

Texts of Tagore and Tagore as text: A framework for diversity and inclusion in the twenty-first century

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Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) is primarily known worldwide as the first Asian poet to receive the Nobel Prize in literature, in 1913. He lived and died in colonial India as a British subject. However, any engagement with studies of Tagore would reveal that, despite his outstanding achievements in creative writing and music, he deserves to be remembered as the only poet of international standing who not only founded a self-funded university, but also designed a curriculum which radicalized traditional institutionalized education in colonial India. This essay endeavours to explore Tagore's re-imagining of the process of institutionalized instruction and the objectives of education. Undoubtedly, the concepts and models of the teaching-learning process outlined by Tagore bear the stamp of a poet-philosopher who tried to distance himself from the public educational sector, epitomized in colonial times as the formidable University of Calcutta, under British administration. Historically, Tagore's Visva-Bharati University at Santiniketan, obviously a private sector enterprise, is regarded as a unique experiment in inclusive education that debunks rote learning and fragmented knowledge, though its viability in the 21st century is open to debate.

Keywords: Diversity; inclusion; Tagore; texts; India

INTRODUCTION

The 1929 prospectus of Rabindranath Tagore's university, Visva-Bharati, stated:

College students are expected to become familiar with the working of existing institutions and new movements inaugurated in the different countries of the world *for the amelioration of the social condition of the masses* [emphasis added]. They are also required to undertake *a study of international organizations* [emphasis added] so that their outlook may become better adjusted to the needs of peace. (Nussbaum, 2012, p. 84–85)

In the era of globalization, in 2019, how many of our universities have included in their prospectus such a paragraph on social outreach, global politics, and the crucial importance of peace, as was found in the prospectus of Rabindranath Tagore's Visva-Bharati University almost 90 years ago, in colonial British administered India?

A litmus test in terms of a comparative study would be to cite the recently reconfigured National Policy of Education outlined by the education sector of the Indian government. Though the policy draft stated the rich heritage of ancient Indian systems of education, quite conspicuous by its absence is the total lack of any mention of Rabindranath Tagore's alternative system of education, initiated in Tagore's Patha Bhavan school and Visva-Bharati University. Expectedly, therefore, motivating aspirational signifiers crucial for nurturing young minds, such as freedom, creativity, research, and critical thinking beyond the pedagogical stereotypes, are not addressed at all in the recently revised national policy of education.

Interestingly, the concluding paragraph of the National Policy of Education 2019 draft indicates, beyond doubt, that the government of India's controlling mechanism of education targets, through the regulatory bodies of the education sector, prioritizes mechanized socio-economic progress and utilization of human capital:

The National Education Policy 2019 provides a framework for the transformation and reinvigoration of the education system in order to respond to the requirements of fast-changing, knowledge-based societies while taking into account the diversity of the Indian people, their traditions, cultures, and languages. It seeks to ensure that human capital, the most vital form of capital that would fuel the necessary transformation, is secured and strengthened. Highest priority is accorded to the task of ensuring universal access to an education of high quality and breadth that would support India's continued ascent, progress, and leadership on the global stage—in terms of economic development, social justice and equality, environmental stewardship, scientific advancement and cultural preservation, and help develop and maximise our country's rich talents and resources for the good of the individual, the country, and the world. An education system built on the premises of quality and equity is considered central to sustainable development, achieving success in the emerging knowledge economy and society, for socio-economic mobility, and for building an equitable, just and humane society. (p. 35)

Quite noticeably, as a result, Rabindranath Tagore's ideas and activities still offer a unique standpoint for thinking beyond the constraints of the controlled knowledge economy and the euphoria of nationalisms. In the study of Tagore's literary and non-literary texts, it is possible to track how artistic practice, analytical thought and educational institutions can be linked to move us beyond the myopia of nationalism, creating a space to rethink and even disrupt the increasingly powerful homology in which home, family, language, and nation have come to stand for each other to divide not unify. The emerging need is to address perspectives on global education while underscoring the culture-specific and region-specific needs of local education. Perhaps, this is what the concept note of this conference identified: "It aims to decentre/decolonize our minds from an obsession with the West and Western knowledge, culture, theories and epistemologies in conducting social science research and knowledge production". One, however, must guard against one obsession replacing another. The approach should be balanced, holistic, and inclusive, rooting out politicized exploitation of regional pride and prejudice.

