

# Rabindranath Tagore Educational Experiment for Economic Sustainability

**Milan Das**

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Education, Visva-Bharati, West Bengal, India

## **Abstract:**

Nations' development depends on their economic condition, and every nation is trying to develop its economic condition but needs to be more focused on economic sustainability. Economic Growth and economic sustainability are different approaches; economic growth is not concentrated on the future, but economic sustainability is focused on the future. Rabindranath Tagore focused on economic sustainability and experimented with his thoughts on Visva Bharati and Shilaidaha. This paper aims to discuss Rabindranath Tagore's educational experiment on economic sustainability. Rabindranath Tagore realized that the nation's progress could occur when the financial status of millions of rural people improved through education. Rabindranath Tagore focused on advanced scientific methods of agriculture, animal husbandry, cottage industry, nature education, etc. Rabindranath Tagore concentrates on the development of self-reliance and unity of pupils. This paper discusses how self-reliance and cooperation develop economic sustainability through Rabindranath Tagore's thoughts and experiments. This paper focuses on some aspects of Tagore's economic thought and rural development and will try to re-evaluate the significance of his economic thought in the present context of economic sustainability in India.

**Keywords:** Economic sustainability, Rural reconstruction, Education, Self-reliance, Cooperation, poverty alleviation.

## **Highlights**

- Rabindranath Tagore's view of economic sustainability points to economic self-reliance, utilization of resources, cooperation, and poverty alleviation.
- Rabindranath Tagore established rural reconstruction at Sriniketan to spread sustainability.
- Visva-Bharati festivals are made for the economic and social sustainability of Visva-Bharati stakeholders, like Ananda Bazar, Nandan Mela, Magh Mela, Rathindra Mela, Poush Mela, etc.

Rabindranath Tagore is one of modern India's greatest poets, writers, and educators. It was a period of social upheaval and reforms in India when the mystic Rabindranath Tagore, a prominent poet, profound thinker, and economist, was born in Calcutta on 6th May 1860. He was born into a prominent Calcutta family known for its socio-religious and cultural innovations during the 19th Bengal Renaissance. Rabindranath did not write a central educational treatise; his ideas must be gleaned through his various writings and educational experiments at Santiniketan (Ghosh, 2014). Rabindranath Tagore experiments with his economic thoughts at Shilaidaha and Santiniketan. He believed that education is not to develop only knowledge; education develops man's potentiality, self-realization, and skills. Rabindranath Tagore spread his thoughts on economic sustainability through the development of his rural reconstruction. Economic sustainability means satisfying the needs of humans but in a manner that sustains natural

resources and the environment for future generations. Sustainable development is managing these resources so that they will not be depleted and remain available for future generations (Anon, n.d.). In 2030, a sustainable development agenda with 17 sustainable development goals and 169 targets was adopted in September 2015. India is emerging as one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. The Indian economy is in a good position to witness GDP growth of 8.0-8.5 percent in 2022-23. This economic development is not sustainable economic development, and for that reason, Indian policy and agenda focus on a green economy and a green GDP. A green economy is a clean, environmentally friendly economy that promotes health, wealth, and well-being. A green economy means growing our economies in ways that benefit, not sacrifice, social justice, equity, and environmental development (Bholane, 2021). Even though we are looking at a sustainable economy in the present time, its experiment was laid out by Rabindranath Tagore approximately 130 years ago. Santiniketan, established by Rabindranath Tagore in 1901, and Sriniketan, established in 1921, discussed economic self-reliance and environment-friendly economic development with the spread of education. Rabindranath Tagore believed that sustainable rural development is necessary for a country's sustainable development. Sustainable development depends on maintaining harmony between culture, economy, society, and environment. Therefore, Rabindranath Tagore developed the balance of culture, economy, society, and environment as the foundation of education in Visva-Bharati. Education should not be only book-centric; education should be work-oriented and maintain equality. Even today, along with education in Visva-Bharati, efforts are being made to keep equality between culture, society, economy, and environment through festivals that impact economic sustainability. That development is environmentally and socially friendly development. That development is rural development, the development of low-income families, communities, society, and nations.

### Research Objectives

1. To find out Rabindranath Tagore's philosophical views on economic self-reliance
2. To explore Rabindranath Tagore's philosophical thoughts and experiment on economic self-reliance.

**Methodology:** The researcher used the content analysis method. The researcher collects the data from Tagore's various writing documents and experiments and secondary sources used from other authors' documents, books, research works, etc. Researchers find out what Tagore Educational thinks about achieving economic sustainability through education.

