



## Contribution Of Tagore Family in Education and Culture of Bengal with Special reference to Rabindranath Tagore

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### Abstract

*The Tagore family from Jorasanko, Kolkata, had a huge impact on the Bengal Renaissance, changing the way people thought and lived in Bengal in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This paper aims to analyse the family's significant contributions to religious reform, institutional education, women's emancipation, music, theatre, and literature, illustrating their crucial role in the development of a unique modern Bengali identity. This examination centers on prominent individuals including Dwarakanath, Debendranath, Hemendranath, Rabindranath, Jyotirindranath, and Satyendranath Tagore. This paper also highlights the significant contributions of Rabindranath Tagore in education and culture of Bengal. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the research engages with secondary literature, institutional histories, and digital archives. This paper delineates the evolution from home-based education and early Brahmo reform to the educational developments at Santiniketan, Visva-Bharati, and Sriniketan. It finds that Tagore's distinctive perspective on colonial education prioritized holistic personal development, artistic enrichment, intercultural communication, and civic participation. The study also examines the significance of Jorasanko Thakur Bari as a cultural hub that fosters innovation in music, theater, and women's participation.*

**Key words:** Tagore Family, Education, Culture, Bengal Renaissance

### 1. Introduction

The Bengal Renaissance of the 1800s was a time when people were very interested in learning. During the time of colonial rule, new ideas about religion, education, and the arts changed Bengali society. The Tagore family from Jorasanko is one of many families that helped bring about this change. They are known for their long-lasting and wide-ranging contributions to business, social change, literature, music, and new institutions. Their unique social status, which came from a



mix of Bengali customs and European ideas, made it possible for them to act as cultural middlemen. The family's unique blend of spiritual universalism and modern humanism came from Dwarakanath Tagore's business dealings with Europeans, Debendranath's religious innovations, and Rabindranath's writing and teaching.

This paper examines at how the Tagore family helped shape the cultural and educational life of Bengal, especially between the early 1800s and the middle of the 1900s. It has three goals that are all connected: to map out the main educational projects connected to the family, to examine at how they helped create new cultural forms and spaces, and to see how these projects are still relevant to current discussions about education and identity. The article states that the Tagore family is one of the most coherent and long-lasting examples of family-based alternative modernity in colonial South Asia. It does this by putting the Tagore family in the context of the wider Bengal Renaissance.

## 2. Literature review

**Mallick (2024)** conducted a study on “Rabindranather Jatiyatabad o Palli Punargathan Ekti Parjyabekshan o Sangkshiya Punarmulyayan”. The main objective of this study was to highlight Rabindranath Tagore’s thoughts on how to build a strong society in federal structure, sowing the seeds of nationalism, and how to benefit the philosophy by staying away from the politics of truth.

**Ghosh (2019)** performed a study entitled “Abanindranather Rachanai Loksanskritir Upadan”. The objectives of the study were to analyse how Bengali folk culture, Social customs, *Brata* customs and injustices are depicted in his literature. **Sarkar (2018)** conducted a research work titled “Rabindranather Chinta Chetanar Bikash o Paripustite Unis Shataker Rabindra purba Bangali Bidwajjaner Pravab Pratikriya: Ekti Oitihasek Samiksha”. In this research paper, researcher introduces the intellectual community of Bengal in the back ground of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and their influence and reaction on Rabindranath has been expanded in nine chapters.

**Chakraborti (2018)** conducted a study on “Rabindranather Jibansadhana o Shantiniketan 1901-1921”. The main objectives of this study were to introduce the life philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore and purpose of establishing Shantiniketan. **Gangopadhyay (2016)** conducted a study on “Rabindranather Samaj Chinta”. In this study researcher highlighted on Rabindranath Tagore’s social thought was multifaceted and profound. He thought about various aspects of society, among which women’s liberation, education, rural development and nationalism are particularly notable. He was against the prevailing prejudices and injustices of society and dreamed of a humane and progressive society. **Dutta (2014)** conducted research titled “Rabindranather Shiksha ChintarBahumatikata”. In this study researcher introduced the educational thought of Rabindranath Tagore and its multidimensional ways. Rabindranath Tagore’s educational thought is multidimensional and far reaching. He emphasized the holistic development of human life, not limiting education to mere textbook knowledge. His philosophy of education emphasized nature, creativity, and mutual respect. He wanted to promote international and intercultural education by establishing Visva-Bharati University. **Das (2014)** in her study entitled “Educational Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore” explained the educational thought and philosophy of



