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Creative Imagination in Education and Democracy. A Dialogue between Rabindranath Tagore and Martha Nussbaum

ABSTRACT

This article reflects on the role of creative imagination in education for democracy in the 21st century. The concept, central to Rabindranath Tagore's educational philosophy, is revisited through the lens of Martha C. Nussbaum's critique of contemporary education. Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) a Bengali writer, poet, essayist, and activist, developed the concept in the early twentieth century. In the 21st century, Martha C. Nussbaum (1947–), an American philosopher and activist, diagnoses a "silent crisis" in education, rooted in the prioritization of technical skills at the expense of humanistic values. The American trend to promote specialized technical education has become global and has also influenced Poland. Nussbaum sees Tagore's vision as a compelling model for cultivating democratic and cosmopolitan citizenship. Tagore's notion of creative imagination is discussed in a wider context of his theory and practice of education, in relation to the concept of the "citizen of the world," and juxtaposes it with Nussbaum's reflection on the role of education for democracy. The article explores their shared emphasis on empathy, critical thinking and holistic development, drawing on descriptive, hermeneutical, and comparative methods within a wide context of cultural and civilisational encounters. Both thinkers stress the need for education to foster critical thinking, empathy, and a holistic understanding of human relationships and the world, and Tagore further emphasizes spiritual freedom, man's relation to the Infinite, and a connection with nature.

KEYWORDS: Martha Nussbaum, Rabindranath Tagore, philosophy of education, creative imagination, sympathy

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STRESZCZENIE

Kreatywna wyobraźnia dla edukacji i demokracji.
Dialog Rabindranatha Tagore'a i Marthy Nussbaum

Artykuł poświęcono refleksji nad wyobraźnią twórczą i jej rolą w edukacji na rzecz demokracji w XXI w. Ta koncepcja, zasadnicza dla filozofii edukacji Rabindranatha Tagore'a, jest analizowana w kontekście krytyki współczesnej amerykańskiej edukacji, której dokonała Martha C. Nussbaum. Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), bengalski pisarz, poeta, eseista i aktywista, opracował ją na początku XX w. W XXI w. Martha C. Nussbaum (1947–), amerykańska filozofka i aktywistka, pisała o „cichym kryzysie" w edukacji, który zrodził się w efekcie przedkładania umiejętności technicznych nad wartości humanistyczne. Amerykański trend promowania specjalistycznego wykształcenia technicznego stał się trendem światowym i rozprzestrzenił się również na Polskę. Nussbaum postrzega edukacyjną ideę twórczej wyobraźni Tagore'a jako pomocną w kształtowaniu kosmopolitycznego i demokratycznego obywatela. Pojęcie wyobraźni twórczej Tagore'a zostało omówione w szerszym kontekście jego teorii i praktyki wychowania oraz w odniesieniu do koncepcji „obywatela świata" i ogólniej, w relacji do refleksji Nussbaum nad rolą edukacji dla demokracji. Badania przeprowadzone w artykule są wynikiem systematycznych rozważań, w których zastosowano metody związane z analizami opisowymi, hermeneutycznymi i porównawczymi w szerokim kontekście spotkań kulturowych i cywilizacyjnych. Nussbaum i Tagore opowiadają się za edukacją humanistyczną i artystyczną, aby stworzyć empatycznych, wrażliwych obywateli świata. Podkreślają potrzebę edukacji, która sprzyja krytycznemu myśleniu, empatii i holistycznemu zrozumieniu tak relacji międzyludzkich, jak i świata, przy czym Tagore dodatkowo kładzie nacisk na duchową wolność, związek człowieka z Nieskończonym i naturą.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: Martha Nussbaum, Rabindranath Tagore,
filozofia wychowania, wyobraźnia twórcza, empatia

Introduction

> This history has come to a stage when the moral man, the complete man, is more and more giving way, almost without knowing it, to make room for the political and the commercial man, the man of the limited purpose. [...] [F]or the sake of humanity, we must stand up and give warning to all, that this nationalism is a cruel epidemic of evil that is sweeping over the human world of the present age, eating into its moral vitality.
>
> Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (1917).

