

A study of blended learning approach and Humanistic pedagogy of Visva-Bharati University and Shantiniketan and its universal relevance to modern society

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ABSTRACT

Rabindranath Tagore is an unresolved name in Indian literature and winning the Noble Prize for literature in 1913. Shantiniketan was built by Debendranath Tagore, father of Rabindranath Tagore. It is popularly known as university town, was originally an ashram established by Debendranath Tagore, where anyone could come and spend time for meditation and it was free from caste and creed. In 1901, Rabindranath Tagore started Brahmacharya ashram and today it is known as Patha Bhavan. Visva-Bharati is the oldest central university of India. It is established as a centre of culture with the objective of exploring the arts, language, humanities, music etc. In 1951 by the act of the parliament it was declared an institute of national importance. The educational philosophy of Tagore was- generate lecture in the mother tongue for the learner to feel it, freedom of the learner is important in education to understand the reality not by force but by their own personality, creative work should be promoted to develop creativity in students, give freedom to the child to understand their innermost essence, and the most important is that educational environment should completely remain in nature lap. In Shantiniketan teaching is not based on syllabus or textbooks. Teachers give opportunity to the students to express themselves in the form of poem, dance, music, drawing etc. Tagore was constantly engaged in improving the pedagogy quality. Today Visva-Bharati has 12 departments and all are using proper technology in teaching learning process. Through Visva-Bharati Tagore was also trying to negotiate the East-West relations seen from the vantage of the East. Shantiniketan and Visva-Bharati are both based on four fundamental principles of Tagore- **Naturalism, humanism, internationalism and idealism.**

Keywords- harmony, culture, social reconstruction, blended learning, naturalism

INTRODUCTION

Humanity and the word 'democracy' is harmonizing to each other but our understanding of democracy in the 21st century is still very narrow. The whole world wants peace through education but the structure of curriculum does not support such goal. Just as literacy in reading provides us access to new kinds of information, literacy of harmony shapes our aptitude to access the solutions about the national, international and even family problems, humanity gives practical and realistic answers of the life related inquiries like how to live, what are our accountabilities about nature and natural environment etc. (Chappel P.K. 2017). As seen in the above context, the present study focuses on the best practices which is a part of curricular structure of Shantiniketan and Visva-Bharati and its importance in promoting humanity, peace and harmony. The present study also investigated the learning style and social and humanistic approach of Shantiniketan and also tries to explore the relevancy and relationship of the courses run in this institution with globalization. Whatever knowledge we gather, we should apply it and use it in the societal betterment for social reconstruction. Education should create dynamic citizen so that they are able to transfer their learning in real life and man can realise his innermost essence.

Rabindranath Tagore is an unresolved name in Indian literature as well as a multi-dimensional personality, awarded with the Noble Prize for literature in 1913. He is the most renowned Bengali renaissance poet, philosopher and composer who dreamt of harmony of universal humanity among the people of different origins through freedom of mind and spiritual

sovereignty. According to Tagore “Humanism means interpersonal relationship and adjustment of *Char, achar, jad and chetan, and sajiv and nirjiv* power of a person. Humanity develops with the development of the personality. The world of science is not a world of reality, rather it is an abstract world of force. We understand this force by the help of intellect but we realize it by our personality. He said definitions of a thing mean limitation of the existence of that word. From the world of science, the element of personality is carefully removed and promoted individuality and existentialism. Individuality is a negative side of the existence whereas dualism of relationship is a positive aspect of existence and it maintains unity with the universe (Tagore R.N., personality 1917). Further he said “man is not a tool in the hand of the physical forces. He has the power to change the matter of his behavior and responses.” The function of education is to develop these quality in people. He had supported the Indian system of Education (*Vadic Education system*) i.e “*Sa Vidya Ya Vimuktaye*” which means education should develop spiritual knowledge of a person and help people accept the reality of a finite self (Self Study Report of Visva-Bharati, 2020). Rabindranath Tagore also supported that education is a tool whose function is to provide freedom to the people from mental, economical and political slavery.

