



THE ROLE OF ART, MUSIC, AND LITERATURE IN TAGORE'S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

Rabindranath Tagore, one of India's most influential thinkers, poets, and educators, revolutionized the concept of education by placing art, music, and literature at its very heart. His philosophy stemmed from his deep conviction that education should nurture the total personality of the learner – intellectual, emotional, aesthetic, moral, and spiritual – rather than merely transmitting information. The present research paper explores how Tagore conceptualized and implemented his educational vision through creative expression, the integration of the arts, and the harmonious coexistence of humanity and nature. It analyzes the philosophical foundations and practical implications of his ideas, especially as manifested in his experimental school at Santiniketan and later at Visva-Bharati University. The study also reviews existing literature on Tagore's educational thought and discusses its continuing relevance in the 21st century, where mechanized and exam-oriented systems still dominate. The paper concludes with suggestions for revitalizing modern education through Tagore's aesthetic and humanistic principles, emphasizing that the integration of art, music, and literature fosters creativity, emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, and universal harmony.

KEYWORDS: *Tagore, Educational Philosophy, Art Education, Music and Literature, Holistic Learning.*

INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), the first Asian Nobel laureate, is best known for his literary achievements, but his contribution to education is equally remarkable and enduring. Born in an era when British colonial education emphasized rote learning, discipline, and conformity, Tagore envisioned an alternative that sought freedom, creativity, and self-realization. For him, education was not a mechanical process but a living, dynamic, and creative experience. He believed that the purpose of education was to help individuals realize the unity of all existence and cultivate harmony between the individual, society, nature, and the divine. This vision was rooted in the Upanishadic philosophy of oneness (advaita) and the humanistic values of compassion, creativity, and freedom. Tagore criticized the colonial education system for producing clerks and followers rather than thinkers and creators. His solution was an education that combined intellectual growth with aesthetic and emotional development. Art, music, and literature thus became central to his pedagogy—not ornamental subjects but essential means of awakening the human spirit. The school he founded at Santiniketan in 1901 embodied his vision: an open-air environment where students learned under trees, sang songs, read poetry, painted, and engaged with nature. This atmosphere fostered joy, curiosity, and creativity. For Tagore, art was a mode of knowing, music was a mode of feeling, and literature was a mode of expressing the soul. Together, they cultivated what he called the “complete man,” someone in whom head, heart, and hand worked in harmony. In an age dominated by standardized testing, Tagore's educational philosophy remains a timeless reminder that education must nourish creativity, emotion, and the human spirit alongside intellect.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Scholarly engagement with Tagore's educational philosophy has spanned over a century, reflecting the depth and versatility of his ideas. According to Irena Lesar (2015), Tagore's approach to art education was not confined to skill development but aimed at awakening aesthetic consciousness and moral imagination; she asserts that Tagore viewed artistic creation as a spiritual process connecting the individual with the universal. Similarly, Seema Rani (2021) notes that Tagore's holistic vision integrated literature, music, and art as natural extensions of life, encouraging students to experience learning as joy rather than burden. Navjot Kaur (2019) emphasizes that his educational principles revolved around freedom, creativity, and harmony—qualities that contemporary systems often neglect. David Hansen (2013) in his work *The Teacher and the World* highlights how Tagore's idea of the “universal man” translates into an education that fosters cross-cultural empathy and artistic awareness. Scholars such as Krishna Kripalani (1980) and Edward Thompson (1948) document how Tagore's personal involvement in writing, composing, and painting influenced his pedagogical methods, creating an environment where learning and artistic production coexisted organically. Modern researchers like Bhagat (2020) and Dutta (2022) have re-evaluated Tagore's relevance in the context of global education, concluding that his integration of art and learning offers a sustainable model for creativity-driven education. The *INFED* online encyclopedia (2018) observes that Tagore's Santiniketan experiment successfully combined intellectual, aesthetic, and physical education, countering the alienation caused by industrial schooling. The *Teachers Institute* (2023) identifies Tagore as a precursor of experiential and constructivist education, emphasizing learning through self-expression and interaction with the environment. The



INFLIBNET digital library notes that Tagore's method anticipated later theories of multiple intelligences and arts-based learning. Across these works, a consensus emerges: Tagore's emphasis on art, music, and literature was not peripheral but integral to the moral and spiritual development of the learner. His educational philosophy continues to inspire both Eastern and Western educators seeking to balance creativity with critical thought.