TAGORE AS TEXT: A HISTORIC OVERVIEW

A brief review of the history of the beginnings of Tagore's institutions is imperative for a clear understanding of the programmatic paradigm shift that Tagore introduced in his institutions. According to the *Visva-Bharati Santiniketan prospectus* (2019):

In 1863, on a 20 Bigha plot at the site of the present institution, Debendranath Tagore, the poet's father, had built a small retreat for meditation, and in 1888 he dedicated, by a trust deed, the land and buildings, towards the establishment of an Asrama where seekers after truth, irrespective of their formal religious affiliations, sect, creed and caste, could come and meditate in seclusion; a Brahmavidyalaya and a library. Rabindranath's school Brahmacharyasrama which started functioning formally from December 22, 1901... From 1925 this school came to be known as Patha-Bhavana. (p. 6)

It was with the founding of Visva-Bharati, Tagore's dream university representing the world in one nest, that Tagore entered the most challenging stage of his mission in life. He supervised it till the end of his life, nurturing it like a parent or a gardener nurturing a sapling, addressing the macro issues of sustainability and fundraising entirely on his own, and, quite remarkably, not seeking guidelines or funds from the British government in India. Visva-Bharati brought in teachers from all parts of the world, both from the East and West, creating an island that celebrated the confluence of cultures where German, Chinese, Japanese, British, and Bengali scholars, writers, teachers, and artists worked side by side, creating a multi-disciplinary space of creativity, cultural inter-exchange and exchange of ideas and skills. In 1991, Satyajit Ray wrote about Santiniketan: "Santiniketan opened my eyes for the first time to the splendors of Indian and Far Eastern art. Until then, I was completely under the sway of Western art, music and literature. Santiniketan made me the combined product of East and West that I am" (Sen, 2005, 115).

In Satyajit Ray's assertion, we hear the voice of the local cosmopolitan and a validation of the dream of the founder of the university, who had to travel all around the globe to raise funds to sustain his university, mostly by writing and delivering series of lectures despite indifferent health. Uma Dasgupta (2009) states:

For a while, Tagore was witness to his Visva-Bharati offering hospitality to the world. In the 1920s and the 1930s scholars, painters, musicians, economists, agriculturists, and medical experts from different parts of the world gathered on the soil of Santiniketan and Sriniketan to join hands with the local populace in their common goal of learning and creating and serving without national barriers. (p. xxxiii)

Rabindranath Tagore invited artists and scholars from other parts of India and the world to live together at Santiniketan daily to share their cultures with the Visva-Bharati University, maintaining its multifarious global and local networks. The constitution of the university designated Visva-Bharati as an Indian, Eastern, and global cultural centre whose goals were (*Visva-Bharati Santiniketan*, 2019, p. 2):

1. To study the mind of Man in its realization of different aspects of truth from diverse points of view.
2. To bring into more intimate relation with one another through patient study and research, the different cultures of the East on the basis of their underlying unity.

3. To approach the West from the standpoint of such a unity of the life and thought of Asia.
4. To seek to realize in a common fellowship of study, the meeting of East and West and thus ultimately to strengthen the fundamental conditions of world peace through the free communication of ideas between the two hemispheres.
5. And with such ideals in view to provide at Santiniketan a centre of culture where research into the study of the religion, literature, history, science and art of Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Zoroastrian, Islamic, Sikh, Christian and other civilizations may be pursued along with the culture of the West, with that simplicity of externals which is necessary for true spiritual realization, in amity, good-fellowship and co-operation between the thinkers and scholars of both Eastern and Western countries, free from all antagonisms of race, nationality, creed or caste and in the name of the One Supreme Being who is Shantam, Shivam, Advaitam.
6. The objectives of the University shall also include harmonizing the cultures of India, the East and the West by, among other things, the admission of students and appointment of adhyapakas from various regions of India and various countries of the world and by providing incentive thereof.

