

Chapter 1

Introduction

Abstract Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) spanned almost two halves of two centuries that stood as witness to change in India and the world on an unprecedented scale in almost all spheres of life was himself an architect of that change. He believed that the principal means of effective and sustained change would come through education, and therefore, it was important to think seriously and deeply about its nature and form. This chapter explores the forces that drove a world-renowned poet and also a prolific artist in his later life to take up the art and craft of education for more than half his life. Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913, the first Asian to be so honoured. We need to situate Tagore’s ideas in the light of the colonial rule. The core of Tagore’s educational ideas was built around the need for **self-determination; strengthening the nation** from the grass roots; the ‘**universal man**’; need for **sensitivity** to the aspirations, struggles and distress of his countrymen; and the need to **resolve** conflicts between the old (traditions) and the new (modern). The other core idea centred round his conviction that the beginning of education was best in **mother tongue** or the vernacular. His approach to education was both knowledge generation and dispensation. He was keenly aware of the need for appropriate and surplus reading material for students that he provided through his many writings. This chapter provides glimpses into the different phases of Tagore’s educational thoughts and their translation into institutions as well as the various practical measures that he adopted in order to sustain them.

Keywords Alternative education • Self-determination • Mother tongue and education • Universal man

I am an artist and not a man of science and therefore, my institution necessarily has assumed the aspect of a work of art and not that of a pedagogical laboratory.¹

¹ Rabindranath Tagore (Henceforth RNT), My Educational Mission, *Modern Review*, June 1931.

I

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) spanned almost two halves of two centuries that stood as witness to change in India and the world on an unprecedented scale in almost all spheres of life. Tagore notwithstanding in his own words being ‘...a poet first and a poet last...’² was one of the key figures of the extent as well as in shaping of that change in India. He believed that the principal means of effective and sustained change would come through education, and therefore, it was important to think seriously and deeply about its nature and form. He showed interest in education from very early stage in his life, and he had strong conviction that education changed society. Undoubtedly, education allows for access to the ocean of knowledge to those who partake of it and thus sets in motion the channels by which universal aims and objectives are realized and through which societies become progressive. Individuals learn to question social norms, religious compulsions, economic and political structures.³ Also, education forms bridges or links between people, reducing the divide between the literate and illiterate when the literate come to be of service to society at large. There is a need to build educational systems and institutions that are rooted in such values that will allow greater mass participation sans caste or creed. ‘...in the present age with its facility of communication...the great federation of men...a unity, wider in range, deeper in sentiment, stronger in power than ever before’⁴ can make for true education. Tagore clearly did not mean the prevalent tradition of religious teaching in India in the context of his educational ideals.

Ever since the award of the Nobel Prize to Tagore for literature in 1913, Tagore performance became known throughout the world as the first Asian to have been so honoured. How was Rabindranath Tagore or Tagore, as he came to be called, placed in the Western world and how was the Western world generally perceived? That the Western world was emerging as economically powerful and advanced in terms of knowledge was an established fact. ‘From the early decades of the nineteenth century, an informed awareness of the west became an overpowering presence in the consciousness of educated Indians. ...There was a fairly universal recognition that the west was now dominant....An attitude to knowledge, fundamentally different from the one informing Indian civilization, was the key factor in the triumph of the west’.⁵ Tagore witnessed World War I and the beginning of World War II. Internationally, he came to be regarded as a messenger of peace and calm, a sage. Gandhi named him the Great Sentinel,⁶ the conscience of the nation. Tagore’s Nobel

² RNT, An address on his 71st birthday, *Pravasi*, 1931.

³ Anisuzzaman, ‘Ihajatatika’, *Ihajatatika O Ananya*, 2012, p. 19.

⁴ RNT An Eastern University, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Volume 2 (henceforth EWRT2), pp. 556–569.

⁵ Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Perceptions, Emotions, Sensibilities: Essays on Indian’s Colonial and Post-colonial Experiences*, 1999, p. 5.

⁶ M. K. Gandhi in his essay, A Great Sentinel, *Young India*, 13 October, 1921, ‘I regard the poet as a sentinel warning us against the approach of enemies called Bigotry, Lethargy, Intolerance, Ignorance, Inertia and other members of that brood’.

