Atmosphere in Education: Tagore and the Phenomenology of Spheres

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Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1940), Asia’s first Nobel laureate, was convinced that nothing influences children’s education and upbringing more than the ‘atmosphere’ in which they grow up. He argues that children learn many things by absorbing them unconsciously. In the experimental schools he founded in India, he shifted the focus from the teaching content to creating the conditions that help intensifying children’s connection with the world. The creative and aesthetic potentialities of ‘atmosphere’ are vital in all forms of education. Tagore’s notion of atmosphere is currently gaining new specificity thanks to a range of philosophical reconceptualizations of atmosphere. In this paper, I will compare Tagore’s philosophy of ‘atmosphere’ with concepts that are more commonly used in education today, such as ‘ethos’ and ‘climate’. I will then take the concept forward by comparing it with Sloterdijk’s spherologies and thereby adding a new dimension to his conceptualization of spherology. By comparing Tagore’s ‘atmosphere’ with concepts and ideas of philosophers and social scientists, we will get a better grasp on its importance and scope.
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According to Tagore, the aim of education is self realization. It means the realization of universal soul in one’s self. It is a process which cannot be realized without education. He synthesized the ancient 'Vedantic' traditions with the modern western scientific attitude in formulating the goal of education. Let me mention some aspects of his views about education that I found really awesome. It has open spaces and atmosphere of freedom surrounded by natural environment. It is open to all irrespective of country, race, religion, or politics. It is centered around simple living and high thinking and has spiritual and religious atmosphere. The establishment of Shantiniketan reflected the desired goal of Tagore in the educational sphere. Tagore’s concept of ideal education covered the description of ideal atmosphere, institution, teacher, and method. Actually Tagore’s success lies in the fact that he did not try to control directly the ideas, feelings, and values of his children but imaginatively designed an environment and a program of activities and experiences which evoked the desired responses. Tagore’s first educational writing attracted wide attention in Bengal and for some time Tagore kept on writing about the subject in editorial columns of Sadhana under the general title Prasanga Katha (Relevant talks). Successful in that sphere of life to which he or she truly and naturally belongs. In his institution Tagore gave an equal place to the education of girls and women and had built a hostel for girls.


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