and subjects that unnecessarily increased the cost of education and were therefore too expensive for the poorest social strata⁴⁵. At the same time, he stressed the need for teaching in native languages. Speaking only English was limited to the higher castes; the masses did not know the language of the coloniser and therefore were unable to benefit from education⁴⁶. Universities should never become machines for collecting and distributing knowledge, but rather platforms for exchanging experience. People should offer a wealth of thought in them. He wanted university environments to integrate with the rest of society and take on the burden of educating people living in poor regions. He did not want education to be reserved exclusively for urban communities and the higher castes. School institutions should be at the heart of society, linked to it by living ties of cooperation.

Tagore was particularly concerned about the dramatic situation of the rural population, who, deprived of education, were unable to change their life situation. Lack of food, health, joy, lack of awareness of what a social initiative and cooperation is, made Tagore establish a school for the poorest called Sri Niketan and the Institute for Rural Reconstruction in the village of Surul. He taught the villagers that instead of blaming failure on ill fate, they had better take their lives in their own hands and be dependent only on their own efforts. This motto was the basis of Tagore's theory of rural reconstruction⁴⁷. He was particularly interested in the indigenous forms of upbringing, which were considered scandalous in those times, and especially in the openness of contacts between men and women. He divided knowledge into general and utilitarian knowledge. The former should concern all people, while the latter should be connected with social

⁴⁵ R. Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, says: "it was a school. The rooms were cruelly dismal with their walls on guard like policemen. The house was more like a pigeon-holed box than a human habitation. No decoration, no pictures, not a touch of colour, not an attempt to attract the boyish heart. The fact that likes and dislikes form a large part of the child mind was completely ignored. Naturally our whole being was depressed as we stepped through its doorway into the narrow quadrangle".

⁴⁶ See A. Bhattacharya, "Tagore on the Right Education for India", *Asia-Pacific Journal of Social Sciences* 2009, Vol. 1, p. 27, <https://brill.com/view/book/9789460912665/BP000009.xml> (available: 30.02.2020).

⁴⁷ See N. Jha, "Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)", op. cit., p. 605-606.

functions adopted in society⁴⁸. The aim of the school was to provide a comprehensive education to the rural population, to enable them to gain a future income and to equip them with practical skills that would improve their lives in all aspects. His intention was, without negating the role of science and the latest technologies, to teach traditional crafts. Without this effort it was not possible to revive the countryside.

From the beginning, the main task of the program of Sri Niketan, the Tabernacle of Success led by Leonard Elmihst, an English economist and agricultural specialist, was to increase the productivity of the land. In addition, efforts were made to improve the quality of life and hygiene conditions of the rural population. Tagore also tried to organize scouting, mobile libraries and outdoor theatre performances. He considered theatre to be a key factor in the development of students' personalities. He treated work and science as a form of a spectacle. The basic activity was learning local handicrafts⁴⁹. At the end of his life, Tagore became a promoter of the new idea of loka-shiksha, i.e. education for the people. He initiated the publishing of a series of books to popularize science among the poorest strata of society. He divided the illiterate into three categories, claiming that the majority of the villagers were illiterate, secondary illiterate or functional illiterate. He said that there are only two methods of educating the illiterate. The first, Jatra, is outdoor education through drama, and the second through stories of heroes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata⁵⁰. Gandhi saw affinities between loka-shiksha and his idea of Wardha, or basic education for the people. A few months before his death, Tagore tried to draw the public's attention to the fact that unequal access to education is the source of social inequality. Until the end of his life, his activities focused on the lifelong learning of the rural population⁵¹. In 1940, a year before his death, Oxford University awarded him an honorary doctorate.

⁴⁸ See Z. Krawczyk, *Rabindranath Tagore – poszukiwanie prawdy i piękna w teorii i praktyce wychowania*, op. cit., p. 209.

⁴⁹ See P. Parmar, "Rabindranath Tagore's Views on Education", op. cit., p. 231.

⁵⁰ See A. Bhattacharya, "Tagore on the Right Education for India", op. cit., p. 30.

⁵¹ See *Ibidem*.

