

## REPORT OF ACTION TAKEN IN RESPONSE TO THE MODIFICATIONS SUGGESTED BY THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER

The report of the external examiner recommended four amendments to the thesis along with two minor corrections. In compliance with the recommendations of the external examiner, the addendum has responded to every item on the list. The particulars of the responses are as follows:

Serial No.	Recommendation of the External Examiner	Response to the Recommendation	Page number of the response within the Addendum
1	Discussion of the influence of the Buddhist tradition of education on Tagore's educational enterprise	The Addendum has discussed Tagore's references to Buddhist education system in his essays and which values of Buddhist education system he sought to inculcate in his educational enterprise.	pp. 8-9
2	Discussion of the influence of Kalidasa in Tagore's imagination of the <i>tapovan</i> .	The Addendum has discussed Kalidasa's influence on the way Tagore envisioned <i>tapovan</i> with particular reference to the essays in Tagore's <i>Prachin Sahitya</i> and has related the same with Tagore's opinions as expressed in his essay " <i>Jatiya Bidyalaya</i> " or "National School" and " <i>Shikshashamashya</i> " or "The Problem of Ashram" (both translated as part of the Section II of the thesis)	pp. 1-8 & pp. 9-11

3	<p>Discussion of the shift in the character of Tagore’s institution – from a strict adherence to the Vedic model to a secular, socially inclusive ethos that foregrounded freedom and joy in learning.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">&amp;</p> <p>Relating the shift to Tagore’s disillusionment with the nationalist politics</p>	<p>The Addendum had discussed, in detail, how Tagore’s disillusionment with the nationalist politics and the consequent withdrawal from the same, resulted in his decision to move away from the Hindu revivalist approach that he had taken in the early days of his school. This shift from the Vedic model has been discussed with specific descriptions of the</p>	pp. 11-17
4	<p>Reconsidering the interpretation of <i>Achalaytan</i></p>	<p>The Addendum has reworded the interpretation of <i>Achalaytan</i> written in Chapter III of the thesis in order to clarify that the thesis does not claim that the Achalaytan, as an educational institution, does not represent the colonial education system. But there are certain features of Achalaytan which allow the reader to draw parallels with the colonial education system.</p>	pp. 17-18
5	<p>Minor correction to a footnote misattributing a quote to Kathleen M. O’Connell</p>	<p>The Addendum has corrected the mistake and has attributed the quote to H. B. Mukherjee.</p>	p. 18
6	<p>Minor correction in order to mention Gandhi’s dissatisfaction with the students of Tagore’s</p>	<p>The Addendum has included details of Gandhi’s visit to the ashram in 1915 and the new experiment in self-help and self-service that he started. The</p>	pp. 18-19

	schools not being responsible for emptying their latrines	Addendum has also discussed the eventual result of the experiment.	
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Signature of the Supervisor

Signature of the Candidate

Date:

Date:

## ADDENDUM

(Written in compliance with the Recommended Amendments)

- With reference to Chapter 1, p. 5 of the thesis (in response to Recommendation No. 2)

The ideal of the *tapovan* or forest hermitage exerted a powerful attraction on Tagore's imagination and he wished to create a school that would capture the spirit of the *tapovan* of ancient India.

Tagore describes the image of a *tapovan* that he bore in his mind as:

... ত্যাগের দ্বারাই ভোগ করবে এইটি উপনিষদের অনুশাসন, এইটেই কুমারসম্ভব কাব্যের মর্মকথা, এবং এইটেই আমাদের তপোবনের সাধনা। লাভ করবার জন্যে ত্যাগ করবে।

... আমাদের কবির সাক্ষরই বলেছেন তপোবন শান্তরসাস্পদ। তপোবনের যে একটি বিশেষ রস আছে সেটি শান্তরস। শান্তরস হচ্ছে পরিপূর্ণতার রস। যেমন সাতটা বর্ণরশ্মি মিলে গেলে তবে সাদা রঙ হয়, তেমনি চিত্তের প্রবাহ নানা ভাগে বিভক্ত না হয়ে যখন অবিচ্ছিন্নভাবে নিখিলের সঙ্গে আপনার সামঞ্জস্যকে একেবারে কানায় কানায় ভরে তোলে তখনই শান্তরসের উদ্ভব হয়।

তপোবনের সেই শান্তরস। এখানে সূর্য-অগ্নি বায়ুজল স্থল-আকাশ তরুলতা মৃগ-পক্ষী সকলের সঙ্গেই চেতনার একটি পরিপূর্ণ যোগ। এখানে চতুর্দিকের কিছুই মানুষের বিচ্ছেদ নেই এবং বিরোধ নেই।<sup>1</sup>

[... one can enjoy earthly pleasures only through the act of forsaking. This is the instruction of the Upanishads, the message at the core of *Kumarasambhava* and the endeavour of our *tapovan*. One has to give up in order to gain something. All our poets have stated that the *tapovan* bears *shanta rasa*.<sup>2</sup> The special *rasa* of the *tapovan* is *shanta rasa*. *Shanta rasa* is the *rasa* of fulfilment. The way rays of seven colours blend to form the colour white, similarly when the flow of the mind does

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<sup>1</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Rabindra Rachanabali*, vol. 7 (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1988), 696. When quoting from Bengali sources, I have translated the excerpts into English within square brackets.