Rabindranath Tagore, a Bengali writer, was the first non-Westerner to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in English in 1913. Born into an influential family, Tagore grew up in a creative and cosmopolitan environment. He was actively involved in the Bengal Renaissance movement, which fostered a "cross-cultural mentality," in which Indian and Western perspectives were creatively merged. This atmosphere contributed to Tagore's intellectual inclination towards universalism and his rejection of narrow nationalism. He addressed questions related to the character, goals, and problems of education, focusing on the importance of peaceful dialogue between different civilizations. Within this context, he reflected on the role of creative imagination in the educational process, the ultimate aim of which was to cultivate the "universal man," characterized by empathy towards all mankind. In her book *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Martha Nussbaum similarly advocates for a humanistic education that nurtures creative imagination and critical thinking. She discusses the "silent crisis" in American education and the concept of the "citizen of the world," which in many ways parallels Tagore's notion of the "universal man." Nussbaum argues that the growing trend of economizing on humanities and arts at all levels undermines not only educational institutions but societies in the long run. Drawing on philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Dewey, and Rabindranath Tagore, she envisions a future that steers academia away from the precarious path toward a "silent crisis," yet in this article only Nussbaum-Tagore dialogue will be considered.

Methodology

The research carried in the article is the result of systematic considerations in which methods related to descriptive, hermeneutical, and comparative analyses were applied in a broad context of cultural and civilisational encounters.

Research framework

Both Rabindranath Tagore, an Indian writer, poet, and essayist who lived at the turn of 19th and 20th centuries, and the contemporary American philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum, known for her studies on ancient Greek and Roman philosophy as well as legal, political, and feminist philosophy, belong to the prominent intellectuals of their times who gave ample place to reflection on education in many of their works. Tagore did not consider himself a philosopher, though he philosophically reflected on different aspects of life, humanity, politics, nature, nation, religion, arts, creativity, and also education (Marlewicz, 2023, p. 88). Tagore did not author a single comprehensive work outlining his theory and practice of education. Instead, his ideas are dispersed across numerous Bengali and English writings.[1] In his first major work on the subject, *The Vicissitudes of Education*, originally delivered in Bengali language as a lecture in 1892 and translated into English in 1947 (Tagore, 1961, p. 367), he emphasized the role of the native language as a medium of instruction, criticizing the introduction of English in the Indian educational system of his time. He continued writing and lecturing on education, and most importantly, put his theory into practice in his educational institutions, beginning with the establishment of a school named Brahmacharyasrama in December 1901, which was transformed into Patha-Bhavana in 1925 (n.a., 2023). Tagore's most notable works in which he presented his educational ideas appeared after 1918, when he decided to transform his previously established educational institutions into Visva Bharati (sometimes also spelled Viśva Bharati), the World University, an international academy. This shows that Tagore's philosophy of education was not merely descriptive but prescriptive in nature: the poet theorized about education with the aim of establishing and implementing a certain standard of educational practice. In a letter to his son Rathindranath, Tagore describes Visva Bharati as "the center for cultivating universal manhood," "transcending the barrier of nationalistic geography," "a link between India and the world" (Bhattacharya, 2014, p. 64), educating toward tolerance, openness, and respect for traditional values of different civilisations. Tagore discussed education problems in *The Unity of Education* (1921) (Tagore, 1961, p. 376), *Creative Unity* (1922) (Tagore, 1922), *The Centre of Indian Culture* (1919) (Tagore, 1961, p. 375), as well as *A Poet's School*, first published in 1926 and then, in 1928, reissued as a *Visva-Bharati Bulletin* (Tagore, 1961, p. 376). Relevant excerpts on the role of creative imagination in education from *Creative Unity* and selected essays will be cited and interpreted.

1 Most recent monographs in English, which reconstruct Tagore's philosophy of education include Bhattacharya (2014), Mukherjee (2020), and Quayum (2023).