Rabindranath Tagore died on August 7, 1941, but his work has stayed very much alive. His texts on pedagogy are valuable research material. The Santiniketan School and the Visva Bharati University have been in existence until today. Art, music and craftsmanship still occupy the main place in these institutions. The study of Indian native languages and Asian culture attracts many students from all over the world to Santiniketan. Its graduates are people who are convinced of the need to fulfil a special mission towards the world and other people, with respect for the traditions and values inherent in the cultures and civilizations of other nations⁵².

TAGORE'S VIEWS ON EDUCATION

The goals of education formulated by Tagore should be read in the context of his philosophy and the art of living. For many educators his views did not have a scientific status and therefore were not treated as the content of education. It should not be forgotten, however, that Tagore's pedagogical writings were created in the atmosphere of the nascent Indian Renaissance, a negation of everything Western, and additionally characterized by a strong liberalism. The boundary line in his views on education was between tradition and modernity and was not clear-cut. Much of his reflection intertwines and links in a new creative way what is new and what is already known. He replaced the positivist concept of education with a hermetic poetic convention, with no points of reference to European intellectual culture⁵³. Tagore's views evolved from the ashram paradigm in the first phase, through the model of national education in the second and the ideas of Visva Bharathi in the third, to the promotion of the idea of the *loka-shiksha* at the end of his life.

According to Tagore, society can choose between two models of upbringing. One aims at the appropriation of the pupil, who is an object of education and total trust is placed in the teaching process, in the process of assimilation and accumulation of knowledge. The second

⁵² See N. Jha, "Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941)", op. cit., p. 611.

⁵³ See Z. Krawczyk, *Rabindranath Tagore – poszukiwanie prawdy i piękna w teorii i praktyce wychowania*, op. cit., p. 97.

model of education is based on limited trust in the didactic process. According to the transmigration theory, man comes into the world with a specific character, which as a consequence assigns to education a far more modest role. Rather, it boils down to an agreement between master and student and knowledge is treated as an object of personality and soul development. The content of the curriculum is limited to the basic tendencies of cultural development⁵⁴.

Tagore swore that he had never been influenced by any ideology of upbringing. He emphasized that his views on education were mostly influenced by his childhood memories⁵⁵. In many ways Tagore's ideas referred to the views of Rousseau, Dewey and Montessori. For example, like Froebel, Tagore believed that harmony with nature can be achieved through proper education and that household chores are part of young people's upbringing, just as community service is the responsibility of every student. According to many researchers of Tagore's thoughts, he knew European views on education, but these stemmed from Indian philosophy and tradition⁵⁶. Of special importance were moreover the views of Mahatma Gandhi, who wanted to establish "people's education", adjusted to rural, self-sustaining communities⁵⁷.

Thinking about education, Tagore referred to the categories of truth, beauty, love and joy, which came close to wisdom in its metaphysical sense. Education through truth should lead to the full development of the inner spiritual culture and to participation in the transformation of the surrounding world. Beauty, understood as the result of intentional human activity and the search for contact with the ultimate reality by means of symbols, causes not only emotional and aesthetic reactions, but also brings us closer to the sacred⁵⁸.

According to Tagore, the goal of education should be a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction with life. Science is not only knowledge and

⁵⁴ See *Ibidem*, p. 160.

⁵⁵ See R. Tagore, *My School*, London 1933.

⁵⁶ See N. Jha, "Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)", *op. cit.*, p. 611.

⁵⁷ See R. Tagore, L. K. Elmhirst, *Rabindranath Tagore, Pioneer in Education. Essays and Exchanges Between Rabindranath Tagore and L. K. Elmhirst*, London 1961.

⁵⁸ See Z. Krawczyk, *Rabindranath Tagore – poszukiwanie prawdy i piękna w teorii i praktyce wychowania*, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

intellect, but also creativity and aesthetics. Man must become an integral part of the environment, go beyond his human nature to unite with the universe. At the same time, he has to explore the world intuitively, via emotions⁵⁹.

Tagore doesn't disregard Western-style education, he says:

I do not deny that the civilization of the West has abundant material from which we can draw knowledge and educate our intellect. We are allowed to acquire this knowledge and use it properly, but India is not a beggar of Europe, even if this is what the West thinks⁶⁰.

