



A Comparative Study of Tagore's and Rousseau's Thoughts on Naturalism & Education

Namita S. Sahare,
S.P. Mandali's
Tilak College of Education, Pune

Abstract

Rousseau's natural education is going to cultivate a natural person, and the natural instinct of children to adapt to the development of a set of educational theory. The paper comparatively studies the dissimilarities and connections of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Gurudev Ravindranath Tagore, two representative naturalistic educators, in the aspects of connotations, targets, contents and teacher-student relationship of naturalistic education. Naturalism as a philosophy of education was developed in the 18th century. It is based on the assumption that nature represents the wholeness of reality. Nature, itself, is a total system that contains and explains all existence including human beings and human nature.

Key words: Naturalism, Education, Research Methodology

Introduction:

Rousseau's natural education is going to cultivate a natural person, and the natural instinct of children to adapt to the development of a set of educational theory. The paper comparatively studies the dissimilarities and connections of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Gurudev Ravindranath Tagore, two representative naturalistic educators, in the aspects of connotations, targets, contents and teacher-student relationship of naturalistic education. Naturalism as a philosophy of education was developed in the 18th century. It is based on the assumption that nature represents the wholeness of reality. Nature, itself, is a total system that contains and explains all existence including human beings and human nature.

Key words:

Naturalism: Naturalism is the doctrine which separates nature from God, subordinates spirit to matter and sets up unchangeable laws as supreme. According to this law, nature is supreme, all answers should be sought in nature and it alone can solve all the philosophical problems.

Education: According to Rousseau (1712-1778) education means, natural development of organs and powers of the child. According to Ravindranath Tagore (1861-1941) aim of education is self realization.

Research Methodology: This paper is mainly based on secondary data, which is collected from the books, magazines, journals and websites. The Investigator had herself visited to Vishva Bharti, Shantiniketan, Bolpur near Kolkata in May 2011.

Naturalism is a concept that firmly believes that ultimate reality lies in the nature of the matter. Matter is considered to be supreme and mind is the functioning of the brain that is made up of matter. The whole universe is governed by laws of nature and they are changeable. It's through our sense that we are able to get thereal knowledge. The senses works like real gateways of knowledge and exploration is he method that helps in studying nature.

According to naturalists the material and the physical world is govered by certain laws, and man, who is the creator of the material world, must submit to it. It denies the existence of anything beyond nature, behind nature and other than nature such as supernaturalism. In terms of epistemology or theory of knowledge, naturalists highlight the value of scientific knowledge. Francis Bacon emphasizes the inductive method for acquiring the scientific knowledge through specific observation, accumulation and generalisation. He also lays emphasis on the empirical and experimental knowledge. Naturalists also lay stress on sensory training as senses are the gateways to learning.

To naturalists, values arise from the human beings' interaction with the environment. Instincts, drives and impulses need to be expressed rather than repressed. According to them, there is no absolute good or evil in the world. Values of life are created by the human needs. The great names associated with naturalism are many but the important ones are

those of Jean Jacques Rousseau, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Herbert Spencer and Rabindra Nath Tagore.

Jean Jacques Rousseau, in his, “*A Discourse on Inequality*” an account of the historical development of the human race, distinguished between natural man; man as formed by nature and social man; man as shaped by society. He argued that good education should develop the nature of man. Yet Rousseau found that mankind has not one nature but several man originally lived in a pure state of nature but was altered by changes beyond control and took on a different nature; this nature, in turn, was changed as man became social. He wrote, We are born weak, we need strength; helpless, we need aid; foolish, we need reason. All that we lack at birth, all that we need when we come to man's estate, is the gift of education. The creation of the arts and sciences caused man to become less pure, more artificial, and egoistic, and man's egoistic nature prevents him from regaining the simplicity of original human nature.

Emile, his major work on education, describes an attempt to educate a simple and pure natural child for life in a world from which social man is estranged. *Emile* is removed from man's society to a little society inhabited only by the child and his tutor. Social elements enter the little society through the tutor's knowledge when the tutor thinks *Émile* can learn something from them.