In a number of her writings, Nussbaum addresses issues related to the philosophy of education, such as educating for democratic and world citizenship, the role of art and humanities in education, as well as moral education.[2] She also discusses legal education (Nussbaum, 2003), Socratic pedagogy (Nussbaum, 2016), the education of women as a global problem (Nussbaum, 2004), and the role of art in learning and teaching (Nussbaum, 2002). In 1997, she published *Cultivating Humanity. A Classical Defence of Reform in Liberal Education* (Nussbaum, 2003). In second chapter of the book, she reflects on the idea of the "citizen of the world," a term coined by the Greek philosopher Diogenes the Cynic (Nussbaum, 2003, pp. 50, 52), describing a person who has been taught to engage meaningfully and respectfully with representatives of other cultural traditions. In the present paper, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, the second chapter of *Cultivating Humanity. A Classical Defence of Reform in Liberal Education* and several other selected works by Nussbaum will be discussed and interpreted in the context of her application of Tagore's ideas in education for democracy of the 21st century.

Creative Imagination in Educational Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore lived at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, when India was still under British control but the Indian independence movement was gaining strength, ultimately leading to India's independence in 1947. A Bengali writer, Tagore felt the need to communicate his ideas to the world beyond India after becoming the first non-Westerner to earn the Nobel Prize for Literature in English in 1913 (Fraser, 2019, p. 126). Receiving the award was an important impetus for Tagore to become a bilingual writer who translated many of his earlier essays and lectures into English. He also began to travel the world, journeying to "the West and East on his one-man mission, urging the world to heed his ideas on the dangers of narrow nationalism and the need for internationalism / universalism, unity, mutual understanding and respect" (Fraser, 2019, p. 216).

Tagore, the youngest of fourteen children of Debendranath and Sarada Devi (Kripalani 1962, p. 33), was raised in an aristocratic, wealthy, and influential family (Gupta, 2004, pp. 3–4), whose members were actively involved in the intellectual, social, religious, and artistic life of Bengal. He grew in a creative and cosmopolitan atmosphere, at home where German, French, Sanskrit, Parsi writers and poets were read in their original languages (Gupta, 2004,

2 Some of the most recent works in English discussing Nussbaum's concept of education for democracy include Goubet (2014), Indrajaya (2019), and Karelin (2017).

pp. 66–67; Fraser, 2019, pp. 156–157). The writer was actively involved in the Bengal Renaissance movement (late 18th to early 20th century), a period of fruitful intellectual interaction between the Hindu upper-class intelligentsia and some representatives of the British government and missionaries, which fostered a "cross-cultural mentality" blending the cultural traditions of India and the West (Dasgupta, 2011). The atmosphere of the age, as well as the intellectual and cultural environment in which he lived, undoubtedly shaped the thinker's personal attitude, leading him to embrace universalism and reject a narrowly conceived nationalism. In addition, as a man of the East-West encounter, Tagore often centered his reflections around the meeting between these two cultural and civilisational worlds, discussing, juxtaposing, contrasting, and evaluating them in specific contexts, including that of education.

He addressed questions related to the character, goals, and problems of education from the perspective that was vital for his times, and this outlook is clearly reflected in the Visva Bharati University Constitution drawn up by Prasanta Mahalanobis and Tagore's nephew, Surendranath Tagore. The excerpt reads as follows:

> research into the study of the religion, literature, history, science and art of the Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Zoroastrian, Islamic, Sikh, Christian and other civilizations may be pursued along with the culture of the West, with that simplicity of externals which is necessary for true spiritual realization, in amity, good fellowship and cooperation between the thinkers and scholars of both Eastern and Western countries, free from all antagonisms of race, nationality, creed or caste and in the name of one supreme being who is Shantam, Shivam, Advaitam (Bhattacharya, 2014, p. 64).

The above emphasizes the universal values of various religious traditions, as well as the arts, literature, science of both India and Europe, which were to be pursued at the Visva Bharati University. The aim was to incorporate the best of what the East and the West have to offer into the teaching curricula. The educational ideal expressed above sought to promote teaching and learning grounded in the peaceful and fruitful dialogue among different civilizations. As Kathleen M. O'Connell observes, "Tagore's educational model has a unique sensitivity and aptness for education within multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-cultural situations" (O'Connell, 2003). A university thus conceived was envisioned as a community where students and teachers could find the perfect environment for realizing the principle of creative unity:

> University, where we can work together in a common pursuit of truth, share together our common heritage, and realise that artists in all parts of the world have created forms of beauty, scientists discovered secrets of the universe, philosophers solved the problems of existence, saints made the truth of the

> spiritual world organic in their own lives, not merely for some particular race to which they belonged, but for all mankind (Tagore, 1922 [Kindle Locations 1621–1624]).

