

1 **INNOVATION PRACTICES ON ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION**
2 **IN THE TWIN SCHOOLS OF TAGORE'S VISVA-BHARATI,**
3 **SANTINIKATAN: A CASE STUDY**

4
5

6 **ABSTRACT**

7 Universal global concern for the Environment is important here. Environmental
8 Education is an emerging area of research. Tagore's ideas on nature and environment
9 are unforgettable.Visva-Bharati (Santiniketan-Sriniketan) is an exemplar model of
10 environmental education. The twin schools, 'Patha Bhavana' and 'Siksha Satra'
11 reflects indigenous Tagorean thought and practices with regard to environment. There
12 are significant pedagogic importance in terms of curricular inputs, value development
13 and environmentally awakened and enlightened citizenship. Rabindranath Tagore did
14 not remain within the boundary literary practices. The consistent writing of Tagore has
15 chronic adherence to nature. In Tagore, nature is not red with tooth and claw. Nature is
16 neither a benign mother nor a ferocious malevolent agent. To him, nature is the
17 embodiment of freedom that one crazes for from the childhood. Tagore successfully
18 incorporated Idealism into Naturalism. At Santiniketan, Tagore started the festival of
19 the Earth through brikkharopan (planting of trees) in 1927, at which the students would
20 sing and read his poems. This approach gave his environmental campaign a very
21 positive image, so that it was not a negative campaign about what man should not do
22 but rather it was a subtle reminder conveyed through creative expression. This
23 encouraged more people to get involved in supporting his campaign. Tagore wanted to
24 study nature by observation and experiments both. Nature is very much reflected in his
25 poetry, novels, stories and paintings. There is a fundamental unity between nature and
26 man. Nature is nothing but reflection of God in physical form. Education should
27 promote this unity through love of nature. Child should enjoy complete freedom to
28 develop according to his nature. Nature is an effective and powerful teacher of the
29 world.

30 **Key Words:** Innovation, Practice, Environment, Environmental Education, Twin
31 Schools.

32

33 **Introduction:**

34 Tagore's thought on Environmental Education-

35 *Mantra of the Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan of Rabindranath Tagore –*

36 '*Yatra Visvam Vhavyekanidam*' which means 'Where the world makes a home
37 in a single nest'.

38 From Tagorean thought, Policy formulation in relation to Environmental
39 Education is important in field of school education system. Better policy and
40 schemes for Environmental Education thus need to be visualized from every
41 corner. At the same time this will help in looking at what is actually happening
42 in the school and in the classrooms of Indian schools where there is usually a
43 huge gap between what is conceptualized at the imagination stage of the
44 curriculum, and what is being actually done in the class rooms. This process
45 will help in suggesting suitable curricular frame work of environmental
46 education envisaging the place, importance, efficacy, suitability and timeliness
47 of Environmental Education in our school curriculum. It may help situating
48 Environmental Education vis-à-vis other subjects of study, to help in
49 improving the mode and strategy of inclusion of chapters in different stages,
50 Environmental Education in terms of time and allocation of marks and in
51 development of syllabi and instructional material for dissemination at different
52 stages of school education.

53 Tagore discovers a deep hearted relationship between man and nature. In all
54 the famous Sanskrit poems and dramas, nature is silent; still they appear full of
55 life and responsive nature. Man only in company of man cannot attain fullness,
56 cannot be in terms with him if he remains out of the touch of nature. If he does
57 not give nature an entry into his day to day life, his thought and activity get
58 polluted and diseased and ultimately face extinction. Tagore inherent the
59 Indian tradition. Santiniketan was a Tapovan and he gave the students lessons
60 in open air, admits nature. According to Tagore-“I left them sitting class by
61 class on their little mats under the Chatim Trees, their books by their side and
62 their teachers in their midst. They smiled and chatted as I passed. Everything
63 was peaceful, natural, and happy. I went into another world where well-
64 meaning graduates from Oxford and Cambridge are toiling and perspiring like

65 blacksmiths with heavy hammers to beat and bend the Indian mind into
66 strange forms on strange anvils and where there is unhappiness and sadness of
67 heart timorous whispers instead of laughter, doubt, instead of hope".