<sup>2</sup> The *rasa* of tranquility. *Rasa*, variously translated as flavour, essence and emotion, refers to classical Indian aesthetics, where the artist's ideal is to evoke one of nine *rasas* in the receiver. *Shanta rasa* is regarded as the highest.

not divide itself into many but harmonizes itself intrinsically and completely with the world, therein occurs the birth of *shanta rasa*.

That *shanta rasa* belongs to the *tapovan*. In a *tapovan*, complete connection exists between the consciousness and every other thing, which includes the sun, fire, wind, water, land, sky, trees, vines, deer and birds. There, no separation or opposition occurs between man and everything around him.]

This idea of *tapovan* and how Tagore interpreted it has been gleaned from the multiple references to *tapovan* as found in the literary oeuvre of Tagore. Not all the references are however in the context of education. In fact, Tagore, while discussing the Vedic model of education as the primal root of his educational enterprise, does not mention any single text or quotation that can be traced back to a specific text as the source of his inspiration. Rather, the reader can interpret that Tagore has distilled his mental image and philosophic conceptualization of the *tapovan* from his wide reading of Sanskrit literature that encompassed Vedas, Upanishads as well as Sanskrit poetry. In some of his essays on education Tagore quotes lines from *Taittiriya Upanishad*, *Brahma Sutra*, *Manusmriti* among others which indicate the diverse source material of his conceptualization of the *tapovan*. In his essay “জাতীয় বিদ্যালয়” [translated as “National School” and included in Section II of this thesis], Tagore indicates the following sources from which he derived his ideal of the Vedic education system:

এখানে আমাদের ছাত্রগণ যেন শুদ্ধমাত্র বিদ্যা নহে, তাহারা যেন শ্রদ্ধা, যেন নিষ্ঠা, যেন শক্তি লাভ করে—তাহারা যেন অভয় প্রাপ্ত হয়, দ্বিধাবর্জিত হইয়া তাহারা যেন নিজেকে নিজে লাভ করিতে পারে, তাহারা যেন অস্থিমজ্জার মধ্যে উপলব্ধি করে

:

সর্বং পরবশং দুঃখং সর্বমাত্মবশং সুখম্।

তাহাদের অন্তরে যেন এই মহামন্ত্র সর্বদাই ধ্বনিত হইতে থাকে :

ভূমৈব সুখম্, নাল্লে সুখমস্তি।

যাহা ভূমা যাহা মহান তাহাই সুখ, অল্লে সুখ নাই।

ভারতবর্ষের প্রাচীন তপোবনে ব্রহ্মবিদ্যাপরায়ণ গুরু মুক্তিকাম ছাত্রগণকে  
যে-মন্ত্রে আহ্বান করিয়াছিলেন সে-মন্ত্র বহুদিন এ দেশে ধ্বনিত হয় নাই। আজ  
আমাদের বিদ্যালয় সেই গুরুর স্থানে দণ্ডায়মান হইয়া ব্রহ্মপুত্র এবং ভাগীরথীর  
তীরে তীরে এই বাণী প্রেরণ করিতেছেন :

যথাপঃ প্রবতা যন্তি যথা মাসা অহর্জরম্, এবং মাং ব্রহ্মচারিণো ধাতরায়ন্তু সর্বতঃ  
স্বাহা।

জলসকল যেমন নিম্নদেশে গমন করে, মাসসকল যেমন সংবৎসরের দিকে ধাবিত  
হয়, তেমনি সকল দিক হইতে ব্রহ্মচারিগণ আমার নিকটে আসুন—স্বাহা।

সহ বীর্যং করবাবহৈ।

আমরা উভয়ে মিলিত হইয়া যেন বীর্য প্রকাশ করি।

তেজস্বি নাবধীতমস্তু।

তেজস্বিভাবে আমাদের অধ্যয়ন-অধ্যাপনা হউক।

মা বিদ্বিষাবহৈ।

আমরা পরস্পরের প্রতি যেন বিদ্বেষ না করি।

ভদ্রনো অপি বাতয় মনঃ।

হে দেব, আমাদের মনকে মঙ্গলের প্রতি সবেগে প্রেরণ করো।<sup>3</sup>

[May the students derive not only learning from it, but also the knowledge  
of how to respect, devote and strengthen themselves—may they learn to be

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<sup>3</sup> Rabindra Rachanabali, vol. 6, 592-593.

fearless—may they realize their own selves—may they realize within their very bones:

“*sarvaṃ paravaśaṃ duḥkhaṃ sarvamātmavaśaṃ sukham*”<sup>4</sup>

May this great mantra ever reverberate within themselves:

“*bhūmaiva sukham, nālpe sukhamasti*”<sup>5</sup>

That which is *bhuma*, which is great, is *sukh* or pleasure; there is no pleasure to be had in less.

In the ancient *tapovans* of India, the mantra via which the *Brahmavidya*-learned<sup>6</sup> guru had called upon the students has not rung across this country for ages. Today our school stands in the place of that guru and is sending its clarion call across the banks of the Brahmaputra and Bhagirathi:

“*yathāpaḥ pravatāyanti yathā māsā aharjaram,*”

and

“*evaṃ mām brahmacāriṇaḥ dhātarāyantu sarvataḥ svāhā*”<sup>7</sup>

The way in which all waters flow downwards—the way in which all months run across the year—similarly, let the *brahmacharis* from all directions come to me--*swāha*.<sup>8</sup>

“*saha vīryaṃ karavāvahai*”<sup>8</sup>

May we all unite to express strength.]