Indeed, Visva Bharati University, "The Transnational Center of Education" (Bhattacharya, 2014, pp. 57–74), which embodied Tagore's ideas of Eastern University, the Centre of Indian Culture and International Culture gathered many artists, intellectuals, and teachers from India and abroad (Bhattacharya, 2014, pp. 65–66).

Freedom to the children, power to the grown-ups

How do you work to develop creative imagination in students? What does it contribute to the betterment of the human condition in general, and to the achievement of self-realization of an individual in particular? Tagore's ideas on education "were derived mainly from his own experience", when, as a child, he was forced to live life with restrictions, supervision, and routine teaching of subjects he had no interest in (Kabir, 1961, p. 8). Of the experiences, the poet wrote:

> We had to get up before dawn and ... begin with a bout or two with a blind wrestler. Without a pause we ... started on our courses of literature, mathematics, geography and history. On our return from school our drawing and gymnastic masters would be ready for us. In the evening Aghore Babu came for our English lessons. It was only after nine that we were free (Tagore, 1917, p. 38).

When Tagore was then sent to the Bengal Academy, "A Eurasian institution," it was not much better: "What we were taught there we never understood, nor did we make any attempt to learn, nor did it seem to make any difference... . The rooms were cruelly dismal with their walls on guard like policemen. ... No decoration, no pictures" (Tagore, 1917, pp. 60–61). These childhood and early adolescent experiences lead him to formulate, in later life, an overarching educational principle that was reflected in most of his educational writings. He was convinced that any educational process should be adapted to the child's individual predisposition, and their thinking and creative abilities should not be curbed by rigid curricula.[3] Freedom, as E.O. Bălănescu writes, is for Tagore "an essential aspect of education because it gave children the possibility to learn subconsciously and intuitively, to take initiative and ultimately to

3 Of recent works which discuss Tagore's principles of children education in comparative perspective see e.g.: Czekalska (2022) and Bălănescu (2023).

become more independent and self-reliant" so that they could create "an intimate relationship with nature, life and the teacher, the three main sources of education ..." (Bălănescu, 2023, p. 51). Such a process should focus on nurturing creative imagination, the realm of freedom of thought and imagination. This was closely related to Tagore's educational concept of teaching and learning in a natural environment, which some researchers relate to, but are careful not to equate it with, the idea of an "environmentally sustainable, eco-friendly" green university (Haque, 2023). In *The Centre of Indian Culture*, title of which directly refers to Visva Bharati University (Tagore, 1961, p. 228), we read: "true education is to realize at every step how our training and knowledge have an organic connection with our surroundings" (Tagore, 1961, p. 203). He was convinced that, especially in early childhood, contact with nature is vital. It serves as a catalyst for the development of imagination, creativity, and freedom. Furthermore, it is also the means to teach the children to live in agreement with nature, "to have an organic connection" with it, and thus not only to develop sensitivity and a respectful attitude, but also overall ethical behavior towards environment. It is impossible not to notice the similarities between Tagore's pedagogy of nature and the basic tenets of twenty-first-century deep ecology, with its emphasis on developing the ecological self (Madsen, 2023). However, twenty-first-century deep ecology belongs to what came to be described as an atheistic spirituality, whereas for Tagore, who was deeply religious, imagination, creativity, and freedom were inseparable from his religious vision of reality and the self's relationship to it. He described this as "our attitude towards our surroundings, our conscious relationship with the Infinite, and the lasting power of the Eternal", which "can only be made possible by "making provision for students to live in intimate touch with nature, daily to grow in an atmosphere of service offered to all creatures, tending trees, feeding birds and animals, learning to feel the immense mystery of the soil and water and air" (Tagore, 1922 [Kindle Location 1908]).

