

## Exploring Relations: Tagore and Geddes, Bengal and Scotland

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Bashabi Fraser, Tapati Mukherjee and Amrit Sen, eds. *Confluence of Minds: The Rabindranath Tagore and Patrick Geddes Reader on Education and Environment*. Santiniketan: Visva-Bharati, 2017. 262 pp. ISBN 978-81-7522-650-0.

Tapati Mukherjee, Bashabi Fraser and Amrit Sen, eds. *Scottish Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Continuum of Ideas*. Santiniketan: Visva-Bharati, 2017. 210 pp. ISBN: 978-81-7522-651-7.

These two edited volumes are the outcome of a collaboration between the Scottish Centre of Tagore Studies (SCoTS) at Edinburgh Napier University and Rabindra-Bhavana at Visva-Bharati, funded by the British Council and the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India as a UK-India Educational Research Initiatives (UKIERI) project.

The first volume, *Confluence of Minds*, attempts to bring together the relevant writings of Rabindranath Tagore and Patrick Geddes for an avowedly global audience. The “Introduction” jointly by Neil Fraser and Bashabi Fraser presents the backdrop of the Tagore-Geddes association as well as the subtle differences in their opinions quite succinctly. The writings are arranged according to the following scheme: nine instances of Tagore’s musings and five representing Patrick Geddes’s thoughts on education, followed by four essays of Tagore and five pieces by Geddes on environment.

The selection of Tagore’s essays on education begins with “The Vicissitudes of Education” (1892) highlighting the joyless school atmosphere and the imposition of English language and literature on Indian students who find this bewildering. He put stress on the students’ own experiences, imagination and the use of the mother tongue to make education relevant to their lives. In “The Problem of Education” (1906), “My School” (1917) and “A Poet’s School”

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(1926), written after the establishment of his school in Santiniketan in 1901, he compared most schools with factories and decried the prison-like walls enclosing them. Rabindranath wanted the pupils to be self-reliant, imaginative, nature-loving and find freedom in creativity. The ideal teacher, like the Master (guru) in the ancient Indian *tapovana* or forest-hermitage would offer succour to the body and the mind of the student, in a homely atmosphere. This idea formed the basis of his own school in Santiniketan.

In “Centre of Indian Culture” (1919) and “An Eastern University” (1921), Rabindranath advanced the idea of a confluence of the best in the arts, science and culture of the East and the West. We have to understand his University, Visva-Bharati, in the light of these essays. Two edited sections from “Sriniketan” (1924) and “The First Anniversary of Sriniketan” (1924) discuss the establishment of the Institute of Rural Reconstruction at Surul as essential to a holistic idea of education in terms of service rendered to community and nature. “The Parrot’s Training” (1918), a parable about educating the King’s pet, is an inevitable choice. The parable ends with the parrot dying, literally stuffed with pages from textbooks. Evidently, its education is complete.

References to Rabindranath’s Bengali play *Achalayatan* (1911) and/or excerpts from “Indian Students and Western Teachers” (published in *The Modern Review* in April 1916), “The Schoolmaster” (published in *The Modern Review* in October 1924), *Talks in China* (comprising his lectures delivered in China in 1924; published in 1925), “The Function of a Library” (published in *Visva-Bharati Bulletin* in January 1929), “The Educational Mission of Visva-Bharati” (lecture broadcast by Radio New York on 10 November 1930; published in *The Modern Review* in June 1931) and “Religious Education” (published in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* November 1935-January 1936 issue), would have been welcome in the context of a discussion of his idea of education.

Patrick Geddes cherished his idea of the In-World of memories and plans and stimulation of the students’ imagination. He argued in favour of a systematic, scientific collection and analysis of data, and close interaction with nature. His diagrams, the “thinking Machines,” on folded sheets of paper illustrated the interrelatedness of various academic subjects, place, work and life. Civilisation made progress, not very smoothly always but there remained a thread of continuity due to the contributions of not only the Precursors, but the Initiators and Continuers, according to him. “The World Without and the World Within,” “The Fifth Talk from my Outlook Tower: Our City of Thought” and “The Notation of life” attest his ideas about education. In “The Education of two Boys,” he affirms the necessity of a childhood immersion in the practical aspects of learning by citing instances from his life and the upbringing of his children. The specific proposals made in “Scottish University: Needs and Aims” complement the ideals propounded in the essays on education selected in this volume.

“The Religion of the Forest” (1922), “Can Science be Humanized?” (1933), “The Relation of the Individual to the Universe” (1913) and the “Introduction” to Elmhirst’s address, “The Robbery of the Soil,” referring to faulty and indiscriminate exploitation of nature leading to desertification, form the crux of the selections of Rabindranath Tagore’s essays and lectures on environment in *Confluence of Minds*, and so do pertinent letters, a poem “Homage to the Tree” and *The Waterfall*, Rabindranath’s play representing an indictment of the big mechanical contraption stopping the flow of the water downstream to teach the inhabitants there a political lesson, appended here. It is understood that in a *Reader* like *Confluence of Minds*, not all of the numerous relevant writings can be included. Still, references to his Bengali short story “Balai” written for and read out at the first *briksharopan* or tree-planting ceremony instituted by him in Santiniketan on 14 July 1928, would have been essential.

The environmental thoughts of Patrick Geddes have been represented in “Cities, and the Soils They Grow from,” “The Valley Plan of Civilisation,” “Ways to the Neotechnic City” (Chapter V of *Cities in Evolution*), “Life and its Science” and “The Sociology of Autumn,” in this volume. Deforestation, pastoral societies, work related to topography, conservation of nature (in towns) and finite natural resources are some of the subjects juxtaposed with the practical values of gardening since childhood, exploring and nurturing individual and collective ties with nature and looking at Nature and Life as a whole through the lenses of the Arts and the Sciences together. Geddes seeks and presents the poetry of existence in some of these writings.