In terms of curriculum, Tagore advocated the Socratic method of argument and interaction, a dialogic mode, in teaching. Rather than studying national cultures for the wars won and cultural dominance imposed, Tagore initiated a teaching system that analysed history and culture for the progress that had been made in breaking down social and religious barriers:

The school was a conscious repudiation of the system introduced in India by the British rulers [emphasis added], and Rabindranath initially sought to realize the intrinsic values of ancient education in India. The school and its curriculum, therefore, signified a departure from the way the rest of the country viewed education and teaching. Simplicity in externals was a cardinal principle. Classes were held in the open air in the shade of trees where man and nature entered into an immediate harmonious relationship. Teachers and students shared the single integral socio-cultural life. The curriculum had music, painting, dramatic performances and other performative practices. Beyond the accepted limits of intellectual and academic pursuits, opportunities were created for invigorating and sustaining the manifold faculties of human personality. (Visva-Bharati Santiniketan, 2019, p. 6)

Such an approach emphasized the innovations that had been made in integrating individuals of diverse backgrounds into a larger framework, and in devising the economic policies which emphasized social justice and narrowed the gap between rich and poor. Art would be studied for its role in furthering the aesthetic imagination and expressing universal themes. This liberating, inclusive approach towards diverse races, cultures, lands, languages, and people was beyond the comprehension of hardcore traditional pedagogic practices outlined by the British system of a rigid curriculum that fostered rote learning for the natives in the many British colonies. Traditional teaching methods were not about triggering intellectual curiosity, but concentrated on selective conditioning of the mind urged to accept stereotypes as indestructible monuments of

timeless wisdom. No wonder, “Tagore hated every school he ever attended, and he left them all as quickly as possible. What he hated was rote learning and the treatment of the pupil as a passive vessel of received cultural values. Tagore’s novels, stories, and dramas are obsessed with the need to challenge the past.” (Nussbaum, 2012, p. 70)

Tagore’s travels to various parts of the world were largely lecture tours aimed at fund raising for his university. This must be the sole example in human history that a poet did not only donate the entire Nobel Prize money for the university but would travel around the world and deliver lectures to sustain the university. He severely deplored the practice of institutionalized, fragmented knowledge and memorized notes, and a corresponding lack of new ideas and imagination that seemed to paralyze students instead of making them blossom.

In a letter to an unidentified correspondent referring to the resolution adopted by Calcutta University to introduce vernacular languages at the postgraduate level, while supporting the resolution that the vernacular language was more effective as a tool of communication and empathy, Tagore outlined his reservation about educational institutions. Referring specifically to Bengali language and literature taught at Calcutta University, Tagore wrote in 1918:

But I have found that the direct influence which the Calcutta University wields over our language is not strengthening and vitalizing, but pedantic and narrow. It tries to perpetuate the anachronism of preserving the Pundit-made Bengali swathed in grammar-wrappings borrowed from a dead language... The artificial language of a learned mediocrity, inert and formal, ponderous and didactic, devoid of the least breath of creative vitality, is forced upon our boys at the most receptive period of their life (Das, 1996, Vol. 3, 743).

A FRAMEWORK FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

In his alternative configurations of imparting formal and informal education at Santiniketan, Tagore initially conceived a school for children (Patha Bhavan) who would become sensitized about world history and culture, and would be urged to imagine a world beyond the restrictive barbed wires of nationalism. But that was just the beginning. Uma Dasgupta (2009) stated:

The mind that conceived Santiniketan school did not remain complacent with just those beginnings... Within two decades of the existence of the Santiniketan school, he announced that Santiniketan was “a sapling that would grow into Visva-Bharati, a widely-branching tree”. Visva-Bharati would be an international university of higher learning for studying and understanding the cultures of ‘East and West’ (p. xxix).