Self-knowledge and creative unity

Equally important for Tagore was educating students in spiritual self-knowledge, which should enable the individual to experience the unity of life, the unity underlying all beings, in accordance with the Upanishadic teachings and the Sufi mystics (Kabir, 1961, p. 25). The poet firmly believed that educational practice should lead to the realisation of "the universal human spirit that transcends narrow self-interests of the individual and elevates itself to the state of universal," and that this was the only way by which an individual could achieve "the universal being of man" (Basu, 2020, p. 12). This is also why the *Visva Bharati Constitution* ends with an affirmation of faith in "one supreme being

who is Shantam, Shivam, Advaitam", which Tagore interprets as the Blessed (Shantam), Auspicious (Shivam) mystery of Unity (Advaitam) (Tagore, 1922 [Kindle Location 96]), identified with the Vedantic Absolute.

Creativity and sympathy

As a man of almost infinite creative powers, with an extraordinary unparalleled range and breadth, Tagore inspired all who came into contact with his creative fervor. Raina observed that "His stress on the spontaneity of creative impulse ... created an army of untutored geniuses; his lyrics canalized Bengali literature mainly into one channel; and his music and dance led to an 'epidemic' of musicians and dancers" (Raina, 1997, p. 157). Describing the principles of his educational philosophy in the essay *A Poet's School*, Tagore wrote that this first lesson for children in his school would be that of improvisation, as "The first important lesson for children in such a place would be that of improvisation, as that is an incessant source for the exploration of one's abilities, which find their fulfillment in 'surprise achievements'," which in itself is "a lesson ... in creative life" (Tagore, 1961, p. 295). In the final part of the essay, he summarizes:

> I tried to create an atmosphere in my school – this was the main task. In educational institutions our faculties have to be nourished in order to give our mind its freedom, to make our imagination fit for the world which belongs to art, and to stir our sympathy for human relationships (Tagore, 1961, p. 300).

The freedom of human spirit, in which intuitive knowledge merges with imagination and imbues a person with sympathy for others, becomes a powerful means for distinguishing right from wrong, or truth from falsehood, something a person can immediately perceive, though cannot rationally explain. "For knowledge is not union. We attain the world of freedom only through perfect sympathy" (Tagore, 1961, p. 291), Tagore famously wrote. He was convinced that there is an inherent affinity between creativity, imagination, and values. Following an educational path that emphasizes the development of intuitive knowledge and imagination through literature, art, and other forms of expression of the human spirit is a way to cultivate sympathy and empathy for others. It is also a valid means of entering into meaningful dialogue with others, whether they are our fellows human beings or representatives of other cultures and civilizations. In many of his writings, Tagore emphasizes the role of sympathy in relations between the East and West. In the essay *The Centre of Indian Culture*, he wrote that sympathy is "the positive force" which has the "power to combine" (Tagore, 1961, p. 218). This means that if imagination and creativity lead to sympathy, sympathy, in turn, leads to a sense of unity and cooperation

between people of different cultures and races. In *The Poet's Religion*, a subchapter of *Creative Unity*, Tagore writes:

> ... we know that this sympathy carries in it an eternal reality. The fact that the world stirs our imagination in sympathy tells us that this creative imagination is a common truth both in us and in the heart of existence (Tagore, 1922 [Kindle Location 1442]).

Sympathy, therefore, does not originate in human compassion; it is the result of the workings of a spiritual reality beyond the human world, which, if known and recognized by humankind, becomes the basis for experiencing the entire world as one creative unity.

Tagore took very seriously his mission of designing an educational system, which would promote and focus on the growth of free human spirit, necessary for creating a free man with a wholesome and integrated personality. He speaks of the equal role of the powers of thought and imagination in childhood education. However, he was of the opinion that in a harmonious educational system enough space should also be given to teaching cognitive faculties different from thinking and reasoning, such as imagination, intuition, or intuitive knowledge. Intuition and imagination are the means of knowledge acquisition that cannot be acquired by logic or reasoning. Intuitive knowledge, in which the creative powers of man, such as poetic inspiration and intuition, unite and transform into nothing less than philosopher's truth, an ultimate means of freeing not only the individual, but also the entire society or the nation.