Prize-winning collection of poems, *Gitanjali* or the Song Offerings (1913, London, Macmillan) had been cited as a universal message of fortitude, solace and wisdom to the individual in troubled times. 'It is a pleasure merely to sit beside him, he reposes the mind and the body. Speaks very little but looks beneficent and intelligent...' ⁷ 'He *is* like a saint...[and] made me feel that we in the west hardly know what real gentleness and tenderness are....I can now imagine a powerful and gentle Christ, which I never could before' ⁸ 'It was impossible for me to say anything to you about your poems *last night* because they are of a kind not easily spoken about. ...You have put into English which is absolutely transparent in its perfection things it is despaired of ever seeing written in English at all or in any Western language' ⁹

'Who were Tagore's contemporaries in world literature? Some of those who were born like him in the 1860s were the Belgian poet-dramatist Maurice Maeterlinck (b. 1862), the English author Rudyard Kipling (b. 1865), the Irish poet W.B. Yeats (b. 1865), the French novelist and essayist Romain Rolland (b. 1865), the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce (b. 1866), British playwright John Galsworthy (b. 1867), the French author Andre Gide (b. 1869). ... With most of them Tagore had formed a relationship of mutual admiration' ¹⁰ Romain Rolland expressed his deep appreciation and admiration of Tagore and his ideas.

Of Tagore's poetry and literature, there have been spells of stirrings in the whole world because of the Nobel Prize in 1913 and as already mentioned, he being the first Asian to be awarded the prestigious prize for literature. ¹¹ However, of his work in his life's mission in defining the aims of education that he propagated and the institutions that he founded, there was a lack of interest, awareness or discussion in academia or by educationists and intellectuals in his time. Other than his writings on education, a significant body of his writings in philosophy too had not excited much attention or engagement with. In this context, it could be recalled that he delivered the prestigious Hibbert lectures at Oxford (1930) that was published later as the *Religion of Man* (1931). At the time of the lectures, it was reported that 'no series of the Hibbert lecture has aroused more public interest than the present one' ¹²

L. K. Elmhirst and his wife Dorothy Straight set up Dartington Hall in England loosely modelled on the idea of Visva-Bharati, Tagore's university, and there were references to Tagorean ideas of education in Patrick Geddes and his

⁷ Undated letter from Thomas Sturge Moore, English poet, cited in Mary Lago (ed.), *Imperfect Encounter: Letters of William Rothenstein and Rabindranath Tagore 1911–1941*, 1972, pp. 18–19.

⁸ Ibid, p. 19. Letter of 15 July 1912 written by Frances Cornford to Rothenstein; she was Charles Darwin's granddaughter and wife of Cambridge classical scholar Francis Cornford.

⁹ Letter from Mary Sinclair, 8 July 1912; quoted in Rathindranath Tagore, *On the Edges of Time*, 1981, pp. 102–103. Mary Sinclair (1863–1946) was a novelist and philosopher leaning towards feminism, idealism, psychoanalysis and psychological research. There has been renewed interest in her work by feminist thinkers during the 1970s.

¹⁰ Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *Rabindranath Tagore: An Interpretation*, 2011, pp. 235–236.

¹¹ Bikash Chakravarty, *Poets to a Poet: 1912–1940*, 1998, 2001. See also Martin Kaempchen, *Rabindranath Tagore and Germany: A Documentation*, 1991.

¹² *Manchester Guardian*, (19, 21, and 26 May 1930), EWRT3, p. 970.

institution in Montpellier, France. We might care to explore Tagore's impact on some of the Eastern and Asian countries of the world that he visited like Japan, China, Indonesia, Thailand, Russia, and the west-Asian countries like Persia and Iraq. The Indo-Japanese association established in Tokyo still maintains links with Visva-Bharati through various programmes. About responses to Tagore within the subcontinent (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka), the bag is extremely mixed and is discussed in the last chapter (Conclusion—Home and the World).

Tagore started a school for boys in 1901 in a rural area of West Bengal, India, where his father Devendranath had bought a fairly big piece of land for the purpose of meditation and prayer. Devendranath named this place Santiniketan (abode of peace). It was here that Tagore got his father's permission to start the school. In 1918, when the boys' school that became co-educational in 1909 had been functioning for 18 years that Tagore conceived of a university, Visva-Bharati. This university was one of its kind, and it was formed in 1918 but formally inaugurated on 23 December 1921. The school formed the nucleus of the university; the two institutions were symbiotically connected.¹³ However, long before he started his school, he engaged with the problems and conditions of education and rural uplift at an intellectual and practical level and started small attempts at creating ways of educating people and ameliorating their conditions.