Rabindranath Tagore in detail. **Singh and Rawat (2013)** tried to introduce the contribution of Rabindranath Tagore in educational field and perspective in this work entitled “Rabindranath Tagore’s contribution in education”. **Sen (2012)** conducted a study on “RabindranatherNatakeShiksharUpadanBislesantak Anusandhan”. Researcher highlighted the educational elements in various drama of Rabindranath Tagore. He also highlighted on the real meaning of life, social norms, women’s development, child mentality, etc. with the reference of Rabindranath’s drama. **Bardhan (2011)** in her study entitled “Rabindranather Kabitay Pratiphalita tar Vyaktijiban”. In this study researcher has taken some parts of Rabindra’s works and presented an outline of Rabindra’s wellstructured artistic form, his poetic life, and personal life. Through which the nature of poetic consciousness and the individual mind are revealed.

### 3. Objectives

- To study the educational contributions of Tagore family in Bengal,
- To study the cultural contributions of Tagore family in Bengal
- To analyse the contribution and relevance of Rabindranath Tagore in education and culture of Bengal.

### 4. Methodology

This study has employed a qualitative methodological approach, predominantly based on primary and secondary sources. These are biography, autobiography, personal essay, monographs, academic articles, institutional histories, and well-known digital archives. This study utilizes data from historical records, educational assessments, and cultural studies to situate the family's activities within their broader social context. The analysis specifically focuses on encyclopedic entries related to the Tagore family and its members, critical examinations of Rabindranath Tagore's educational philosophy, and heritage studies concentrating on Jorasanko Thakur Bari and Santiniketan.

This inquiry amalgamates insights derived from existing scholarly articles and official institutional websites that document the inception and development of foundational institutions such as Santiniketan, Visva-Bharati, Sriniketan, and Rabindra Bharati University. These informational resources are subjected to stringent critical evaluation, focusing particularly on their representation of familial roles and their wider ramifications for dominant historio-graphical narratives concerning the Bengal Renaissance and the framework of colonial modernity. Because it only uses established secondary literature, both published and digital, instead of primary archival manuscripts or firsthand oral accounts, the results are interpretive syntheses and analytical recombination instead of new empirical discoveries.

The focus is selective; it highlights examples of people and projects that help explain the family's educational and cultural vision, rather than trying to create a complete genealogy of all Tagore branches. This approach is suitable for the article's objective of comprehending the family's cohesive impact on education and culture; however, it allows for further investigation utilizing primary sources and micro-historical case studies.



## 5. Findings

### 5.1 Educational Contributions of the Tagore Family

#### 5.1.1 *Early Reform: Debendranath Tagore and the Brahmo Milieu*

Debendranath Tagore (1817–1905) was the family's spiritual and intellectual leader in the middle of the 1800s. He led them away from a purely business-focused life and toward religious and moral reform. He became a prominent leader in the Brahmo Samaj, a movement that promoted monotheism, rational inquiry, and ethical conduct while denouncing idolatry and various elements of caste orthodoxy. He started the Tattwabodhini Sabha in 1839. This group was focused on studying and spreading Upanishadic philosophy and encouraging rational religious debate. The Tattwabodhini Patrika, which was connected to the Tattwabodhini, published essays on religion, social norms, and education. Some of these essays were about women's education and using Bengali as an intellectual language.

Debendranath used these programs to show that education is a lifelong process of self-improvement based on both scripture and reason, not just a way to get a job with the government. This orientation led the family to focus more on moral and spiritual growth in their children's education. It also helped create an environment where children, including Rabindranath, were encouraged to read a lot, question old ways of doing things, and get involved in current debates.

#### 5.2.2 *Domestic Pedagogy and Women's Education at Jorasanko*

In the nineteenth century, elite Bengali families taught their children at home, especially girls. This was the family's first step in their approach to education. The Tagores, on the other hand, slowly moved from random home tutoring to a more structured program, especially with the help of Hemendranath Tagore, Debendranath's third son. Hemendranath was entrusted with the superintendence of the familial estates. Concurrently, he assumed a pivotal role in meticulously shaping the academic trajectory of his younger siblings, ensuring they received a comprehensive and rigorous education. This involved fostering a regimen of strict discipline and cultivating consistent intellectual application. Furthermore, he deliberately facilitated their exposure to, and assimilation of, both indigenous Indian and broader European cultural paradigms.