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<sup>4</sup> This line is from *Manusmriti*.

<sup>5</sup> *Brahma Sutra*, 1.3.9.

<sup>6</sup> One who has gleaned the true knowledge about Brahma through his study of Vedas and Upanishads.

<sup>7</sup> *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 1.4.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 3.1.

Apart from this, Tagore's wide reading of Sanskrit literature allowed him to glean his ideal from the Sanskrit epics as well. His work *প্রাচীন সাহিত্য* or "Ancient Literature" includes his deliberations upon the *Ramayana*, Kalidasa's poetic works like *Kumarasambhava* and *Shakuntala*, among others. Within these essays, one can find how the image of *tapovan* finds its expression in Tagore. In the essay "কুমারসম্ভব ও শকুন্তলা" or "*Kumarasambhava* and *Shakuntala*", Tagore analyses the similarities between the two *tapovans* found in Kalidasa's poem and drama respectively, and in doing so, describes how he views the *tapovan* ideated by Kalidasa:

সমাজবেষ্টনের বাহিরে দুই তপোবনের মধ্যে অহেতুক আকস্মিক নবপ্রেমকে কবি যেমন কৌশলে তেমনি সমারোহে সুন্দর অবকাশ দান করিয়াছেন।

... তপোবনে বসন্তসমাগম! তপস্যার সুকঠোর নিয়মসংঘমের কঠিন বেষ্টন-মধ্যে হঠাৎ প্রকৃতির আত্মস্বরূপবিস্তার! প্রমোদবনের মধ্যে বসন্তের বাসন্তিকতা এমন আশ্চর্যরূপে দেখা দেয় না।

মহর্ষি কব্দের মালিনীতীরবর্তী আশ্রমেও এইরূপ। সেখানে হত হোমের ধূমে তপোবনতরুর পল্লবসকল বিবর্ণ, সেখানে জলাশয়ের পথসকল মুনিদের সিন্ধুবন্ধলক্ষরিত জলরেখায় অঙ্কিত এবং সেখানে বিশ্বস্ত মৃগসকল রথচক্রধ্বনি ও জ্যানির্ঘোষকে নির্ভয় কৌতূহলের সহিত শুনিতেছে। কিন্তু সেখান হইতেও প্রকৃতি দূরে পলায়ন করে নাই, ...<sup>9</sup>

[The poet has provided the space for the sudden and illogical awakening of new love in the two *tapovans* that are away from the strictures of society.

... The arrival of spring in the *tapovan*! The sudden revelation of nature's own form by bursting through the strict austerity of asceticism! The essence of spring does not reveal itself so wonderfully in the gardens of pleasure.

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<sup>9</sup> *Rabindra Rachanabali*, vol. 3, 718.



The same happened at Rishi Kanva's ashram located on the bank of the river Malini. There the leaves of the trees of the ashram are faded by the rising smoke from the sacrificial fires, there the paths to the ponds and lakes are marked by the water dripping from the austere wet attire of the sages after their ablutions, and there the trusting deer are listening to the roaring of chariots and sounds of bows being strung, curiously and without any fear.]

So, to Tagore, the *tapovan* becomes a space where human character is purified through the austerity of yogic and other ascetic practices. It is a space where the excesses of human nature are controlled. Thus, it allows mankind to live in harmony with nature where the animals do not apprehend any harm from the humans dwelling alongside them. At the same time, it is also a place that is finally ruled by the moods and ways of Mother Nature. That is why nature can have its fullest and most extraordinary expression within the milieu of a *tapovan*.

It is this image of *tapovan* that was driving Tagore in his educational enterprise and the same is vindicated by his letter written on 11 November 1902, that is taken as the Constitution of his school in this thesis. The translation of the letter has been included in Section II of this thesis. Within that letter, Tagore emphasizes the regularization of the care of animals like cows, deer, fish, birds and other small animals. He also stipulates regular meditation and chanting of the *Gayatri* mantra as a daily exercise for the students at the Brahmavidyalaya. This is a clear echo of the human-animal relationship that is found in Kalidasa's *tapovan* as well as the ascetic practices intrinsic to the *tapovan* life as described by Kalidasa.

That Tagore's ideation of the *tapovan* owes much to Kalidasa is evident from this essay as Tagore also draws the distinction between the two *tapovans* depicted at the beginning and at the end of *Abhijnana Shakuntala*. While the former has already been introduced as the place where the fullest joy of nature at the advent of spring and of romantic love finds its expression, the latter is described as a more transcendental space where Shakuntala is no longer a young heroine struck by the arrows of first love but a mature woman and mother who deserves respect and acknowledgement from her husband. From Kalidasa's play, Tagore derived the character of the *tapovan* that he sought to recapture in his own educational enterprise. In the essay "শকুন্তলা" or "*Shakuntala*", Tagore writes, "তপোবন স্থানটি এমন যেখানে স্বভাব এবং তপস্যা, সৌন্দর্য এবং