68 Togore says, man is the child of nature. The more he enjoys the mother's lap,
69 the more he remains in touch with nature, the better for him. Modern man
70 forgets this truth, this essential primal truth. Western man now realises this
71 truth very well, but he is in dark as what to do, because his tradition and culture
72 offer him no clue as to the real nature of this man-nature relationship. But
73 Indians have ever been on this truth and are nourished by this truth. I have already
74 referred to Tagore's drama Sharodatsov but have not disclosed how to repay
75 our debt to nature through love. We are bound to exploit nature for our
76 survival. But we should not be ruthless and heartless while doing so. We
77 should express our heartfelt gratitude to nature. In India the woodcutter bows
78 down to tree several times before he puts his axe into the trunk. The egoistic
79 ungrateful modern man must be humble and take lessons on humanity.

80 ➤ **Objectives:**

- 81 1. To make a case study of twin schools of Visva-Bharati to identify the
82 innovation practices with regard to environmental education inputs as
83 envisioned by Rabindranath Tagore.
- 85 2. To suggest pragmatic and innovation measures for making
86 environmental education more meaningful and relevant in school
87 education.

89 ➤ **Research Design:**

90 The research is based on descriptive survey research.

92 ➤ **Methods:**

- 93 1. Case Study
- 94 2. Observation

96 ➤ **Results and Discussion:**

- 97 ▪ **Reflection of Innovation Practices on Environmental Education in the
98 Twin Schools at Visva-Bharati, Santinikatan:**

99 Tagorean thought on Environmental Education along with best practices as
100 reflected in 'PathaBhavana' and 'SikshaSatra', twin schools at Visva-Bharati,
101 Santiniketan must act as an exemplar model in arousing pupil's awareness and
102 curiosity about the environment and encourage active participation in
103 resolving environmental problems. This is not meant of increasing the burden
104 on students but it would help modify the existing textbooks in establishing a
105 link between the students and their immediate environment. Besides, it can be
106 implemented in schools to involve students in practical environment activities.
107 Environmentalists or the intellectuals who have come to realise the truth that if
108 the earth does not survive, humanity at large will not survive. The earth must
109 be protected not by a single nation only but wholly by all nations and all
110 countries. To protect this earth with her plant, birds, animals, reptiles, water,
111 soil and sky we must love her. She needs a loving care or rather a holistic
112 approach as Tagore puts it.

113 According to Tagore, the whole hearted love for the earth, the love of a child
114 for his mother went an away to formulate his concept of education-the ashram
115 education. Children should be brought up and given education in the lap of
116 nature; children are near the neighbours of the world of nature. This is the
117 motive force that actuates the heart of the child. Let the body and mind of the
118 child with the rhythmic beat of the heart, of the universe – out of the deaf and
119 dumb stone walls of a dead city. The ashrama and the Tapoban in Santiniketan
120 tend to become a creation of the inmates as every time they conduct their own
121 affairs in fellowship and co-operation. The philosophy which the
122 environmentalists search for, finds place in Tagore's poems, essays, novels
123 and dramas.

124 Moreover the Santiniketan is not merely seminary for the education of boys. It
125 is alive with the belief of India. It is aware of what is going on outside. It
126 shares in the larger Indian life. The particular interest of the School at the
127 moment is the enlighten of the masses. For under the trees I had seen an
128 interesting sight. The villages around the inhabited by the original Santals and
129 the boys of the school go out sometimes with football or bat and began the
130 game. When a crowd has gathered, the game is stopped and the players talk of
131 knowledge to the villagers. From this an evening class is formed and the

132 Santiniketan boys go out and teach in it. The day I was there about a dozen of
133 these children had come in and was being taught to describe what they saw.
134 Two boys were looking after them. It was their tribute to India and their
135 services to the reincarnated motherland.