After Rabindranath was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913, he was invited to numerous countries all over the world, held Maghmela¹, and, as a result, he was exposed to a large part of the world and its people. By 1917, the range of his experience and the restlessness of his exploration led to his own self-clarification regarding the idea of a centre of Indian culture at Santiniketan. The centre, as conceived by him, was to provide:

¹ A festival that was organized by Tagore at his school and university campus in Shantiniketan

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[F]or the coordinated study of the different cultures... music and the fine arts are among the highest means of national self-expression... in the proposed centre of our culture, music and art must have prominent seats of honour... This centre should not only be a centre of the intellectual life of India but the centre of economic life as well. Participating thus in all the major spheres of Indian life, the institution would attain a representative character and enter into an encounter with the rest of the world. (Visva-Bharati Santiniketan, 2019, p. 6)

Tagore was always skeptical about the fragmented education churned out by the British administered Indian universities. In his essay, “the Centre of Indian Culture”, Tagore outlined his understanding of what he considered to be a complete education:

[O]ur education should be in full touch with our complete life, economical, intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual; connected with it by the living bonds of varied co-operations. For true education is to realize at every step how our training and knowledge have an organic connection with our surroundings. (Das, 1996, vol 2, p. 469)

Therefore, for Tagore, complete education would be possible when there was a need to bring together all cultures, races, gender irrespective of geographical locations. Visva-Bharati university would be able to provide this sort of inclusive education, according to Tagore. He stated without ambiguity, “So, in our centre of learning, we must provide for the coordinated study of all these cultures—the Vedic, the Puranic, the Buddhist, the Jain, the Islamic, the Sikh and the Zoroastrian. And side by side with them the European—for only then shall we be able to assimilate the last” (Dasgupta, Chakravarti, & Mathew, 2013, p. 487).

The inclusive motto of the Visva-Bharati University was this statement in a Vedic text “Yatra visvam bhavatyekanidam (where the world makes a home in a single nest).

On 23 December 1921, Visva-Bharati became a registered public body which adopted a constitution of its own. The aims and objects as set forth on the occasion have since then remained the objectives of Visva-Bharati.

In 1922, the Department of Higher Studies became Uttara Vibhaga to be renamed Vidya-Bhavana in 1925. Hindu philosophy, medieval mysticism, Islamic culture, Zoroastrian philosophy, Bengali literature and history, Hindustani literature, Vedic and Classical Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, Chinese, Tibetan, Persian, Arabic, German, Latin and Hindi formed its areas of study and research.

Vidya-Bhavana was the manifestation of the ideal of the proposed centre of comprehensive studies in the cultures of the East and the West. The centre was viewed principally as a community of scholars, Indian as well as foreign, who would be engaged in the creation and dissemination of systematized and philanthropic reasoning. The concern was epistemological. (Visva-Bharati Santiniketan, 2019, p. 6)

Santiniketan attracted a number of scholars inspired by Tagore’s re-invention of educational methods. Leonard Elmhirst acted as private secretary to Tagore between 1924 and 1925 and, inspired by Tagore’s work, co-founded Dartington Hall in Devon England in 1926. It is a significant factor that a pattern of dissent against colonial education system meted out to the ‘natives’ by the British administration was not just propagated by Tagore, who referred to the importance of vernacular languages and

bilingualism, but seemed to be often strikingly similar to the critique of the British education system in Ireland that the Irish nationalist leader Patrick Pearse described as a murderous mechanism of control and power. In his essay, “Murder Machine” published in the *Irish Review* in 1913, Pearse stated:

Modern education systems are elaborate pieces of machinery devised by highly-salaried officials for the purpose of turning out citizens according to certain approved patterns. The modern school is a State controlled institution designed to produce workers for the State and is in the same category in which a dockyard, or any other State-controlled institution which produces articles necessary to the progress, well-being, and defence of the State are included. We speak of the “efficiency”, the “cheapness” and the “up-to-dateness” of an education system just as we speak of the “efficiency”, the “cheapness” and the “up-to-dateness” of a system of manufacturing coal-gas. (Pearse, 1916, p. 6)

The concepts of the teacher as a “transformative intellectual” who can “give direction to history” and the definition of education as “a practice of freedom” describe and define the educational endeavour of Pearse in a way that had not been previously attempted. Commentators such as Tolstoy, Pearse, Tagore, the Elmhursts, Curry, and Russell gave practical expression to their reservations by establishing schools located outside mainstream provision (Walsh & Lalor, 2015, p. 595–617). They, thereby, signaled their dissatisfaction with the education system of the time, and their desire to provide an alternative model. The antecedent of their position is undoubtedly classical humanism and, by scrutinizing the act of education in relation to interested parties, such as the state, they highlighted and insisted upon the integrity of learning as inherently valuable, regardless of outcomes.

