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The Politics of Aesthetic Education with Special reference to Tagore's View

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the performatives and elements of Tagore's school which was set up in 1901 at Bolpur in West Bengal. He called it Santiniketan. The paper investigates Tagore's thoughts of instructional method according to the pregnant organization interfacing the understudies, instructors and their regular natural surroundings; further, it explores how the school has showed itself as a green talk and worked itself out inside the rationalization of room and spot, giving Tagore's thoughts and the pragmatics of execution a new course of comprehension. Here, Tagore's thoughts on schooling and nature are intricately problematised through the convergences of an assortment of contemplations and ideas drawn from contemporary eco-basic examinations, ecosophy, talks on nature, culture, and morals of others conscious comprehensive quality and bio-egalitarianism.

Tagore himself compared the investigation to the superb 'unreliability' of the butterfly. As indicated by him,

> The silkworm seems to have a cash value credited in its favour somewhere in Nature's accounting department...but the butterfly is irresponsible. The significance which it may possess has neither weight nor use and is lightly carried on its pair of dancing wings. Perhaps it pleases someone in the heart of the sunlight, the Lord of colours, who has nothing to do with account books and has a perfect mastery in the great art of wastefulness. (Tagore, 1992, p.286)

In 1901 the 'artist's school', the ashram, was set up by seeking esteems which didn't limit the butterfly as against the silkworm. Looking to exorcize the apparition of his childhood encounters in school where he was momentarily enlisted. The artist tried to 'carry on with in the existences of different young men, and to construct its missing heaven with fixings which might not have any universal material, recommended measure, or standard worth' (Tagore, 1961, p.285-286). He needed a school away from the strife of human home which would be the site for 'calm investigations and instructing' where students would 'experience childhood in the holy and significant air of learning' while at the same time 'reacting innovatively and thoughtfully' to the climate (Uma, 2004, p.15) How is training influenced by district? How could 'open sky, handle, trees' add to an 'environment of learning'? What sort of work space did the ashram-school develop into, and what was its life-world? Tagore reported,

> In our highly complex modern conditions, mechanical forces are organized with such efficiency that the materials produced grow far in advance of man's capacity to select and assimilate them to suit his nature and needs. Such an overgrowth, like the rank vegetation of the tropics, creates confinement for man. The nest is simple. It has an easy relationship with the sky; the cage is complex and costly, it is too much itself, excommunicating whatever lies outside. And modern man is busy building his cage. He is always occupied in adapting himself to its dead angularities, limiting himself to its limitations, and so he becomes a part of it. (Tagore, 1980, p.289)

The phantom of the 'confining' ruthless techno-invasion left Tagore stressed as he examined the idea of his school and the air he trusted it would create. The artist's school was conceived around a daily existence far eliminated from that pentagon of actual force which machines were intended to fabricate, yet it was one without bias towards innovation's non-forceful kindness. This indispensable 'connection' with nature would decide the temper of the ashram and its advantageous communitarian space. Tagore compared himself to

> …the gardener who has to look after the tender young shoots of the human soul. When one mind meets another in perfect harmony, the outcome is spontaneous joy. This joy is instinct with creative energy. Education in an ashram is the gift of this bounteous joy. (Tagore, 1992, p.431)

Thus education in the ashram was 'education for life at its fullest'. Tagore made children realise that

> …education is a permanent part of the adventure of life; it is not like a painful hospital treatment for curing them of the congenital malady of their ignorance, but is a function of health, the natural expression of their mind's vitality (Tagore, 1961, p.299)

Tagore wanted his school to have an alternative atmosphere of 'aesthetic intensity' within a non-Cartesian and pre-discursive 'presence-pedagogy'. The integration of the laws of nature and the laws of humans operate on 'possibilities'. For Tagore the possibilities were 'surprise', 'wonder', 'excitement', 'mysteries'. He delighted in the singularity of objects, refusing to see them merely as 'objects for use'. He sought thus to create 'possibilities'. This is a mode of thinking which considers a student's reading a book sitting on a branch of a tree no less significant than his doing so sitting on a chair or a bench. Children in the ashram needed a world capable of surprising them, a world which humans had not programmed, a world

whose projection supervened on mutual knowing and seeing. According to Tagore,

A boy should live in the midst of nature. Towns are not our natural abodes, and have been built to supply our material needs. That we should be born in towns and be brought up in the lap of stone and brick was never intended by Providence. .people who live in them, and are absorbed by work, hardly feel that anything is missing from their lives, even though they have already strayed from nature and are daily is getting further and further away from the great universe. But nature's help is indispensable when we are still growing up, and still learning, and before we are drawn neck and crop into the whirlpool of affairs. Trees and rivers, and blue skies and beautiful views are just as necessary as benches and blackboards, books and examinations (Tagore, 1961, p.72)

However in the event that Tagore's vexed 'profound' environmental position sounds altogether mysterious, the administration of the ashram was immovably established in material practice. It was anything but a position of unmixed examination. The association that Tagore needed his understudies to assimilate was material and non-material, mental and mortal, interceded and unmediated; but not 'supernatural'. His teaching method was performative, intelligent, groundbreaking; and non-idealistic. It was educated both by legacy and the commonsense irreversibility of ashramic rehearses grounded in explicit verifiable and material conditions.

