Global Design and Local Histories: Culturally embedded meaning-making for Inclusive Education

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This article provides an account of the recent literature on inclusive education, addressing its meaning and significance for school education in postcolonial India. I engage with the major theoretical debates in the academic literature on inclusive education and examine their historical trajectories globally through policy documents. I then examine the conceptual, political, and practical dilemmas associated with the concept within the local Indian context. Scholars, such as Chakrabarty (2007) and Connell (2007), have argued about the contextual limitations of theoretical accounts arising out of specific historical, social, economic, and political circumstances of Euro-American societies. Drawing on Chakrabarty and Connell's critiques, my discussion attempts to illuminate some of the problematic aspects of the Western "provincial" understandings and theorizing of the concept of inclusive education and its transfer to the global South through narrowly-defined policy texts. In doing so, the paper discusses the work of scholars who argue for the need to examine indigenous historic and cultural traditions to identify a commitment towards inclusivity as a way of broadening meaning-making and theoretical understanding of the concept of inclusive education. This paper makes a case for particularly engaging with Rabindranath Tagore's 'Southern Theory' of Inclusive Education for contextual meaning-making of inclusive education within the Indian context.

Keywords: Southern Theory, Tagore, Philosophy of Education

INTRODUCTION

It is widely argued (for example by Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2010) that, in order to explore the idea of inclusive education, it is important to first examine issues of "exclusion". Therefore, in the second part of this article, I will describe some of the ways in which, within the Indian system of education, with regards to provisions for both private and public school education, children belonging to a specific socioeconomic class, caste, tribe, religion, gender, and different-ability (disability) are systemically "excluded" from receiving the benefits of education. Drawing on Walter D. Mignolo's (2000) concept of "subaltern knowledge" and Raewyn Connell's (2007) concept of "Southern Theory", I argue that an alternative epistemology and ethical understanding of inclusive education in its broadest sense can be found in the humanist educational philosophy and practice of Rabindranath Tagore in his experimental school and university in early 20th Century colonial India. I argue that theoretically engaging with Tagore's humanist philosophy of

education can be most useful in contextually-specific meaning-making of inclusive education within the Indian context.

GLOBAL DEBATES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

What is meant by "Inclusion"?

> The meaning of "inclusion" is by no means clear and, perhaps conveniently, blurs the edges of social policy with a feel-good rhetoric that no one could be opposed to. What does it really mean to have an education system that is "inclusive"? Who is thought to be in need of inclusion and why? If education should be inclusive, then what practices is it contesting, what common values is it advocating, and by what criteria should its successes be judged? (Armstrong et al., 2010, p. 5)

The above questions suggest that, there is a lack of clarity about the meaning of inclusive education. Inclusive education means different things, because experiences of exclusion vary according to context, and can only be adequately understood within the specificities of their history. Yet, inclusive education is often globally framed as an important universal social justice issue, acknowledged alongside other basic human rights as articulated, for example, in the UNESCO *Salamanca Declaration (1994)* states that, inclusive education is "[a] developmental approach seeking to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion." Since the publication of these two major declarations, most national governments have adopted this policy characterization.

In recent decades, inclusive education is widely understood to be the inclusion of children with special needs into the mainstream schooling system (Pijl, Meijer, Cor, & Hegarty.1997). Following the *Salamanca Declaration*, research has also become more focused on inclusion of children with "disability". However, much of the research on inclusive education appears to be limited to local policy responses following global policy declarations, including evaluative studies related to the inclusion of children with disability in mainstream schools. Johansson (2014) reviewed some of such studies which were conducted within the Indian context.