136 **▪ Key Festivals of Tagore's Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan touching with
137 environmental aspects:**

138 **1. Vasantotsav (March)**- A spring festival coinciding with 'Holi' celebrated all
139 over India or 'Doljatra' in Bengal. The day is celebrated with dance, songs and
140 readings from Rabindranath's writings on Spring; Girls and boys dress in
141 yellow and wear garlands of palash flowers. Vasantotsav falls on the day of
142 the Full Moon in the month of Phalgun. The colourful Holi festival is not only
143 an obsession for the Hindus; it has attracted many people from various nations
144 of the world. The great Indian Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore was not
145 immune to the charms of Holi, or Vasantotsav as this spring festival is
146 known as in many parts of India. This famous Indian poet introduced Vasant
147 Utsav in his Visva-Bharati University at Shantiniketan, Birbhum to recreate
148 the magic of the joyous Holi festival. Today, the Vasant Utsav of
149 Shantiniketan is an integral part of Bengali culture and has young as well as
150 old students of the institution annually celebrating the festival in a special
151 manner.

152 **2. Poush Mela (23rd – 26th December)**- This fair is one of the important which
153 is held from 7th to 9th Poush month of Bengali Calender. It is start through the
154 morning assembly at Chatimtala, Santiiketan Aashram. In the year 1888 the
155 Santiniketan Trust Deed was drownnd provision was made for a Mela. The
156 Poush Mela formally started in 1892 in front of the ground of north side of
157 Brahmo Mandir. The Poush Mela at Shantiniketan is held every year around
158 December 22 the date on which the Adi Brahmo shrine at the seat of Tagore
159 was dedicated in 1891. The Mela has developed at Santiniketan and
160 Sriniketan, providing a meeting ground for tribal, rural and elite cultural
161 elements. Mooted by Maharshi Debendranath Tagore as an 'ashram' and a
162 centre for meditation, Santiniketan catapulted to international fame through the
163 open-air school and later the university founded by Maharshi's illustrious son,
164 poet Rabindranath Tagore. The history of the place goes back to well over a

165 hundred years, to the 1860s, when Maharshi was struck by the beauty of the
166 place. The westernmost corner of Bengal, Birbhum is a red laterite soil zone,
167 watered by the several rain fed rivulets. Undulating red vistas spread over
168 miles all around, with patchy forests of sal, palash and other local trees as well
169 as jamun and mango groves. Passing through the village commons of
170 Bhuvandanga (an area once avoided by travellers because of dacoits),
171 Maharshi was captivated by the kaleidoscopic beauty of two luxuriantly
172 canopied Chhatim trees, offering shade in that barren, red land. To the
173 Maharshi, this was an idyllic venue for meditating. So he bought a large tract
174 of land along with the two Chhatim trees and built a beautiful prayer hall made
175 from coloured glass. Trees were planted all around to bring the ancient forest
176 ashram look. In keeping with the spirit of the place, Maharshi named it
177 'Santiniketan' or the 'abode of peace'. Not too far from Kolkata 212 km by
178 road, the place slowly became popular.

179 **3. Magh Mela (February)**- This is also known as Sriniketan Utsav. This Mela
180 along with an exhibition is held early in February on the occasion of the
181 anniversary of Sriniketan. This Mela along with an exhibition was formally
182 started on 23rd Magh 1328 B.S. (6th February, 1982). It is held during 23rd to
183 25th Magh. The Mela is based on the agricultural products, components as well
184 as the rural handicraft. It is to celebrate the anniversary of establishment of
185 Sriniketan.

186 **4. Anandabazar (October)**- A small fair held at Gour Prangan by students on
187 the day Mahalaya. Soon after, the University closes down for the autumn
188 recess. Proceeds from this fair go towards a fund used for charity.