What urged a poet who later emerged also as an artist to engage himself so seriously with both the art and task of education? Tagore was often asked this question, and his replies on various occasions provided us with insights into his thoughts and ideas. He chose his words according to his audience. To an audience of school students in Tokyo, he conspiratorially confessed how he '[when thirteen] finished going to school'¹⁴; or how he heeded the cry of the young, 'Comrade Poet, where are you hiding yourself? Come to us. ... We are suffering at the hands of the school-master, come and rescue us'.¹⁵ Besides these, there were reasoned arguments supporting his ideas of education in his countless letters, essays and books and these could help us trace how he had confronted the prevalent systems of education and constructed his alternative approach and in many instances his unique approaches. Yes, in the true spirit of the path breaker of hitherto uncharted terrain, Rabindranath did not confine his ideas to a narrow spectrum of an 'ideal'; he allowed his personal experiences and understanding; his imagination and his own growth as an individual; his changing attitudes to give *shape, substance,*

¹³ Visva-Bharati is unique for the reason that in the near history of the country there are no instances of such a symbiotic growth of a school and university. Even today there are few instances of such institutions. Incidentally, in the Buddhist Viharas we find boys (and sometimes girls in separate monasteries) entering as neophytes at a young age and spending long years or staying on for a lifetime for the purpose of study and meditation.

¹⁴ RNT, 'My School', *Modern Review* May 1925, EWRT4, p. 518.

¹⁵ RNT, 'To the Child', An address given at The Kyoto High School for Girls, 1925, EWRT4, op. cit. p. 524.

intention and *direction* to his ideas and their manifestations. Tagore did not rest by just propounding a scheme and theory; he tried to give shape to his ideas in concrete terms.

Let us try to identify the core ideas of Tagore and explore whether there were some radical departures from convention in his practices of education. The core ideas were built around the ideas of the need for **self-determination**; **strengthening the nation** from the bottom; the ‘**universal man**’; need for **sensitivity** to the aspirations, struggles and distress of his countrymen; and the need to **resolve** conflicts between the old (traditions) and the new (modern). The other core idea centred round his conviction that the beginning of education was best in **mother tongue** or the vernacular. Some of these core ideas were being voiced by a few thinkers and reformers like Vidyasagar and Devendranath Tagore even before Rabindranath’s birth. There was also a rising discontent with the rule of the alien power in the country and hence a dislike for English as a medium of instruction. Tagore’s active and almost passionate championing of the vernacular medium in education throughout his life from a relatively young age was a departure from the prevalent practices of his times when English teaching was gaining ground.

In Tagore’s creation of his own institutions is an indication of the value he ascribed to self-determination; the establishment of his institutions is an instance of this. ‘I repeat our education is the thing which we should first take into our own hands’.¹⁶ Tagore believed that self-determination would lead to strengthening of the nation from below. Tagore had long rejected the idea of nationalism and had embraced the idea of the universal man; he believed that human problems are inter-linked and their solutions too are to be worked out in cooperation and fellow feeling. In Tagore’s work on rural welfare, he displayed his deep sensitivity to the rural people and their aspirations. When Tagore embarked on his own institutions, he boldly introduced radical measures in student discipline and routine school management through democratic student participation and responsibility. This was indeed a radical departure as students were usually seen as passive receptors. Another departure or rather innovation in his institutions was creating a body of texts for students filling a void not only of text books but also of books for general reading; for this, he himself wrote many books and persuaded his colleagues to embark upon book-writing on various topics in an interesting and engaging way. The books were in the vernacular, thereby filling a long-felt vacuum. Thus, we see a two-dimensional approach to education—knowledge generation and dispensation in ways that would hold the attention of the students and draw them towards learning. Tagore entered a different phase with his ideas of the complete or universal man when he shifted from his initial ideas of the ideal educational institutions being secluded from civilizational life of cities or isolated from the world, i.e. he moved away from the idea of the *tapovana*.