Debendranath and Hemendranath hired good teachers like Ajodhyanath Pakrashi to teach the women in the family. Pakrashi changed the curriculum to include Bengali and English literature, music, and parts of European culture. This was not common at the time, when many upper-caste women only learned the basics of religion and how to read and write. It made it possible for women in the family to become writers, composers, and active members of cultural life. The Tagores' approach to education at home was ahead of its time in terms of women's education because it encouraged learning across subjects and self-expression at home.

### 5.2 Cultural Contributions of Tagore Family

#### 5.2.1 *Jorasanko Thakur Bari as a Cultural Laboratory*

In the 1800s, Jorasanko Thakur Bari, the ancestral home of the famous Tagore family in northern Kolkata, became a well-known place for intellectual discussion and creative expression. The family often held convocations, which were lively events where new literary works were read and



discussed, Bengali and Western classical music were played, and new, experimental plays were performed. Professional musicians, including experts in Dhrupad, were asked to live and teach there. This made sure that the children got regular high-level music lessons.

Women in the family were very involved in this cultural life. They wrote, composed, and sometimes even acted in family dramas. This was possible because the family was relatively open-minded about *purdah*. Over time, Jorasanko became closely linked to the Bengal Renaissance and the reformist ideas of the Brahmo Samaj. It later became the main campus of Rabindra Bharati University, which is now a center for Indian classical fine arts and Tagore studies. The site is now both a university and a museum, and it protects the family's cultural experiments' physical and intangible heritage.

### **5.2.2 Theatre, Music, and Literary Innovation**

Jyotirindranath Tagore was a key figure in the development of modern Bengali theater. He wrote historical and social plays, composed music, and came up with new ways to stage plays. His groundbreaking work in theater led to a collection of plays that blended traditional Bengali stories with European dramatic conventions in a way that was completely natural. This new mix of styles and themes greatly expanded the range of styles and themes in urban Bengali theater. These plays, which often premiered at Jorasanko, were important places for people to talk about important issues like patriotism, social change, and changing ideas about gender roles.

The Tagore lineage maintained a distinctive tradition of musical innovation, which ultimately culminated in Rabindranath Tagore's seminal contribution: Rabindra Sangeet. This extensive corpus of lyrical compositions is characterized by its artful synthesis of traditional Indian rāga structures, indigenous folk melodies, and Occidental harmonic idioms. To this day, these musical works retain profound cultural resonance and enduring significance within the Bengali cultural landscape. They were used in concerts and in schools like Santiniketan and Visva-Bharati, where singing and listening were part of the daily routine of learning. Rabindranath's writing, which included poetry, novels, short stories, plays, and essays, changed the way modern Bengali and Indian literature was written. He won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913 for his work.

Kala Bhavana was built at Visva-Bharati, which expanded this cultural project into the visual arts. It offered studio-based training that encouraged students to use folk art, classical iconography, and modernist trends from around the world. Artists linked to the institution played a big role in the rise of a modern Indian art style that turned away from both colonial academic realism and nationalism that only copied other styles.

### **5.2.3 Religious Reform and Social Critique**

Debendranath's work in the Brahmo Samaj linked the family's cultural activities to a larger effort to change religion and society for the better. The Brahmo movement wanted to bring back what it thought was the monotheistic core of the Upanishads. It also opposed worshipping images, strict caste lines, and social customs like child marriage. It supported widow remarriage, promoted inter-caste dining, and encouraged women to get an education, mostly among the new middle class.



Satyendranath Tagore and Jnanadanandini Devi deeply incorporated this reformative spirit into everyday life, mainly through a few important actions. First, their public appearances together as a married couple clearly went against the norm in society. Second, they supported the idea of intellectual companionship in marriage, calling for a partnership based on mutual understanding and shared knowledge. Thirdly, they came up with a more practical and socially acceptable way to drape a sari, which made traditional clothing more modern. These joint efforts helped to create a new model for the educated, politically active Bengali woman. As a result, their actions greatly improved the larger conversation about gender roles that was going on during the Bengal Renaissance.

