

Rabindranath Tagore's Thoughts on Education and Development: An Analytical Discussion

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Abstract Rabindranath Tagore is one the leading poets and noted thinkers in the Indian sub-continent as well as in the world. His diversified views and thoughts on various human and social issues have almost brought a revolution and contributed a lot to the welfare of mankind. His thinking on education leading to all-out development of human beings is one such idea which has ample relevance, insight and prospect but which is yet to be implemented fully in our education system, especially in Bangladesh that has a great economic stride ahead. In this paper, we have tried to point out Tagore's thoughts on Education, how education leads to an integrated development of mankind and how they are still relevant and effective in our country's context, even more than seven decades after his death.

Keywords Education, Humane development, Economic development, Intellectual development, Poverty alleviation, Optimization of life and living

1. Introduction

Achieving Knowledge was the only motto of education in the past and theoretical knowledge of things was everything in pursuit of education. But nowadays that idea about education is worn-out. The objectives of education are multifarious today. Education at present is considered to be deeply related with development, especially with humanistic development. Since the second half of the twentieth century, the old concept of development has been transformed into humanistic development. Development is now termed in terms of global perspectives and sustainability. To ensure humanistic development there is no alternative to a timely and ideal education system. There are seven special fields with which education is considered to be directly associated in modern times, namely: 1) Education and Economic Growth, 2) Education and Productivity, 3) Education, Poverty and Balance of Income, 4) Education, Health and Demographic Change, 5) Education and Globalization, 6) Education and Women and 7) Education and Environment. Thus the concepts of education and development are now identical and inseparable from each other.

The first Nobel Laureate of the Indian Sub-continent poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was one of the most eminent thinkers who thought seriously about the relationship between education and development. In deed, he played a pioneering role in this respect. We become

astonished thinking that almost one hundred years ago, Rabindranath theorized education relating it to humanistic and wholesome development. He did not consider education only as a means of acquiring knowledge; rather he related education with social and economic aspects and as a tool of poverty alleviation. He actively considered health, rural development, empowerment of women, environment etc to be closely related to education. He passed away about 75 years ago, but still his thoughts on education are considered to be very much important and relevant. In fact, he was a versatile genius and event today all his works and ideas the Bengali people take great pride in. In spite of his chiefly being a romantic poet, he did not leave any sphere of human life untouched. He is also one of the humanitarian writers of world literature. Rabindranath is directly or indirectly with all-existence of the Bengali people and they can not do a single moment without his boon and remembrance in their everyday life. But it is very much unfortunate that we have been utterly failed to realize his ideas on education and to implement them in our academic procedures.

2. Methodology and Objective of the Paper

Documentary Method of research has been followed in preparing this article. But sometimes, analytical method has also been used while arranging and explaining data and information. Information have been collected as primary and secondary sources from various writings of Rabindranath, books, essays and discussions by others and writings related on education and development by the eminent thinkers of modern times.

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Here, in this paper, the term 'Development' is used to mean development of economy, health and environment, increase of productivity of labor force, poverty alleviation, reduction of illiteracy rate, empowerment of womenfolk and advancement in all determinants which are responsible for actualizing an optimum standard of life and living.

The sole objective of the article is to point out Rabindranath's revolutionary ideas about education and draw due attention of the people concerned, with a view to bringing a radical change in traditional thinking of education and age-old educational know-how in our country.

3. Education, Development and Rabindranath Tagore's Ideas about Education

For a long time, the idea of development lies in the concept of economic growth. Not only materialistic capital but also human capital is equally important for development and this idea is very recent (Alam and others, 2002). Nowadays development means human development to a great extent. In the past, development was considered in the context of economic growth only and this created limitations of various sorts. According to a report of Asian Development Bank, the lack of human development idea is the greatest weakness of existing development issues (ADB, 1991). Noted development policy-maker Tariq Banuri opines that atmospheric disaster is the greatest limitations of traditional development concept, (Banuri, 1987). Due to these limitations of development idea, modern development policy makers have come up with new explanations of development perceptions. They put emphasis on basic human needs and environment-friendly development along with economic growth and flourishing. Dofper considers it to be an overall change for the upliftment of human beings (Dofper, 1979). Capra, on the other hand, thinks that development means an integrated take-up. He considers development in respect of globalization and sustainability (Capra, 1996).

