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RESEARCH ARTICLE

INNOVATION PRACTICES ON ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN THE TWIN SCHOOLS OF TAGORE'S VISVA-BHARATI, SANTINIKETAN: A CASE STUDY

Asmita Ghosh¹ and Kalpataru Mondal²

1. Assistant Teacher, Srinanda High School, Bolpur, Birbhum, West Bengal, 731204

2. Assistant Professor, B.Ed. Dept. Nikhil Banga Sikshan Mahavidyalaya, (Govt. Aided B.Ed. and B.P.Ed. College), Bishnupur, Bankura, West Bengal-722122.

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Abstract

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

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Corresponding Author:- Asmita Ghosh

Address:- Assistant Teacher, Srinanda High School, Bolpur, Birbhum, West Bengal.

Introduction:-

Tagore's thought on Environmental Education- Mantra of the Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan of Rabindranath Tagore – 'YatraVisvamVhavtyekanidam' which means 'Where the world makes a home in a single nest'. From Tagorean thought, Policy formulation in relation to Environmental Education is important in field of school education system. Better policy and schemes for Environmental Education thus need to be visualized from every corner. At the same time this will help in looking at what is actually happening in the school and in the classrooms of Indian schools where there is usually a huge gap between what is conceptualized at the imagination stage of the curriculum, and what is being actually done in the class rooms. This process will help in suggesting suitable curricular frame work of environmental education envisaging the place, importance, efficacy, suitability and timeliness of Environmental Education in our school curriculum. It may help situating Environmental Education vis-à-vis other subjects of study, to help in improving the mode and strategy of inclusion of chapters in different stages, Environmental Education in terms of time and allocation of marks and in development of syllabi and instructional material for dissemination at different stages of school education. Tagore discovers a deep hearted relationship between man and nature. In all the famous Sanskrit poems and dramas, nature is silent; still they appear full of life and responsive nature. Man only in company of man cannot attain fullness, cannot be in terms with him if he remains out of the touch of nature. If he does not give nature an entry into his day to day life, his thought and activity get polluted and diseased and ultimately face extinction.

Tagore inherent the Indian tradition. Santiniketan was a Tapovan and he gave the students lessons in open air, admits nature. According to Tagore-"I left them sitting class by class on their little mats under the Chatim Trees, their books by their side and their teachers in their midst. They smiled and chatted as I passed. Everything was peaceful, natural, and happy. I went into another world where well-meaning graduates from Oxford and Cambridge are toiling and perspiring like blacksmiths with heavy hammers to beat and bend the Indian mind into strange forms on strange anvils and where there is unhappiness and sadness of heart timorous whispers instead of laughter, doubt, instead of hope". Tagore says, man is the child of nature. The more he enjoys the mother's lap, the more he remains in touch with nature, the better for him. Modern man forgets this truth, this essential primal truth. Western man now realises this truth very well, but he is in dark as what to do, because his tradition and culture offer him no clue as to the real nature of this man-nature relationship. But Indians have ever on this truth and are nourished by this truth. I have already referred to Tagore's drama *Shaloka* but have not disclosed how to repay our debt to nature through love. We are bound to exploit nature for our survival. But we should not be ruthless and heartless while doing so. We should express our heartfelt gratitude to nature. In India the woodcutter bows down to tree several times before he puts his axe into the trunk. The egoistic ungrateful modern man must be humble and take lessons on humanity.

Objectives:-

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

Research Design:

The research is based on descriptive survey research.

Methods:-

1. Case Study
2. Observation

Results and Discussion:-**Reflection of Innovation Practices on Environmental Education in the Twin Schools at Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan:**

Tagorean thought on Environmental Education along with best practices as reflected in 'PathaBhavana' and 'SikshaSatra', twin schools at Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan must act as an exemplar model in arousing pupil's awareness and curiosity about the environment and encourage active participation in resolving environmental problems. This is not meant of increasing the burden on students but it would help modify the existing textbooks in establishing a link between the students and their immediate environment. Besides, it can be implemented in schools to involve students in practical environment activities. Environmentalists or the intellectuals who have come to

realise the truth that if the earth does not survive, humanity at large will not survive. The earth must be protected not by a single nation only but wholly by all nations and all countries. To protect this earth with her plant, birds, animals, reptiles, water, soil and sky we must love her. She needs a loving care or rather a holistic approach as Tagore puts it. According to Tagore, the whole hearted love for the earth, the love of a child for his mother went an away to formulate his concept of education-the ashram education. Children should be brought up and given education in the lap of nature; children are near the neighbours of the world of nature. This is the motive force that actuates the heart of the child. Let the body and mind of the child with the rhythmic beat of the heart, of the universe – out of the deaf and dumb stone walls of a dead city. The ashrama and the Tapoban in Santiniketan tend to become a creation of the inmates as every time they conduct their own affairs in fellowship and co-operation. The philosophy which the environmentalists search for, finds place in Tagore's poems, essays, novels and dramas. Moreover the Santiniketan is not merely seminary for the education of boys. It is alive with the belief of India. It is aware of what is going on outside. It shares in the larger Indian life. The particular interest of the School at the moment is the enlighten of the masses. For under the trees I had seen an interesting sight. The villages around the inhabited by the original Santals and the boys of the school go out sometimes with football or bat and began the game. When a crowd has gathered, the game is stopped and the players talk of knowledge to the villagers. From this an evening class is formed and the Santiniketan boys go out and teach in it. The day I was there about a dozen of these children had come in and was being taught to describe what they saw. Two boys were looking after them. It was their tribute to India and their services to the reincarnated motherland.