Pijl et al. (1997) highlighted the need to move beyond evaluative study of the effect and "how-to" of inclusive education to conducting "qualitative studies with inductive and ethnographic ambitions that can help understand social patterns and subjective experiences" (p. 31). Most research highlights the tension between these universal human rights based policies and local exclusionary practices within schooling contexts (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006; Armstrong et al., 2011; Slee, 2011; Walton, 2016). Kiuppis and Peters (2014) have critiqued this trend and urged comparative and international education scholars to advance research on inclusive education with broader conceptual framework following *Education For All* (EFA) and the Millennium Goals (MDGs). They affirm:

> Some children start school with more advantages than others—advantages of wealth and health among the most influential. Children in poverty and children with impairments, and all marginalized students (whether due to language, religion, race, ethnicity, or gender) do not have to be disadvantaged by their treatment in schools or by their exclusion from schools. If children are denied educational opportunities, then it is the lack of education and not their characteristics that limit them. (p. 61).

This belief has also been affirmed by UNESCO's (2014) Global Monitoring Report. Foreman (2008, p. 31) emphasizes that inclusive education is a concept that "extends well beyond students with disability, and encompasses the idea that all schools should strive to provide an optimal learning environment for all their students, regardless of their social, cultural or ethnic background, or their ability or disability." This paper also situates the debate on "inclusive education" within this broader framework of education for social justice, human rights and equity for all students.

According to Kozleski, Artiles, and Waitoller (2011), much of the early theoretical debates on inclusive education within the scholarly community emerged in developed economies of the global North. The Scandinavian countries along with the US, Canada, and England are considered to be pioneers in the field. They comprise the first generation of inclusive education. Beginning in the 1960s, diverse social and political movements in these countries by social minorities, including the feminist movement, civil rights movement of the Black community in the US, movement of persons with disabilities and advocacy groups of parents and activists, led to the emergence of a public discourse on inclusive education. This first generation was followed by the second generation of inclusive education in postcolonial countries of the South in Asia, Africa and Latin America with very different historical trajectories because of their colonial histories and legacy.

Conceptually, the idea of inclusive education is often portrayed as a universal construct––a global utopia based on the principles of social justice, equity and human rights. The idea became popular particularly in the recent years that witnessed increasing mobility of people and ideas and an increase in social and cultural diversity, leading policymakers to realize the importance of inclusive education for social cohesion (Kozleski et al., 2011). It is now no longer limited to developed economies of North America, Europe and Australia, but developing economies and postcolonial nation-states must also make accommodations to implement it following the global policy mandates by organizations, such as UNESCO, as noted by Armstrong et al. (2010) and Pijl et al. (1997).

Loreman, Deppeler, and Harvey (2011) have noted that in much of the early literature and popular discourse, two terms: inclusion and integration, were used synonymously. This is also evident from some of the authors in the edited volume by Pijl et al. (1997), *Inclusive Education: A Global Agenda*, in which the terms integration and inclusion are used interchangeably, referring primarily to the integration of children with disability. In that literature, issues of student disadvantage based on categories, such as linguistic, ethnic, racial, and religious difference are not generally considered. However, the debates on inclusive education have now shifted from this early focus on integration into the mainstream, to a broader focus on creating inclusive social and learning spaces within the mainstream schooling system, mindful of individual learning needs, personal histories, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds of students. Based on a study of 727 teachers in Hong Kong, who participated in a university level course on inclusive education, Forlin, Sharma, and Loreman (2014) argued that, regardless of demographic diversity of students, better teacher preparation and training for inclusive education coupled with the knowledge of the significance of inclusive policy can improve "teaching efficacy for inclusive practice". Since "exclusion is a relational process", the focus of the debate in recent years is more on pedagogic aspects that help teachers build "restorative relationships" and "address the needs of the whole child" (Razer & Friedman, 2017, p. 148).

Theoretically, most scholars of inclusive education consider it as an ideal, which is hypothetically capable of creating a more inclusive society, helping to curb prejudice and discrimination (Ainscow, 2005; Barton, 1997; Slee, 2006). Walton (2016) also highlights that within the South African context inclusive education is now understood in broader terms. There is now a clearer distinction between the concepts of integration and inclusion, which necessitates attending to the diverse learning needs of students. This has led to a more sophisticated discussion of the idea of inclusive education, consisting of three major aspects for establishing an inclusive school system: inclusive school culture, inclusive school policy, and inclusive schooling practice (Ainscow et al., 2006; Ainscow & Sandill 2010). However, implementing the ideals of creating socially inclusive spaces for all children with diverse learning needs within regular schooling systems is still a major challenge globally. It appears from the research literature that, regardless of the degree of economic development, the dominant norms of school and society still reproduce various structural inequalities within which the schools are embedded. (Johansson, 2014; Singal, 2008; Yates, 2014).