While appealing for donations for running his unique bilingual school, Pearse assured potential donors that his school was “modern in the best sense”, offering an education that was “wholly Irish in complexion and bilingual in method. The attempt has been a notable success”. He stated:

Apart from its Irish standpoint, our College is distinguished from other secondary schools and colleges in Ireland by the appeal which its ideals make to the imagination of its pupils, by its objection to the cramming system, its viva voce teaching of modern languages and, in short, its linking of the practical with the ideal at every stage of its work. (McGreevy, 2016)

Tagore was aware of various experimentations in the European education sector and, inspired by these innovations, Tagore’s own initiatives in revising and transforming the process of education in colonial India were ground-breaking in many areas. He was one of the first in India to argue for a humane educational system that was in touch with the environment and aimed at the overall development of the personality. Santiniketan became a model for vernacular instruction and the development of Bengali textbooks; as well, it offered one of the earliest coeducational programs in South Asia. The establishment of Visva-Bharati and Sriniketan led to pioneering efforts in many directions, including models for distinctively Indian higher education and mass education, as well as pan-Asian and global cultural exchange.²

² From the very beginning Rabindranath tried to foster a self-sufficient social life along with new values of creative as well as participatory culture. The most joyful expressions of the community are the festivals which at different times of the year celebrate the cycle of the seasons and the diverse manifestations of

Noticeably, following the examples of Tagore, John Dewey, Froebel, and other like-minded educationists, such as Martha C. Nussbaum, advocated an approach of inclusive learning; she states that, instead of concentrating on world history as a theatre of war, battles, and civil war, “when a culture’s history and economy are studied, questions should be raised about differences of power and opportunity about the place of women and minorities, about the merits and disadvantages of different structures of political organizations” (Nussbaum, 2012, 89).

Rabindranath Tagore, by his efforts and achievements, is part of a global network of pioneering educators, such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, and Dewey who had stressed the need to create non-authoritarian learning systems appropriate to their respective surroundings. In fact, Maria Montessori visited Visva-Bharati and appreciated Tagore’s efforts. So, Nussbaum states, “world history and economic understanding then must be humanistic and critical if they are to be at all useful in forming intelligent global citizens, and they must be taught alongside the study of religion and philosophical theories of justice” (Nussbaum, 2012, 94).

THE TEXTS OF TAGORE

If intellectual and cultural freedom were the overt agenda of Tagore’s formulation of an alternative system of education free of pedagogic shibboleth and intellectual myopia, as defined repeatedly in his many essays on education practices, his literary texts also made a bid to push against the boundaries by reaching towards cultural and intellectual de-territorialization. So, referring to Tagore’s novel, *Gora*, Gayatri Spivak (2013) stated that when Gora decides to drink water brought in by the Dalit woman, Lachmiya, he truly breaks free, not through a shift in epistemic self-positioning but empirical assertiveness.

The conclusion of *Gora*, therefore, illustrates how humanities and social sciences, traditionally clubbed together as “arts” are interlocked in its intertextuality and critical diversity paradigm that are integral to intersectionality studies. After Gora learns that he was an Irish orphan, nurtured in a Hindu home, he addresses, Anandamoyee, his surrogate mother as his only mother, and states, “You have no caste, no-caste-judgement, no contempt—you are nothing but the image of our good! You are my Bharatvasha, indeed.” (Spivak 2013, p. 303). Yet, as a cultural critic, Spivak categorically stated that, though *Gora* ends with a call to the Dalit domestic worker, Lachmiya, Tagore “builds nothing on it”. Whereas, citing Mahasweta Devi’s protagonist, Mary Oraon, the central character in “Shikar”, Spivak comments that,

