

Mohammad A. Quayum (Ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore's Journey as an Educator: Critical Perspectives on His Poetics and Praxis*. London & New York: Routledge, 2023. 314pp. ISBN: 978-1-003-15776-2.

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The Bengali poet and the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize (in Literature, in 1913), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is respected not only as a litterateur, but also as a philosopher, social reformer, and educationist. A polymath and an autodidact, Tagore's educational philosophy was articulated over and over again in his poems, fictions, plays, letters, and lectures and concurrently put into action, as evidenced by the establishment of Brahmacharya Asrama at Santiniketan, West Bengal in 1901, a school which was upgraded to a university, Visva-Bharati University, in 1921. This was followed up with the formation of the Institute of Rural Reconstruction in 1922, to realise his ideas about village reform.

The paramount significance of this current volume under review is that it is not only one of the first books to critically investigate Tagore's educational ideas and experiments from diverse perspectives, but more importantly, it successfully assembles a group of globally recognised Tagore scholars, from Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, India, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, who adroitly and eloquently highlight the enduring relevance of Tagore's humanistic educational philosophy and practice. Such reflections are urgently necessary in these contemporary times when humanity is faced with the gravest danger on earth, not merely from an increasing ethnic, religious, and nationalistic hatred and bigotry, but also from an aggravating environmental degradation and climate crisis, which is threatening the very existence of the species.

The editor, Mohammad A. Quayum, a literary academic and Tagore scholar, who has already produced five publications on Tagore, including critical works and translations,

articulates the vision and structure of this volume in his long and incisive introduction. The chapters that follow explore how Tagore's educational philosophy "developed from a nationalist stance to one of constructive globalism or cosmopolitanism" (p. 1). It also examines Tagore's perspicacity as he conceptualised and constructed an alternative educational model that challenged "the colonial school system" of his time, which was hinged on the "Western capitalist-consumerist pedagogic model" (p. 3). Thus, the critical volume interrogates at the outset the stereotypical education system consisting of untrained, unenlightened, and self-centred teachers who provide no freedom to their students, and emphasise the importance of mindless, mechanical learning. Finally, it brings to the fore Tagore's humanistic principle of cultivating feelings of sympathy, empathy, and compassion which aims at learning to live "in harmony with all of existence", with "the fullest growth and freedom of soul" (p. 4).

The fourteen chapters in the volume are divided into two parts. Part One consists of four chapters, which compare and examine Tagore's pedagogical vision and experiments with his selected European and Asian counterparts. Part Two consists of ten chapters, delving deep into the different approaches, views, and perspectives of Tagore's educational ideology, as manifested through his poetics and praxis.

Part One commences with Narasingha P. Sil's comparative explorations of the visions of Tagore and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), where both, in spite of their socio-cultural differences, highlight that a complete education should aim at an individual's holistic development. Christine Marsh, in her illuminating discussion of the educational ideals of Tagore and William Morris (1834-1896) in chapter 2, demonstrates how developing "culturally rich, self-sufficient local communities" could have helped in averting today's "runaway climate change and ecological catastrophe" (p. 54). The following two chapters, 3 and 4, compare Tagore's views on education with those of two contemporary Bengali thinkers: Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932). In chapter 3, Goutam Ghosal points

out how both Tagore and Sri Aurobindo stressed that a child must be allowed to learn freely without any external imposition, and that the “aim of education is not for selfish nourishment of the ego but for a selfless contribution to humanity” (p. 82). In chapter 4, Quayum focuses on how both Tagore and Rokeya changed the educational landscape of British India in their own individual ways. While Tagore emphasised education for all Indians, irrespective of gender or religion, Rokeya’s focus was on educating and empowering Indian women in general, and Bengali Muslim women in particular. The chapter argues that in spite of the many challenges and constraints, faced by the two iconic writer-educationists, both eventually introduced a holistic educational model in their schools, established respectively in 1901 and 1910.