For the aforesaid limitations and new concepts about development, a group of western thinkers relate education deeply with it while considering development. In our country also, some researchers have given us new ideas. Showing the intimate relationship of education with development, researchers opine that, to ensure any economic growth, it requires more education and more training to keep the endeavor going on (Rahman and Kabir, 2002). These new explainers of development think that educational development should not be determined only by economic flourishing, rather it should be determined in respect of moral, human and skill-development factors (Rahman, 2001).

So, to make education humane, there is no alternative to an ideal and constructive education system. To turn human beings into human resources, education is a must and this education should be humanistic, too. This conception regarding education and development has come to be very popular nowadays. But strangely enough, Rabindranath expressed the same thoughts about education one hundred years ago. He considered education to be a human capital as it helps turn people into human resources.

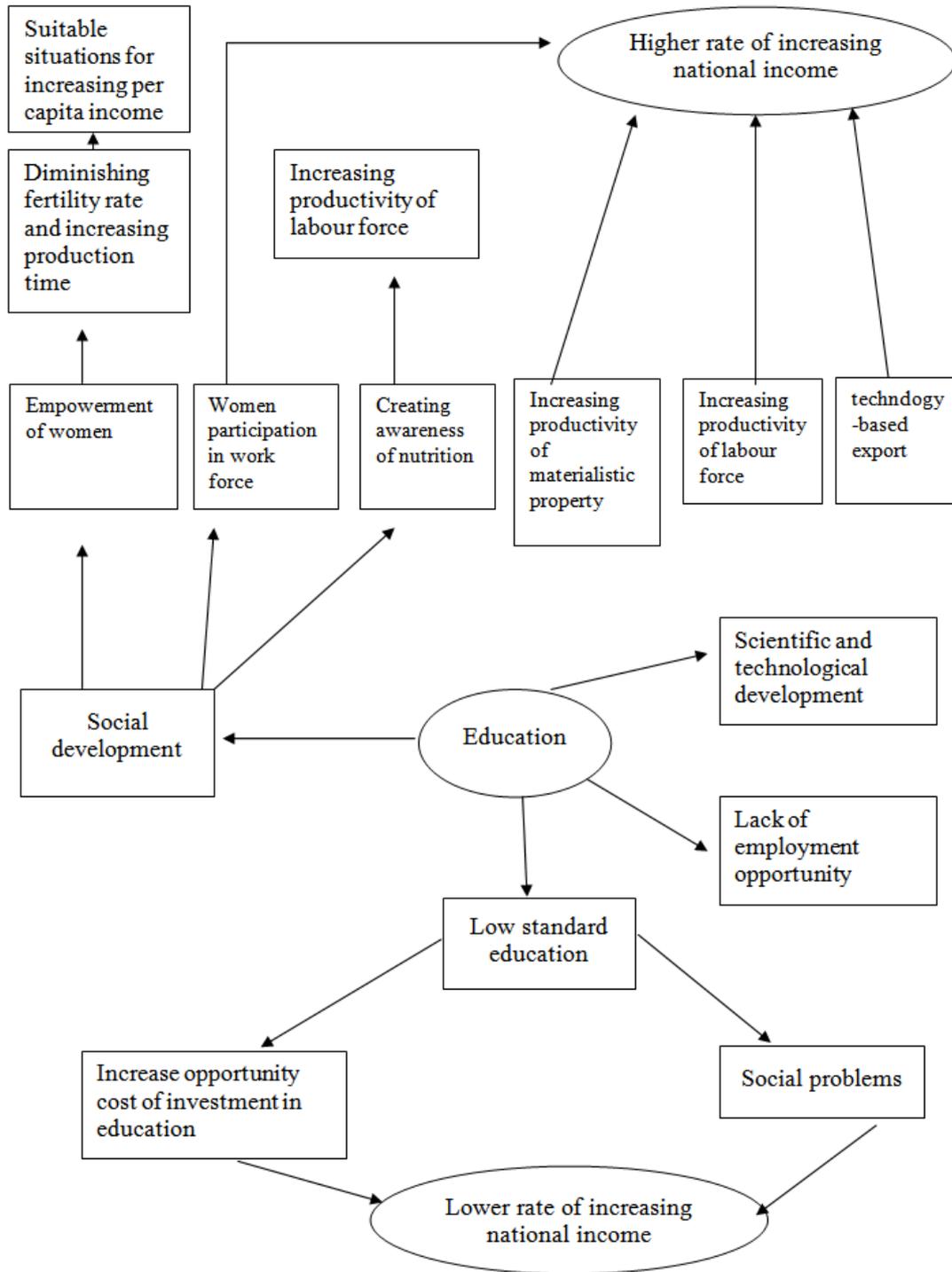
Today everybody admits that with utility-based and scientific education growth of national income, poverty alleviation and social development can be made easier and faster. But Rabindranath could recognize the fact many years ago. If education is not easy and lifelike, social development may be impossible, and this anxiety was expressed in various writings of Tagore. Modern social thinkers consider education and development to be two supplementary concepts. They observe that in modern growth theory the relationship between education and development is inseparable, positive and education plays a key role in technology and innovation. Hence, education and technology help alleviate poverty and enhance national income. (Rahman and Kabir, 2002)