The first part of *Émile* describes the period from birth to learning to speak. The most important thing for the healthy and natural development of the child at this age is that he learn to use his physical powers, especially the sense organs. The teacher must pay special attention to distinguishing between the real needs of the child and his whims and fancies. The second part covers the time from the child's learning to speak to the age of 12. Games and other forms of amusement should be allowed at this age, and the child should by no means be overtaxed by scholarly instruction at too early an age. The child *Emile* is to learn through experience, not through words; he is to bow not to the commands of man but to necessities. The third part is devoted to the ages from 12 to 15. This is the time of learning, not from books of course but from the book of the world. *Émile* must gain knowledge in concrete situations provided by his tutor. He learns a trade, among other things. He studies science, not by receiving instruction in its facts but by making the instruments necessary to solve scientific problems of a practical sort. Not until the age of 15, described in the fourth book, does *Émile* study the history of man and social experience and thus encounter the world of morals and conscience.

Rousseau's essay, "Discourse on the Arts and Sciences", argued that the advancement of art and science had not been beneficial to mankind. He proposed that the progress of knowledge had made governments more powerful, and crushed individual liberty. He concluded that material progress had actually undermined the possibility of sincere friendship, replacing it with jealousy, fear and suspicion.

Naturalism as a philosophy of education has exercised a great influence on the theory and practice of education. In the naturalistic system of education there is no place for classrooms, text-books, time-tables, curriculum, formal lessons or examinations. The teacher has to play the role of acquainting children with their natural environment; External discipline is altogether out of place. The only discipline is the discipline of natural consequences. Naturalism believes that formal education is the invention of society which is artificial. Good education can be possible only through direct contact with nature. Naturalism in education has the following common themes:

- Look to nature and to human nature, as part of the natural order, for the purposes of Education.
- The key to understanding nature is through the senses. Sensation is the basis of our knowledge of reality.
- Because nature's processes are slow, gradual and evolutionary, our education also should be steady.

Naturalism and Organisation of Education

In his early writing, Rousseau contended that man is essentially good, a "noble savage" when in the state of nature (the state of all the other animals, and the condition man was in before the creation of civilization and society), and that good people are made unhappy and corrupted by their experiences in society. He viewed society as "artificial" and "corrupt" and that the furthering of society results in the continuing unhappiness of man.

According to naturalists, the existence of school is a natural necessity. All of us know that man is the most dependent creature of God as compared to other animals because of the long period of infancy of the child and its consequent dependence on adults. The offspring of other animals have negligible periods of infancy whereas the human offspring requires

a few years even to perform simple functions of day-to-day living. Because of this important dimension of the dependency nature of man, education becomes an urgent necessity and so do educational institutions like the school. Naturalism attaches less importance to the existence of formal school and text-books because it hinders the natural development of children. For Rousseau "Everything is good as it comes from the hands of author of nature, but everything degenerates in the hands of man". According to him nature is the only pure, clean and ennobling influence. Human society is thoroughly corrupt. Therefore man should be freed from the bondage of society; and he should be enabled to live in the "state of nature". Human nature is essentially good and it must be given fullest opportunities for free development in a free atmosphere. Tagore believed in International Brotherhood. Hence, by society he meant world society

Ravindranath Tagore visiting [Santa Barbara](#), near [Los Angeles](#) in 1917, meditated among orange groves and conceived of a new type of university, desiring to "make Shantiniketan the connecting thread between India and the world ... a world center for the study of humanity ... somewhere beyond the limits of nation and geography." The foundation stone of the school, which he named Visva-Bharati, was ceremonially laid on 22 December 1918 and the school was later inaugurated on 22 December 1921. Tagore's duties as steward and mentor at Santiniketan kept him busy; he taught classes in mornings and wrote textbooks for his students in afternoons and evenings.

The school to the naturalist is in no way different from the home; Tagore also believes that education given in natural surroundings develops intimacy with the world. He puts more faith on the individual rather than institutions. Nature, to him, is the focus where the interest and aspirations of human beings meet. It is therefore essential not only to know nature, but to live in nature. "School" according to him, is like a large home in which the children and teachers with their family live together, sharing a common life of high aspirations, planned living and noble effort in contact with nature on the one hand, and with the spirit of joy on the other. Naturalism also believes in the principle of individual differences which means that every child has a unique capacity to acquire knowledge and also the pace of learning is unique. So the school should have respect for personal diversity and it should cater to the varied and different interests of the child.