#### **5.2.4 Construction of a Modern Bengali Identity**

The Tagore family, with their contributions to religion, education, and culture, helped shape a Bengali identity that was both deeply rooted and open to the world. Rabindranath Tagore's writings criticized narrow, aggressive nationalism while also promoting cultural self-respect and the inherent dignity of village life. He thus articulated a unique paradigm of communal cohesion, markedly differing from the principles of colonial imperialism and the disunity characteristic of sectarian politics. His songs were very important in both public and private ceremonies. The subsequent elevation of these works by India and Bangladesh to the status of national anthems ensured that Tagore's aesthetic philosophy became profoundly entrenched within the sociopolitical discourse of the subcontinent.

The Tagore family started Santiniketan, Visva-Bharati, Sriniketan, and later Rabindra Bharati University at Jorasanko. These places were meant to have their own unique identity. These places were like test labs for trying out new ways of organizing society, doing research, and making art. The Tagore family had a big impact on the way cultural and educational activities were done, changing the social and spatial settings in which they took place.

### **5.3 Contribution of Rabindranath Tagore in Education and Culture**

#### **5.3.1 Santiniketan: Experimental School and Child-centered Education**

Rabindranath Tagore's aversion to inflexible, exam-centric education—exacerbated by his negative experiences at institutions like Presidency College—propelled his quest for an alternative educational paradigm. In 1901, he started a school in Santiniketan, a rural area of Birbhum district. The school started out as a small Brahmacharya Ashram, where students and teachers lived together in a simple, eco-friendly setting. Most of the time, lessons were held outside, often under the natural cover of trees. The pedagogical methodology incorporated elements such as discourse, narrative traditions, musical forms, and direct empirical observation, intentionally avoiding didactic recitation and punitive physical discipline.

The goal of Santiniketan was to make the child the center of the learning process, which would help them become curious, creative, and peaceful with nature. Along with more traditional subjects, the curriculum included literature, music, drawing, crafts, and seasonal festivals. It also stressed teaching in Bengali, the language of the mother, while also exposing students to ideas and literature from around the world. One of the first attempts at co-education in South



Asia was when the school took in girls. It also tried to blur the lines between mental and physical work.

Since then, educational theorists have seen Santiniketan as an early example of a holistic and humanistic approach to education that values the "full development of personality" and the growth of empathy and social responsibility. It stresses learning by doing and the arts as important subjects rather than extras. This is similar to many modern calls for experiential and arts-integrated curricula.

### **5.3.2 *Visva-Bharati: the World University and Intercultural Dialogue***

In 1921, the Santiniketan school grew into Visva-Bharati, a university that Rabindranath saw as a place where cultures could meet and "the world makes its home in a nest." Visva-Bharati set up departments in literature, philosophy, comparative religion, music, and the fine arts, and later in social sciences and rural studies. These were meant to encourage conversation between Indian and global intellectual traditions. Students from different parts of India and other countries were encouraged to live and study together on a mostly residential, informal campus.

Kala Bhavana (fine arts) and Sangit Bhavana (music and performing arts) were two of the university's arts education programs. Teachers like Nandalal Bose and Benode Behari Mukherjee helped create a unique modern Indian art that was based on folk and classical forms but also open to international influences. The curriculum at Visva-Bharati was fairly flexible, and it didn't encourage students to focus too much on one area of study. Instead, the institution championed a curriculum encompassing a diverse array of disciplines, thereby facilitating the cultivation of individual intellectual inclinations among its students. Its subsequent designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site profoundly underscores the global significance of this distinctive educational paradigm.

### **5.3.3 *Sriniketan: Rural Reconstruction and Extension Education***

Rabindranath set up Sriniketan in 1922 as a center for rural reconstruction next to Santiniketan to connect education with the real lives of people in rural India. Sriniketan offered classes in health, handicrafts, animal husbandry, agriculture, and cooperative organization. The institution, moreover, endeavored to cultivate collaborative relationships with proximate communities, eschewing a model of unilateral financial provision in favor of mutual engagement. This approach actively fostered the participation of both faculty and students in these undertakings, thereby integrating theoretical inquiry with tangible societal involvement.

This rural reconstruction work showed that Tagore's ideas about education went beyond the classroom. He believed that education should help villages come back to life and create communities that can take care of themselves. Sriniketan foreshadowed subsequent paradigms of extension education and community-based development utilized in Indian universities and non-governmental organizations.

