

Creative Quest for Leadership Transformation: Insights from Liberal Arts

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Abstract

Innovation, ethical as well as humanistic, has its roots in fostering and flourishing of creativity in every field of human endeavour, business and otherwise. Mere techno-economic connotation of creativity, as dominant in modern global business and economy, is inadequate to capture the deeper and wider reaches of human creative potential that can inspire breakthrough innovations in modern organizations. The present paper expands the quest for creativity from its narrow instrumental confines to the vast realm of effulgence of human creative potential in the arena of Liberal Arts and aspires to achieve the much awaited and desired synthesis of Management and Liberal Arts for mutual enrichment. At a more tangible level the paper attempts to delve into the various aspects of creativity from the life and works of legendary creative masters from the East and the West to gain inspirational insights for leadership transformation. The paper unfolds this creative odyssey, in the spirit of pilgrimage, towards evolution of leadership consciousness from agony to ecstasy, from questioning to quest culminating in the experience of joy and freedom when the leader, like many creative masters finally becomes child-like in nature.

Keywords: Creativity, Art of Questioning, Tryst with Nature, Silence, The Child-like Creator, Joy, Freedom

Introduction

A few years back the phenomenon of globalization was marching ahead triumphantly at an incredible speed across the world with its dominant and seemingly irrefutable ideology of market economy. The gospel of competition provided the ultimate rationale behind the mindless rush for careerism and consumerism. The question was raised in conscientious minds - where is the space for creative pursuits in such a scenario? When the technology-driven engine of development is unstoppable in its ever-accelerating linear progress, where does one find the congenial ambience for all round creative expression? Robert Frost had some time to stand and stare at the beauty of the woods and appreciate the bounties of Nature. But modern civilization, with its glaring lights and deafening sound, had completely engulfed our consciousness, compelling us to a life of instant gratification and conspicuous consumption that nearly came to a collapse and impasse caused by an alarming pandemic worldwide. Till then the

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How to Cite the article: Mukherjee, S. (2025). Creative Quest for Leadership Transformation: Insights from Liberal Arts. *Purushartha*, 17(2), 120-132

Source of Support: Nil

Conflict of interest: None

perennial flow of Time Eternal was simply remaining a witness to this predicament – how could human beings living amidst such material affluence and glory of success lead such a purposeless life? But even now when the perils of the pandemic are gone, has there been any stir or concern in human consciousness at the colossal wastage and misuse of our boundless yet latent creative potential amidst the glitter of the celebrated idol of 'the market' and its allied forces? When shall one begin to learn from past blunders to restore ethicality, sanity and sustainability in life and work?

Limitations of Techno-economic Creativity

But times have changed so radically and rapidly that humans are encountering an existential crisis of a

different proportion altogether. Rapid consumption of our creative energy in the rush for mindless speed and endless greed is increasingly posing serious challenges to the human species from multiple directions especially with the decline of all the parameters of sustainability of nature and the planet. Time has come when we need to begin our quest for creativity against all odds as posed by the current reality. The journey can begin by raising some pertinent questions.

Is the expression of creativity limited to pursuits of only a few disciplines of knowledge like Science, Arts and Literature?

Certainly not. For a fuller and deeper experience and celebration of life in all its dimensions, one needs to have a creative mind, a creative approach to life. Of late there has been a prevailing myth that if there is an abundance of creature comfort in personal life, success in the professional sphere and a fair measure of satisfaction of our mental craving for pleasure, there will naturally be enhancement of creative activity. But this is far from the truth. When the opinion leaders hail from a genre of professionally successful people who are otherwise rather low on the scale of human qualities and intellectually quite mediocre, but come armed with material affluence and so-called success in working life, they exert an overriding influence on the impressionable minds of the youth luring them towards single-pointed pursuit of success in career and deriving enjoyment out of material consumption. Ironically enough, in their chase of a 'good life', a kind of life-defeating mentality pervades the minds of the younger generation, devitalizing their infinite possibilities and immense surfeit of energy to a state of powerlessness and impotency and thereby dampening the true creative spirit.

Principles of Creativity: Lessons from the Mahabharata

Any creative output of high quality awaits the awakening of latent possibilities of the creator and unveiling of hidden talent. Apart from this there are some principles or characteristics of the act of creation that contribute towards creative excellence leading to pathbreaking innovations. A study of the creative process behind the composition of the Mahabharata, the great Indian epic, can throw some light on this. Sage Vyasa, the creator of the Mahabharata had approached Lord Ganesha for his help in writing of the epic. India being the land of oral transmission of classical wisdom, Lord Ganesha had agreed to give shape to the Mahabharata in writing while Vyasa would be narrating the epic, but not without a condition. There should be no gaps during the narration by Vyasa was the caveat spelt out by the elephant God. The wise sage agreed to this but also gave a counter condition. Lord Ganesha would not write a single verse without comprehending the full meaning of it. Following Ganesha's condition, *the creative process must be continuous without any pause* – not a chance happening. On the other hand, following the condition laid down by Vyasa, creation of the immortal epic Mahabharata was the outcome of a process that was a blend of both - *continuous and simultaneously conscious*. This can serve as an inspiration for attaining creative excellence and transformation in leadership consciousness. Observance of these principles and practices led to a master creation like Mahabharata that can well inspire the leaders in business even today to develop innovative products and services, systems and structure with a strong ethical culture and a deep sense of purpose and direction.