Developing the powers of creativity was to become an antidote against narrow technical education, needed for economic growth:

> Professions in the modern age are more numerous and lucrative than ever before. They need specialisation of training and knowledge, tempting education to yield its spiritual freedom to the claims of utilitarian ambitions. But man's deeper nature is hurt; his smothered life seeks to be liberated from the suffocating folds and sensual ties of prosperity. And this is why we find almost everywhere in the world a growing dissatisfaction with the prevalent system of teaching (Tagore, 1922 [Kindle Locations 1561–1564]).

The educational philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore, which can be related to experimental or alternative education, stresses the non-instrumental nature of knowledge, which, in short, means that a student learns about something because of curiosity, not because of necessity. The student develops an integral personality in the freedom of thought and creative imagination stirred by contact with performative arts, literature, and nature that all induce sensitivity, sympathy, and empathy, which all can be taught in a friendly, open to nature environment. Tagore believed that in India of the past and of today poetry

and philosophy are naturally coexisting spheres of knowledge that conjoin the domains of poetic intuition, inspiration, and imagination with rational, philosophical reflection.

Martha Nussbaum on the *Silent Crisis* in education of the 21st century

In her book *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* Nussbaum discusses, among others, the "silent crisis" in American education, education for profit and for democracy, the concept of the citizen of the world, and the role of cultivating imagination in academic education (Nussbaum, 2016). The book resembles a manifesto rather than an academic work, as it grew out of Nussbaum's strong personal conviction that our contemporaneity requires a philosopher's voice to defend humanistic education threatened by a dangerous tendency to cut down on teaching humanities and liberal arts, because such education cannot be immediately marketed in hard cash or profitable professions (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 43). She draws on philosophers of education such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Dewey, and Rabindranath Tagore to envision the education which would take the world off the precarious path towards a "silent crisis," which she discusses in relation to American education reformers, who postulate to align education goals with the requirements of the labor market, which in turn relates to the globally promoted politics of rapid, and at the same time constant economic growth. According to some political leaders of the twentieth and twenty first centuries, the key to this constant economic growth lies in the promotion of narrow, specialized technical education, which requires tailoring to economic needs, profits, and the technicization of society (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 18 ff.). Fortunately, this trend is slowly declining, which is one of the few positive effects of the global coronavirus pandemic of 2020–2023. Alternative economies, such as the solidarity economy that promotes a "culture of caring and sharing," are conceptualized and put into practice (Healy, 2020). However, the evolution from the neoliberal market towards economies of sustainability is slow and the "silent crisis" in university education is the reality of the 21st century worldwide, including Poland. It manifests in constant economizing on the humanities and arts at all levels of education, from primary to university education, because they are "seen by policy-makers as useless frills, at a time when nations must cut away all useless things in order to stay competitive in the global market" (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 19). Nussbaum argues that it does not only affect educational institutions, but in a long run, it affects societies in general.

The consequences of this trend in education can, indeed, be upsetting. Young people who are freshly entering the labor market may not be able to

cope with attempts at corruption, exploitation, mobbing, and demoralization. They may not know what course of action to take in the contemporary pluralistic world of values, relativisms, and post-truths.

Nussbaum's book *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* considers in many contexts the observations of Tagore related to theory, methods, and crucial principles of education, as he conceived them at the beginning of the twentieth century. This only confirms that Tagore's diagnosis of the status of education at the beginning of the twentieth century is still relevant in the twenty first century, although the historical and geopolitical contexts are different. Nussbaum, just like Tagore, passionately advocates for educating the citizen of the world, which needs to begin at the level of children's education. She discussed the concept in a number of her other works (Nussbaum, 2003, pp. 50–85), and (Nussbaum, 2009). She summarizes the abilities of a democratic citizen under in three ethical principles: "the capacity for Socratic self-criticism and critical thought about one's own traditions," "the ability to see oneself as a member of a heterogeneous nation, and world," and a "narrative imagination" (Nussbaum, 2009, pp. 56–57). The last ability is Tagorean, in the sense of cultivating imaginative sympathy for others, which was discussed earlier in this article. Nussbaum urges teachers to teach and develop in children and students not only critical thinking and reflection (Nussbaum 2016, pp. 47–48, 52–54) but also sympathy for others, which has the potency to eradicate our xenophobic attitudes and may result in creating a future, cosmopolitan citizen of the world (Nussbaum, 2016, pp. 55–56).