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

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

2. Poush Mela (23rd – 26th December)- This fair is one of the important which is held from 7th to 9th poush month of Bengali Calender. It is start through the morning assembly at Chatimtala, Santiiketan Aashram. In the year 1888 the Santiniketan Trust Deed was drowned provision was made for a Mela. The Poush Mela formally started in 1892 in front of the ground of north side of Brahma Mandir. The Pous Mela at Shantiniketan is held every year around December 22 the date on which the Adi Brahma shrine at the seat of Tagore was dedicated in 1891. The Mela has developed at Santiniketan and Sriniketan, providing a meeting ground for tribal, rural and elite cultural elements. Mooted by Maharshi Debendranath Tagore as an 'ashram' and a centre for meditation, Santiniketan catapulted to international fame through the open-air school and later the university founded by Maharshi's illustrious son, poet Rabindranath Tagore. The history of the place goes back to well over a hundred years, to the 1860s, when Maharshi was stuck by the beauty of the place. The westernmost corner of Bengal, Birbhum is a red laterite soil zone, watered by the several rain fed rivulets. Undulating red vistas spread over miles all around, with patchy forests of sal, palash and other local trees as well as jamun and mango groves. Passing through the village commons of Bhuvandanga (an area once avoided by travellers because of dacoits), Maharshi was captivated by the kaleidoscopic beauty of two luxuriantly canopied Chhatim trees, offering shade in that barren, red land. To the Maharshi, this was an idyllic venue for meditating. So he bought a large tract of land along with the two Chhatim trees and built a beautiful prayer hall made from coloured glass. Trees were planted all around to bring the ancient forest ashram look. In keeping with the spirit of the place, Maharshi named it 'Santiniketan' or the 'abode of peace'. Not too far from Kolkata 212 km by road, the place slowly became popular.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

14. Raksha Bandhan (August)- This festival ceremony holds during Rakhi Purnima. The concept of celebrating the 'Rakhi Utsav' is totally different in Tagore's Ashram. According to Gurudev, Rakhi is not only a festival of the siblings but it is a celebration of mankind of humanity. By 'Rakhi Mahotsav' Gurudev developed the concept of unity as well as the harmony among all. Especially in today's situation Tagore's vision is very much applicable as teaches us to think and care of others.

Innovation Practices on Environmental Education in Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan based on Tagore's Perspectives:

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

Environmental Education Inputs from Tagorean Thought and Practices:

Tagore did not simply look for a solution to the problem; he made something creative out of his environmental campaign. In 1927, he started an annual tree-planting ceremony in Santiniketan (brikhoropon), at which the students would sing and read his poems. This approach gave his environmental campaign a very positive image, so that it was not a negative campaign about what man should not do but rather it was a subtle reminder conveyed

through creative expression. This encouraged more people to get involved in supporting his campaign. The ceremony is still held each year in Santiniketan. Classes in Santiniketan were in the shade of trees, not simply as a romantic idea but as a deliberate way of bringing students closer to nature so that they would unconsciously learn to respect it. He also started an annual celebration of the arrival of the monsoons at the end of the dry season (Borsha Mongol). Halakarshan (tilling the land) was introduced in July 1927. On one such occasion, Tagore wrote the song "Maruvijayeraketanaurao he shunye" (rise aloft the banner of the conquest of the desert), which was a clarion call to increase the green cover across the deserts through tree plantation. The festival of the earth, though one of the many expositions of Tagore's imaginative and at times maverick world-view, nonetheless is unique. Perhaps it was the first sentient move in the world to build up mass environmental awareness.

Major Findings:

- Tagore successfully incorporated Idealism into Naturalism.
- He believed in the absolute and immortal existence of God. But his God was a superman and he considered this world as his best creation.
- Tagore wanted to study nature by observation and experiments both. Nature is very much reflected in his poetry, novels, stories and paintings.
- There is a fundamental unity between nature and man. Nature is nothing but reflection of God in physical form. Education should promote this unity through love of nature.
- Child must enjoy complete freedom to develop according to his nature. Nature is an effective and powerful teacher of the world.

Results and Implication:-

- There is a universal global concern for the Environment.
- Environmental Education is an emerging area of research.
- Tagore's ideas on nature and environment are unputdownable.
- Visva-Bharati (Santiniketan-Sriniketan) is an exemplar model of environmental education.
- This helps to indicate indigenous Tagorean thought and practices with regard to environment.
- This indicates significant pedagogic import in terms of curricular inputs, value development and environmentally awakened and enlightened citizenship.
- The research can design environmentally sensitive action plans with sustainable development strategies.

Conclusion:-

Good thing is always a never ending discourse. Tagore is not a messiah. He is not magic stick. His ideas can perform more than magic. His broodings on nature and environmental issues might direct us towards the dream of a better universe. Tagore's engagement with nature both in literature and in real life practices might continue as an endless discourse. But this nature oriented writings and practices are now familiar with the rest of the universe. Be it short or novel, Tagore did not deliberately move out of the Concordia of nature's phenomenon. The celebration of 'Rakhi bandhan', 'Nabanaa Utsav', 'Barsha Mangal', 'Briksharopan' (Tree-planting), 'Halakarshan' (Ploughing), 'Basantotsav' (spring festival) will always bear the seeds of good dream of good society where environment will get the driver's seat. Where the whole world is suffering from the deliberate threat global warming and Globalization, Tagorean ideas, practices and prediction might prove to be the best most procuring medicine for the all ages to come. The celebration of 'Rakhibandhan', 'Nabanaa Utsav', 'Barsha Mangal', 'Briksharopan' (Tree-planting), 'Halakarshan' (Ploughing), 'Basantotsav' (spring festival) might consistently bear the message of spreading environmental awareness among us. It can also bear the truth spirit of the idea that if we keep our nature healthy; it is always going to give us our dream society with all congenial environments.

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