SHIFTING FOCUS OF GLOBAL "POLICYSCAPE"

Parallel to the academic theoretical debates discussed above, in recent times, the neoliberal discourse of market efficiency and cost-effectiveness have entered into the global inclusive education agenda. Scholars argue that the early liberal humanist global policy imperative of inclusive "Education for All" is being increasingly contradicted by the neoliberal economic priorities of competition and choice, which often runs contrary to the values of inclusion (Barton & Slee, 1999). Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson (2007) highlighted the contradiction of "raising standards" and "social inclusion" within the schooling context in the UK, where professionals, parents, and students were found to be moving more towards an inclusive schooling system while "policies for raising standards, such as the emphasis on competition and choice, and the publication of test and examination results, [were] tending to discourage the use of teaching approaches that are responsive to student diversity." Scholars, such as Ainscow (2002), however, have argued that strategies which promote the inclusion of marginalized groups can also improve learning outcomes for all learners.

Hardy and Woodcock (2014) argue that the global neoliberal policy discourse for market efficiency, cost-effectiveness and standardization of curriculum by organizations such as the OECD and the World Bank, which has now been also adopted by UNESCO and UNICEF, further appear to be excluding more and more children from marginalized vulnerable populations from deriving the benefit of an education. This is depriving them from both education's instrumental purpose of gaining employment and also depriving them from education's intrinsic purpose of empowerment for decision-making in life. Without education, the children from marginalized communities are being deprived of their voice to fight against discrimination and injustices in society. They take a critical policy sociology approach by analysing key policy documents in Western settings, like US, Canada, England, and Australia, where there have been a strong public advocacy and support for inclusion, as well as policy documents by global organizations like UNESCO and OECD, to argue how policies can fail to provide adequate provision for diverse learning needs of students. Based on evidence from a wide range of policy documents across these countries, they argue that, inclusion is often constructed in problematic ways in policy documents.

Hardy and Woodcock (2014) further argue that "[r]espect for difference can only be cultivated in educational systems if those responsible for enacting educational practices are supported by consistent and coherent policy messages which value diversity and challenge deficit." (p. 22). A review of the emerging literature on inclusive education, therefore, reveals the inherent contradictions between the policy discourses circulating globally and the theoretical formulation of the philosophical idea of inclusive education. Hardy and Woodcock (2014) also affirm that, "[i]n the realm of public policy, words do matter, and need to be deployed carefully" (p. 22). However, the liberal humanist policy imperatives of inclusive "Education for All" are contradicted by the neoliberal economic priorities of competition and choice in global policy documents, which runs contrary to the values of inclusion and social cohesion. This disjuncture in the discourse of global "policyscape,"[1] is directing the individual nation-states to further decouple and formulate their own policies that are often fractured and disjointed. Therefore, inclusion is construed in problematic ways, as the policy documents at the level of nation-state and local governments include the "politically correct" rhetoric of inclusion without a clear conceptual understanding of the notion of inclusion and little practical guidelines for implementation.

Slee (2006) critiqued the way in which the term "inclusive education" is now being circulated globally through policy documents by intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governments of individual nation-states by citing Edward Said's "Travelling Theory Revisited". He suggested that the social justice mission driving the movement for inclusive education following social movements of minorities for inclusion (not integration) within the mainstream society has, in many ways, lost its force and "the theory is degraded and subdued" (p. 113). Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou (2011) also argued that, though social policy is dominated by the rhetoric of inclusion, exclusion persists in reality due to poor translation of the concept of inclusion and entrenched practices of exclusion "both in the countries of the North and in the 'developing countries' of postcolonial globalization" (p. 30).