Therefore, it is only

> an education for a more inclusive type of citizenship which cultivates capacities for critical thinking and reflection, crucial in keeping democracies alive and wide awake against the education for profit-making (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 24),

that is capable to slow down or put to a halt these global trends which, if viewed pessimistically and with no trust in the resilience of human spirit, may ultimately result in educating useful people-automatons not used to critical thinking, with skills reduced to a set of practical tools. Humanities and liberal arts can certainly be seen as an antidote to this grim future. In addition, they are propitious to the growth of a particular kind of democracy, which Nussbaum believes in.

> The watchword of this liberalism is not the market but social justice, not efficiency but moral rightness, not the minimization of the role of the state but the common good, which is not born of spontaneous economic processes and inevitably requires a "political distribution" of available resources by a more-or-less welfare state,

explains Jerzy Szacki in his introduction to a Polish translation of Nussbaum's book (Szacki, 2008, p. 8).

What kind of citizens would together strive for creating a thus-defined democracy? For such a unique democratic project, which Nussbaum promotes in her works, supporting the argument with voices of different authors including Tagore's, a set of tools must be developed and implemented to educate the future citizen of the world. According to Nussbaum, education of such citizens begins as grassroots work, with small children, who are naturally open to others and are relatively easy to teach how, for example, to view the world from the perspectives of other people. The "political struggle for freedom and equality must first be a struggle within each person, as compassion and respect fight against fear, greed and narcissistic aggression," Nussbaum writes, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's ideas (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 47). However, the hallmarks of both the "universal man" of Tagore and of the "citizen of the world" of Diogenes should remain in balance, so that the cosmopolitanism of the "citizen of the world" would not become radicalized and can be curbed by the "universal man's" ethics based on "noncoercive identification with universal human ideals and aspirations (which would include both indigenous and Western forms of identification)" (Roy, 2015, p. 183).

What, however, is the role of creative imagination in this task? It is crucial because it is not enough to think, even critically, to become a valuable member of the democratic society. One also needs be able to engage cognitive faculties other than thinking because "factual knowledge and logic alone" are simply not enough to relate to the complex world in a meaningful and fruitful way. One needs to work on developing sympathy, empathy, intuition and imagination, as "we can only build what we can imagine" (Dviwedi, 2020).

Concluding remarks

To realize Tagore's educational philosophy practiced in Visva Bharati, the World University music, theater, painting, and dance were of primary importance in children's education. Nussbaum is of the opinion that artistic instruction should be linked to the citizen-of-the world education "since works of art are frequently an invaluable way of beginning to understand the achievements and sufferings of a culture different from one's own" (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 126). In this way, art and empathy can simultaneously be associated with democratic values, provided that they present "a normative view about how human beings ought to relate to one another (as equals, as dignified, as having inner depth and worth)". Associating creative imagination with democracy may seem striking, yet even democratic or seemingly democratic governments often see creative and critical thinking as a threat to their existence, and

"many of the world's governments depend on ignorance for their existence" (Sternberg, 2006, p. 2).

Nussbaum and Tagore tend to present the model of the future cosmopolitan citizen assuming that it is primarily humanistic and liberal arts education that is apt to create "sensitive, emphatic citizens of the world." However, their argument is not aimed at proving the dichotomous chasm between the 'good' humanities and 'bad' science. One need not unjustly presuppose that science produces people focused exclusively on economic growth and profit-making, probably lacking the empathy for fellow citizens. This is neither justifiable nor true. Scientific-technical education is overshadowed in their discussion simply because such education does not require to be defended.