সংযম একত্র মিলিত হইয়াছে। সেখানে সমাজের কৃত্রিম বিধান নাই, অথচ ধর্মের কঠোর নিয়ম বিরাজমান।”<sup>10</sup> [The *tapovan* is a place where character and asceticism, beauty and abstinence, are blended together. There are no artificial social strictures in the *tapovan* but the strict laws of dharma are ever present.] It is this milieu that Tagore believed to be ideal for the process of education. That Tagore was heavily influenced by Kalidasa and applied his interpretation of Kalidasa within his own works is also attested by William Radice, who writes, “... some poems that make use of Kālidāsa’s mythology or imagery (without being addressed to him directly) stem from a highly personal ‘reading’ of Kālidāsa. In his essays on Kālidāsa, Tagore gives us a discursive reading of him.”<sup>11</sup> This principle that Radice stipulated in the case of Tagore’s poetry holds good when applied to Tagore’s conception of the *tapovan* as well. Tagore’s personal reading – as stated by Radice – caused him to conceptualize *tapovan* in the manner described; as a place where the purest instincts of human character are cultivated and nurtured, a place where beauty, dharma and asceticism make the way of life, and as a place where nature finds its fullest expression. Tagore has himself referred to his Kalidasa-inspired conceptualization of the *tapovan* in an address to the alumni of his institution: “কালিদাসের গ্রন্থে তপোবনের যে বর্ণনা পড়েছি সেইটি বাল্যকাল থেকে আমার অন্তরে ছিল – ...”<sup>12</sup> [In my heart, from my childhood, I had the description of the *tapovan* that I had read in the books of Kalidasa ...]

Tagore himself admitted the difficulty to arrive at an exact definition of the *tapovan* and stated as much in his essay “আশ্রমের শিক্ষা” or “The Education of the Ashram” [translated in Section II of the thesis]: “প্রাচীন ভারতের তপোবন জিনিসটার ঠিক বাস্তব রূপ কী তার ঐতিহাসিক ধারণা আজ সহজ নয়। তপোবনের যে প্রতিক্রম স্থায়ীভাবে আঁকা পড়েছে ভারতের চিন্তে ও সাহিত্যে সে হচ্ছে একটি কল্যাণময় কল্পমূর্তি, বিলাস-মোহমুক্ত প্রাণবান আনন্দের মূর্তি।”<sup>13</sup> [It is not easy today to historically conceptualize the actual form of the *tapovan* of ancient India. The reflection of the *tapovan* that has become eternalized in the heart and literature of India is an imaginary vision of benevolence—an embodiment of lively joy devoid of luxury and mortal

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<sup>10</sup> *Rabindra Rachanabali*, vol. 3, 724.

<sup>11</sup> William Radice, “Tagore and Kālidāsa”, *South Asia Research*, Vol. 16, No. 1, Spring 1996, 45-60.

<sup>12</sup> Tagore, *Praktani* (Kolkata: Karigar, 2016), 16.

<sup>13</sup> Tagore, “*Ashramer Shiksha*”, *Rabindra Rachanabali*, Vol. 16, 348.

attachments.] Tagore wished to invoke that spirit of lively joy in his educational enterprise as he diagnosed the absence of that very joy in the colonial education system to be one of the latter's prime failings.

➤ With reference to Chapter II, p. 51 (in response to Recommendation No. 1)

During the Brahmavidyalaya period of Tagore's educational enterprise, he did not refer to the Buddhist education system even though he was influenced by Buddhist philosophy in his literary oeuvre. His educational philosophy does carry the legacy of the Buddhist concept of education being the path to investigate ego-personality via overcoming past ignorance (*avijjà*), craving (*taṇhà*), attachment (*upādāna*) but he neither mentions nor enacts anything in the Brahmavidyalaya that explicitly links it to the Buddhist tradition of education. However, there was a shift in Tagore's position during the Visva-Bharati period when he clearly stated that the character of his university was formed in continuum with the tradition of the universities of ancient India. He emphasizes that he has not imitated or copied anything from any foreign tradition but simply sought to further something that was already existing in the Indian tradition of education: "... আমি অন্য কারও নকল করতে যাইনি, কোনো বিদেশি শিক্ষাপ্রণালীর অনুসরণ করিনি ..." <sup>14</sup>  
[I did not try to copy anyone nor did I follow any foreign education system ...]

Tagore traces the roots of the university system to ancient India as he refers to the *mahaviharas* of Nalanda and Vikramshila. He states, "... এই য়ুনিভর্সিটির প্রথম প্রতিক্রম একদিন ভারতবর্ষেই দেখা দিয়েছিল। নালন্দা বিক্রমশিলা তক্ষশিলার বিদ্যায়তন কবে প্রতিষ্ঠিত হয়েছিল তার নিশ্চিত কালনির্ণয় এখনো হয় নি, কিন্তু ধরে নেওয়া যেতে পারে যে, য়ুরোপীয় য়ুনিভর্সিটির পূর্বেই তাদের আভির্ভাব।" <sup>15</sup> [The prototype of the university had first made its appearance in India. The dates when the educational centres of Nalanda, Vikramshila and Takshashila were established have not been determined accurately as yet but it can be assumed that they had made their appearance before the European universities.]

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<sup>14</sup> *Praktani*, 16.

<sup>15</sup> *Rabindra Rachanabali*, vol. 16, 318.

H. B. Mukherjee writes that Tagore was operating in accordance with three main principles while envisioning Visva-Bharati as a university and they were:

- (1) India should consolidate her own culture in order to contribute to world culture.
- (2) She should invite her scholars to different education centers in order to pursue and produce knowledge in an atmosphere of free and independent enquiry.
- (3) Her educational centers should be organically related to every aspect of the life of her people, which they should constantly enrich through their superior knowledge and intelligence.<sup>16</sup>

So, the first and the third principles clearly place Visva-Bharati in succession with the Buddhist centres of learning at Nalanda, Vikramshila and Takshashila. It can be argued that Tagore was perhaps hoping to locate in Buddhism the roots of an Asian identity. But till the advent of Visva-Bharati, the Buddhist epistemological traditions do not make their presences felt in the function and day-to-day activities of Brahmavidyalaya.

