Education as Empowerment

*Twins in Search of an Alternative Education**

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Abstract

Of the multi-faceted activities of Rabindranath Tagore, education had been the corner-stone. He was not only a visionary and philosopher of education, he was at the same time an ardent activist for the cause of education. He stands unique also as a writer on education which extends from creative to critical constructive writings on the subject. On the other hand, he even sacrificed personal family property to give his ideas a tangible form.Tagore's first effort in setting up a family school started at Sialadh in 1898. In the same year, in keeping with the stipulation of the Trust Deed willed by his father Devendranath Tagore. Tagore's nephew Balendranath started a Brahmacharyasrama in Santiniketan. It was a very short-lived enterprise. In 1901, Tagore moved to Santiniketan and revived the school which passing through a process of reforms was made into an eastern university, Visva-Bharati, in 1921. In 1924, he added a new school, Siksha-Satra for the depraved section at Sriniketan, among the cluster of faculties. Tagore was constantly engaged in experimenting and improving the pedagogic quality and system practised in his institution. His other worry was to collect adequate finance to sustain it. Many fellow travellers throughout the world came forward to help him in different ways. It was truly an essay negotiating with western modernism on the one hand, and colonial education system, on the other. For Tagore, education did not consist in achievements alone. His ideal was to help create a complete man by making open choices and opportunities before the students and thereby letting them develop their latent talents. Generation of Atmasakti or self-reliance for him was not conditioned by anti-colonial excitement, it was the result of all out self-disciplining in life.Through Visva-Bharati Tagore was also trying to negotiate the East-West relations seen from the vantage of the East. That too was aimed at a reconciliation of the best features of the two cultures. In the process Tagore had also been trying to create alternative spaces for cultures of creativity – the ultimate ideal of education for Tagore. The second half of the paper deals with the theme of empowerment as approached by two great minds of our times – Tagore and Gandhi. Their approach routes may be apparently different, they might also have differences in opinions and positions, yet the innermost truth they had been seeking in their educational enterprises underlines the amity of visions.

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Education as Empowerment : Twins in Search of an Alternative Education

We all know, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was essentially a poet. We usually think, poets are driven more by emotion rather than by reason and consequently are weak in essaying discourses. Tagore was an exception on all counts to this common belief. His writings on education: its pedagogic philosophy and applied apparatus in particular have been providing food for thought no less for the present day education scientists. For example, no poet of Tagore's eminence from Aeschylus to Eliot has ever cared to compile primers for the tiny taught – and that too in three languages, namely, Bengali, English and Sanskrit as Tagore did. It proves beyond doubt his anxieties and concerns for the cause of education. It may seem ironic that the fled-school student had set up a school itself that organically grew into an international university. Yet it also explains the compulsions he realised for changing – or at least make an effort to do so – the then prevalent colonial education system in our country.

The long line of illustrious thinkers on education that includes Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, Grundtvig and Dewey in the West and Vidyasagar in his own country tried in their own inimitable ways to modify the system, but none like Tagore's endeavoured to question the basic premises that lie at the back of the system itself. He wrote number of articles on education almost spanning his whole creative life besides publishing several books, addresses, monographs, pamphlets and very many letters containing gems of thoughts on the subject. Even he ventured to write a scathing sarcastic story on the theme of tyranny of forced education, a classic of its kind, "The Parrot's Tale". And above all, by the time he barely crossed two scores of his life, he was busy setting up a residential school at then a remote suburb away from Calcutta. For the sake of nurturing a faith, he spared not selling his wife's ornaments and attending to all sorts of teething problems of the new found institution.