Becoming acquainted with the reflections of the Indian poet and the American thinker makes us poignantly aware that schools or universities do not provide neutral information about the world, that knowledge transmission inadvertently has a normative basis, however idealistically the norms are conceived or what Utopian values are attached to the equally normative idea of liberal democracy (cf. e.g. Nussbaum's remark above, on the necessity of providing children with a normative view of how human beings should relate to one another).

However, the society in different parts of the world needs citizens who think critically, are able to keep a certain distance from the changing reality, or to adopt the point of view of another human being with whom they cohabitate a society full of conflicting opinions. They should be able to join their critical thinking ability with an emphatic and sympathetic approach to a political opponent, or the so-called Other. Nussbaum, pointing to the "silent crisis" of education, asks us about the foundations of the system, which should consist in teaching skills worthy of a free human being. Tagore was also convinced that only a free man, not afraid of going against the grain, recognizing his relation to other people and the world as a part of a bigger creative spiritual unity can be a valuable member of the society. The idea of educating a free person with a wholesome and integrated personality and with a naturally developed sympathy for others is therefore a common element of Nussbaum and Tagore's educational philosophy, though it is noticeable that Nussbaum combines sympathy with empathy, as our contemporary understanding of both concepts requires. For Tagore freedom was not a philosophical, abstract idea, nor was it a value of *per se* in a democratic society. Tagore's freedom is embedded in the notion of "conscious relationship with the Infinite," and it is made possible by living "in intimate touch with nature." Inner spiritual freedom makes us sympathetic not only to the fellow human being but to the whole creation, and by emphasizing this, Tagore goes a step further than Nussbaum, who focuses mainly on the human world.

For over 300 years, India, with its rich, multifarious, multicultural spiritual and material heritage was confronted not only with the British colonial rulers,

but also with the British and European values, culture, and civilisational patterns, which were often forced upon Indians, in an attempt to colonize their minds in a more or less veiled manner. Tagore found a way to avoid a confrontational and resentful attitude towards the colonizers by the educational philosophy and practice, in which the principles imposing dualism and dichotomy, such as individuality versus universality; the seemingly opposing parts of human personality, such as intellect, emotions and will; whether nature or nurture determine humans; and all the human world constituents, such as the individual selves, nature, environment, the inner and the outer worlds, were ingeniously merged to create a transnational, transcultural, and undoubtedly Utopian though attractive vision of the creative and spiritual unity of mankind.

Both Tagore and Nussbaum argue that education must go beyond technical training and economic utility to nurture empathy, critical thinking, and a holistic understanding of human relationships. Tagore's vision of the "universal man" and Nussbaum's concept of the "citizen of the world" converge in their emphasis on freedom, imagination, and moral development as essential components of education. Together, their ideas present a compelling case for re-imagining education as a means of building inclusive, empathetic, and critically engaged societies. I do not want to make a claim that present-day Oriental Studies, specifically the traditionally conceived Oriental Studies, which reach back to good philological traditions of teaching different Oriental languages and cultural and civilisational tradition, are the last resort of educating students towards freedom, creativity, and democracy. Yet, it seems quite probable that the *sine qua non* condition of both teaching and studying Oriental languages and cultures shows an inclination, at the very least, towards gaining (a sympathetic?) knowledge of other civilizations and cultures via the language. Such inclination does not exclude a practical approach in the sense of becoming competent in a linguistic and cultural sphere of a given specialization of Oriental Studies in expectation of merchandising this rare expertise and skills. Choosing to be educated in the area of Oriental Studies can today be taken as a sign of curiosity and openness to the unfamiliar, whether it would be expressed in new ideas, worldviews, and traditions, notwithstanding that it can also be a path of acquiring a profitable profession. It may also speak of being ready for an encounter with the "unknown East." This seems to be a clear sign of creative thinking combined with an anticipating, sympathetic, open-minded willingness to explore, and be ready for dialogue with the other. It can become an opportunity to activate creative and critical approaches not only to the foreign world, but also to one's own cultural tradition. In a world increasingly shaped by division, rapid change, and ecological uncertainty, the integration of creative imagination into education, including Oriental Studies, is not a luxury – it is a necessity. It is through such imagination that we can envision and enact a more just, compassionate, and democratic future.

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