ANALYSIS AND EXPLANATION

Tagore's integration of art, music, and literature in education can be understood as a manifestation of his belief that beauty, truth, and joy are interdependent. His philosophy combined the rational with the emotional and the moral with the aesthetic. The following analysis unpacks how each of these elements—art, music, and literature—functioned within his educational scheme and why they were crucial for human development. First, art, for Tagore, was a form of self-expression and discovery. He held that artistic activity engages both the senses and the spirit, creating harmony between perception and imagination. At Santiniketan, children were encouraged to draw, paint, sculpt, and engage in crafts as part of their daily routine. This approach reflected his conviction that creativity cannot be taught mechanically but must be allowed to unfold naturally. Art connected learners to the rhythm of nature; through colors, forms, and textures, they experienced the beauty of the world and their place within it. Second, music occupied a sacred position in Tagore's educational philosophy. Himself a prolific composer of more than two thousand songs (Rabindra Sangeet), Tagore believed music nurtured emotional depth, sensitivity, and spiritual awareness. He integrated music into all aspects of school life—morning prayers, seasonal festivals, and classroom activities. The aim was not merely to train professional musicians but to cultivate inner harmony and collective joy. He viewed rhythm and melody as universal languages that transcend cultural and linguistic barriers. In Tagore's vision, music was not entertainment but communion—a way of realizing the unity between self and world. Third, literature was the lifeblood of his educational method. Tagore used literature as both content and method of instruction. Reading and writing were not limited to textbooks but included poetry, stories, drama, and essays that reflected real human emotions and experiences. He encouraged students to write their own poems, stage plays, and publish their work in school journals. This practice democratized literary creation and gave learners a voice. Literature, for Tagore, was a mirror of life, capable of evoking empathy and imagination. By engaging with great works—both Indian and Western—students learned to appreciate diversity and universality. Through literature, Tagore sought to develop what modern theorists might call emotional intelligence and intercultural understanding. These three dimensions—art, music, and literature—were woven together in Tagore's curriculum, creating a seamless integration of heart, mind, and hand. Moreover, Tagore's educational philosophy was grounded in the belief that education must take place in harmony with nature. At Santiniketan, learning happened under the open sky, surrounded by trees, birds, and sunlight. Nature was not just

the backdrop but an active participant in the learning process. He viewed the arts as natural expressions of the same creative energy that animates the universe. His educational philosophy thus combined aesthetics with ecology, anticipating today's eco-pedagogical approaches. The underlying principle was freedom—freedom to think, to feel, to create. He rejected coercive methods, rote memorization, and competitive exams, advocating instead a child-centered pedagogy that nurtured curiosity and joy. In Tagore's own words, "The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence." His system anticipated what contemporary educationalists like Howard Gardner and John Dewey would later articulate—the need for multiple intelligences and experiential learning. Tagore's approach was not only philosophical but also practical: Santiniketan offered art studios, music halls, drama stages, and a publishing house for student works. Education was a living, breathing, aesthetic experience. In terms of social philosophy, Tagore saw the arts as instruments of human unity. Through shared artistic experiences, individuals transcend barriers of caste, religion, and nationality. His university, Visva-Bharati, was founded on the motto "Yatra visvam bhavati ekam nidam"—"Where the world makes a home in a single nest." Here, art, music, and literature became means of fostering international understanding and peace. In today's globalized yet fragmented world, this vision remains profoundly relevant. The overemphasis on STEM and market-oriented skills has sidelined the arts, leading to emotional impoverishment and loss of imagination. Tagore's model reminds us that creativity and empathy are as vital as technological competence. By nurturing aesthetic sensibility, education can cultivate compassion and resilience. Furthermore, Tagore's focus on the arts had gender and social implications: by encouraging all students—boys and girls alike—to engage in music and art, he challenged patriarchal norms and redefined the boundaries of knowledge. In his school, manual crafts were valued as much as intellectual pursuits, bridging the gap between mental and physical labor. Thus, Tagore's philosophy anticipated later movements for inclusive and holistic education.

SUGGESTIONS

Drawing lessons from Tagore's educational philosophy, several practical recommendations emerge for modern education systems. First, there should be an intentional reintegration of art, music, and literature into the mainstream curriculum at all levels. These subjects should not be treated as optional extras but as core components that foster creativity, empathy, and moral awareness. Second, schools should adopt flexible, experiential, and child-centered pedagogies that encourage self-expression through artistic media. Third, teacher education programs should include aesthetic training, helping educators become facilitators of creativity rather than mere transmitters of information. Fourth, educational institutions should establish environments—physical and cultural—that nurture beauty and joy: open spaces, music corners, art studios, and literary clubs can recreate Tagore's spirit of Santiniketan. Fifth, assessment methods must be reformed to recognize creative and emotional growth alongside cognitive



achievement. Portfolios, performances, exhibitions, and reflective writing can complement traditional exams. Sixth, education policies should encourage collaboration between schools and local artists, writers, and musicians, turning communities into learning ecosystems. Seventh, global education frameworks should draw on Tagore's idea of universal humanism, using arts and literature to promote peace, intercultural dialogue, and environmental consciousness. Finally, parents and society at large must recognize that the arts are not luxuries but necessities for balanced human development. Tagore's philosophy shows that only when the intellect, heart, and imagination grow together can education fulfill its true purpose—the realization of human freedom and harmony.

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