➤ With reference to Chapter III, p. 82 (in response to Recommendation No. 2)

... someone to whom teaching was innate and who touched the souls of each of his students, someone to whom teaching was not just a livelihood but a calling. Tagore was aiming to find teachers who would inspire the complete devotion of the student to the altar of education – one who would, by dint of his own example, evoke in the students the quest for self-knowledge and knowledge of the world around. In “আশ্রমের শিক্ষা” or “The Education of the Ashram”, Tagore describes the guru of the Vedic times:

দেখেছি মনে মনে তপোবনের কেন্দ্রস্থলে গুরুকে। তিনি যন্ত্র নন, তিনি মানুষ –  
নিষ্ক্রিয়ভাবে মানুষ নন, সক্রিয়ভাবে; কেননা মনুষ্যত্বের লক্ষ্য-সাধনেই তিনি প্রবৃত্ত।  
এই তপস্যার গতিমান ধারায় শিষ্যের চিত্তকে গতিশীল করে তোলা তাঁর আপন  
সাধনারই অঙ্গ। শিষ্যের জীবন প্রেরণা পায় তাঁর অব্যবহিত সঙ্গ থেকে। ... গুরুর

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<sup>16</sup> H. B. Mukherjee, *Education for Fullness* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2013), 88.

মন প্রতি মুহূর্তে আপনাকে পাচ্ছে বলেই আপনাকে দিচ্ছে। পাওয়ার আনন্দ সপ্রমাণ করছে নিজের সত্যতা দেওয়ার আনন্দেই।

[Within my mind, I have envisioned the guru (teacher) at the heart of the *tapovan*. He is not a machine, rather, he is human—not passively but actively; that is because he is engaged in attaining the goal of humanity. It is a part of his own endeavour to infuse the flowing stream of this enterprise within the mind of his disciple. The life of the disciple draws inspiration from his immediate accompaniment. ... The mind of the guru finds itself at every moment and thus in turn gives itself. The joy of receiving proves its truth by the joy of giving.]

- With reference to Chapter III, p. 100 (in response to Recommendation No. 2)

Finally, Tagore believed in the role that Nature plays in educating the human mind. Thus, his school was a place where the students came into unfettered and intimate contact with boundless Nature as they witnessed its varied hues in their open-air classes and became attuned with the moods of Nature without being instructed in any specific way. The spiritual value of this unhindered communion, Tagore felt, would facilitate the spiritual development of the students' individual personalities. The concepts of *gurugriha* and *tapovan* play highly significant roles in this context. Tagore was invoking the atmosphere and the milieu of the Vedic *tapovan* where the *gurugriha* or the teacher's home would be located. When Tagore started Brahmavidyalaya, it was that atmosphere that he wanted to recapture in his school. The challenge to the critical reader, however, is pinning down the character of the *tapovan* precisely, as Tagore admits in his essay “শিক্ষাসমস্যা” or “Problems of Education”:

একদিন তপোবনে ভারতবর্ষের গুরুগৃহ ছিল এইরূপ একটা পুরাণকথা আমাদের দেশে প্রচলিত আছে। অবশ্য তপোবনের যে একটা পরিষ্কার ছবি আমাদের মনে আছে তাহা নহে এবং তাহা অনেক অলৌকিকতার কুহেলিকায় আচ্ছন্ন হইয়া পড়িয়াছে।

যে কালে, এই সকল আশ্রম সত্য ছিল সে কালে তাহারা ঠিক কিরূপ ছিল তাহা লইয়া  
তর্ক করিব না, করিতে পারিব না।<sup>17</sup>

[Legends of our country have it that once upon a time the *gurugriha*<sup>18</sup> of India was  
in the *tapovan*. However, it is not that we have a clear picture of a *tapovan* and the  
picture has been much obscured by the fogs of the supernatural.

I would neither enter into debate nor would I be able to do so regarding the exact  
nature of these ashrams in the period when they actually existed.]

Tagore's effort was to interpret the concepts of *tapovan* and *gurugriha* from his wide reading of  
not only the Vedas and Upanishads but Sanskrit poetry as well, and recreate the kind of harmony  
that existed between humankind and nature as found in Shakuntala's relationship with the plants,  
trees, deer and other elements of nature in the *tapovan* of Rishi Kanva created by Kalidasa. Tagore  
wanted to facilitate that easy, effortless sense of oneness between the environment and the students  
in his school.

➤ With reference to Chapter III, p. 101 (in response to Recommendation No. 3)

### **Shift from the Strict Vedic Model**

As it has already been stated, though Tagore started his school in emulation of the system of the  
Vedic *gurukul*, Brahmavidyalaya evolved in the course of the years to become an institution that  
developed a character unique to itself and did not remain adherent purely to the Vedic model.  
Much of this shift can be dated post-1907 and there are multiple factors contributing to it. The first  
and a highly significant reason is that Tagore, while embarking on his educational enterprise, was  
motivated by the spirit of the nationalist revivalism that was sweeping through the country. This

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<sup>17</sup> *Rabindra Rachanabali*, vol. 6, 578.