A western-style school is compared by Tagore to a factory that opens in the morning when the bell rings, and when a teacher starts talking, the factory starts working. When the teacher finishes talking at four in the afternoon, the factory closes and the students go home carrying on their backs some sheets of paper produced by the learning machine. He was also against examinations, which dominated the British teaching system. In a hierarchical society, they were to mean that a career is not determined by the caste, but by hard work and knowledge⁶¹.

The overarching goal of education should be to pass on to the youngest generation the entire cultural heritage of India and other nations, so that they can learn from it and gain experience. Tagore placed great emphasis on learning the native languages of India, which were the driving force behind Indian education⁶². Science should begin with an ascending curve; it should be rooted in the natural cultural foundations of the community and be guided by values that consolidate the cultural heritage of India as a whole⁶³.

⁵⁹ See K. O'Connell, "Tagore and Education: Creativity, Mutuality and Survival", *Asiatic Volume 2010*, Vol. 4, Np. 1, p. 76.

⁶⁰ R. Tagore, *Nacjonalizm*, Warszawa 1922, p. 102.

⁶¹ P. Parmar, "Rabindranath Tagore's Views on Education", op. cit., p. 229.

⁶² R. Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, p. 60, writes: "On leaving the Normal School we were sent to the Bengal Academy, a Eurasian institution. What we were taught there we never understood, nor did we make any attempt to learn, nor did it seem to make any difference to anybody that we did not".

⁶³ See Z. Krawczyk, *Rabindranath Tagore – poszukiwanie prawdy i piękna w teorii i praktyce wychowania*, op. cit., p. 84.

Tagore was extensively involved in the education of women, who were mostly illiterate. In his schools, women were always welcome and attended co-educational classes. He believed that it was necessary to get rid of the stereotype that the wife's too much knowledge offended her husband. He called for a change in the status of a woman who should cease to be a household object and stand upright next to her husband as his companion⁶⁴. Although he opposed early marriage, he himself married his daughters when they were 15 and 10 years old. At the end of his life he was said to be tormented by remorse because of this⁶⁵.

At Tagore's school, the teacher's job was not only to pass on knowledge, but also to cultivate virtues in a way similar to the way a gardener fertilizes his plants. In order for a student to acquire a passion for learning, the teacher should stimulate his or her doubts, ask questions, instil in him or her love for mental adventures, courage to discover the world. At the same time, the teacher should enjoy teaching, feel harmony between himself as a teacher and his pupil⁶⁶. Tagore stressed that the teacher must not only provide information, but also inspire⁶⁷. If no one inspires the students, and they only accumulate information in their heads, the truth loses its meaning. Most school knowledge is wasted because teachers treat their subjects as dead specimens in display cases with which you have to get familiar, but there is no communication with them. Of paramount importance in teaching is spontaneity and a creative atmosphere, and the teacher's main goal should be to work constructively with students. Instead of gathering encyclopaedic knowledge, learning everything from books, thus being cut off from reflection, the student should explore what is truth, beauty and what leads to love in action. Teaching will only be wholesome and natural if it becomes the direct fruit of life and the development of knowledge. The content of the curriculum about the external facts of the world should not be more important than the content developing the truth and beauty of its disciples. Do not teach everything, but only

⁶⁴ A. Bhattacharya, *Tagore*, op. cit., p. 24.

⁶⁵ B. Grabowska, B. Śliwczyńska, E. Walter, *Z dziejów teatru i dramatu bengalskiego*, op. cit., p. 88.

⁶⁶ P. Parmar, "Rabindranath Tagore's Views on Education", op. cit., p. 230.

⁶⁷ R. Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, writes: "The main object of teaching is not to explain meanings, but to knock at the door of the mind".

what is important for the development of the student. According to the Indian evolutionary order, development is descending, hence Tagore's keen interest in states of mind and consciousness⁶⁸.