In the early years of the school, called Brahmacharyashram, comensality was governed by caste distinction as also was the system of greeting a teacher by the

¹⁶ RNT, ‘The Way to get it done’ cited in Uma Dasgupta, *Selected Writings on Education and Nationalism*, 2009, p. 320.

students—a high-caste student could abstain from touching the feet (traditional Hindu greeting of a senior in age as a sign of obeisance) of the low-caste teacher. These practices were soon given up, and modern values were fostered. There was enough evidence of his changing views of women's education, their independence and roles, changes that were radically different from his earlier notions.¹⁷ However, in his literary works right from the beginning, there was evidence of a deep sympathy for women characters and their condition of social suppression.¹⁸ Later on, when he started his Sriniketan work of Rural Reconstruction, he gave special attention to the health and nutrition needs of women, their need to be independent and their participation in community life. His conception of the goals of education went through a process of evolution in response to his own personal growth.¹⁹ Rabindranath did not disown his earlier ideas even when they were in sharp contrast to his present ones; rather, he explained the reasons why he had changed course. He had once remarked in jest how 'inconsistency' was both his greatest virtue and greatest vice!²⁰

II

From a historical perspective of the colonial past, Rabindranath's place in the hall of fame of educationists is assured. His ideas had stimulated academicians and educationists, and there were some institutions that developed along the path that he had showed.²¹ The present series on 'Key thinkers in world education' signals the demand for innovative ideas guiding us on paths of educational excellence and progress in order to make the world a better place. Rabindranath amply fulfils the conditions of innovation and ingenuity, and this is evident in his still active institutions. We have the testimony of this in his vast body of writings, observations, letters as well as the reports and descriptions of the many visitors, alumni and

¹⁷ Cf. RNT, 'Stri Siksha', *Siksha, Rabindra Rachanavali* (henceforth RR), Volume 6, p. 286. Tagore makes a subtle distinction between two branches of education—one being of knowledge in which there should be no distinction between men and women while in the second branch, application of knowledge, there will be natural distinctions between men and women.

¹⁸ RNT's short stories like *The Wife's Letter* (tr. Supriya Chaudhuri) in *The Essential Tagore*, Fakrul Alam and Radha Chakravarty (eds.), 2011, pp. 567–580; RNT's novels like *A Farewell Song* (tr. Radha Chakravarty), 2011.; *Gora* (tr. Radha Chakravarty), 2009; *Relationships Jogajog*, (tr. Supriya Chaudhuri), 2006. There is a vast body of literary creations about women and their condition in different genres of songs, poems, essays and letters.

¹⁹ For more details on this see H. B. Mukherjee, *Education for Fullness: A Study of the Educational Thought and Experiment of Rabindranath Tagore*, 2nd edition, 2007, pp 14–16.

²⁰ Anisuzzaman, 2012, 'Nana Rabindranather Mala', op. cit. p. 236; Krishna Kripalani, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography*, 2008, p. 191.

²¹ Deeply influenced by Tagore, L. K. Elmhirst and his wife Dorothy Straight set up Dartington Hall in Devonshire, UK; Patrick Geddes established his institution in Montpellier, France. There are some recent (post-independence) examples of schools in India inspired and influenced by Tagore's ideas—in these schools children study in the lap of nature following many of the Tagorean principles.

teachers who have been associated with the institutions that he built and managed over a time span of nearly forty years (1901–1941) till his death.²² We also have some seminal works of scholars and educationists on Tagore's ideas and philosophy of education.²³

The history of his institutions during his lifetime is not an unbroken chain of events, policies, philosophy or even manpower. Rather one could rightly remark that the institutions, at first the school and then the University in continuation of the school, grew and evolved in spurts and bursts. The story of the changes as well as the responses to these changes is also worth noting. In talking of the changes in Visva-Bharati in particular and Santiniketan in general, there is a range of perceptions—'altered beyond recognition' to 'never really taking off as an academic institution'²⁴ and the not-to-be-ignored opinion that 'there is a strain of continuity'²⁵—this is also a story of interest and could be a lesson.