<sup>18</sup> In ancient India, there was a custom of students living in the *griha* or the house of their guru  
where they would learn and serve the guru in every way.

nationalist revivalism was spearheaded by the Indian National Congress of which Tagore was an active member. He was involved in the activities of the INC quite heavily as attested by the participation of the Tagore household in the Swadeshi Mela, his leadership in the Rakhibandhan festival organized on 9 August 1905 in order to mark the protest against the partition of Bengal. But gradually, Tagore started realizing the narrowness of the ideology and politics that focused exclusively on nationalism, and that, too, on a purely Hindu version of it. In a conversation with Maitreyee Devi, he expressed his disillusionment with the sentimental excesses of that brand of nationalism as well as the ineffectuality of the same as it did not result in any constructive outcome:

... মনে আছে সেই প্রথম স্বদেশী যুগে নেমেছিলুম তো কাজে, কিন্তু টিকতে পারলুম না, গদ গদ sentimentalism – এ ভারাক্রান্ত সেই আবহাওয়া ক্রমে আবির্ভূত হয়ে উঠল, ধিক্কার এল মনে। সব বক্তৃতা দিতে উঠতেন – মাটি তো নয়, যেন মাটি, কেঁদে ভাসায় আর কি। অসহ্য হয়ে উঠত আমার। কিছুতেই মিলতে পারলুম না। একটা সুস্থ আর্দশের দ্বারা চালিত, সুস্থ বুদ্ধি-বিবেচনার দ্বারা প্রতিষ্ঠ, সবল চরিত্র আমাদের দেশে একেবারে বিরল।<sup>19</sup>

[... I remember that I had been actively involved in nationalist work during the first Swadeshi period but I could not remain within it; the atmosphere become polluted with cloying sentimentalism and my heart repudiated it. Everyone would get up and lecture in a vein as if they were weeping floods of tears over a mother. It used to become intolerable for me. I could not find any commonality with them. A strong character, built on healthy wisdom and regulated by a healthy ideal, is a complete rarity in our country.]

This disillusionment with the nationalist movement brought about a great shift in Tagore's approach to the running of Brahmavidyalaya. Alongside this, there was an associated factor; Tagore had lived largely in Calcutta since 1902 owing to his responsibilities, like the illness of his wife Mrinalini Devi and the activities of INC. But in 1907, he permanently moved to Santiniketan and took upon himself the running of the school.

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<sup>19</sup> Maitreyee Devi, *Mongpote Rabindranath* (Calcutta: Mitra o Ghosh, 1943), 76-77.

The school had, till then, witnessed a number of principals like Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, Rewachand, Manoranjan Bandyopadhyaya, Mohitchandra Sen, all of whom had differing ideologies and approaches to the running of the school, the details of which are discussed in Chapter V. With Tagore assuming the reins of the school, the operations became more methodical and in line with his philosophy of education. Accordingly, a new set of rules was put up in the living quarters of the boys. While some of the rules and regulations prevalent since the inception of the school were retained, additions were made, among which the most notable was the removal of casteism from the operations of the school. This attests to the secular and global character that Tagore's institution became identified with in the days to come. This is a marked shift from the strictly Hindu, Vedic character that had marked the initial years of the school and the change can be attributed to Tagore's disillusionment with Hindu nationalism. In November 1905, Tagore wrote a letter to Kshiti Mohan Sen where he communicates his instructions for putting new regulations in place and one of those new regulations reads: “বুদ্ধ, খৃষ্ট, মহম্মদ, চৈতন্য, নানক, কবীর, রামমোহন প্রভৃতি মহাপুরুষদের মৃত্যুদিনে উৎসব করিতে হইবে – সেদিন তাঁহাদের জীবনী ও উপদেশ ব্যাখ্যা ও তাঁহাদের রচনা পাঠ বা গান করিবার দিন।”<sup>20</sup> [The death anniversary of great men like Buddha, Christ, Muhammad, Chaitanya, Nanak, Kabir, Rammohan and others would be observed. On those days, the stories of their lives and teachings would be explained and their writings would be read or their songs sung.] This clearly marks a new era of inclusivity where Tagore wanted his institution to commemorate the death anniversaries and assimilate the teachings of great men across faiths, specifically including Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Vaishnavism, Sikhism, Bhakti and the Brahma Samaj.

In addition to this, another significant step was taken not by Tagore but by his younger son Samindranath Tagore, whose tragically short life was full of great promise. In 1907, under the initiative of young Shami (Samindranath), Santiniketan witnessed its first Ritu Utsav or seasonal festival in the form of the very first Basantotsav (festival heralding spring). Shami's initiative was not fueled by any ideological shift but it can easily be assumed that it was not done without the endorsement of his father who, though absent from Santiniketan during the festival, was kept abreast of the minutiae of the ashram through the frequent letters written between himself and the



teachers and his children. Two years later, in 1909, the first Barshamangal (festival celebrating the monsoon) at the ashram was held under the leadership of Kshiti Mohan Sen. In the same year, Tagore himself took the initiative of celebrating the arrival of *sharat* or autumn on a grand scale by writing his seasonal play *Sharadotsab* and staging its production with students and teachers of the school. This new practice of seasonal festivals marks a radical shift from the austere Vedic model that had ruled the operation of Brahmavidyalaya since 1902. Another significant festival added to the calendar of Santiniketan was Rakhibandhan, about which Kathleen O’Connell writes, “New festivals such as the ‘Rakhi Bandhan’ festival were introduced in September 1909, to celebrate the friendship between all religions and groups, particularly Hindu and Muslim.”<sup>21</sup> Bashabi Fraser summarizes this shift from a Hindu-centric model to a secular and more creative one: “Starting as a school functioning on the principles of bramahacharya (literally meaning, the vow of celibacy) and Upanishadic Bramhoism, it soon stepped beyond religious precincts to embrace a secular curriculum and expanded to become a residential school for boys and girls.”<sup>22</sup>