Nature. Dances and songs presented on such occasions draw as much upon Rabindranath as other cultural resources of all parts of India. The community comes together in these festivals and, for the young students in particular, it is an unobtrusive process of cultural enrichment. Cultural events and festivals are a legacy from the inception of the institution. The open-air devotional service that is held on 7 Poush (on or about 23 December) every year under the Chhatim tree where Maharshi Debendranath once meditated is an occasion of particular significance for the institution since it is the foundation day of the Asrama. In accordance with the trust deed, a mela (fair) popularly known as the Poushmela is held to mark the occasion. Another three-day village fair, called Maghmela is held early in February every year at Sriniketan. ‘Vasanta Utsav’ (Spring Festival), Briksaropan (Tree Planting Ceremony) and Halakarsana (Ploughing) are not just festivities but are curricular activities contributing to the core courses on Tagore Studies and Environmental Studies. (Visva-Bharati Santiniketan, 2019, p. 8)

“Mahasweta takes the hybrid and puts a machete in her hand. Daughter of the rape of a Christian tribal domestic worker by a white imperialist displaced at Independence, Mary—has a Christian name as Gora has a Hindu—corrects the failure of decolonization by the solitary exercise of a wild justice, a re-inscription of aboriginality” (Spivak 2013, 315).

Interestingly, *Ghare Baire*, published in 1916, was severely criticized by Marxist critics such as Georg Lukacs, who described the novel as a “petit bourgeois yarn of the shoddiest kind” and “at the intellectual service of the British Police” (Sen, 2015, p. 109). Tagore’s third political novel, *Char Adhyay*, published in 1936, was a critique of the swadeshi movement and armed struggle. The social novels, on the other hand, were gender-centric. However, in all these fictional narratives, Tagore’s inclusive spirit was crucial for disseminating unfettered knowledge, a passionate belief that led to his setting up his exclusive educational institutions to practice inclusive knowledge, is either latent or manifest.

So, Gora metamorphoses from a bigoted, Hindu fundamentalist to a liberated and secular individual, in the true spirit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakum—“the world is one family”. Gora discovers his identity and self as he asserts, “I am Indian today. In me today there is no conflict among Hindu, Muslim and Christian society” (Spivak, 2013, p. 26).

Moreover, in her caveat about the parasitic epidemic of internet culture and the threats of globalization that romanticize artificial intelligence, post-human discourse, programmed robotic responses that become paradigmatic, Gayatri Spivak stated in her book, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, that “linguistic diversity can only curb the global. In the ferocious thrust to be ‘global’, ‘the humanities’ and the ‘qualitative social sciences’, ‘comparative’ at their best, are no longer a moving epistemological force. They will increasingly be like the opera, serving a peripheral function in society” (Spivak, 2013, p. 26). Rabindranath Tagore would have agreed with Spivak’s observations and caveat, as it is obvious that both these public and transformative intellectuals ardently believed that intellectual and cultural freedom were essential for consolidating the inclusive spirit of universal humanism.

My central argument is that in Tagore’s work we find a radical effort to think beyond nationalist and gendered ideologies to create a truly international but, at the same time, local field of practice through holistic education and democratic approaches, which can be described as cosmopolitan nationalism, and underpins inclusive practices. Tagore clearly outlined that local Bengali cultures, agricultural practices, international artistic and ecumenical educational practices should be understood as fundamentally interconnected, offering an alternative to real-politick, rote learning, and utilitarian moral reasoning. Such an alternative gestures towards a rethinking of gender, family, and nation. In the early twentieth century, Tagore had provided a blueprint for holistic education while he interrogated fragmented knowledge. So, in his essay that focusses on the ideal of education in India, Tagore wrote:

Education can only become natural and wholesome when it is the direct fruit of a living and growing knowledge... our education should be in full touch with our complete life; economical, intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual; and our educational institutions should be in the very heart of our society, connected with it by the living bonds of varied co-operations. For true education is to realize at every

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step how our training and knowledge have organic connection with our surroundings. (Dasgupta, 2009, p. 148).

In order to decolonize the hegemony of Western knowledge paradigms, in the global South, specifically India, Tagore's overt agenda regarding an alternative education system can be used to formulate interdisciplinary studies, cross-cultural studies, transdisciplinary studies, intersectionality studies and critical diversity studies, leading to an inclusive approach enabling fortification of knowledge systems often disturbed by systemic fissures and ruptures. As is obvious, it is through cross-cultural comparativist engagements that binaries and monoliths that consolidate canons can be replaced by inclusive knowledge paradigms and policy.