The Poet's father, Devendranath Tagore stipulated in the Trust Deed of the Santiniketan *Asrama* to set up a school on the traditional lines of *Gurukul Parampara*. Accordingly, Balendranath, Tagore's nephew, brought into existence the *Brahmachary Asrama*, the precursor of *Patha-Bhavana*, the school modelled after the *Tapovana* style of education of ancient India. After a brief life, it was reborn as it were in 1901 under Tagore's supervision. The revival of the ideals of the Brahminic past was soon to be found too restrictive for his own ideas. The rechristened *Brahma Vidyalaya* also could not satisfy him until he arrived at a non-connotative name, that is, the Santiniketan School. In between, the primary and the secondary sections were also called the *Purva-Vibhaga* and the *Uttara-Vibhaga*s respectively. When other *Bhavana*s came up within the fold of Vishva-Bharati (1921), it was given a faculty status and was renamed as *Patha-Bhavana.* Vishva-Bharati which Tagore himself dubbed as an 'Eastern University', chose '*Yatra Visvam*

Bhavatyeka Nidam' ('Where the world meets in one nest') as the institution's motto. Twenty-three years' experience in school education made him realised the urgent need for pragmatic education and its dissemination among the rural masses and led Tagore once again to venture in establishing a new school, with a new vision altogether, one for the destitute and the weaker sections of the society, *Siksha-Satra* in 1924.

Tagore's initiation in educational institution building had begun in 1898 at Sialdah. It was not indeed a school in the formal sense but a coaching home organised for the tuition of his son and a few more from among the poor subjects' children of the estate. The mission continued till his death. In spite of some common and constant features running through the phases, the venue shifted along with the group of teachers to Santiniketan in 1901. Though there had been no temporal discontinuity, a close observer may not fail to notice the inherent changes it had passed through under the leadership of Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya to Manoranjan Bandyopadhyaya, down to Ramananda Chattopadhyaya. The name of the school also changed from *Brahmacary asrama* or *Brahmavidyalaya* to *Purva-Vibhaga* and *Uttara-Vibhaga* and thereto *Patha-Bhavana*, suggesting significant shifts in ideology as well : the quasi-religious overtones being removed gradually.

Tagore was simultaneously praised and derided for the absence of a well-defined structural system in his institution. It was in fact a cantilever pattern of education comprising the School i.e., the *Sisu-Vibhaga* and the then *Vidya-Bhavana* or the Research Division. Now, if we recollect the very lay out of the school compound during Tagore's lifetime, we would find the research library located at the very centre with two sprawling playgrounds adjacent to it. Classes were held all around in the open air. The seats of teachers were fixed and students were given five minutes time to move from one class to another, thus having an opportunity to break the monotony of continuous classes as well as to refresh their spirit. The idea was that the little boys would observe the senior scholars spending the whole day at the library, which will be an implicit instance to emulate for them. Nor would the scholars feel distracted by the fun and frolics of the boys; their juvenile enthusiasm would help them relate their study to life and reality – an existing reality Tagore would never lose sight of, particularly in the rural Bengal suburb. He knew full well the uneven standard of the students. As a possible remedy he improvised a system of mobility among them depending on their merit in a given subject. One who was advanced than the rest was allowed to attend the higher class; another who was just the reverse was asked to take lessons in the lower class and make up the deficiency. Apart from the regular curricular study, it was obligatory for every student to take lessons in fine arts – be that music or painting or craft. The range of options in elective subjects had no compart-mentalisation: arts and science subjects could be opted for simultaneously. It was designed to bring out the latent potentiality of a student as also to let him find for himself the area of his interest. It resulted not only in a reduction in

number of total drop-outs on the one hand, on the other it also served as a process of talent search. The most important feature, however, was his decision to do away with the practice of examinations that bred according to him an undesirable tension arising out of a break neck competition.

The basic philosophy underlying the removal of exams was to create a space for the students which would be free from torture of a suffocating process of accumulation and reproduction. Study for the students, he thought, must be as much an enjoyment as the games are for them. As and when they would learn how to derive pleasure from studies or practices of any other arts up to their taste, their learning would turn creative. For Tagore, creativity did not mean earning an authority in any field of expression. It was essentially an awakening of the mind – an awakening not merely of the hunger for knowledge, but of an awareness of belonging to a social setting – micro and macro at the same time. Even in a text like *Santiniketan*, which many educated readers think to be a compilation of religious sermons, we come across an article entitled *Jagaran* (Awakening). This awareness of mind can neither be attained nor created by gathering or disseminating information. It can grow only through human contacts. The realisation of the ideal of education rests on this spirit of togetherness, another recurrent theme in the cosmology of Tagorean thought.