In this context what Pijl et al. (1997) suggested appears to be relevant. They identified the need to move beyond just in-school factors to external factors of society to study inclusive education as a sociological and historical research agenda, since school as an institution operates within the larger society. They highlighted the need to move beyond evaluative study of the effect and "how-to" of inclusive education to conduct more "qualitative studies with inductive and ethnographic ambitions that can help understand social patterns and subjective experiences" (p. 31). While arguing for urgently needed insights for future policy and research on inclusive education that is mindful of equity, Kozleski et al. (2011) also assert that, since inclusive education has "far-reaching equity implications for marginalized groups across the globe, we ought to refine the theoretical formulation of this movement through a culturally and historically situated research program" (p. 9). The following section of this paper will, therefore, reflect on local histories of exclusion in the global South, with particular reference to India as the cultural and historical context of the larger ethnographic case study (examining inclusive policies, practices and school culture) from where this paper has been culled.

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[1] I have used the term "policyscape" here as Carney (2011) used the term drawing on Appadurai's (1990) theory of "scapes" representing different global cultural flows

LOCAL HISTORIES OF EXCLUSION IN THE SOUTH

The colonial histories in Southern postcolonial countries make the challenge of conceptualizing and implementing inclusive education even more complex because these nation-states were mostly formed out of the imagery of modern-colonial world systems, as Mignolo (2000) has argued. Prior to their colonial histories, most of these modern Southern nation-states were princely states with diverse linguistic and ethnic heritages. The political borders of the modern nation-states in Latin America, Africa and much of Asia were carved out of the colonial history of these regions. They are sometimes divided by indigenous ethnic (linguistic) groups across religious lines like in South Asia. In much of Latin America and Africa, indigenous ethnic (linguistic) groups are completely ignored and divisions are based on the territorial authority of the dominant language groups of European Nations, thus creating English speaking Nigeria, French speaking Benin, Portuguese speaking Mozambique and Brazil, and Spanish speaking Mexico and Argentina.

Hence, since the formation of independent nation-states, cultural integration for national identity formation through education has been carried out through purposeful state policies in these postcolonial countries. Social inclusion remains a contentious issue in most of these postcolonial modern nation-states because the dominant cultural and ethnic groups try to impose their values on others in order to achieve cultural integration and homogeneity in the name of postcolonial national identity formation. In their drive to assert a postcolonial national identity, which was, ironically, carved out of the colonial history, textbook narratives, curriculum framework, and pedagogy in these postcolonial nations often assert a dominant narrative of national identity undermining the rest as "others". The colonial legacy and local histories in many of the Southern postcolonial countries might work against the ideals of inclusive education within these ethnically diverse communities. For example, the incident of kidnapping over 200 young girls from a school by the "Boko Haram" (which means Western education is sinful, see Peters 2014) nationalist militant group in Nigeria, the postcolonial nationalist education agenda of "us" vs. "them" as evident from textbook narratives and nationalist curriculum framework in the South Asian nation-states (see. Ghosh 2012 and Kamat 2004) show how colonial legacies act against the values of inclusive education.

Within the Indian context, the modern Indian constitution espouses inclusive values, yet exclusion and discrimination continues as part of entrenched cultural practices. Hence, indigenous tribal groups and other marginalized minorities of the society, such as women, Hindu outcasts, that is, "dalits", Muslims and children with disabilities, continue to face major challenges in education. The education of these marginalized groups is often disconnected from their life experiences and learning needs, as analysed by the first India Exclusion (IE) Report 2014 published by the New Delhi-based independent research and advocacy organization, Centre for Equity Studies (2014). This report dedicated an entire chapter on issues of school education and exclusion, drawing on data from various sources in collaboration with researchers within India and abroad. The IE report highlighted that, irrespective of socioeconomic class, large section of girls, Dalits,[2] Adivasis,[3] Muslims, and children with disabilities are excluded from the schooling