Blended learning support modern instructional technologies, communicative information technologies (Dziuban C. et.al. 2018). Blended learning in integration with face-to-face and in online mode (Graham, 2013) were widely accepted in higher education across the world referring to it as the ‘new traditional model’ (Ross and Gage 2006). But the fact is it is very challenging because of definitional ambiguity (Oliver and Trigwell 2005). Despite the number of changes developed around the world, Shantiniketan is still maintaining its own philosophy put forward by Tagore. The basic thing is learning should be interesting, engaging, encouraging and challenging. The educational philosophy of the institution was- “generate lecture in the mother tongue for the learner to feel it, freedom of the learner is important in education to understand the reality not by force but by their own personality, creative work should be promoted to develop creativity in students, give freedom to the child to understand their innermost essence, and the most important is that educational environment should completely remain in nature lap (Banerjee D. 2018).” Today we are improving the teaching technique but we are less engaging in improving learning technique. Learner do not participate in the lecture so lecture become informative rather than generating knowledge. Present education system never fulfill the outcome of objectives of the subjects as is was mentioned and experts are not concerned about it deeply. So blended learning had been already promoted in Shantiniketan with the changing environment to make learning meaningful and beautiful. Institutions apply it on learning situations like-learning material, interactions and in experiences.

BACKGROUND OF THE INSTITUTIONS

Shanti Niketan commonly recognized today as Visva-Bharati University or University town, is one of the pillar of Indian Education System that prevented our old education practices and policies. The area is bordered on two sides by the rivers, the Ajay and the Kopal. Santiniketan School progressed from the Brahmachary ashram into Visva-Bharati, an international learning centre. was established by Debendranath Tagore, father of Rabindranath Tagore and developed by Tagore family. It is located near Bholpur city, West Bengal, nearly 152 km north to Kolkata. Schools provide encouraging environment which is based on cooperative values and give proper training to face the challenges and prepare students for future world. The classes are still held in open under the shade of trees.

Tagore wanted his schools to resemble the *Tapovans* where the students can express their inner self openly (Suri Navdeep 2010). The old building is made up of mud walls and thatched roof and some are preserved as historical values. Visva-Bharati University is located in the twin towns of Santiniketan and Sriniketan, in the district of Birbhum, West Bengal. NIRF (National Institutional Ranking Framework) ranking of Visva-Bharati is 96th overall in India and 64th among Universities in India (India ranking 2021).

The Journey of Shantiniketan was started in 1902 from small ashram, where anyone, irrespective of caste and creed, could come and spend time meditating on the one Supreme God. Visva-Bharati was inaugurated in 16th May 1922, as a Centre for Culture with exploration into the arts, language, humanities, music and these are reflected in diverse institutes that continue in their educational programmes, which are based on the founding principles of excellence in culture and culture studies (Archeological survey of India, 2021).

The objective of Visva-Bharati is- realization of truth from different point of view, to make a bond of relationship with one another, to strengthened the fundamental condition of world peace, and harmonizing culture of India (Visva-Bharati prospectus 2021). Rabindranath Tagore focused on three dimensions - level of love, level of knowledge and level of action (Suri Navdeep 2010). There are many departments in this university like *kalabhavan, vinaybhavan, vidyabhavan, sangeetbhavan, pathabhavan etc.* and all department are committed to fulfillment of the objective of the Tagore philosophy. Visva-Bharati reflects Tagorean ethos of making a complete human being. Under the banner of NSS, the students of this University regularly undertake social welfare programmes within and outside the University.

METHODOLOGY

Data collection

For the present study observation method were used and also used as secondary data as samples which is available in the official website of Shantiniketan and Visva-Bharti and from the research papers and books. Table 2 showing the curricular structure of the school. The school upto Std. IX is a residential school. The medium of instruction is Bengali but equal importance is given to subject English and other subjects. On Tuesday the students of upper classes go for social work in nearby villages and on Wednesday the students take part in Upasana (Prayer). Institutions do not conduct any exams for the students till class VIIIth but weekly test conducted for the students to assess the progress. In Santiniketan teaching is not based on syllabus or textbooks. Teachers give opportunity to the students to express themselves in the form of poem, dance, music, drawing etc. Magazine committee invites their creativity and print it. From Std. IXth Ashram Sammalani i.e. Self-government is formed from the students through election. This concept develop administrative responsibility in various matter in the student. There are different departments and each department has different responsibility like sevavibhag- they collect money for social work in the nearby santhal gram, pariveshvibhag look after the cleanliness of the ashram area, they also protect plants from outsider who came and visit the ashram. Collaborative efforts develop their accountability and decision making power, self discipline and self respect (Banerjee Sarmila 2009). Tagore was constantly engaged in improving the pedagogy quality. Today Visva-Bharti has 12 departments and all are using proper technology in teaching learning process. Through Visva-Bharati Tagore was also trying to negotiate the East-West relations seen from the vantage of the East (Majumdar Swapan 2009). School students do many activities for villagers which is clearly mentioned in table-1 and in Table-3 best practices of Visva-Bharti University is given.