Education can contribute to development in many ways. Experts have determined four main traits in this regard. These are (Rushidan, 2003):

- i) High productivity of labor,
- ii) More effective utilization of land and other materialistic wealth,
- iii) More export based on skill and technology, and
- iv) Socio-economic empowerment of women and creating awareness about nutrition.

Side by side with these traits, some more trends can be mentioned here. Development in agriculture, importance to the villages, development of health, spreading vocational knowledge, creating awareness of fertility, development of environment etc. have also become identical with education. Again, what is more worth mentioning here is human development. Rabindranath wanted to make a learner 'a real human being' through education and turn him/her into human resource. To turn a human being into human capital is the most remarkable trait of Rabindranath's philosophy of education. He accepted education as technology. Not in the context of Indian subcontinent only, this view of Rabindranath is equally important, innovative and inspiring in the context of the whole world also. How education can contribute to the growth of national income and overall development is shown in the following diagram (Rushidan, 2003):

Diagram showing relationship between Education and Development



The key-point underlying in the greater context of education and development is nothing but humanistic development. A critic says, through ensuring effective freedom of man, education plays a vital role in humanizing development (Rahman and Kabir, 2002). According to Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, education as a social force makes human participation in the development process easier. (Sen, 1999) Rabindranath expressed the view that

village-based mass education can play a great role in social and economic development and in minimizing mortality rate. This view of Rabindranath is echoed in the remarks of Amartya Sen Diminishing of mortality rate helps minimize birth rate which further strengthens the influence of fertility awareness, especially of the female education. (Sen, 1999).

Educationists and development planners think that in the third world countries village-based mass education can

positively turn general people into human resources. With the help of mass education the lower class people can attach themselves to the mainstream of development activities. A country having huge population can not be said a country of huge human resources; unless the people become conscious and skilled and engage themselves to the development thereof. People get knowledge about education and health through mass education. Education and health bring qualitative change in man and turn him into a useful manpower. For the overall development of a country, the importance of mass education, adult education and literacy beggar description, as they endow people with the following ideas and tendencies:

- a) Mass education inspires a man to reshape his life and creates eagerness for a change;
- b) Through mass education, a man goes for acquiring knowledge spontaneously.
- c) It creates thinking power in a man.
- d) It arouses the sense of rights and responsibilities in a man.
- e) Mass education makes a man skilful.
- f) It arouses awareness of society and sense of unity among people.
- g) It creates awareness of observing health-rules and understanding importance of family planning, and
- h) Mass education creates a longing in a man for the upliftment of life standard (Sheikh, 2003).

So, it seems obvious that mass education is a very important means of all-out development of a country. Here again, we notice with wonder that Rabindranath uttered these words and expressed the same opinion about mass education at least ten decades ago.

He realized that most of the people were deprived of the light of education and for this they did not have confidence in themselves. That's why, they were not willing to take part in development activities. So, he observed, education had to be spread among all the illiterate people.