The poet and the town-planner tried to bring together ideas of education and environment in their work-ethics. This volume succeeds in paying homage to their dreams.

*Scottish Orientalism and Bengal Renaissance: The Continuum of Ideas* has an excellent scholarly introductory article on the subject by Bashabi Fraser. Even the uninitiated readers are bound to take an active interest in eighteenth century Scottish intellectual history with reference to Hutcheson and Stewart of Glasgow University advocating liberalism in thought, the publication of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* from 1768 to 1771 in Edinburgh and William Robertson’s 1791 estimate of a sophisticated civilisation in India giving rise to Scottish Orientalists appreciating Eastern cultures. However, James Mill’s six-volume *History of British India* (1817) effectively taught East India Company officials about Indian depravity and paved the way for Macaulay’s dismissal of the existence of a proper culture in India down the millennia. Following the earlier generation of Scottish intellectuals’ appreciation of Indian culture and civilisation, the role played by Warren Hastings, William Jones, Colebrook, Halhed, Wilkins, Princep, Chambers, David Hare, Alexander Duff, Patrick and Arthur Geddes and Daniel Hamilton have been duly noted in this survey. The inception of the Bengal

Renaissance and the contribution of Raja Rammohan Roy and the Tagore family (with special reference to Prince Dwarakanath and his grandson Rabindranath) to the process of bridging the East and the West have been chronicled in Fraser's writing. In fact, the volume is divided into four unequal sections following this historical trajectory: "From the West to the East," "The Trio Who Turned the Clock of Education in Bengal," "The Poet and the East-West Encounter" and "Scientific Innovation in India."

In the first section, apart from Fraser's introductory article, there is her article on "A Sojourner's Calcutta: Through the Colonial Lens," concentrating on the journals of Maria Graham, Walter Hamilton and [Robert Grenville] Wallace. With the connotations of diaspora, migration and sojourn distinguished, and with reference to Said's idea of the Orient being known to the West through trade and travel writings, the writer analyses the journals presenting Indians through the colonisers' idiom. She views their charting of Calcutta the way a hundred years later the flaneur/flaneuse would, and cites an interesting interplay of colonialism, objectivity, metropolitan consciousness and cosmopolitanism. In "East Meets West: A Vibrant Encounter Between Indian Orthodoxy and Scottish Enlightenment" and "The Scotland-India Interaction: A So-called Native Stalwart in India – Dwarakanath Tagore," Tapati Mukherjee charts the history and impact of prominent Scots in India and Prince Dwarakanath's experience of Scottish religion, culture and economy during his visit to Scotland, respectively.

In the second section, Saptarshi Mallick chronicles with scholarly care in "Serampore Missionaries and David Hare: On the Penury of Education in Nineteenth Century Bengal," the contribution of Carey, Marshman, Ward and David Hare towards alleviation of the "penury" in education, the turning point for Bengal. Kathryn Simpson's "Understanding the Renaissance in Nineteenth Century Bengal" concentrates on Alexander Duff and Raja Rammohan Roy as pioneers spreading modern education among Indians. In "The Caledonian Legacy: Of the Scottish Church College in Kolkata," Kaberi Chatterjee describes the General Assembly's Institution founded by Duff, nomenclature changes, Swami Vivekananda and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose as alumni, and its divergence from government policies in accepting students with a nationalist agenda, in an attempt to concentrate primarily on education.

In the third section of the volume, Amrit Sen indicates that the influence of Robert Burns on Rabindranath Tagore is deeper and wider than hitherto understood, in "A Complex Interface: Rabindranath and Burns." "An Assessment of Sir Daniel Hamilton's Political Philosophy: The Panacea of Scottish Capitalism and Utilitarianism" by Thomas Crosby is a detailed analysis of Scottish economic reforms, Hamilton's belief in Christianity, compassionate capitalism and the principle of cooperatives that changed the lives of many Indians. Neil Fraser in "A Scotsman in Sriniketan" and Dikshit Sinha in "Arthur Geddes and Sriniketan: Explaining Underdevelopment," read the role played by

the same man in the history of Santiniketan-Sriniketan and enrich the readers consistently.

In the last section, “The East’s Writing Back to the West: Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray and Postcoloniality” by Biswanath Banerjee records Ray’s experiences as a student in Edinburgh, the average Indian’s craze for a degree fetching a job, the real thirst for knowledge among scientists in the West, imperial policies, the necessity of economic and political independence for Indians and his opinion contrasting Shakespeare and Rabindranath as cultural icons in two countries. Amrit Sen’s “The Scientist as Hero: The Fashioning of the Self in Patrick Geddes’s *The Life and Work of Sir Jagadish C. Bose* (1920)” highlights Bose, Geddes and Rabindranath’s relation to science. This essay concludes the volume.

Each essay in the second volume explores Scottish Orientalism, or the Bengal Renaissance or pioneering thinkers and doers in these areas, in a scholarly manner. However, possibly due to two volumes being published simultaneously, an error has occurred at the end of the Acknowledgements section in the second volume as it mentions an attempt to bring the contribution of “two great men on education and the environment to a global audience” (iv), relevant to the first volume only. Otherwise, the two publications would be useful to readers interested in Tagore and Geddes, as well as the relation between Bengal and Scotland.

The editors published the two volumes together, possibly thinking that it would be relevant to discuss the links between Scottish Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance, to establish the politico-cultural context and concentrate on Tagore and Geddes thereafter. These volumes are not exactly companion volumes as then the selection of the educational and environmental writings of Tagore and Geddes would demand critical articles on these by scholars, in the companion volume. However, these two volumes might still retain an academic interest, individually and together.