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[2] Hindu social outcasts
[3] They are the tribal aboriginal people of India, considered as the traditional owners and custodians of land. "Adi" is Sanskrit means ancient and "vasi" means resident.

system. The IE report (2014) portrays a grim picture of exclusion and suggests that the situation is worse for children, who experience layers of exclusion because of the intersectionality of different-abilty, gender, religion, caste and tribal family backgrounds. The process of exclusion of these children from basic education is, therefore, systemic according to the report. A disabled girl belonging to a poor Dalit, Adivasi, or Muslim background will, therefore, experience multiple layers of discrimination within the society and exclusion from the education system.

Public-private divide aggravating exclusion

In addition to exclusion based on social groups, within the Indian system, exclusion is also driven by the public-private divide in the provision and delivery of quality education. Children from upper class backgrounds with "family sponsorship" for education are at an educational advantage and large numbers of children experience "economic apartheid" because they are excluded from access to quality basic elementary education because of their poor socioeconomic backgrounds (Govinda, 2011; Juneja, 2014; Nambissan, 2010). In most cases, students belonging to historically privileged elite families within the Indian context continue to get access to well-resourced, elite, fee-paying private schools built in the model of exclusive British public schools like Harrow and Eton during colonial times (Rizvi, 2015; Srivastava, 1998).

The public sector is handicapped by a paucity of basic infrastructural resources and specialized training to implement inclusive education (Singal & Jeffrey 2011). This paucity of resources, particularly of the public sector, is also systemic, as emphasized by the IE report (2014). Despite the Kothari Commission recommendation in 1966 to allocate 6% of GDP for education, public investment in education has been very low and hovers around 3.5% of GDP even in the 1990s, reducing further below 3% in recent years (Jha, 2008; Srivastava & Noronha 2014; Tilak, 2004). Moreover, the IE report highlights that funds utilization has also decreased over the years and the majority has been allocated to infrastructure development rather than investment in teacher recruitment and teacher education for capacity development to improve student learning experience.

Conceptually inclusive education is, therefore, significant within the postcolonial Indian social and educational context which is characterized by extreme inequality because of its colonial legacy and "exclusion" from receiving the basic benefits of education based on socioeconomic class, caste, tribe, gender, religion and different-ability. However, inclusive education is universally considered as a Euro-American theoretical construct of utopia in academic debates (Kozleski et al., 2011). It is considered to have transferred to the rest of the world through policy documents by IGOs (Evans, 1999). However, within the field of comparative education extensive body of critical literature argue about the problematic nature of such policy transfer and the need to understand the local policy contexts (Beech 2006: Steiner-Khamsi 2004, 2012; Steiner-Khamsi and Quist 2000). A review of the literature on inclusive education from the global South also brings to the fore these problematic aspects. In fact, there is a sense of postcolonial rejection of the concept as neo-colonial imposition in the emerging literature, which will be discussed in the next section.

POSTCOLONIAL CONCEPTUAL DILEMMAS

The emerging literature on inclusive education from the global South reveals that, scholars continue to take a linear development historicist perspective even when they take

a postcolonial approach in critiquing the global agenda for inclusive education. According to these postcolonial scholars, as Johansson (2014) has reviewed, the concept of inclusive education appears to be thrust on developing third world countries like India without any clear policy direction about "how" to implement it. Therefore, scholars researching inclusive education in these countries argue, citing evidence from the field, that these countries are not developmentally ready to implement such a global agenda, especially since these societies lack necessary infrastructural resources for implementation. Bhattacharya (2010) argues that, inclusive education as a concept developed within certain historic and geopolitical context of the Northern/Western countries is not always applicable in the global South.