### Rabindranath Tagore's educational views on economic sustainability:

Rabindranath's thought has a significant impact on our modern economic development. Rabindranath Tagore realized that the country's sustainable development could occur when the conditions of millions of rural people improve. While looking after the Zamindari family, he saw rural life throughout his stay at Shilaidaha and Patisar (Chattopadhyay n.d.). Rabindranath was a complete man in his literary thought; on the other hand, his views on nation, society, and economic thought were also those of a whole man. However, Rabindranath, in the conventional sense, the economist, was not. He thought deeply about the economic development of the country's people. The economic development of any country depends on human per capita income, but if the monthly or daily income of all people increases, is sustainable economic development possible? Sustainable economic development depends more than human per capita income on the utilization of resources. People use resources in various ways to live a luxurious life, impacting the country's economy. The price of daily necessities is increasing day by day. Poverty and unemployment are the main barriers to sustainable economic development. Some Indians are rich, but

most are poor. Some are very highly educated, and many are illiterate. Some people live in luxury; most people work hard. Some people have tremendous political power, but most have no political power. Some people have many opportunities for progress in life; most have no opportunities. Police, like some people, look down on most people. These disparities are all different, and each of these disparities needs to be carefully considered. Educationist Rabindranath Tagore tried to eliminate this inequality through education. Rabindranath Tagore instructed the students to maintain equality: "Take charge of each village and organize the villages. Teach and introduce innovations in agriculture and village implements; inspire the villagers to make their dwellings clean, healthy, and beautiful; and Invent rules by which they must assemble themselves and perform all the village duties. Do not expect fame in this action; you will even have to accept resistance and distrust from the villagers instead of gratitude. There is no tension, conflict, or proclamation; only patience and love, penance in *nivrit* — the only stake in the mind is to share the sufferings of those who suffer most in the country and devote all their lives to the root remedy of that suffering". Rabindranath Tagore knew he could not take responsibility for the nation's development. He believes the whole country's development is possible if everyone takes responsibility in one village. However, his thinking will show a new direction for the country. Education is essential for sustainable development. Through education, the village will be developed, inequality will be removed, environment-friendly industries will be developed, and health awareness will increase. Rabindranath established Sriniketan, which shows a new form of economic sustainability.

**1. Self-reliance:** Self-reliance in an economic context emphasizes a nation's ability to meet its needs and reduce dependency on external sources. To make a country stable and economically self-reliant, it is necessary to awaken self-reliance among all. Rabindranath Tagore introduced science-based, work-centric education beyond traditional education to make them self-reliant. Rabindranath Tagore founded Santiniketan in 1901 and Sriniketan in 1921 to make students self-reliant. He also focused on rural development by making the students of an institution self-reliant. Rabindranath Tagore realized that rural development would be possible if the students could be self-sustaining; he told the students, 'You should all go and live in a village and help the villagers to develop the village through your educational thought.' At Sriniketan, founded by Rabindranath Tagore, the activities of Sriniketan were divided into six sections in 1927 to make the students self-reliant. They are –

- Economic development: agriculture and animal husbandry, cottage industries, fish farming, cooperatives, etc.
- Education: Lok Shiksha Sangsad, primary education, vocational education, women's welfare.
- Social welfare
- Public health
- Erosion prevention measures.
- Village survey and research.

Some of the festivals of Visva-Bharati, founded by Rabindranath Tagore, make students self-reliant. Which is discussed below –

- Ananda Bazar: Ananda Bazar is held for a few hours in the afternoon on the day of Mahalaya. It is a fun fair for the students. They decorate the shop with sari, paper, flowers, leaves, etc. At the fair, various shops sell various handmade food items, toys, dolls, hand-drawn cards, masks, etc., for the students. The money collected at this fair is spent on public works.
- Nandan Mela: To commemorate the birth anniversary of Nandalal Bose, the art fair, known as Nandan Mela, is organized every year on the 1st and 2nd of December by the Kala Bhavana. The students

involve themselves in various activities, from constructing outdoor sculptures and installations to building stalls for selling craft items, food, calendars, etc. In the morning on the 3rd of December, Nandalal Bose's birthday, the students and teachers have a candlelight procession to his house every year.