There is something more to it. In geometry, 'Vyasa' or diameter is the longest straight-line distance that can be drawn within a circle or a sphere. Simply by changing the position of this line the entire sphere can be traversed in totality. That was why the entire

spectrum of knowledge, human and beyond, was within easy access of sage Vyasa. But when it comes to the making of a timeless creation, such a vast intellectual acumen or knowledge base is not enough. Now 'Ganesha' is a conjoint word formed out of union of two words 'Gana' (the people) and 'Isha' (Lord) thus making Ganesha the Lord of the common people. He has regular emotional and empathetic connection with the swings of joy and sorrow, the hopes and fears, anxieties and aspirations of common folks in their daily life. Thus, the knowledge of the great sage could touch and illumine the real lives of the common people with the help of Ganesha's writing. The wisdom of the seer thus found expression and application in the functional domain of our practical life. The Mahabharata was thus created *out of this symbiosis of highest level of knowledge and intellectual reflection with constant touch with the ground reality. Such a confluence of these two complementary competencies is as relevant and significant for any act of creative excellence even today that has the power to transform organizations by way of authentic synthesis of vision and purpose of leaders with their grassroots awareness and contact with ground reality.*

The Creative Odyssey: Literary Explorations

Let us now turn our attention to modern Indian literature and arts for some pertinent insights into the process of creative expressions.

In his article, 'The Human Society, Our Heritage, Film Making and My Effort' (translated from the original in Bengali), Ritwik Ghatak, the firebrand director of Bengali cinema had discussed the characteristics of a great work of art. In such a creation of superior quality one can find the flavour of the substance (*Rasa*) permeating its different levels. Here he had identified four such levels in a film. In the first stage there is a running storyline – a tale of human life with its joy and sorrow, smile and tears. A little deeper, at the second level one can find

the political and social messages. Further down, in the third stage one can explore the depth of the director's self-consciousness, his philosophy of life and path-finding directions. Finally, at the deepest level of consciousness the precious moments of experience of the creator cannot be expressed in words and remain beyond our ordinary comprehension.

Ghatak goes on to add that it is not possible for everyone to have a flavour of the '*Rasa*' (substance) in all the layers. This brings us to the issue of the level of evolution of an individual. One can experience the joy of this flavour only up to the level attained in one's evolution or progress. "But a real great work of art can touch all these layers: this is the primary condition of greatness in creativity." A compassionate artist himself, his deep and penetrating insight was not limited only to the world of cinema. In the same article, while discussing our (Indian) Puranas and mythology, Ritwik draws our attention to the conflict between two types of human consciousness – that of the realist (men of action) and the idealist (thinkers). Referring to Joseph Campbell's book, 'The Masks of God' while unveiling the philosophy embedded in our myths and folklores, he highlighted that where there is peaceful coexistence between 'attachment to the local and timely, and impulse to the universal' there is no conflict between the two. In fact, they become complementary to each other. Later during his discussion on 'archetypes', when Ritwik reveals the dual form of the Divine Mother as described in Shri Shri Chandi (Indian scriptural text extolling the glory of the Mother who battles with and vanquishes all the demons or evil forces within and without) - the Terrible as well as the Saviour – one wonders in amazement at his genius and the profound depth as well as the vast expanse of his imagination and consciousness.

Ghatak had thus highlighted the importance of different levels of entitlement or competence (perceptual ability) when it comes to enjoying the

substance or flavour of Cinema. In this context he has also thrown light on classical Indian tradition of worship with his deep insight. “Here we find a lot of similarity with the act of worship. At the primary level there is the usual material transaction with the gods; at the deepest core it becomes ineffable – it cannot be expressed in words.” In the same article, while mentioning about Shakespeare he writes, “This domain of the inexpressible occupies a prominent place in the work of any great artist in any stage of civilization.”

Thus, it will not be realistic to expect all the employees of any organization to be inspired by its vision, mission and purpose. Only the enlightened leaders will imbibe their ethical spirit and essence and subsequently transmit that energy or consciousness down the line to others as far as they can receive to ensure that they are motivated and committed to perform and achieve the common goal towards business excellence.