The problem with such postcolonial critiques of the concept of inclusive education, however, is that these scholars are all responding to the concept as a hegemonic "neo-colonial imposition" of Western ideas on these societies through policy documents of IGOs. These scholars are not looking beyond their specific context and they are not taking into account the fact that successful implementation of inclusive education is a global problem. Even the richer Western nations are struggling to successfully implement this abstract philosophical ideal. Since the arguments of these critical postcolonial scholars are based on development economics and the problems of implementing inclusive education in a low-resource developing world context, their arguments also do not pay much attention to the social and cultural issues which act as barriers to successfully implement inclusive education.

Moreover, since the governments of most of these postcolonial nations, including India, have borrowed the concept from the policy documents of IGOs, such as the UNESCO *Education for All*, and, particularly, the *Salamanca Declaration* for inclusive education focusing on the rights of children with disability as the most excluded group of children in every country; "inclusive education" as a concept has taken a very narrow focus in these countries with regards to the inclusion of children with disability/different-ability. Broader understanding of its pedagogic implications and democratic principles, which necessitates evaluation of excluded communities in need for inclusion within the schooling system is missing. Hence, Singal (2008, 2006) argues that, it is important to generate contextual local meaning and understanding of the concept of inclusive education. However, she also argues her case accepting the premise that inclusive education is understood as an international concept within the Indian context.

Such linear development historicist perspective of theorizing and conceptual thinking about inclusive education does not take into account the possibility that inclusive education might have been thought about and practiced in an "other" language/tongue, as Mignolo (2000) and Arteaga (1994) would argue, elsewhere in the global South prior to or in concurrence with such a movement in the global North. It is even more ironic within the postcolonial context, since this "linear global thinking" is a colonial legacy. Mignolo (2014) writes: "Linear global thinking is the story of how Europe mapped the world for its own benefit and left a fiction that became an ontology: a division of the world into 'East' and 'West', 'South' and 'North', or 'First', 'Second', and 'Third'."[4]

However, a linear Eurocentric historicist thinking is also prevalent in much of academic debates because of the hybrid subjectivities of postcolonial scholars from the global

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[4] See: The North of the South and the West of the East: A Provocation to the Question: http://www.ibraaz.org/essays/108#_ftn2

South. Even postcolonial Indian historian, Chakravarty (2007) acknowledges his own debt to European thought as a hybridized postcolonial subject when he utilizes the Heideggerian notion of "worlding" to argue for historical difference and diverse ontological ways of being in the world in "Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference". Similarly, Spivak (1999), a major cultural critic and scholar working within the postcolonial cannon acknowledges the usefulness of diverse intellectual resources from Kant to Marx as a Europeanist herself, and as someone who pioneered deconstructive criticism by translating Derrida's work. In fact, in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* Spivak (1999) critiqued much of contemporary postcolonial literature and sought to distance herself from the field with which she is most often identified.

Taiwanese critical scholar, Chen (2010), suggested something similar while critiquing postcolonial cultural studies for its "obsessive critique of the West" (p. 1) in his book *Asia as a Method*. Moving beyond just postcolonial ideological critique of the West by highlighting the limits of Western knowledge claims, particularly in the social sciences (see, e.g. Connell, 2007), he emphasized the need to "deimperialize" theory itself:

> The epistemological implication of Asian studies in Asia is clear. If "we" have been doing Asian studies, Europeans, North Americans, Latin Americans, and Africans have also been doing studies in relation to their own living spaces. That is, Martin Heidegger was actually doing European studies, as were Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Jürgen Habermas. European experiences were their system of reference. Once we recognize how extremely limited the current conditions of knowledge are, we learn to be humble about our knowledge claims. The universalist assertions of theory are premature, for theory too must be deimperialized. (Chen, 2010, p. 3)

Therefore, as suggested by some inclusive education scholars, such as Armstrong et al. (2010), Artiles, Kozleski, and Waitoller (2011), and Singal and Jeffrey (2011), who argue for the need to contextualize the meaning of inclusive education, in the following sections of this paper I argue for a distinct tradition of inclusive education within the Indian context.