This new era of change and inclusivity, however, did not mean that Tagore was rejecting the education system of ancient India. He was simply abandoning the rigid Hindu-centric austerity that governed the early years of his institution. He was adding elements that were true to his own evolving philosophy, which would eventually build the originality and uniqueness of his institution. He stated frankly that he could not produce an exact replica of the Vedic model nor did he intend to, as testified by the changes enacted from 1907 onwards. He declared,

তপোবনের যুগ ফিরিয়ে আনা সম্ভব না হতে পারে কিন্তু তখনকার কালে যে আদর্শ সক্রিয় ছিল তা সত্য, তা কোনো বিশেষ কালে আবদ্ধ নয়। তাকেই রূপ দেবার কথা আমার মনে ছিল – প্রাচীরের অবিকল নকল হবে না, অনেক বৈসাদৃশ্য থাকবে, এমনকি অনেক কিছু উলটোও থাকবে – কিন্তু মূল আদর্শটি অক্ষুণ্ণ থাকবে।<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Kathleen M. O’Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator* (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 2002), 159.

<sup>22</sup> Bashabi Fraser, “This Great Meeting of World Humanity: Tagore on Education”, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Timeless Mind* (London: The Tagore Centre UK & Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 2011), 120.

<sup>23</sup> *Praktani*, 16.

[It might not be possible to bring back the age of the *tapovan* but the ideal followed back then has truth in it and that is not limited to any time period. I wanted to give shape to that – there would not be an exact copy of the ancient; there would be a lot of dissimilarities – many things would be an exact opposite of it – but the core ideal would be unaffected.]

This statement by Tagore clarifies his stance vis-à-vis the Vedic model and the application of the same in his educational enterprise. He wanted to adjust, modify and in places abandon practices that were not in the best interest of his school. But his respect for the core ideal of the education of the *tapovan* remained in place and that is perhaps why even for the seasonal festival Sharadotsav, he asked Kshiti Mohan Sen to search through the body of Vedas and Sanskrit literature in general for eloquent description of the season: “... শারদোৎসব করিবার জন্য কবি উৎসুক হইলেন। আমাদিগকে বলিলেন, বেদ হইতে ভালো শারদশোভার বর্ণনা খুঁজিয়া বাহির করিতে। সংস্কৃত সাহিত্যের নানা স্থানে খোঁজ চলিল।”<sup>24</sup> [... the poet grew eager to hold a Sharadotsav celebration. He asked us to search the Vedas for good descriptions of the beauty of the season. We started looking through various places in Sanskrit literature.]

A significant addition in this new phase was the practice of self-government of the students put in place since 1913. Tagore wanted students to be active participants in the growth and development of the institution, thereby realizing their full potential as stakeholders. He wanted them to govern themselves, be their own judges and enact measures of disciplining themselves as and when required. Tagore thus put his trust in the students, alongside the onus of facilitating the smooth running of the institution. He wanted the students to actualize the aims of the institution from a perspective where they themselves built the institution, thereby calling for a personal investment from their side. In 1913, in a letter to Santosh Chandra Majumdar, Tagore wrote:

সমস্ত গড়ে তোলবার ভার তাদের হাতে দিতে থাকো – কেননা এই গড়ে তোলাই যা একটা মস্ত শিক্ষা, এবং এটা বিশেষভাবে ছাত্রদের জন্যে আবশ্যিক। এ সম্বন্ধে মনে তোমরা কোনো সংকোচ রেখো না – এই ছাত্ররাজক শাসনপ্রণালীকে যদি তোমরা

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<sup>24</sup> Kshiti Mohan Sen, “*Bedmantrarasik Rabindranath*”, *Visva-Bharati Patrika* (Baisakh 1350).

পাকা করে তুলতে পার তবে সে একটি মস্ত জিনিস হবে। শিবাজি যেমন তাঁর গুরুর প্রতিনিধি হয়ে তাঁর রাজ্যভার ভক্তির সঙ্গে গ্রহণ করেছিলেন, তেমনি আমাদের ছাত্ররা গুরুর প্রতিনিধি হয়ে বিনম্রভাবে যখন শাসন বিস্তার করতে শিখবে তখন আমরা ধন্য হব।<sup>25</sup>

[Start giving them the responsibilities of developing everything because this knowledge of developing things is a great education and is particularly necessary for the students. You all must not bear any reservations about it – if you can build up this self-government of the students, it would be a great thing. As Shivaji had respectfully borne the responsibility of ruling on behalf of his guru, likewise when our students learn to rule humbly and as representatives of their guru, we would be truly gratified.]

This new drive for self-governance of the students was not a part of the Vedic model but something that Tagore had been inspired by during his visit to America. O’Connell records, “Ernest Rhys in his 1915 account of the school mentions that Tagore had studied the American system of education and had been influenced by the principle of self-government in the George Junior Republic of America so that it became a rule at Bolpur ...”<sup>26</sup>.