If we analyse the motivations that may have driven an artist in life to become an activist in education, we shall find that something more profound than mere philanthropy, a vision or a philosophy must have been working deep in him. That the classes were – or even are still – held at these schools in the open air in a mango orchard or a Bakula grove in the natural ambience are, but their external features though learning in the nearest proximity of Nature must have had something far more deeply interfused in such a notion which may seem anachronistic to many today. That it is not so, may be exemplified if we try to re-live the ideas and ideals of its founder closely.

In his celebrated essay *A Poet's School*, Tagore tells us : "The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence." The pronouncement needs elaboration. 'Information' is most certainly a part of education. But it remains to be collected rather than to be created. Collection is not a faculty of the mind or intellection; it is a matter of habit, of cramming, of collation, of putting things together. The so-called good students excel in the exams because they have a knack for gathering information and of course displaying it coherently. This tendency leads to showmanship and competitiveness. And competitiveness when turns out to be intense and aggressive, takes recourse to make everything subservient to itself, ceasing it's bond with all extant living organisms around oneself. The fundamental object of education then, according to Tagore, would be to substitute competition by collaboration between Man and Man, Man and Nature, between Man and every other object, animate or inanimate. This generates Love which lies at the root of all

creativity. Education for Tagore hones this culture of creativity.

Such realisation often tends to be abstract. Tagore would also have run the risk of being too elusive and non-ethereal had he not tried to translate his ideas in concrete terms and to give these a form and shape through the discipline and process of practical training. He was explicit in incorporating these aims and objects while formulating the Memorandum for Vishva-Bharati:

To study the Mind of Man in its realisation of different aspects of truth from diverse points of view. 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. To seek to realise in common fellowship of study the meeting of the East and the West, and thus ultimately to strengthen the fundamental conditions of world peace.

The idea and institution of Vishva-Bharati, what Tagore considered the greatest achievement of his life, was virtually a culmination of that ideal imprinted on his mind at an early age. He obtained a first-hand experience of western culture since the late 70s of the 19th century and studied the western society not as an outsider tourist would do, but as an insider to whom both the naïveté and the complexities, merits and demerits of it were far more exposed. He was certainly averse to the modish modernism of western poetry of the early 20th century, but the quintessence of modernity never disenchanted him. And for Tagore modernity did not consist in the deployment of a mere device or style, a technology of language and form, on the contrary it guaranteed a freedom of choice in determining one's course of action or shaping a view of life. Political freedom was not unimportant to him, but freedom of mind was of much greater import. Assertion of one's individual identity was a matter of value for him, but of greater consequence was how that individuality was to be related to the society at large. The most seminal premise of this idea was contained in his concept of *Atmasakti* formulated as early as 1901. I consider this concept as the driving force of all that Tagore did in his efforts to translate such ideas into practice.

The other point that deserves to be remembered is that, it will be nothing short of foolishness on our part to believe that Tagore's thoughts were like a monolith ever since he engaged himself in the process of opinion formation. Quite late in life – in a different context though – he frankly admitted, 'I have changed my opinion; I have been changing them constantly.' This, I don't think had been a Voltairesque ploy for Tagore to find an excuse to escape. In fact, in him was a restless mind that yearned for ceaseless move towards perfection. He never took his views as impeccable, nor did he think himself free from errors or even misjudgments. And that is why he kept on correcting, honing and developing them again and again. I would even venture to say that the ideal too was not immutable for him; an effort to reformulate them from time to time had caused many misgivings among his associates, yet he never gave up. His entire life is an explicit example of such protean changes on both the planes.