Human Aspirations and Unfolding of Creative Consciousness

To have a clear idea of the adventurous journey of a creative mind it is important to understand the aspirations in our daily existence. Let us now turn to the great Indian film director Satyajit Ray, a multi-faceted genius and winner of the Oscar Award for Lifetime Achievement. In his magical cinematic creation, '*Goopi Gayen Bagha Bayen*' (Goopi, the singer and Bagha, the drummer), an internationally acclaimed and national award-winning film (based on the literary masterpiece authored by his own grandfather Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury), we find the two protagonists, Goopi and Bagha, banished from their villages for their atrocious as well as cacophonous vocal and percussion music respectively, meeting each other in a deep and desolate forest far away from human habitat. There they receive three boons from the King of Ghosts in a dream. Millennia back we also find an episode of offering of three boons in the Kathopanishad, one

of the most profound pieces of ancient Indian wisdom literature. The story goes like this. Commanded by his father, the young Nachiketa had reached the realm of the King of Death, Yama. In that threshold domain, at the meeting point of life and death, Lord Yama offered him three boons. The first boon granted him two things – mental peace of his parents in his absence and assurance that, one day, he would be able to return to them. These are the basic human aspirations at the gross physical / material level – somewhat like the first boon to Goopi and Bagha that would help them to satisfy their hunger by enjoying their choicest platter of food. The second boon to Nachiketa granted him '*Agnividya*' – the art and science of energy transformation, the scientific theory as well as its technological application – that can bring heavenly comfort on earth. To bring down and activate the powerful energy of the subtle world down to the gross level, a device like '*Yajurvedi*' (the sacrificial altar) was necessary – somewhat like the boon of high-speed magic footwear of Goopi and Bagha that would enable them to move at ease to any destination at an incredible speed. This was the manifestation of energy in the vital plane of movement. The third boon to Nachiketa empowered and enlightened him with Self-Knowledge (*Atmajnan*) that would bless him with immortal bliss even in his mortal existence. The third boon granted to Goopi and Bagha was attainment of excellence in musical expression – both vocal and instrumental (percussion). Music was the source of boundless joy and eternal bliss in the mind and heart to both Goopi and Bagha beyond the physical and vital planes of existence.

Intense seekers of Truth and Bliss Eternal undergo a lot of suffering and tribulations and often must come out of the confines of a routine-bound daily existence. In Shri Shri Chandi we find that King Surath and the businessman Samadhi were compelled to leave their familiar habitats and go to the forest. Arjuna had to be tested in the battlefield of Kurukshetra in the Mahabharata. The scientist

renounced the pleasures of life and locked himself up in his research laboratory. While the Yogi found his seat of meditation up the ascending levels of progressive evolution of human consciousness. Such seekers also received responses in the form of boons or benediction from somewhat unusual sources that are quite out of the ordinary - the King of the Ghosts, or the Lord of Death (Yama) or the Charioteer (The Blessed Lord in the Bhagavadgita) who comes as a friend guiding the protagonist through the path of life. They have taught us the mantra of living life anew, afresh – “If one is to live, one is to live dangerously.”

Transformational leaders in business like Steve Jobs and Narayana Murthy, among others, broke away from their comfort zones to pursue their passion and achieved landmark breakthroughs in innovating new products and services, creating a vibrant, ethically sound yet high performing organizational culture that inspired millions to follow their inner calling, achieve their creative excellence and find meaning in their work.

Tracing the Creative Odyssey: From Agony to Ecstasy

It is largely true that after a lot of inner turmoil and agitation an act of creation becomes a reality almost like the experience of a mother's labour pain at childbirth that will be discussed later. Out of an act of creation what is revealed to the outside world is only a part of the entire creative process. When a scientist or an artist is possessed with an irresistible creative urge then only a limited domain of one's personality, that is, the turbulent mind, rebellious spirit and exceptionally unique identity comes to the notice of the common people. But that does not mean that creativity can flourish only in a boisterous and reckless vagabond with Bohemian habits and lifestyle. When the ramblings of the lunatic end up in silence, his eyeballs too become still. To quote Rabindranath Tagore – “Make your vocal and verbose poet now immerse in silence, my

Lord!” Our mind is but a repository of sounds that are yet to find expression. To search for the source of creation amidst myriad sounds, one needs to experience intimate repose in silence and solitude. From the depth of self-reflection in profound silence emerges the array of sounds for creative expression. Hence, what appears to be unruly and wayward from outside, often actually hides the path for a voyage unto self-discovery. In the initial stage the burning quest from within stirs restlessness in the seeker, who becomes overwhelmed with the ecstasy of creation and finds it difficult to maintain balance or equanimity with the ordinary mechanized world outside. Later, upon withdrawal of sensory attention from external excitement and exuberance, the creator can turn inward towards the witness consciousness that resides within us in silence.