The world-citizen Tagore was increasingly influenced by cultures across the globe like Japan, the Phoenix School of Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa, as well as from his contact with Europeans during his travels after the awarding of his Nobel Prize. Of the foreigners, special mention can be made of C. F. Andrews and William Pearson, both of whom joined Tagore’s educational enterprise at Santiniketan in 1913.

The greatest change that Brahmavidyalaya witnessed during this period was that it opened its doors to female students for the first time. It was indeed a revolutionary change when Tagore introduced the system of coeducation, which signalled a clear break from the rigid Vedic-revivalist

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<sup>25</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Chithipatre Bidyalay Prasanga*, compiled by Gaura Chandra Saha (Santiniketan: Rabindrabhavan, 2000), 97.

<sup>26</sup> O’Connell, 159.

image of the school in its early years. With the entry of six young girls to the school a new, albeit fractured, chapter of Tagore's educational enterprise was inaugurated. The history of the female section of Tagore's school is discussed in detail in Chapter V of this thesis.

Tagore's educational enterprise did not remain a static process adamantly clinging to one unchanging model; rather, it evolved and changed in an effort to constantly better itself and imbibe the best that the world had to offer. Tagore described the process thus: “এ বিদ্যালয় নিজেই শুধু ক্রমশ বড়ো হয়ে উঠেছে তা নয়, আমাকেও এ যুগ থেকে যুগান্তরে নিয়েছে এই বিদ্যালয়ের বিকাশের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে আমারও জন্মান্তর ঘটেছে।”<sup>27</sup> [It is not only that this school has gradually grown up but it has also taken me from one era to another. Alongside the development of this school, I, too, have had a rebirth.]

- With reference to Chapter IV, p. 124 (in response to Recommendation No. 4)

**Earlier version without amendment:** “The first point to be noted here is that Achalayatan treats man's natural curiosity and interrogating spirit as a dangerous crime deserving of extreme censure. This symbolically signifies how the colonial education system aimed to kill the inquisitive spirit of students while Tagore, on the other hand, wished to awaken that very spirit of questioning that would lead to an organic process of acquiring knowledge.”

**Amended Version:** The first point to be noted here is that Achalayatan treats man's natural curiosity and interrogating spirit as a dangerous crime deserving of extreme censure. The reader can draw a parallel with the colonial education system which did the same with its aim to kill the inquisitive spirit of the students. Tagore, on the other hand, wished to awaken that very spirit of questioning that would lead to an organic process of acquiring knowledge. However, it does not imply that Achalayatan, in this play, is a symbolical representation of the colonial education system as the play specifically targets Hindu orthodoxy, ritual-centrism and obscurantism. But in

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<sup>27</sup> *Praktani*, 17.

the context of education, the colonial school functioned – quite like Achalayatan – to systematically drive out any natural curiosity in the students.

➤ With reference to Chapter III, p. 82 (in response to Minor Corrections)

Tagore also recommended Nature’s method of discipline, which he termed as “freedom cure,” as far more effective for moulding character than the stereotyped method of discipline adopted at an average home or school. Though similar in essence to the doctrine of discipline by natural consequences, as formulated by Rousseau and, later, developed by Spencer, it is more human in spirit and touched with greater sympathy for the erring child than is evident in the approach of the former two educationists. “When mind and life are given full freedom,” Tagore observed, “they achieve health. I adopted the system of freedom cure, if I can give it the name ...”<sup>28</sup>

Correction done in the footnote of this quote.

➤ With reference to Chapter III, pp. 99-100 (in response to Minor Corrections)

They had to take care of their individual needs as there were no workers or servants to tend to them. It has to be noted, however, that the students did not cook their own meals nor were they responsible for emptying their own latrines. The communal kitchen provided food to the students and their latrines were cleaned by designated sweepers. When Mahatma Gandhi visited Santiniketan on 6 March 1915, he was quick to point out this lacuna. As a result, from March 10, a new experiment was started according to which students and teachers assumed the responsibility of cooking and cleaning. Rudrangshu Mukherjee has described the process and its consequence in thus:

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<sup>28</sup> H. B. Mukherjee, *Education for Fullness* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2013), 295.

From 10 March when Rabindranath was actually not present in Santiniketan, the experiments in self-help were put in place. One of the students at that time, Pramathnath Bishi [sic] ... remembered that because of these new arrangements, in the ashrama a satya yuga began for the students who began doing all the work and as a result studies became irrelevant and no one noticed that. But actually some parents did take notice that their sons were learning to cook and clean and chose to bring them home. One mother wrote that if you have to learn to cook, you will learn it much better at home from me.<sup>29</sup>

This experiment had to cease as it was causing great disruption in the functioning of the school. The students resumed their earlier way of life and a practice of observing Gandhi Punyah on March 10 every year was started in order to keep alive the spirit of self-help and self-service that Gandhiji sought to inculcate. On that date, every year, the students and teachers would do every duty associated with the daily life of the ashram themselves. After the establishment of Visva-Bharati, Nandalal Bose himself took charge of cleaning the latrines with a group of students on that day.

Signature of the Supervisor

Signature of the Candidate

Date:

Date:

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<sup>29</sup> Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Tagore & Gandhi: Walking Alone, Walking Together* (New Delhi: Aleph, 2021), 53.