Tagore's apportionment of nature in considerations about green instructional method had a sort of inside cut-off to it. In his vision for the ashram, Tagore expected to limit the resistance among nature and man which, in the converse, drives us to reason that the nature; man strife has consistently had a surprisingly upsetting vocation. Tagore visualized a 'human great' inside the digressive morals of the ashram which, once more, recommends the human finishes albeit on carefully non-Baconian registers. However I would contend that the digressive space opened up by Tagore's arrangement permitted additionally for 'information amassing' by methods for human and non-human exchange and resistance. The ashram was a 'human settlement', planted amidst a backwoods. It proved unable, clearly, leave nature immaculate. As a site of force, the ashram-school facilitated connections with nature that moved toward a 'discipline' and 'rebuff' system of qualities and practices.

In any case, I challenge in recognizing Tagore's interests here entirely with what Habermas would attribute as 'nature-in-itself'. The ashram supported this through its Spartan foundation and its somber life-propensities, and its accentuation on interfacing with the 'earth'. Tagore's resurgent intentions here were, in any case, somewhat not quite the same as the Naessain School of 'profound environment'. As a site of 'culture in the midst of nature', the ashram was not a post-Enlightenment project communicating 'disillusionment of the world'. The ashram had rules, conventions, and followed the strides of science. All things considered, it was not liberated from extravagant and fantasies. It was not so much educated but rather more experiential. However, the uncertainty of Tagore's romanticisation of the tapovan remains.

Training in the midst of nature required, in Tagore's view, 'penance and renunciation'. The objective was to discover a state of 'harmony' in the consistent rush hour gridlock of fighting powers. This end-point was santarasa. Tapovan had santarasa. Tagore's ashram occupied a spot called Santiniketan. This harmony was not, in any case, the 'serenity' of nature. Tagore's reliance with nature was not guaranteed but rather a delicate cooperative energy requiring ceaseless participation and ready responsibility. Tagore in this manner proposed another ethic of 'being' and 'doing' that, by not dismissing conflating influences, re-imagined 'biocentrism' through the advancement of self-acknowledgment in understudies urged to associate with the 'delight of genuine opportunity'. He thought that 'young men are glad to live in the order of nature. The order encourages them to grow completely and taste the joy of genuine opportunity, and it makes their bodies sparkle with the power of their growing personalities'. (Tagore, 1970, p.71) Tagore noticed,

> We can grow into full manhood only if we have been nursed by earth and water, sky and air, and nourished by them as by our mother's breasts. So let the children play under the open sky, which is the playground of sunlight and clouds. Let them not be taken away from Bhuma, the Supreme Spirit. Let them see the sun unlock the day with bright fingers, and the tranquil glow of evening merge into the star-studded darkness of night...Let them hear the roar of thunder and see the massed clouds darken the woods before bursting into rain. When the rains are over, let the children see the green and dewy fields waving in the wind and overflowing with corn as far as the horizon. (Tagore, 1992, p.73)

The primal energy of life residing at the heart of nature, argued Tagore, becomes the motive force that actuates a child and allows for his rhythmic connection with the universe. Tagore saw the 'necessity' for the human body to interact with the earth in its 'nakedness', in an unabashed state of communion. Moreover, he suggested that the nakedness of the child's body interacting with the nakedness of nature gave a different connotation to the notion of 'shame'. Tagore had no time for conventional classrooms which sought to impart life experiences to students seated in screened-off cubicles, totally disconnected from the natural environment. Accordingly he proposed that

> When they are not engaged in study, the students should work in the garden, loosening the soil around the roots of trees, watering plants and training hedges. Their contact with nature would thus be both manual and mental. In favourable weather the classes should be held in the shade of big trees. Part of the teaching should be in the form of discussion between teacher and student while they are walking between the rows of trees. In the evening recess the students should read the stars, cultivate music, and listen to legendary and historical tales. (Tagore, 1961, p.75)

In this way the ashram became a transformative space through the visibility of its inmates, their works and ways, and invisibility made visible through the changes that it wrought on the inmates and the character of its operation. The body in education is a 'responsive' subject alive to powers of transcendence. The initial mode of 'perception' in the ashram was operated through the body subject, an embodied consciousness. Abstraction from the corporeal world was denied and perception was structured in 'depth'. Tagore's

young students were challenged to engage with the uninhibited and the uncultivated, forms of 'unpremeditated' experience tailored to appeal, primarily, to the body; the secret life of the wind, the shadows of the scudding clouds, the rhythm of the cricket-songs, the power of fragrance, the movement of the buds into bloom; for as Tagore observed,