The historicity of Tagore's educational ideas and the sociocultural forces at play in his personal socialization provide us the tools by which we can integrate his ideas and practices into coherent and interrelated/intersecting sets within the universe of international humanism. Tagore thought of international humanism to be a very significant ideal of education. The story of education since the British colonized India first as a merchant company and then bringing the country directly under the British crown was as overshadowed by the proclamation of Macaulay's minutes on education in 1835²⁶ as also by the various indigenous endeavours to bring modern education to the masses by luminaries like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Dayanand, Swami Sradhananda, Annie Besant, Vivekananda, Sister Nivedita, Rabindranath Tagore and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. In fact, of

²² Amartya Sen remarks, 'I am personally rather partial to seeing Tagore as an educationist having been educated myself at Santiniketan. There was something totally remarkable about the ease with which discussions in the school could move from the traditional Indian literature to contemporary as well as classical western thought, to China, Japan and elsewhere'. Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson (eds.), 1997, *Selected letters of Rabindranath Tagore*, p. xxiv.

²³ H. B. Mukherjee, op.cit.; Kathleen M. O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore: Poet as Educator*, 2011; Bratin Chattopadhyay, *On Education and Rabindranath*, 2000; Bratin Chattopadhyay, *Sikshar Nirman: Prasanga Rabindranath*, 2012; Asoke Bhattacharya, *Education for the People: Concepts of Grundtvig, Tagore, Gandhi and Freire*, 2010.

²⁴ Indira Gandhi (1917–1984), former Prime Minister of India was a student in Visva-Bharati as a 16 year old. In an interview to Uma Das Gupta, 'My Santiniketan Days, in conversation with Indira Gandhi', *Hindol*, Year 3, No. I, 2011, Tagore 150th Birth Anniversary Special Issue, pp. 110–115, Indira Gandhi remarked that she was in agreement with Stella Kramrisch, the noted Austrian art critic, art historian and visiting faculty in Visva-Bharati (1923) that 'Visva-Bharati never really took off as a University but that it was a way of life'.

²⁵ My own personal experience of teaching in Visva-Bharati for almost 34 years and the opinion of the many old-timers who are still alive forms the basis of this observation. The underlying criticism is that we are only carrying on with dead rituals as the inmates of the university are indifferent and inured to innovation.

²⁶ Source <http://www.mssu.edu/projectsouthasia/history/primarydocs/education/Macaulay001.html> for the text of the minutes on education drawn up by T. B. Macaulay, 1835.

many of the above luminaries and their ideas, Rabindranath's ideas appear to possess demonstratively more enduring qualities characterized by the facility to adapt to change. The attaining of Indian nationhood in 1947 was the most significant game-changer, and since its creation as a Central University by the Act of Parliament in 1951, Visva-Bharati is here to stay though not in exact terms as envisioned by the founder but in the way moulded by the state and compulsions of time.²⁷

III

One of the most important and significant contributions of Tagore to education, was the conception of an international university that would '...create opportunities for revealing different peoples to one another... [in] some meeting ground [of] the university. ...I have formed the nucleus of an international university, as one of the best means of promoting mutual understanding between the East and the West'.²⁸ Such an institution was indeed unique; the primary goal of which was '... an opportunity for working together by sharing humanity's common intellectual and artistic heritage'.²⁹ In a letter to Nepal Chandra Ray, a fellow teacher in the University, Tagore wrote, 'Visva-Bharati [that grew out of the nucleus of a school] will not be a mere school; it will be a pilgrimage. Let those coming to it say, oh what a relief it is to be away from narrow domestic walls and to behold the universe'.³⁰ We could here recall Tagore's oft-repeated poem: 'Where the mind is without fear'.

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into narrow fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward to thee into ever-widening thought and action—
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.³¹

India had her first modern universities under British rule in 1857—the first three universities within the presidencies of Calcutta (now Kolkata), Madras (Chennai) and Bombay (Mumbai), all three metropolitan cities. The universities

²⁷ Kumkum Bhattacharya, 'An Old Banyan Tree', Ira Pande (ed.) *Beyond Degrees: Finding Success in Higher Education*, 2008, pp. 202–207.

²⁸ RNT, 'An Eastern University', EWRT2, op. cit. p. 557.

²⁹ Uma Das Gupta, 'Rabindranath's Experiments with Education, Community and Nation at his Santiniketan Institutions', Sanjukta Das Gupta and Chinmoy Guha (eds.) *Tagore—At Home in the World*, 2013, p. 281.