### **5.3.4 *Women's Education and Rabindranath***

Rabindranath Tagore was a fervent supporter of women's education, seeing it as essential to human development and social emancipation. He pioneered coeducation at Shantiniketan,



argued for equal curricula (including practical skills like agriculture and the arts), and portrayed strong, independent female characters in his writings to question conventional roles and spur change. He felt that education should promote both genders' holistic development—physical, mental, moral, and spiritual—in order to produce happy people and a forward-thinking society. In addition to advocating for the same basic curriculum for boys and girls, he also highlighted practical skills like home science, agriculture, and vocational training to assure financial independence, as well as disciplines like natural sciences, social sciences, music, dance, and painting. He founded Shantiniketan to educate girls and promoted the notion that women should have equal access to education, which is a basic human right. As described in *Feminism in India* and *Feminism in India*, Tagore believed that education was the key to women's freedom because it allowed them to become independent, use their minds, and fully participate in society. In line with his larger vision for a peaceful, liberated society, Tagore's educational philosophy essentially sought to produce entire human beings by educating women to be intellectually free, practically skilful, and morally powerful. In 1908, Tagore officially opened a girls' school at Santiniketan. Later, in 1921, he founded Visva-Bharati and Nari-Bhavana, a house exclusively for Indian and foreign female students. At Santiniketan, he was among the first in India to establish a coeducational system in which women took the same academic courses as men. His educational legacy is still very significant in 2026 because it emphasises gender equality and comprehensive development.

## **6. Discussion: Significance and Contemporary Relevance**

The educational contributions of the Tagore family provide significant insights into contemporary academic discussions concerning the aims and methods of pedagogy in varied societal frameworks. Santiniketan's core principles—guided autonomy within a structured communal environment, experiential learning intrinsically connected to natural settings, and the extensive incorporation of the arts—demonstrate significant alignment with modern educational philosophies that advocate for a holistic, learner-centered approach, prioritizing socio-emotional and ethical development alongside cognitive skills. In addition, the institution's innovative co-educational and vernacular teaching methods were ahead of their time and led to changes in India's national education systems that later promoted gender equality and encouraged teaching in native languages.

Visva-Bharati's idea for a transnational university that would encourage dialogue between cultures is still very important today, especially as globalization and social fragmentation grow. Its groundbreaking effort to create a "global village" of scholars, regardless of their nationality or ethnicity, foreshadowed twenty-first-century discussions about global citizenship and cosmopolitan teaching methods. On the other hand, the institution's post-Tagorean path, which has been marked by ongoing negotiations with government officials, financial problems that keep coming up, and changing geopolitical situations, clearly shows how hard it is to keep experimental ideals alive in established bureaucratic systems.



The family's cultural heritage provides insights into the ways artistic practices can both mirror and transform societal norms. The involvement of women in Jorasanko's cultural activities, the public prominence of Rabindra-sangeet, and the rise of modern Indian art from Kala Bhavana indicate that arts education can serve as a potent medium for social critique and collective self-definition. Tagore's songs, plays, and festivals still shape school calendars and public events in modern Bengal. This shows that the family's influence is still strong in both institutions and everyday cultural practices.

The Tagore experience shows how important it is for families and communities to start and run institutions that can serve as innovative laboratories that can eventually change the way policymakers and teachers do things. This phenomenon clarifies the intrinsic difficulties that arise when charismatic, principle-based leadership styles clash with or obstruct the necessities of enduring institutional sustainability. This emphasizes the urgent necessity for robust governance frameworks aimed at protecting exploratory environments and promoting innovation, while concurrently ensuring strict compliance with accountability principles.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has contended that the Tagore family's impact on Bengal's education and culture cannot be attributed solely to the accomplishments of any one individual, regardless of their prominence. Over multiple generations, they established a comprehensive network of practices and institutions—including religious associations, home-based schools, experimental campuses, rural centers, theaters, journals, and universities—that collectively formulated a humanistic response to colonial modernity. Their contributions created a complex link between moral philosophy, artistic growth, and social responsibility, which is very relevant to today's problems with alienating educational systems and divisive political discourse.

Future research may augment this study by utilizing historical letters, diaries, and estate records to reconstruct the nuanced narratives of women's education within the family, daily life in Santiniketan and Sriniketan, and the lesser-known segments of the extensive Tagore family. We could learn more about what made the Tagores unique by comparing their mix of spirituality, education, and culture with that of other reformist families and groups in colonial India. The Tagore legacy gives teachers and cultural workers both inspiration and caution. It inspires them with its broad, inclusive vision of human flourishing, and it warns them that keeping such experiments going requires more than just remembering them.

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