Tagore's experiments in education may perhaps be best analysed in respect

of his other constructive and creative activities – not counting the literary for the time being – namely in experiments with rural reconstruction, creating environmental awareness or innovative festivities – some apparently diverse and disjointed projects – projects, of course, not in the management sense of the term – under the megalith of education. And all these were experimented in the hothouses of Santiniketan and Sriniketan. Tagore's search for alternative models of cultures of creativity obviously began with his literary and musical compositions. To begin with, it was primarily a matter of establishing one's distinctive features of identity clearly distinguishable from his predecessors and contemporaries. Gradually, it turned out to be his sole self: spontaneous and uncontrived.

The idea of institution-building was but an extension of the same urge. The urge, again, was compounded by the necessities arising out of the compulsions of the colonial situation. Tagore's early association with the Congress ended rather prematurely with the exposure to the Moderate and the Extremist divisions within the party. Curzon's partition of Bengal got him intensely involved in the anti-partition movement only to be disillusioned by the militancy of bomb, burning and boycott in the aftermath. These also made him feel the exigency with greater gravity to build up an alternative model of education distinct from that of the colonisers almost as a means to qualify to stand in equal terms with them. Of course Tagore had started his Santiniketan experiment before all these events, but I believe, the impact of these experiences completely changed his approach to education. The gradual shift from a mode of education modelled after the Upanishadic Brahmoism to a secular, self-reliant and at the same time artistic and comprehensive education was conditioned simultaneously by the forces of this nation-wide crisis and his very personal shattering experiences of a series of bereavements that stood him as a solitary man left to justify his ways and means only to himself.

For Tagore, the ostensible alternative to the western education was not to jump for indigenous education as a matter of reaction. He was certainly not a nationalist of that breed. All he wanted was to pay back the masters in their own coins. But he would hasten to insist that it must reach the masses and find the roots in our own soil. In 'Saphalatar Sadupay' [*Atmasakti*; *Bangadarsan*, Caitra 1311BS (March-April 1905)] his call was simple though covered with a somewhat sentimental metaphor:

Hopeless laments won't do. We shall have to strive for what we ourselves can do. ... Necessity impels us to take upon ourselves the responsibilities of our education. I know well that it will not be a stone replica of the huge Oxbridge model to be enshrined in our educational establishments; their infrastructure will be befitting that of the poor. ... But the living Goddess Sarasvati seated on the hundred-petal lotus of our reverence would dispense like a Mother the nectar to the children unlike the wealth-proud merchant-wife giving away alms to the beggars from the high balcony.

It would inevitably be an alternative education for the poor yet without any trace of poverty in thought. Such

alternative education would obviously desist from creating a class of subalterns in the colonisers' employment hierarchy, but would do all it could to generate an ambience of righteousness which would ensure the structuring of a civil society and that again as an alternative to the nation/state build up after the western pattern and superimposed on us.

Tagore was not satisfied with creating alternative spaces theoretically, he immediately wanted to have these implemented in practice. It was out of this anxiety that Tagore after running the school at Santiniketan for more than two decades decided to set up another school at Sriniketan at a distance of only three kilometers. Could the distance be the only reason for such a move? Perhaps not. He knew from experience that the middle or upper middle class boarder students of Santiniketan almost refused to mix up with the day scholars from Sriniketan, Surul and the adjoining villages. This was symptomatic of temperamental differences between the city and the village, affluence and poverty. Tagore wanted his second school to cater to the needs of the surrounding villages. They were trained in vocational arts: from carpentry to weaving, husbandry to harvesting. The community now comprised of students drawn virtually from the same class – both economically and socially. They were asked to extend camp services to the villages on school holidays, instruct the villagers in the rudiments of health and hygiene and the like. The Sriniketan experiment so impressed even the senior members of the community that Tagore introduced without late an adult education programme where the school students served as prime reciters or *Sardar Paduyas*. The success was greeted with the enthusiasm of the rural people. It also helped them initially to earn a few rupees during the harvesting and later on by selling their artifacts at the *Silpa Mela* also introduced by Tagore and exclusively organised by the Sriniketan students. It developed an organisational skill among them as well. Sriniketan realised what Tagore envisaged as complete education. But the apathy of the Vishva-Bharati authorities relegated the set up to the second fiddle soon after Tagore's death.