> Children love the earth with its dust and its dirt, and they love the sun, the wind and the rain. They do not like to be dressed up, they enjoy themselves most when they are discovering the world with their senses, and they are not a bit ashamed to be their natural selves. (Tagore, 1992, p.80)

So the perceptual logic of the ashram was different; its 'interiority' different too. Through 'the flesh of the ashram', students encountered inter-subjectivities which whispered of secrecies and codes of 'nakedness', the language of glances, gestures and traces.

Tagore's ashram, then, embodied a 'being' located in its inhabitants. From a Heideggerean perspective, we could say that the core of it was how the ashramites manifested themselves to each other in a non-utilitarian way. Tagore referred to it seriously as a commingling of 'souls', a clearing of spaces with other species-beings, an effusion of 'joy'. (Tagore, 1961, p.357) In other words, Tagore tried to make his ashram a place where the intrinsic value of non-human entities was recognised and allowed to 'exist' unmediated. The authenticity of the place lay in its respect for the 'sacrament of co-existence'. It was an ontological democracy wherein nature was looked upon as an entity-in-itself and its human inhabitants as beings-with-the-world. In the Japanese tradition of looking into 'nature', communication is sought to be effected through the 'poetic'. Sensibility and 'sympathy' power the participatory dialogue. A dream, an ideal, does not simply happen; it needs to be pursued. Tagore proposed a 'freedom', but the goal was not devoid of method. Hearkening back to the ancient 'forest tradition' was all well and good but tapping into its efficacy required modulated and critical appropriation which recognised the imperative of changing times. The ashram-school could not have functioned hermetically sealed within narrow forest-school laws, indifferent to contemporary developments in governance and values.

So within the habitus of the ashram-school, Tagore unleashed a kind of green democracy, a discourse of green politics. This philosophy is not inviting of the 'teacher', but requires a 'guru' cognisant of the 'Law' built into the dynamics of nature and culture. The teacher might have formal competence, but the guru will give much more than he is paid for; in the Indian tradition a guru is one who 'devotes his whole mind and spirit to the service of his students', and expects from them in return a 'devotion that owes nothing to the fear of being punished, and is deep enough to be called religious and genuine enough to be called natural'. (Tagore, 1970, p.79) Tagore's determination to impose a specific structure on the functioning of the ashram-school betrayed a discursive rigidity at odds with the founder's commitment to the goals of freedom and creativity. Ashram education worked within a bureaucratic green frame shot through with an ecological ethic of survival. At its heart there was 'order', a code of institutional responsibility. By locating his educational ideas in the tradition of tapovan, Tagore was suggesting that man's position in the web of things is demonstrative of democratic co-operation between nature and culture, a relationship not of domination but of mutuality and conflation.

Experience of place, 'the feeling of place, and its origins' as Anne Stenros argues, is essential as 'place is the most unique experience of space, and it is man's deepest experience of the environment'. Tagore's choice of place, and his description of its landscape and environment, bears out the truth of this assessment.

> All round our ashram is a vast open country, bare up to the line of the horizon except for sparsely-growing stunted date-palms and prickly shrubs struggling with anthills. Below the level of the field there extend numberless mounds and tiny hillocks of red gravel and pebbles of all shapes and colours, intersected by narrow channels of rain-water. Not far away towards the south near the village can be seen through the intervals of a row of palm trees the gleaming surface of steel-blue water, collected in a hollow of the ground. A road used by the village people for their marketing in the town goes meandering through the lonely fields, with its red dust staring in the sun. Travellers coming up this road can see from a distance on the summit of the undulating ground the spire of a temple and the top of a building, indicating the Shanti-Niketan ashram, among its amalaki groves and its avenue of stately sal trees. (Tagore, 1961, p.131)

Numerous since have shared Tagore's conviction that Santiniketan is an exceptionally uncommon spot, a 'hearth' in fellowship with the universe.

Nonetheless, the pregnant sacrality of the ashram worked over a time of seventeen years coaxed out a bigger number of spaces than it could oblige, prompting its reconfiguration as Visva Bharati University in 1921. Rescuing a college from an ashram required 'creating' spaces with a profound interest in qualities and morals of contestation. This progress had a 'reason' whose tricky required a comprehension past an idealistic local area; it required a straightening out of the standards of bio-round libertarianism to assess the miniature rationales of a different 'traffic' fixated on the charming issues of 'line', 'strife' and 'trade'. The obligation, the danger, and the morals of the butterfly all needed to adjust.

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