BEYOND PROVINCIALIZING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Moving beyond provincializing inclusive education as a hegemonic Northern theoretical construct and seeking to contextualize the meaning of inclusive education within the Indian context, I draw upon the first IE report (2014) and Singal and Jeffrey's (2011) cultural historicist perspective in examining values of inclusivity embedded in the modern Indian constitution and Indian educational thinkers. I particularly draw upon the philosophical ruminations in the pedagogic ideas and practices of Rabindranath Tagore that resonates with broader conceptual framework of inclusive education.

As a creative artist, Tagore conceptualized his educational ideas and expressed them through his numerous essays, poems, short stories, novels and dance dramas, primarily written in Bengali. Though he became renowned as the first non-European Nobel Prize winning poet, Collins (2011) argues that perhaps his philosophy of education will be seen as his most significant contribution in the future:

> The Bengali poet, writer and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) remains a unique, though still under-recognised genius. Tagore's cultural production was

vast, covering poetry, prose and plays; an astonishing volume of music which is played and sung throughout Bengal to this day (and includes the national anthems of two countries, India and Bangladesh); internationally acclaimed and exhibited paintings; social, political and philosophical essays; agrarian reform; pioneering environmentalism; the creation of a school and a university. His philosophy of education may yet come to be seen as one of his most significant contributions (online, no page number).

Hence, rather than taking a linear development historicist approach of first generation of inclusive education in Northern/Western countries followed by second generation of inclusive education in the Southern/postcolonial countries as theorized by Kozleski et al. (2011), this paper argues for culturally embedded meaning-making for inclusive education within the Indian context as suggested by Armstrong et al. (2010). The following sections of the paper draws on Mukherjee's (2015, 2017) argument for Tagore's "Southern Theory" (Connell, 2007) of inclusive education drawing on empirical data from ethnographic field research. It offers critical engagement with the "subaltern knowledge" (Mignolo, 2000) about Rabindranath Tagore's humanist philosophy and inclusive educational experiments during early 20th Century colonial British India. Thereafter, the paper argues the significance of this conceptual meaning-making of inclusive education within the contemporary Indian context.

Tagore wrote about his ideas on education in a series of essays written primarily in Bengali from 1892, analysing the many problems of mainstream "factory-model" of Indian education system during colonial times before setting up his own school in Shantiniketan as an alternative model. (Bhattacharya, 2013: Mukherjee, 2013; Tagore, 1892, 1906, 1917). However, Tagore's progressive approach to establish an alternative education system in his school for democratic citizenship, environmental sustainability and inclusive learning for all children has, for some curious reason, remained on the fringes of mainstream Indian society—even after independence from colonial rule. Though, Mukherjee (2013) argues that there has been attempts at the policy level to implement several of his ideas on education post-independence, the mainstream system still follows a colonial "factory- model" of schooling. It is to be noted here that the learner-centric and socially inclusive school Tagore built in rural Shantiniketan was a self-reflexive critical response against indigenous inequalities as well as colonial policies perpetuating segregation and exclusion. Tagore invited not just Indians across ethnic, religious, social class, caste, and gender divide to attend his school but he also invited students and scholars from abroad to his school to study and teach (Dasgupta, 1998).

Dasgupta (2013) argues:

> 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 dialogue crafted through knowledge of history and the arts. (p. 280-281).

Therefore, engaging with the "subaltern knowledge" (Mignolo, 2000) of Tagore's humanist philosophy of education and experiments during colonial India provides an interesting possibility for exploring "Southern Theory" of inclusive education in its broadest sense.

A number of scholars such as Nussbaum (2006, 2010), O'Connell (2003, 2010); Ghosh, Naseem and Vijh (2010); Guha (2013) and R. Ghosh (2015) have argued that, Tagore's progressive ideas on education are as relevant today as the educational ideas of major Euro-American educational thinkers, such as Socrates, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Alcott, Mann and Dewey. Popkewitz (2000, p. 4) argued that, educational philosophers like John Dewey and Paulo Freire have become "indigenous foreigners" in the postcolonial hybridized societies. Here I would argue that, Rabindranath Tagore, an intellectual contemporary of John Dewey and "intellectual forerunner" of Paulo Freire, as Ghosh et al. (2010) have argued, was an important "indigenous native" intellectual, whose educational work needs to be considered seriously to understand the challenges of inclusive educational reforms even within the contemporary postcolonial Indian context.