To explain and determine the relationship and nature of education, the experts determine seven main fields (Rahman and Kabir, 2002), such as--

- a) Education and Economic Growth,
- b) Education and Productivity,
- c) Education, Poverty and Imbalance of Income,
- d) Education, Health and Demographical Change,
- e) Education and Globalization.
- f) Education and Women, and
- g) Education and Environment

a) Education and Economic Growth:

According to the development theorists, increase of investment in education plays a vital role in economic growth. They explain that increased investment in education creates much qualitative and skilled human capital which develops technology and which, by utilizing existing technologies and productivity contributes a great deal to the increasing of productivity. (Rahman and Kabir, 2002)

b) Education and Productivity:

Increasing of productivity is the main contribution of education. Education creates skills in workers, and as a result, productivity is increased. A skilled and educated worker can influence his co-workers indirectly and gear up their working capacity and ensure their quality service (Roy, 2003). If education can be related to productivity, we can have other advantages too. Firstly, the process of education can be run well. Secondly, it will help build up characters of the learners. Thirdly, socialization of the learners will take place. Fourthly, the society will be benefited. Some of the ways of relating education with productivity are: i) Giving importance on scientific and technical education; ii) Increasing opportunities for vocational training; (iii) Taking steps for vocational education at the secondary level and iv) Creating opportunities for scientific and technological research (Grossman, 1980).

c) Education, Poverty and Imbalance of Income:

Education contributes a lot to poverty alleviation and helps remove imbalance of income. Spread of education among the poor class people can play an important role in freeing them from the curse of poverty. When literacy rate increases, inequality of resource resource distribution diminishes. Education further makes the poor workers aware of their rights and they understand whether they are exploited or not by others.

d) Education, Health and Demographic Change:

Education makes men aware of their basic rights. It changes man's attitude towards life and world. Chance of education increases the standard and quality of life and living. For instance, the man who has received health education, must be aware of his own health and it will have positive impact on his family and on his neighbours. Thus a healthy man can reduce social expenditure in health sector and with the saved money he can contribute to the economic development of the society. In this way, he can indirectly play a role in development activities. Again, an educated couple can reduce birth rate and contribute to population control .Couple with few children get much time for productive works and their health remains sound. Thus, education plays an important role in preserving health and controlling population in a society. That's why; Grossman opines that much investment in education can produce a positive impact on health and population control. (ADB, 1991)

e) Education and Globalization:

Today is the age of globalization. To survive in the keenly competitive world market, there is no alternative to education. The country whose economy has highly qualified, skilled and flexible labor-force, can easily keep pace with the changing challenges of globalization (Rahman and Kabir, 2002). Education and information is directly related. If information is not available, an individual can not be exalted, nor can a society. To build up globally acceptable and world

class manpower, countries are now giving topmost importance on education. According to the experts, the countries which invest much in education and technology, can take much advantages of knowledge-based global economy and globalization, and thus can make their economy stronger and more sustainable (Rahman and Kabir, 2002).

F) Education and Women:

Women constitute about half of a population in a country. So, social development is never possible without the development of women themselves. This is why, development experts have put special emphasis on female education. To ensure the participation of women in national development and to remove the socio-economic discrimination, female education is a must. In fact, womenfolk are a very prospective source of human capital (Rahman and Kabir, 2002). Outcomes of investment in female education in the developing countries are much higher than that of male education, says a report of ADB (ADB, 1991). When literacy rate of adult women increases, it can accelerate productivity, upgrade social status of women and lower gender discrimination. Education ensures women empowerment and helps women stand on their own feet. Then they recognize the world with a new meaning and view it with their own eyes, not with their counterparts'. Education opens up a new vista of self-realization and self-reliance before them.

g) Education and Environment:

With the exploration of science and technology, multifarious problems have also emerged side by side with rapid advancement in various spheres of human life. Disaster in environment is a serious issue people are now concerned with. It poses a major threat to the economic growth of all the countries of the world. For this, conscious people have raised the demand that development must be environment-friendly and sustainable. Keeping the next generation in mind, development must be eco-friendly and longer lasting. Education on environment can play a positive role in this respect (Rahman and Kabir, 2002).