³⁰ RNT's letter 3rd November 1918; Rabindra Bhavana, Serial No. 395. It may be noted that Visva-Bharati was yet to be formally inaugurated but in Tagore's mind the university was a reality.

³¹ RNT, poem no. 35, *Gitanjali: Song Offerings*, 2010, p. 43.

till about 1920 were not teaching universities; they organized examinations and publication of results for the students studying in various affiliated colleges. These three institutions of education were under the patronage and administration of the British Crown. In 1904, Lord Curzon passed the Indian Universities Act by which the government assumed almost total control over education. There was some protest at this; the feeling that the responsibility of education should be taken up by the people of India themselves and not the British gained some currency.³² We would have to see Tagore's endeavour and initiative against the backdrop of a conglomeration of factors set in motion by colonial policies, systems and content of education. Tagore single-handedly and without the least promise of support from any corner forged his own path armed with the courage of conviction in his ideas. He founded not only an alternate school but also a unique university 'Indian in origin but international in intent—a meeting point of a multitude of cultures pursuing the path of truth and knowledge'.³³

Educational ideas are expected to take shape in structures and forms, and these are to be assessed periodically on the quality and scope of knowledge generated, extent of their impact on students as well as gauge whether these structures and forms possess the powers of self-generation and self-renewal. These will be the core issues of this monograph.

IV

This monograph has been divided into six chapters (including Introduction). After a general introduction, the historical and social-cultural influences on Tagore have been described, and the forces that urged Tagore to engage with issues of education have been discussed. Tagore's work in the field of education had three distinct phases that have been elaborated upon in three chapters, Tagore's corpus of writings and accounts of practices being the principal guide in the preparation of this monograph.

In the first phase, Tagore confronted the realities of rural Bengal while being relegated the duties of the landlord by his father. The exigencies of his stay in rural Bengal also gave him the necessary push to think about his own wife and children away from the protecting umbrella of his ancestral home and the patriarch, his father who seemed to have had the capacity to take anyone's burden on his shoulders. It was when Tagore was 32 he wrote the seminal essay, 'Sikshar Herpher' or 'The Discrepancies in Education' in 1892.³⁴ In an earlier collection of writings,

³² For details on the Indian Universities Act and the consequent protests see Anisuzzaman, 'Jatiya Siksha Andolan O Rabindranath', Anisuzzaman (ed.) *Sardhosatabarshe Rabindranath: Bangladesher Sradhhanjali*, 2012, pp. 501–517. See also Report of the Sadler commission, 1832; http://www.kkhsou.in/main/education/calcutta_university.html.

³³ RNT, 'An Eastern University', *Creative Unity*, EWRT2, op. cit. p. 560.

³⁴ RNT The essay *Sikshar Herpher* or *Discrepancies in Education*, was first read at a public meeting at Rajshahi, now in Bangladesh, and later published in *Sadhana*, a monthly journal in 1892 included in RR Volume 6, pp. 565–572. Among the various translations of the title, the one used here is attributed to Kathleen M. O'Connell op. cit. pp. 123–124.

Letters from a sojourner in Europe, Tagore championed the cause of women's education, and he observed how free women in European society seemed to be. He also admired the show of friendship between husband and wife in European society. Of course, we must read England in place of Europe as most of the letters were observations on English society.

This phase could also be called the transforming phase—giving body and shape to ideas and establishing an institution in which a new kind of education could be provided. The system did not merely symbolize talking back to the Raj but was much more than a revolt; it was a movement. This was the phase when the school was established in Santiniketan following his trial of home tutoring of his children in Selidaha where he was with his family, looking after the family estates. The school in Santiniketan went through its own processes of change over a period of almost twenty years after which Tagore entered his second phase.

The formation of Visva-Bharati as the centre for Indian culture, referred to as an Eastern University with an international approach to knowledge, formed the second phase. This was the most complex phase of all with many dilemmas and conflicts that Tagore experienced and expressed through his writings. If we simply put together his writings on education, we would arrive at a number that exceeds 100 if not more. However, there were many repetitions and elaborations on similar themes in the writings and letters of this phase mainly because he gave many public lectures often on the same topic in various parts of the world and the country (India). Simultaneously, he was raising funds for his new university and trying to convince intellectuals of the day to contribute of their knowledge to the institution. Also, Tagore and his institutions were too much in the public gaze—in some ways, Tagore himself invited this visibility, but it meant lending ears and responding to all 'concerned well-wishers'!