A cry has been raised in our country: We shall have nothing to do with Western Science – it is Satanic. This we, of Sriniketan, must refuse to say. Because its power is killing us, we shall not say that we prefer powerlessness. We must know that power in order to combat power, power is needed; without destruction cannot be staved off, but will come all the faster. Truth kills us only when we refuse to accept it.

Tagore might not have accepted the superficialities of modernity, but would have never denied the truth of modernity.

As late in his life as in 1925, Tagore was almost obsessed with the idea of Mass Education. Men and women of the country who were depraved of basic education in their childhood either for economic reasons or for belonging to remote areas were planned to be brought under an education scheme under the aegis of the New Education Fellowship. As early as in 1917, Tagore contemplated of bringing out a series of books on basic areas of knowledge with a target readership of non-Matriculates of those

days. The idea of educational extension programme also inspired him to set up the *Lokasiksha Samsad* which was designed to expand the network of literacy and basic education in the country. The *Samsad* in this way simultaneously became a council for adult education, mass education as well as distance education through correspondence. In order to make the project complete in all respects, he also initiated a series of books called *Lokasiksha Granthamala* and contributed the first book on physical sciences to it. The basic intention of the scheme was to reach out to would be students in their own home environment rather than forcing them to reach the school. Introduction of exam and study centres throughout the country was also one of the innovative aspects of the system conducted by Vishva-Bharati.

For Tagore, education was most certainly a means of empowerment and yet much more. His vision of a complete man was not a philosophical idea. For him, completeness consists in one's readiness to face any situation with equal poise and weather it. The modern man in the western sense might have some faculties more developed than the others, thus causing an imbalance that could seriously upset him and his actions. Modernity is circumscribed in terms of temporal frames. Tagore's alternatives are not chained in time and space. In spite of a more logically plausible formulation of a principle of education conducive to the growth of a mind that would make a man complete, many of Tagore's experiments have failed – or better be said, we have made him fail – the full potentials of his ideas still remain to be fully explored.

Tagore, like his other illustrious fellow traveler Gandhi, may have failed apparently – or better to say, as we have spared no pains to make them fail – the potentials of their experiments are still not exhausted. The unfinished results are no testimony to the fallibility of their visions.

II

Both are called *Asrama*s. As originally conceived, one was planned to be a meeting place of religious believers of different orders, the other to be a centre of social service among the untouchables living around the place. Today they represent the rudiments of basic education as envisioned by two almost contemporary personalities living in the same country. In one, the library holds the centre stage, in the other, it is the prayer square. The playground is laid out adjacent to the library in one, in the other it is beyond the cluster of huts composing the establishment. Apparently both look like traditional *Ashrama*s, but certainly are not rehashes of the heritage *Vidyapeeth*s. Both the institutions include a combination of the *Kala-Bhavana* and the *Sangit-Bhavana*. I am talking about Tagore's Santiniketan and Gandhi's Sevagram.

Tagore's Santiniketan school was started in 1901, Gandhi's Sevagram in 1937. But their preparations started earlier– Tagore's at Sialdah and Gandhi's in South Africa. It must be accepted without much hair-splitting that the two savants' primary reputation did not rest on their philosophies of education, nor did they ever strive for formulating a

regular philosophy either. It grew from their hands on enterprises in devising a workable model for them. Yet, if both the poet and the activist shared one common anxiety, it was most certainly for education. Living as they did in a colonial situation, the alterity of their ideologies are often attributed to their anti-colonialist, hence anti-British, attitude. It is commonly believed that these tenets are etched out to experiment on possible alternatives to the model provided by western education system. I believe, both were in search of a new dispensation in education – not buckled by the state aid, neither western in toto, nor oriental in and out. It aimed at a happy and simultaneously judicious combination of the two. The most interesting points, however, were the proportion between the western and oriental elements in their thoughts and actions on the one hand and the third factor of their original contribution on the other. But such bare simplifications blur the complexities as well as the originality of their positions.