Rousseau bases his view of life and education on one main principle the principle of autonomy. He believes that people should govern themselves both physically and mentally

with self-cultivated reason and without the influence of society. His educational process reflects this ideal, however he is quite hypocritical as Wollstonecraft points out. Rousseau's belief that men and women are different and should therefore be educated differently is based on the influence of society. Rousseau only believes men should be autonomous and not women.

Naturalists advocate such methods of teaching which offer the child an opportunity for self-education, self-expression, creative activity and integrated growth in an atmosphere of unrestrained freedom.

Naturalism and Curriculum

Naturalists emphasize the study of sciences dealing with nature-Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Zoology, Botany etc. They also give importance to the study of language and Mathematics. Naturalism gives a very insignificant place to spiritualism in the curriculum. However, naturalists like Rabindra Nath Tagore do emphasize spiritual values together with the study of literature and sciences so as to facilitate harmonious development of the child. At the same time, teaching of religion according to Tagore cannot be imparted in the form of lessons, but in actual practice of living. By religion he does not mean the religion of man or any narrow sectarianism. According to him, truth is the basis of all religions.

Spencer, an extreme naturalist, thinks that human nature is strictly individualistic and self-preservation is the first law of life. Tagore's remit expanded to science in his last years, as hinted in *Visva-Parichay*, 1937 collection of essays. His respect for scientific laws and his exploration of biology, physics, and astronomy informed his poetry, which exhibited extensive naturalism. He wove the *process* of science, the narratives of scientists, into stories in *Se* (1937), *Tin Sangi* (1940), and *Galpasalpa* (1941). Thus in the curriculum he assigns a special place to "Laws of life and principles physiology". He gives a very high place to science, which he considers best both for intellectual and moral discipline. According to him all studies should be correlated with science.

Rousseau advocates negative education - The child should be left free to develop his body and senses. He attaches great importance to sense training as he believes senses are the gateways of knowledge. For naturalists, genuine education is based on the laws of readiness and needs of the human being. According to them child's nature, interests, and needs provide the basis of curriculum.

Role of the Teacher

According to naturalists the teacher is the observer and facilitator of the child's development rather than a giver of information, ideas, ideals and will power or a moulder of character.

For Rousseau, the teacher, is a person who is completely in tune with nature.

He has a profound faith in the original goodness of human nature. He believes that human beings have their own time-table for learning. So Rousseau in his didactic novel "Emile" organized education according to Emile's stages of development. For each stage of Development, the child, shows certain signs that he is ready to learn what is appropriate to that stage. Appreciating the educative role of the natural environment as an educative force the teacher does not interfere with nature, but rather cooperates with the ebb and flow of natural forces. Significantly, the teacher who is aware of human nature and its stages of growth and development, does not force Emile to learn but rather encourages learning, by stimulating him to explore and to grow by his interactions with the environment.

Like Rousseau Tagore is also an individualist and a naturalist. He says that everyone is unique and every individual is different from another. He believes that the natural teachers i.e. the trees, the dawn, evening, the moonlight etc. -nourish the child's nature spontaneously. Nature inspires the human being differently at different stages of human development. He gives an important place to the teacher because according to him a real teacher humanises the learning process and activates the mind instead of stuffing it. It is the teacher who kindles independent thinking, imagination and judgement.

Rousseau opines that teacher should not be in a hurry to make the child learn. Instead he should be patient, permissive and non-intrusive. Demonstrating great patience the teacher can not allow himself to tell the student what the truth is but rather must stand back and encourage the learner's own self discovery. According to him the teacher is an invisible guide to learning. While ever-present, he is never a taskmaster. Naturalists are of the view that teacher should not be one who stresses books, recitations and massing information in literary form, "rather he should give emphasis on activity, exploration, learning by doing

Conclusion: Rousseau and Tagore both emphasize the role of education in children's development of adaptability to nature, and put forward the similar educational principles and methods. The comparison of the naturalistic education thought of Rousseau and Tagore will

be of great significance to promote education research, children's healthy growth and harmonious development.

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