189 **5. Rathindramela (27th November)** - The students of PalliSamgathanaVibhaga
190 have for the last few years been commemorating the birth anniversary of
191 Rathindranath, the poet's son with a small Mela held in Sriniketan.

192 **6. Nandan Mela(December)** - This is an innovative art fair held before the
193 birthday of Nandalal Bose. Works of art by students and teachers of Kala
194 Bhavana are available at affordable prices.

195 **7. Maharshi Smaran (20th- 21st January)** - The University remains closed to
196 mark the death anniversary of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, father of the
197 poet.

198 **8. Gandhi Punyaha (10th March)** -All members of the Visva-Bharati
199 community do the mental work on the campus themselves on this day
200 remembering Gandhiji's visit to Santiniketan in 1914 and in token respect to
201 his ideals.

202 **9. Varsha Mangal**-VarshaMangal, an evening where Rabindranath's rain
203 songs are sung, often accompanied by dance.

204 **10. Naba Barsha (14th /15th April) and RabindraJanmotsav(25thBaisakh)-**
205 The new year starts with prayer in the Mandir followed by Rabindra
206 Janmotsav celebration. The University remains closed for summer and Poet's
207 birth anniversary is celebrated on that day.

208 **11. Silpotsav (17th September)**-A secular festival honouring the artists and
209 craftsmen.

210 **12.Vriksharopana(7th / 8th August)**- Vriksharopana or Tree Planting
211 Ceremony as a seasonal festival was formally introduced in 1928 and along
212 with Halakarshana (Ploughing) was part of the Rain Festival. These two
213 seasonal festivals at Santiniketan and Sriniketan respectively are picturesque
214 with their simple and artistic ceremonials accompanied by music, dancing and
215 Vedic chanting, invoking nature's fertility and symbolizing its ever recurring
216 youth. Rabindranath had long bewailed the ruthless deforestation of the
217 countryside and wished to introduce a practice which would catch the popular
218 imagination and make people plant trees for the love of them.

219 **13. Halakarshan (8th / 9th August)** - Halakarshana is a symbolic tribute to the
220 activity of ploughing the land. The ceremony aimed at endowing the work of
221 ploughing with the dignity, almost sacredness that was its due. An important
222 dignitary is invited to drive the plough. This is one of the important
223 ceremonies which held at Visva-Bharti, Santiniketan on 23rd Sharvan in the
224 early morning for development of environment by ploughing and other
225 activities (i.e. dance, drama, song etc.).

226 **14. Raksha Bandhan (August)**- This festival ceremony holds during Rakhi
227 Purnima. The concept of celebrating the 'Rakhi Utsav' is totally different in
228 Tagore's Ashram. According to Gurudev, Rakhi is not only a festival of the
229 siblings but it is a celebration of mankind of humanity. By 'Rakhi Mahotsav'
230 Gurudev developed the concept of unity as well as the harmony among all.

231 Especially in today's situation Tagore's vision is very much applicable as
232 teaches us to think and care of others.

233

234 **▪ Innovation Practices on Environmental Education in Visva-Bharati,**
235 **Santinikatan based on Tagore's Perspectives:**

236 In Visva-Bharati, the twin schools in Santiniketan-Sriniketan experiment on
237 education is an exemplar rare model of learning and living in tune with nature
238 where lots of inputs for environmental education lay lie. Here lies the genesis
239 of the problem and a research need to identify those inputs for greater and
240 meaningful use and engagement in environment and education.

241 **▪ Environmental Education Inputs from Tagorean Thought and**
242 **Practices:**

243 Tagore did not simply look for a solution to the problem; he made something
244 creative out of his environmental campaign. In 1927, he started an annual tree-
245 planting ceremony in Santiniketan (brikhhoropon), at which the students
246 would sing and read his poems. This approach gave his environmental
247 campaign a very positive image, so that it was not a negative campaign about
248 what man should not do but rather it was a subtle reminder conveyed through
249 creative expression. This encouraged more people to get involved in
250 supporting his campaign. The ceremony is still held each year in Santiniketan.