The work of Rural Reconstruction, the third phase has been dealt with in a separate chapter—this work occupied the poet as long as his ideas on education did; complete education for the poet entailed educated individuals extending themselves to the uplift of their surrounding environment. Visva-Bharati situated in Santiniketan since its inception spreads to another campus in Sriniketan in 1921, some 3 km distance where Tagore in 1912 had purchased a big mansion-like building (known as Surul Kuthi Bari) and some surrounding land. Santiniketan and Sriniketan became twin campuses of the university. The former or Santiniketan was the seat of learning in all its streams, and the latter or Sriniketan was the centre that had a two-way traffic in knowledge generation and knowledge application and extension. The principal aim of Sriniketan was to bridge the created gulf between the educated and the rest of society so that rural societies that were largely formally uneducated could revitalize themselves along the needs of the times. Along with his work of Rural Reconstruction, Rabindranath conceived of a plan for mass education under the aegis of the Public Education Society or Loka Siksha Samsad formed in Visva-Bharati in 1937, for those adults who were literate and interested in knowledge/learning but were unable to attend university/college. This could be described as a precursor to distance education. Special text books were prescribed and commissioned, examinations were arranged in various

centres and those taking such courses could appear for the examination and upon successful qualification presented with certificates stating the level and the course they had undertaken.³⁵ The subjects were limited to understanding of Indian culture, social history and geography, some topics of science, religion, etc. Some of the texts were prepared under the series *Loka Siksha Granthamala* and *Visva-Vidya Sangrahalaya*.

Rabindranath set up in 1923 the University's publication unit in Kolkata (Calcutta) with its own sales counter; this was called *Granthana Vibhaga*. There was already a press in Santiniketan for the regular journals like the *Visva-Bharati News*; *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*; *Visva-Bharati Patrika* (in Bengali and later on, there was also the Hindi journal of the same name); *Visva-Bharati Bulletin* and the *Annual Reports* of the University. Besides, the Publication Unit in Kolkata was for Tagore's own writings and the writings that he commissioned scholars to write. In 1923, he went to some lengths to retrieve his copyright from a firm in Allahabad (Indian Press)³⁶ and invested the same for *Visva-Bharati*. Since then and till the lapse of copyright (2001), *Visva-Bharati* had monopoly rights over all of Tagore's Bengali writings, and this was indeed a sound business proposition. Most university presses find academic writings and profit do not go together—Tagore found the unique solution by subsidizing the academic writings by ploughing back the money earned through his creative works.

From the 1920s, Tagore gradually moved away from the ideas of a nationalistic model of university to internationalism, a way of thinking that had not yet gained much currency. From the idea of the village being the cradle of civilization,³⁷ he went on to conceive of how civilizations in order to thrive and grow need to share knowledge and wisdom in an atmosphere of mutual respect where knowledge was not seen as power to control others but flowing from all directions without distinction.

In the concluding chapter, an attempt has been made to integrate the chapters to be able to arrive at the 'final product' and to assess that 'final product' in the context of the present. As we plough through the vast literature that Tagore has left behind, it becomes clear that he thought deeply and passionately about education—its nature, its spread and its uses. He championed the cause of mass education but not at the cost of quality. Rabindranath worked tirelessly to give shape to his ideas—he wrote textbooks for various levels; commissioned the writing of texts by other scholars; composed songs, plays, dance-dramas for the students to participate in and be part of the creative process; took classes starting from the very young to the advanced levels; personally attended to guests and visitors to the campus; and guided the work of extension activities in rural areas adjacent to the campus. He was not just a man of letters; he tried to live up to his words and dreams. Such is his legacy.

³⁵ For details see H. B. Mukherjee, op.cit. pp. 225–228.

³⁶ For details see *Panchasatbarsha Parikrama: Granthana Vibhaga*, Kanai Samanta (ed.) 1974.

³⁷ See H. B. Mukherjee, op. cit. p. 301.

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