Let us accept at the outset that both Tagore and Gandhi were exposed to the best possible western education available at their times. Because of his family background, Tagore perhaps had a deeper involvement with the heritage of our culture than Gandhi's. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the fact that Gandhi perhaps had a greater understanding of the ground realities prevailing in the country at that point of time. No poet of Tagore's eminence from Aeschylus to Eliot ever cared to compile primers for the tiny taughts – and that too in three languages, namely, Bengali, English and Sanskrit; Tagore did. No activist of Gandhi's standing from Plato to Russell would ever care to set up basic primary schools as Gandhi did. The school system in the scheme of both the thinkers, again, was erected on a theistic foundation. Both had in their own individualistic ways drawn up schemes for extension of its field of operation among the rural and down-trodden people as well.

Education – the highest and the noblest form of it – did not consist in the scale of preferences of Tagore and Gandhi in acquisition of information alone; according to them, it would succeed only if it could make our life harmonies with all possible situations of life, with multiform of meaningful living. Most certainly would they admit information as an essential part of education, but would hasten to add that it is more a faculty of collection rather than of creation. Any act of gathering – be that material or abstract – does not enrich the power of the mind, it is more a matter of habit. It brings about a proclivity towards competitiveness, putting up a resistance, as it were, against the fundamental object of education, that is, cooperation between man and man, man and nature, between man and every other phenomenal object, animate or inanimate. Such a realisation often tends to be abstract and elusive. Almost parallel, they had involved the students in what we call today social welfare schemes. The concept of *Palli Punargathana* or Rural Reconstruction in Tagore and *Gramodyoga* in Gandhi were based by and large on similar social values. But the volunteer corps or *Vrati Balaka*s in the former system were also required to document the basic statistics on the living conditions of the people in

the adjoining villages they covered. Tagore and Gandhi did not stop short at theoretical formulations; they did their best in translating their ideas into practice – refining their positions time and again, but never completely drifting away from the quintessence of their respective visions of ideal education.

Knowledge, says the proverb, is power. Education – a Tagore or a Gandhi would argue – does of course ultimately lead to knowledge and hence to power. But the attainment of the ultimate is not obtainable for all. There are at least three stages to reach this state: *Patha* (Learning), *Siksha* (Education) and finally *Vidya* (Knowledge). *Bodhi* (Wisdom) or *Jnana* (Enlightenment) is beyond yet dependent on these previous stages. Tagore and Gandhi would rather think of empowerment through education in two different ways. For Tagore, true empowerment lies in the awakening of the self, aware enough to decide for oneself the oughts of life: the duty, the desirability and the good. We shall have to accept that Tagore does not seem to be concerned with the basic problems of opportunity to education. A confirmed pragmatist as he was, for Gandhi creating a truly congenial ambience of and an open avenue to education was the foremost of the problems to negotiate with.

Historical evidences force us to admit that Tagore's and Gandhi's intended students come from two different cultural and economic strata altogether. This also partly explains the debate between them regarding the need and justification for introducing possibilities to earn during the students' years of learning. Gandhi's *Nai Taalim* created a space for earning by simple investment of one's labour and thus decide for one's possible future means of livelihood. He knew full well that academic merit could not be expected among the majority of the students. As a result of his experiences at Santiniketan, Tagore also perhaps realised the necessity of imparting honest labour but not linked with direct personal earning. Interestingly enough, *Seva* or cashless service to the less fortunate people around occupies perhaps more an important place in Tagore's second school, *Siksha Satra* at Sriniketan than in his first, *Patha-Bhavana* at Santiniketan, and in Gandhi's second school at Sevagram than in his first at Sabarmati.