- **Magh Mela:** In 1922, Rabindranath Tagore established Sriniketan, the rural center for folk culture and cultivation of rural activities near Santiniketan. Sriniketan Utsav or Magh Mela and an exhibition were formally started on 23rd Magh, 1328 of the Bengali Calendar (6th February 1922). To mark the foundation day, a fair is organized every year on 23- 25 Magh (6-8 February) at Sriniketan. Fair is based on agricultural products grown scientifically, equipment, and rural handicrafts. Functions of folk culture are the other attractions of Sriniketan Utsav.
  - **Rathindra Mela:** The students of Palli Samgathana Vibhaga, Sriniketan, for the last few years, have been organizing a fair on 27th November commemorating the birth anniversary of Rathindranath Tagore, son of Rabindranath Tagore.
  - **Poush Mela:** Poush Mela is celebrated for three days in mid-December in the large Mela Maath opposite the ashram. Poush Mela is an annual fair and festival that marks the harvest season. The event is characterized by its live performances of Bengali folk music, especially Baul, tribal dance (Santhali), and firework displays. The stalls sell various products like toys, garments, books, household items, utensils, and local handicrafts. The fair offers a perfect insight into the true heritage of the place, and the students' performance adds zest to this festival. Poush Mela integrates the Santhals and the locals with the students.
2. **Cooperation:** According to Rabindranath Tagore - "Knowledge is the role of action. So, all the country's villages should be developed as necessary for rural development. A society should be established in several villages. If the heads of these societies take care of all the rural activities and remove the poverty, they can make them self-reliant. In that case, autonomy will become a reality across the country. They should be given educational assistance and encouragement to set up their schools, industrial schools, warehouse, collective goods warehouses, and banks."(Tagore 1962). He thought that till each one of them farmed independently, their poor condition would not improve. Therefore, everyone should be united for sustainable economic development, by which many products can be produced using minimal resources. As a result, people will be able to benefit more at a significant cost. In Europe and America, various improved machines have been invented for farming. However, we are unable to use it due to extreme poverty. Because it is not possible to use all those machines with less land and less energy, if a village group or a village all come together and engage in agriculture by combining all their land, then with the help of modern machinery, many costs will be saved, and work will be facilitated (Tagore 1962). If cowherds join to rear cows and prepare butter, ghee, etc., it is done cheaply and well (Tagore 1962). If the weavers join together and bring a cloth mill to their village, and each one contributes to it, the cloth will be produced in greater quantity, and they will each benefit. Therefore, if the villagers cooperate, they will develop a sustainable economy in India.
3. **Poverty alleviation:** Poverty is one of the obstacles to the sustainable economic development of any country. In the context of poverty, Rabindranath Tagore believed that a lack of income could not cause poverty. He saw poverty on a large canvas in the overall context. Rabindranath Tagore said, "The origin of poverty is our lack of knowledge, defects of growth, defects of wisdom, and weakness of character." According to Rabindranath Tagore, the root cause of poverty is desperation within the

people. It is essential to create the right mental attitude for it. He felt that people experiencing poverty must unite; the fight against poverty cannot be won alone. No one from the outside can remove the misery of people experiencing poverty. They must clear themselves. The importance of knowledge as the main driving force of today's world economy has increased. The world's developed countries can improve their product export by correctly applying knowledge. Rabindranath Tagore realized that, and therefore, he spread education among all people. Rabindranath Tagore pioneered 21st-century agricultural production, framing, poultry framing, etc., as a poverty alleviation strategy. He sent his son Rathindranath and his friend's son Santosh Majumder abroad in 1906. Rabindranath Tagore's son-in-law Nagen Ganguly in 1960 to learn science-based agriculture and cow husbandry. Rabindranath Tagore's idea of poverty alleviation can be found in a letter written to his son-in-law Nagen. Rabindranath Tagore wrote, 'If you want to be an associate with Rathi, the field is ready. He was cultivating in cooperation with the cultivators, making banks, setting up healthy dwellings for them, paying off debts, providing education for boys, building roads, closing ditches, alleviating water shortages, and binding each other to help each other (Tagore 1962). Rights and unity are the most important things mentioned by Rabindranath Tagore to escape poverty. Rabindranath's thoughts on poverty alleviation were:

- Identify poverty in a holistic context rather than a partial view.
- Efforts on science-based agricultural methods and establishment of agricultural banks.
- Expansion of rural industries.
- To provide education about rural industries.
- To build unity and self-reliance among all people through education.
- Reconstruction of rural economy and effective rural development.
- A creative, science-based, effective education system should be introduced instead of a rote-based education system.
- An Independent judicial system and anti-corruption system should be created.

### Conclusion:

Economic sustainability is a pillar of sustainable development in any country. We see the reflection of Rabindranath Tagore's nature of educational thoughts and experiments in Visva-Bharati. Rabindranath Tagore emphasizes rural economic development along with economic self-reliance and the development of an eco-friendly economy using fewer resources for sustainable development. In Visva-Bharati, teachers still teach students under trees or in open-air classes. Therefore, there is less utilization of resources in the education system, and on the other side, students are learning joyfully in nature.

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