Tagore was against any form of punishment in order to introduce discipline, which deprived the student of individuality⁶⁹. In his opinion, many teachers believe that fear is essential in teaching. However, it is the teacher who has to create a situation where the student is not afraid to express his or her opinions. His pedagogical proposals oscillated around the idea of education in an atmosphere of joy of creation; upbringing should motivate to learn rather than punish⁷⁰. Tagore considered it a natural right of the child to create forms offering him joy and to learn to be satisfied with the voluntary performance of tasks for his or her own pleasure and to satisfy his or her need for play⁷¹. Childhood, on the other hand, is a period in which one has the right to an unrestricted life free from the needs of specialisation and narrow limitations of professional life. Children love life, embrace it with an imagination full of spontaneous activity⁷². Tagore's teaching methods were based on the idea of "joyful study", which included trips, picnics, games, music, participation in religious performances and festivals⁷³. The children were engaged in gardening, planting, watering, and weeding. Thanks to this they were closer to nature not only through contemplation, but also through action⁷⁴. The main goal was to stimulate the imagination of the alumni. The child was in the centre of his interests; the student was a subject in the teaching process, and education was aimed at satisfying his or her needs, aspirations and abilities.

⁶⁸ P. Parmar, "Rabindranath Tagore's Views on Education", op. cit., p. 232.

⁶⁹ R. Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, observes: "What I learnt there I have no idea, but one of its methods of punishment I still bear in mind. The boy who was unable to repeat his lessons was made to stand on a bench with arms extended, and on his upturned palms were piled a number of slates. It is for psychologists to debate how far this method is likely to conduce to a better grasp of things".

⁷⁰ See P. Parmar, "Rabindranath Tagore's Views on Education", op. cit., p. 230.

⁷¹ R. Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, writes: "If children are only allowed to be children, to run and play about and satisfy their curiosity, it becomes quite simple. Insoluble problems are only created if you try to confine them inside, keep them still or hamper their play".

⁷² See A. Bhattacharya, "Tagore on the Right Education for India", op. cit., p. 33.

⁷³ See K. O'Connell, "Tagore and Education: Creativity, Mutuality and Survival", op. cit., p. 71.

⁷⁴ See A. Bhattacharya, "Tagore on the Right Education for India", op. cit., p. 34.

Tagore believed that education should benefit the pupil, not the other way around. Similarly, he claimed that a child is not only the fruit of divine love, naturally inclined to do good, but is a necessary condition for God to confirm his divinity.

In the West, the “modern” understanding of adult education and lifelong learning was owed to people such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, Piaget, and Dewey. Tagore, on the other hand, was a great promoter of the idea of adult education and lifelong learning, given his efforts to rebuild villages, introduce rural cooperatives, reconstruct traditional crafts and rebuild agriculture⁷⁵. Tagore breaks free from the characteristic Hinduist fatalism and replaces it with the idea of human freedom, which is the prerequisite for all development. Freedom enables man to move from success to success and to create his own history, in which human will plays an important role⁷⁶. Tagore’s motto was: “A man who can and does build his own kingdom is indeed a king and a master of himself”⁷⁷.

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⁷⁵ See A. Bhattacharya, *Education for the People*, op. cit., p. 53.

⁷⁶ See J. Justyński, *Mysł społeczna i polityczna renesansu indyjskiego od Rama Mohana Roya do Rabindranatha Tagora*, op. cit., p. 235.

⁷⁷ S. K. Behera, “Educational Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore: a Comparative Study”, *Golden Research Thoughts* 2011, Vol 1.

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Abstract:

Rabindranath Tagore is one of the foremost thinkers in the world who thought what kind of education India should have for its people. His concepts of an ideal Indian school and university are extremely innovative. In this paper, the author wants to highlight the educational philosophies of Tagore. Five periods of his life have been highlighted: the period until 1901 – Seliadah, the time of Santiniketan 1901-1921, Visva Bharati University appointment, the appointment of Sri Niketan school for the poorest, and the latter associated with the idea of loka-shiksha. Tagore's views on education were shaped by both the Western concepts of education and mainly by the ideas typical of the Hindu tradition associated with education in forest hermitages and ashrams. He was able to creatively combine traditional and modern thinking about education. To date, there is a school of Santiniketan and Visva Bharati University, where students from around the world can study his unusual views on education.

Keywords:

Rabindranath Tagore, education, Santiniketan, university, culture, craft