Tagore and Gandhi believed in disciplining the mind. But the concept of discipline had different connotations for them. In Tagore's *Patha-Bhavana* and *Siksha Satra* and Gandhi's Sabarmati and Sevagram, the entire responsibility of self-governance was delegated to the students. They were to devise means to deal with any situation that would come their way – be that misbehaviour of a fellow student or the maintenance of health and hygiene in the *Asrama* and its vicinity. Teachers were around watching the team work, but would hardly interfere ever. Yet, if asked to underline the difference between Tagore's and Gandhi's conditions of nursing the budding minds of the students, I would dare say, it was the emphasis on the values of Beauty and Duty, respectively, in their order of priorities. I would never say so in absolute terms but relatively. In other words, aesthetics and ethics divided their domains. But are the two really so

opposed to each other? Ethics when properly practiced in life develops on aesthetics of its own, similarly as aesthetics when freed from individualistic confines, produces almost an ethical value. When Tagore wanted to have his students trained in such a way that one could appreciate the play of colours and notes of music and distinguish between one medium scale and another, the aesthetics of appreciation would structure an autonomous hierarchy of its preferences and values which, in turn, would be no less ethical. Gandhi would advise his disciples to turn their back to every evil of life, to abstain from saying, seeing or hearing anything ill. If honestly pursued, it would produce equilibrium of aesthetic enjoyment of comparable distributions of emotions. Gandhi, on the other hand, would endeavour to elevate human beings from their baser instincts. Tagore, on the other hand, was firm in his belief that the number of the good always exceeds that of the bad. These not only indicate differences in their visions of life, but also reflect their very own individual personality types that complement one another mutually and vindicate two processes of edification of the mind.

Empowerment, according to Tagore and Gandhi, then would follow two different tracks: one through humane and aesthetic empathy and the other through economic and moral rearmament. For Tagore, the end of education consists of a wholesome blossoming of the faculties of the mind and the body through learning, work and service, in obtaining what he terms as *Atmasakti*, in achieving 'a rhythm of life'. It is evident that such an optimum student will participate in the greater arena of social life, both as a role model as well as through one's services to the cause of the society. In other words, Tagore emphasises on the inner or the mental empowerment of the student. Not that in Gandhi's scheme of things the mental aspects are relegated, but for him the social responsibility of the student, one's readiness to sacrifice self-interest for the sake of it along with the achieving economic self-sustenance perhaps are of greater consequence.

Students' activities in their schools included indeterminable creative energy, quantifiable productive pursuits as well as social service and self-governance programmes. Learning and work, they would argue, must go hand in hand and necessarily be related to the prevailing social system. It is often glibly remarked about Tagore that a poet as he had been, he lacked pragmatic attitude to various systems of life, education in particular. In repudiation of such a position, I take the liberty to quote a letter of Tagore written to his friend C.F. Andrews from Agra as early as 05 December 1914:

I was surprised to read in the Modern Review that our Bolpur boys are going without their sugar and ghee in order to open a relief fund. Do you think this is right? In the first place, it is an imitation of your English school-boys and not their original idea. In the second place, so long as the boys live in our institution they are not free to give up any portion of their diet which is absolutely necessary for their health. For any English boy, who takes meat and an amount of fat with it, giving up sugar is not injurious. But for our boys in Santiniketan, who can get milk only in small quantities, and whose vegetable

meals contain very little fat ingredients, it is mischievous.

Our boys have no right to choose this form of sacrifice – just as they are not free to give up buying books for their studies. The best form of sacrifice for them would be to do some hard work in order to earn money; let them take up menial work in our school – wash dishes, draw water, dig wells, fill up the tank which is a menace to their health, to the building work. This would be good in both ways. What is more, it would be a real test of their sincerity. Let the boys think out for themselves what particular works they are willing to take up without trying to imitate others.

A number points ensue from the observation: (1) any sort of imitation is to be discarded; (2) sacrifice is good but not at the cost of health; (3) to serve, earn and sacrifice the earning for a greater cause; and (4) let the students devise their own original modes of social service.

Gandhi, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with the *Buniyadi* that is primary and secondary school education, collegiate or higher education does not come within his immediate purview. His basic inclination is most certainly directed towards vocational education that begins with the *Takli* and leads upto the gospel of the *Charkha*. Obviously, the community of students, Gandhi had in mind, turned up from a section economically weaker than the one Tagore was to deal with in his school. The former idea of *Svaavalamban* (Self-reliance) was basically a means to meet the expenses of education of oneself, at the same time he did not consider imparting a kind of training in doing one's own work as much as of nurturing the softer sentiments through music lessons in any way an inferior assignment.