However, Tagore's philosophy of education and inclusive model of schooling has been, by and large, neglected in postcolonial India and the Victorian colonial structures are still dominant within the education system and society. Though Tagore is much workshipped as the "*Kabi Guru*" (Poet Teacher) and the author of the Indian national anthem, most of Indian schools still follow a colonial model of "parrot's training" (Tagore, 1917) kind of rigid curriculum and pedagogy, which is detrimental to the free development of a child's mind and inclusive education for all children with diverse learning needs. As Sriprakash (2010), citing evidence based on her research, notes:

> Learning (is) largely understood as knowledge assimilation (the acquisition of the syllabus) rather than knowledge construction... The strong classification of the syllabus, as a significant aspect of the performance-based system which remained in place, [does] not support a more democratic approach to knowledge acquisition. (p. 303)

Within this larger context, Mukherjee (2015, 2017, In Press) has argued in her doctoral thesis and other articles that Tagore's humanist philosophy of education and pedagogic experiments during colonial India provide a fertile ground for extending Southern Theoretical understanding of inclusive education for both analytic and hermeneutic engagement with empirical research data. It provides an opportunity for enhancing broader theoretical understanding of the democratic underpinnings of inclusive education and pedagogic issues, rather than its narrow definition transferred through policy documents.

SIGNIFICANCE OF CONTEXTUAL MEANING-MAKING

Dreze and Sen (2013) begin their discussion of the "uncertain glory of India" with a caveat that there are multiple factors contributing to the economic underdevelopment of India in spite of recent excitement about macro-economic growth in the middle of a global recession. Among several factors, they highlight the centrality of education hindering development by quoting from Rabindranath Tagore, who said: "in my view the imposing tower of misery which today rests on the heart of India has its sole foundation in the absence of education" (p. 107). This is a striking quote from Tagore chosen by the author of the "argumentative Indian" and India's long intellectual and democratic tradition. What did Tagore mean by "absence of education" and why did Dreze and Sen (2013) chose this quote to include in their book which interrogates the underdevelopment of India? I argue, here, that, despite India's long tradition of education, for Tagore this absence of education was the absence of socially inclusive education fostering principles of cooperation and care for the "other", which Hogan (2003) refers to as the "politics of

Otherness" in Tagore based on the values of *sahrdaya* (which means a person with compassionate heart in Sanskrit, Hindi and Bengali). Though Hogan's (2003) and Radice's (2010) reading of Tagore is quite critical, as they discusss ambiguities in his ideas and his own privileged positioning with regards to certain issues, both agree that Tagore was, in principle, opposed to any kind of segregation based on nationality, class, caste, race, religion, ethnicity, gender, and other markers of social difference even within the colonial Indian context increasing disharmony based on racial, religious and national cultural differeces. Razer & Friedman (2017) state that,

> "Today,.. the growing global commitment to inclusive education- as reflected in the 2009 UNESCO World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 2009)- requires teaching approaches that meet the needs of vary diverse populations. The Declaration defines "inclusive education" as "a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners" (p.8) especially those who experience exclusion because of socioeconomic level, race, ethnicity, immigration status, health problems, physical handicaps, and other such factors." (p. xvii)

Hence, I have argued that, engaging with Tagore's ideas on eduation and peadgogic practices within the colonial Indian context provides an opportunity for deeper enquiry and understanding of pedagogic issues related to inclusive education in the contemporary Indian context. This is particularly because strong postcolonial sentiments overlap with globalizing economy, global aspirations of middleclass, rising inequality and impatience of the masses for a better life. Engaging with Tagore might help generate possible solutions to serious educational and social problems of exclusion within the context, rather than just ideological critique of the concept of inclusive education as hegemonic Western imposition.

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