Humanistic work in curriculum

Table-1: Humanistic work of the school students.

Sr.no.	field of work	Work detail
1	Economics	Wood work, embroidery, agriculture, food storage, Dairy and animal husbandry, fisheries etc.
2	Education	night schools for old people
3	Information	radio class, mobile library, Village fair
4	Health	Anti-malaria programme, public health related programme, Leprosy control programme, Maternity and Birth control programme, child health care programme etc.
5	Research and training	village survey, agriculture training, business training, social work programme, teachers training, land tenure programme etc.

Table-2: Curriculum structure of Shantiniketan

Sr. No.		
1	Medium of language	Bengali and Hindi
2	Format of curriculum	Experience based
3	curriculum	Wide approach, free from bookish knowledge.
4	Uses of leisure period	Properly framed
4	Fundamental principle of the education	Naturalism, humanism, internationalism and idealism
5	Philosophy of education	Social reconstruction, essentialism, progressive and existentialism
6	Educational environment	Natural surrounding
7	Main aim of education	Prepare the individual for the nation.

Table-3 Best practices of Visva-Bharati University (SSR Report 2019)

Sr. No.	Title of the practice	Objective
1.	Remembering Sanskrit verses- a moral teaching-learning practice	Students and teachers closer to the important aspects of Sanskrit literature, moral teachings, convince them that such a practice will not only improve their career but will also lead them in good path.

2.	diversified farm technology	Doubling farmers income
3.	Mobile OPAC	The App namely LSearch mobile has been procured from the LibSys corporation, as library is using LibSys as an Integrated Library Management Software (ILMS). With this any one may surf library catalogue in anywhere any time.
4.	Continuous Village Survey Study in India	The purpose is to assess the pace, process and pattern of rural change by means of repeated survey in the selected villages, across the country, followed by re-surveys of the same villages at an intervals of 5 years.
5.	Build socio-economic condition of women	Empowerment and Capacity Building of the Rural Women through forming Self-Help Groups (SHGs)
6.	Users' (Students/Scholars) participation in Library Collection & Development.	To help the students/ scholar for getting their required document, To induce students in library development.
7.	'Scholarship Alert Service' & 'Earn While Learn'	For 'Scholarship Alert Service' (SAS), library officers are assigned to find out the different National and International scholarship available and list up the URLs of the concerned scholarship in the library portal to enable the students to apply. With this library is trying to extend its hands of co-operation to encourage the needy students to continue their study safely.

RESULT

Tagore sculpted Santiniketan on principles of democracy, humanism, internationalism and a sustainable environment and the curriculum was developed to promote the free interchange of human values and cultures. In developing his holistic educational pattern, Rabindranath tried to break down existing barriers and adopted interconnectivity between local and regional groups: between English-medium educated elites and the common people; between urban and rural economic groups, and to reduce the gender gap. Shantiniketan is based on a purely secular idealism (Archeological survey of India, 2010). Its contributions in the field of literature, art, aesthetics and architecture are relevant aspects of our common cultural past (Biswas P. & Mete J., 2014). From table -2 we analysed that schools is involved in many activities and these activities are reflecting the present need of the society. Shantiniketan tried to focus on social development of the child. The plan of education involve both nature and needs of man in harmonious programme (Personality, 1917 pp113-120). The format of curriculum reflects his thought i.e. the highest education is that which makes our life in harmony with all existence (Majumdar Swapan 2009). Institution promoted the acquiring knowledge through independent efforts and critical examination of the ideas, education inculcating morals and spiritual values in education. In curriculum it is involved to enlighten intrinsic freedom and capability of the child through the education. Shantiniketan and Visva-Bharati are both based on four fundamental principles of Tagore- Naturalism, humanism, internationalism and idealism. There are many global issues of the people like unemployment, women are not empowered, health issues, violence, climate change, institution tried to solve these issues through education with proper training. Tagore use to say that it's true that we cannot change the whole world at once but at least we can start the change by adopting the small village. At the present time this custom is being brought into existence at various parts in India by the educators and social workers. The work carried out by Shantiniketan and Visva-Bharati is practically limited only upto the boundaries of the nearby villages but its impact is felt worldwide.

CONCLUSION

This study addressed important issues of successful learning environment and tried to explain the real definition of blended learning. Again this study investigated that humanism should be a part of Educational goal and how can we access this goal and how we will make more effective decisions about and how blended learning configures itself in the new normal. This pedagogy alters many assumptions about the most effective way to support the educational environment. For instance, blending, like its counterpart active learning, is a personal and individual phenomenon experienced by students.

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