Main is baat ke liye bahut hi utsuk hoon ki dastkari ke jariye vidyaarthi jo kuch paidaa kare, uski kimat se sikshaa ka kharch nikal aaye, kyonki mujhe yakin hai ki des ke kadoron bacchon ko taalim dene ke liye sivaa iske dusraa koi raasta nahin hai। ... Aap log yah bhi samajh lijiye ki prathmik sikshaa ki is yojanaa me saphaai, aarogya aur aahaarsastra ke prarambhik siddhaanton ka samaaves bhi ho jaata hai। Isme bacchon ki vah sikshaa bhi saamil samjhiye, jise ve apnaa kaam khud karnaa sikhenge aur ghar par apne maan-baap ke kaam me bhi madad pahunchaayenge। Main chahungaa ki unke liye sangit ke saath lazimi taur par aisi kavaayad aur kasrat bagairaa ka intzaam ho jaaye, isse unki tandurusti sudhre aur jivan taalbaddh vane।
("Gandhiji kaa udghaatan bhashan", Devi Prasaad sa., Nai Taalim ka Sandes, Nai Dilli: Gandhi Shanti Pratishthaan, 1988, p 9).

Jivan taalbaddh in Gandhi is unmistakably reminiscent of Tagore's *Jivaner Chanda* (p.133). It is also interesting to note that Sabarmati School did not have Sangit or *Kala-Bhavanas*, but in Sevagram these two were integral parts of the *Asrama*. Gandhi was most certainly inspired by Tagore's Vishva-Bharati.

Following this inaugural declaration of Gandhi's Wardha Scheme or the *Nai Taalim* (*Harijan*, 11 December 1937), Tagore admitting of Gandhi's practical genius quipped in strongest words:

As the scheme stands on paper, it seems to assume that material utility, rather than development of personality, is the end of education in the true sense

of the word may be still available for a chosen few who can afford to pay for it, the utmost the masses can have is to be trained to view the world they live in the perspective of the particular craft they are to employ for their livelihood. It is true that as things are, even that is much more than what the masses are actually getting but it is nevertheless unfortunate that even in our ideal scheme, education should be doled out in insufficient rations to the poor, while the feast remains reserved for the poor. I cannot congratulate a society or a nation that calmly excludes play from the curriculum of the majority of its children's education and gives in its stead a vested interest to the teachers in the market value of the pupil's labour.

(*Vishwa-Bharati News*, Jan. 1938, p 53. New Education Fellowship Conference, Calcutta).

If Tagore assessed the question of students' earning depriving themselves of their play-time and paying for the teachers' honoraria, Gandhi was no less pained to negotiate the wider question of being declassed as an upshot of academic attainment.

Tagore, we shall have to admit, was not much aware of such evil some social backlash of a philanthropic enterprise!

Tagore and Gandhi even though did not demean learning English as it was the language of the colonisers thruster down our throat, both of them felt that education through mother-tongue was most certainly better suited for creating a confidence in articulation as much as in generating conviction of thought. And building self-assurance is an unfailing key for empowerment. Both of them realised that creating an ambience of self-reliance is not confined to the extent of the school-going children alone, even the adults require being administered booster doses to bring back their self-possession. The *Lokasiksha* or Mass education programme organised by Tagore and the *Uttar-Buniyadi* projects of Gandhi had almost polygenetic growth, though the *Aryanayakams* – Asha and William – were most certainly the connecting links between the two establishments of Wardha and Bolpur, one basic difference in attitude distinguished the both, in turn. While Gandhi relied more on imparting lessons in certain particularities of applied social sciences, Tagore wanted to initiate the masses in elementary sciences not merely for the sake of their contents so much as for the very fact that such exposures would make the mind alert and intelligence free from illusions.