251 Classes in Santiniketan were in the shade of trees, not simply as a romantic
252 idea but as a deliberate way of bringing students closer to nature so that they
253 would unconsciously learn to respect it. He also started an annual celebration
254 of the arrival of the monsoons at the end of the dry season (Borsha Mongol).

255 Halakarshan (tilling the land) was introduced in July 1927. On one such
256 occasion, Tagore wrote the song "Maruvijayeraketanaura he shunye" (rise
257 aloft the banner of the conquest of the desert), which was a clarion call to
258 increase the green cover across the deserts through tree plantation. The festival
259 of the earth, though one of the many expositions of Tagore's imaginative and
260 at times maverick world-view, nonetheless is unique. Perhaps it was the first
261 sentient move in the world to build up mass environmental awareness.

262 ➤ **Major Findings:**

263 • Tagore successfully incorporated Idealism into Naturalism.

264 • He believed in the absolute and immortal existence of God. But his God was a

265 superman and he considered this world as his best creation.

266 • Tagore wanted to study nature by observation and experiments both. Nature is

267 very much reflected in his poetry, novels, stories and paintings.

268 • There is a fundamental unity between nature and man. Nature is nothing but

269 reflection of God in physical form. Education should promote this unity

270 through love of nature.

271 • Child must enjoy complete freedom to develop according to his nature. Nature

272 is an effective and powerful teacher of the world.

273 ➤ **Results and Implication:**

274 • There is a universal global concern for the Environment.

275

276 • Environmental Education is an emerging area of research.

277 • Tagore's ideas on nature and environment are unputdownable.

278 • Visva-Bharati (Santiniketan-Sriniketan) is an exemplar model of environmental

279 education.

280 • This helps to indicate indigenous Tagorean thought and practices with regard to

281 environment.

282 • This indicates significant pedagogic import in terms of curricular inputs, value

283 development and environmentally awakened and enlightened citizenship.

284 • The research can design environmentally sensitive action plans with sustainable

285 development strategies.

286 ➤ **Conclusion:**

287 Good thing is always a never ending discourse. Tagore is not a messiah. He is

288 not magic stick. His ideas can perform more than magic. His broodings on

289 nature and environmental issues might direct us towards the dream of a better

290 universe. Tagore's engagement with nature both in literature and in real life

291 practices might continue as an endless discourse. But this nature oriented

292 writings and practices are now familiar with the rest of the universe. Be it short

293 or novel, Tagore did not deliberately move out of the Concordia of nature's
294 phenomenon. The celebration of 'Rakhi bandhan', 'Nabanaa Utsav', 'Barsha
295 Mangal', 'Briksharopan' (Tree-planting), 'Halakarshan' (Ploughing),
296 'Basantotsav' (spring festival) will always bear the seeds of good dream of
297 good society where environment will get the driver's seat. Where the whole
298 world is suffering from the deliberate threat global warming and Globalization,
299 Tagorean ideas, practices and prediction might prove to be the best most
300 procuring medicine for the all ages to come. The celebration of
301 'Rakhibandhan', 'Nabanaa Utsav', 'Barsha Mangal', 'Briksharopan' (Tree-
302 planting), 'Halakarshan' (Ploughing), 'Basantotsav' (spring festival) might
303 consistently bear the message of spreading environmental awareness among
304 us. It can also bear the truth spirit of the idea that if we keep our nature
305 healthy; it is always going to give us our dream society with all congenial
306 environments.

307

308 ➤ **References:**

309 • Sinha Kumar Dilip and Mukherjee Deb Ananda(2000), Fundamentals of
310 Environmental Studies, Visva-Bharati.
311 • Bagchi, Sanat Kumar (1989), Rabindranather Pandulipi: Samiksha o
312 bisleshan, Pustak Bipani, Kolkata.
313 • Mondal KumarSusil (1994), Visva-Bharati's Utsav, Rajlakshee Press,
314 Santinuiketan