If such initiatives are not taken, the horrifying end result of our rote learning will destroy creative freedom, creative imagination, and leadership in the world of ideas. Tagore describes in graphic detail the tragic consequence as the end result of such myopic education in his well-known fable, "The Parrot's Training" (*Tota Kahini*). The parrot which flew and sang all day was thrust into a golden cage, encapsulated platitudes of the past were thrust into its throat, and its wings clipped. The narrative reads like a Spielberg movie script, grotesque and sarcastic, animated further by Tagore's signature poetic insight:

The nephew said, "Your Majesty, the bird's education is now complete."

The King asked, "Does it still jump?"

The nephew said, "God forbid."

"Does it still fly?"

"No."

"Does it sing anymore?"

"No."

"Does it scream if it doesn't get food?"

"No."

The King said, "Bring the bird in. I would like to see it."

The bird was brought in. With it came the administrator, the guards, the horsemen. The King felt the bird. It didn't open its mouth and didn't utter a word. Only the pages of books, stuffed inside its stomach, raised a ruffling sound.

Outside, where the gentle south wind and the blossoming woods were heralding spring, the young green leaves filled the sky with a deep and heavy sigh.

(Tagore, 2004)

Therefore, without embarrassment about breaking free from normative practices defining the purpose of education, such as being job-oriented, skill-developers linked to the corporate industries, the 2019 prospectus of Tagore's Visva-Bharati University, states with confidence that:

Visva-Bharati is a pilgrimage for education and culture. It reflects the Tagorean ethos of making a complete human being. It is a hallowed place of learning cradled in a serene environment in the lap of Nature, where Rabindranath founded a school for children at Santiniketan, and it was around this nucleus that the structure of *an unconventional University* [emphasis added] developed through careful planning

and meticulous execution of those ideas and ideals. (Visva-Bharati Santiniketan, 2019, p. 6)

CONCLUSION

The education sector, from primary schools to the universities, with its dedicated register of economic profits and private education industries—actively encouraged to link to corporate sectors, will undoubtedly find Tagore’s educational ideology unworkable and unrealistic. Expectedly, therefore, from the time Tagore’s Visva-Bharati University became a central government funded university, it has conformed to the normative practices followed by all state government aided and central government aided educational institutions. Henceforth, in Visva-Bharati, the teaching-learning process prioritized the importance of university degrees and requisite scores and grades for targetted job procurement. As a result, pursuit of knowledge for the nurturance of a critically informed, liberated mind has been increasingly side-lined as redundant, utopian and irrelevant in the era of globalization.

Also, with its emergence from the esoteric private sector to the exoteric public education sector, Visva-Bharati Central university at Santiniketan no longer replicates Tagore’s idealistic priorities regarding education as a nurturing platform for an inclusive internationalist outlook, derived from a systemic training in the humanities and performing arts. The hegemonic control of economic and cultural globalization has resulted in Visva-Bharati surrendering to the compulsions created by the rapidly changing times, where job-oriented education is highlighted as the sole priority. In the twenty-first century, it is perhaps ironic to consider that the Tagorean paradigm of an “unconventional University” should be regarded as a supreme viable project, where the teacher in the role of a friend, philosopher and guide is regarded as a “transformative intellectual” and education is defined as “practice of freedom” in the registers of empiricism, epistemology, and ontology.

Yet, the process of experimentation in the education sector, globally and locally, will inevitably be an ongoing process in terms of spatio-temporal and geo-political attitudinal shifts regarding education as a highly profitable industry. Already, in the public education sectors, experiential learning has emerged or perhaps re-emerged as a viable innovative process of instruction that activates intellectual curiosity and creativity. The newly configured processes for such sophisticated experiential learning instead of rote learning, however, can be historically traced back to the outstanding instructional practices that characterized Tagore’s exclusive curriculum at Visva-Bharati at Santiniketan, before it received national recognition as a public sector university, funded by the central government of India.

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