Part Two starts with Quayum’s chapter, “Education for Tomorrow: The Vision of Rabindranath Tagore,” which studies a wide range of Tagore’s writings, along with the thoughts and ideas of various Western philosophers, ancient and modern. It subsequently identifies the contemporary relevance of Tagore’s all-inclusive and empathetic pedagogical vision in a world where increasing migratory movements and ecological crises have become a reality. In chapter 6, “Tagore’s Educational Philosophy: Entwined Theory and Practice,” Debarati Bandyopadhyay explains how Tagore’s childhood experiences in colonial schools shaped his educational philosophy as an adult, while in Chapter 7, “Rabindranath Tagore’s Ecology of Education,” Shamsad Mortuza contends how Tagore’s introduction of an indigenous type of liberal arts is vitally important in the current era of the fourth industrial revolution, where the encroachment of artificial intelligence necessitates the human being to nurture “cognitive flexibility and emotional intelligence” (p. 169) more than ever. In Chapter 8, “Rabindranath Tagore and the Idea of a Green University,” Md Rezaul Haque probes how Tagore, more than a century ago, imagined and enacted an environmentally sustainable, eco-friendly green university, a concept which is much in vogue today. Anindya Bhattacharya, in

Chapter 9, “Never a Schoolboy of the West,” examines Tagore’s pedagogical paradigm which would make Indians self-reliant, empathetic, and creative, and also empower them to forge a healthy relationship with the rest of the world.

Tagore’s vision of educational ideals gradually attaining an all-inclusive cosmopolitan outlook is the subject of Ana Jelnikar’s chapter, “Towards the Symbol of a Missing Fullness”. In it she turns her attention to Tagore’s global travel experiences and suggests by referring to the poem “Sonar Tori” (The Golden Boat), that a universalist ideal marks Tagore’s experimental pedagogy, “connecting distant shores and fusing mental horizons” (p. 221), benefitting humanity at large. Dipankar Roy brings forward the less-discussed area of Tagore’s children’s literature in his chapter, “Of Broken Umbrellas and Winged Steeds,” and affirms that Tagore’s writings for children and his development of educational curriculum proceeded concurrently, with the aim of attaining “the full potential of the human race and the shaping of the human civilization” (p. 236). In Chapter 12, “Music’s Spring Breezes Blew through the Heart of the Land,” Matthew Prichard explicates how Tagore included music and art in his educational curriculum as his refined aesthetic philosophy prompted him to develop an “education of sympathy or cultivation of feeling” (p. 263) which would be helpful in constructing positive human values and a dynamic civilisation.

The last two chapters of the collection, written by William Radice and Kathleen M. O’Connell, concentrate on examining individual works of Tagore. Focusing on his novel *Yogāyog* and his play *Muktodhārā*, Radice, in the book’s penultimate chapter, “Never Not an Educator,” attests that Tagore was primarily a poet and his role as an educator was of a “poet-teacher” (p. 266) who predominantly inspired rather than taught in the literal sense. Finally, in chapter 14, “Educational Takeaways from Tagore’s Drama *Achalayatan*” Kathleen M. O’Connell peruses Tagore’s play *Achalayatan* to demonstrate how Tagore’s pedagogical beliefs and practice transformed from a “traditional, sectarian, authoritarian” system to “an

open, inclusive, non-sectarian” one, that was closely connected with nature and the local community, allowing “the world to live in peaceful coexistence” (p. 276).

Even though the educational institutions established by Tagore might have lost some of their sheen today, this timely collection of critical essays appropriately foregrounds why Tagore’s educational philosophy, promoting “instinctive and affective learning” (p. 4) and following the principles of “freedom, love for nature, search for global unity, and fostering of imagination and creativity” (p. 9) requires urgent re-evaluation in the twenty-first century, when humanity stands at a critical civilizational cross-roads. The volume, the first critical edition of a comprehensive study of Tagore’s educational ideas and experiments, should command significant attention from scholars and researchers interested in Tagorean scholarship, educational philosophies, pedagogical practices, literary and cultural studies, sociology and education, South Asian literature, and colonial and postcolonial studies.