In all issues of education stated above, Rabindranath's thoughts and attitudes are expressed some way or other. His philosophy of education has been deeply influenced by the way he thought about life and the norms he had firm belief in. In respect of philosophical thought, he was an idealist and for his deep intimacy with nature, he was a naturalist also. Again, in terms of performance, he is also called a pragmatist. All these traits contribute much in the formation of Rabindranath's philosophy of education. That is why, we notice his frequent emphasis on the relationship between men and nature, upholding Bengali culture, introducing scientific and humanistic education, creating self-dependence, empowering women, all-out flourishing of young learners etc. He thought that if we can integrate all these aspects with education, our education system will be a fruitful one and it will bring greater welfare to the people.

Hence, he relates education with nature and environment; so that human souls can be elevated with the serenity, quietness and vastness thereof.

4. Human Capital and Education

Education is the greatest means of creating human capital. Famous religions leader Vivekanando wanted such a religion which can actually make a man a real man. He desired for such an education system which is constructive in all respects (Vivekanando, 1996). Actually an active, healthy and educated population is the best weapon for the development of a nation. According to Adam Smith, 'The wealth of a nation is its people. And the purpose of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative life (Sheikh, 2003)'. The process of development can be geared up only through education. According to the World Bank, development of human resources is a part of overall development of human beings through which the possibility of employment for the whole population gets increased and through which social discrimination can be removed (Plato, 1963). People would be educated and thus be human resources and create endless chance of living a healthy and productive life. Education would alleviate poverty, create awareness of health and sanitation enlighten and broaden human minds and thus ensure a meaningful life.

5. How Education and Development Interrelated: The Philosophers' Views

Educationists and development theorists have unanimously admitted that education and development is indispensably related with each other. From the ancient times, similarities in thinking among the philosophers and educationists have been found regarding education and development. Plato believed that education is essential for social development. In Plato's words, education is indispensable for the economic health of a good society." (Richardo and Mathus, 1957) He recommended for a definite allocation in education from the total wealth of a country. The eminent economist Adam Smith considered education to be a capital of development. While speaking about the relationship between education and development, Malthus and Ricardo Observe, lack of education makes men poor and poverty makes men unhappy (Sheikh, 2003). Marshall considers human beings to be the best capital in the field of development. So, if the human beings can be made educated, social development will certainly get accelerated.

Through education people achieve ability to participate in development activities and this helps diminish poverty. Alleviation of individual poverty plays a role in national development. Literate people and educated workforce play an important role in social, economic, statistical, political and cultural fields. (Karim, 2005)

The views of Rabindranath Tagore, we find, are identical in to to with the views and comments stated above.

6. Conclusions

So, it is observed that Rabindranath's philosophy of education, his views about its nature and objectives are very much revolutionary and realistic in the sense of humanistic point of view. It has an ample relevance even today in the field of education reformation, especially in the countries which are not so improved in education and Bangladesh is one of them. Many world famous thinkers, educationists and economists have done almost nothing but echoed the views and observations of Rabindranath Tagore. As a matter of fact, in the age when Rabindranath was born, none could express such an integrated, scientific and foresighted view about education. But it is very deplorable that we have not yet been able to exploit and utilize Rabindranath wholly in our education. For some unknown reasons, Rabindranath has remained ever neglected in the reformation of our education system, though from time to time various plans, idealisms and commissions have been formed in the name of innovation or reformation of education. The Bengali people find enforcement, entertainment, motivation and inspiration and spiritual spirit everyday from the songs, poems, novels and his innumerable other literary works, but unfortunately his educational idealism has not been implemented in our education system in the fullest sense of the term. That's why, the population of the country is still termed as a liability and there is acute wastage of human resources, since tremendous prospects of our working people have been kept unused and unutilized. In this context, it is high time we gave topmost importance on Rabindranath's ideas about education and implemented them in our education to make it a modern and beneficial one, for this is the thinking exclusively related with individual, social, national and international welfare and upliftment. To make our people educated in the truest sense of the term, our government, policy-makers, educationists, progressive personalities of the society and all other people related to education should come forward to reshape our education system for the greater welfare and development of the country in the light of Rabindranath's educational thoughts and ideas and evaluate them from a realistic, integrated and productive point of view. If this can be made possible, our nation will get rid of the curse of illiteracy and poverty and she will start marching forward hand in hand with the developed countries of the world.

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