In human life the most profound and complete manifestation of the act of creation and creative energy is during the birth of a child from the womb of the mother. On one hand there is the intense suffering of the mother in her labour pain, while on the other hand, there is the agony of the child, suffocated in the darkness of the womb, eagerly awaiting the freedom of advent unto the earth. Both these sufferings come to an end and reach their final consummation when the child is born to see the light of the world. And the mother is flooded with the joy of creation from within. Prior to any great creation such an inexpressible terrible pain results in turmoil in the inner world of the creator. Out of this utter turbulence in the ocean of consciousness of the creator finally gushes out the nectar of creation in abundant flow. A feeling of poignant unrest pervades the consciousness of the creator born out of a deep insecurity prior to the act and flow of creation. In such a state of intense eagerness to change, there arises within the creator some deep and pertinent questions, sharp as well as incisive, with which he or she challenges and strikes hard at the very root of the state of insecurity that prevails before the act of creation. The shackles of insecurity

thus become loose, making way for the dawning of freedom in new creative expressions.

Forbearance and fortitude in times of uncertainty and turbulence constitute the characteristics of inspirational leaders in corporate organizations and beyond. A feeling of insecurity in tough times is a major roadblock to the flourishing of the creative potential of leaders. Leaders like Warren Buffet and J R D Tata have demonstrated the art of navigating through multiple crises and inspired their employees towards achieving breakthrough innovations and thereby experience joy and freedom of new dawn after long spells of dark nights somewhat like the travails and triumph of the mother and her child when the baby is born.

Creative Destruction in Music: Glimpses into the Genius of Beethoven and His Ninth Symphony

We may now turn to the mind and works of a creative genius from the annals of Western classical music - Ludwig Van Beethoven. The Ninth Symphony of Beethoven is the grand culmination of his creative genius, the ultimate consummation of his musical prowess at its stupendous height – from the majestic saga of the Third, through the vibrancy of the Fifth, the tempest and serenity of Nature's play in the Sixth, the Dionysian grandeur of the Seventh and finally the ascent to celestial glory in the Ninth. From the clutter of mundane existence, we are transported to a transcendental experience of Divine joy and ecstasy; to listen to the song of universal brotherhood and boundless, all-embracing Love for humanity.

Through the medium of grammar, a child begins its first lessons to learn any language. The structure and discipline of grammar play a significant role in any artistic pursuit and creative expression. But major breakthroughs take place when the creative mind takes a quantum leap beyond the familiar terrain and predictable realm of grammar and

breaks free from its conventional systems and structures. The Ninth of Beethoven is the musical portrayal of this adventurous voyage from the known to the unknown and the ineffable – that was never heard before.

Inspired by the German poet Frederick Schiller, the Ninth of Beethoven christened 'Ode to Joy' is not just a sequence of symphonic movements but a flow of creative expressions and inspiration along which every succeeding movement is a 'becoming' of the previous one. As the first movement begins to unfold and expand, it takes us through an oceanic odyssey amidst turbulence. In the words of Beaudelaire, the French poetic genius, Beethoven's music invites us to a journey into the tumultuous sea only to keep us afloat in the ocean of Joy! It fills our lungs with fresh air, expands our hearts, and we reach the pinnacle of ecstasy in all our emotional colours and flavour. The following two movements bring us harmony of new rhythms and vibrations, sporting and happiness in the second while tender and melodious in the third. And then we are greeted with the grand finale – the fourth and the final movement. Here we find the maestro in a mood of creative destruction. Near deaf as he was, Beethoven then breaks the themes and citadels of his first three movements and dissolves into a spell of silence. Then, from the depth of that silence arose a new world of music – in notes, themes and vibrations – first captured in musical instruments and then followed with vocal renditions, evocative and resonant, to reach the crescendo first time ever in the history of western classical music.

Such is the poignant yet inspirational tale of a genius ever struggling to confront and transcend his limitations because of severe impairment of his faculty of audition. Beethoven's own life was a saga of personal tragedies, emotional turmoil and physical challenges but all this could never stop him in his passionate pursuit of music and a zestful life. As Romain Rolland, the Nobel Laureate literary master and biographer of Beethoven had observed:

“Joy appeared to Beethoven only as a gleam of blue through the chaos of conflicting clouds.” But be it amidst triumphs and tragedies, joy and sorrow, Beethoven was ever the solitary voyager in life. Fran Von Breuning has this to say: “When he travelled afar, the sounds of the mundane and the rancour of the populace never touched his thoughts. And it was then and there that Beethoven found his true self, his real nature. Beware! Don't bring him back to our world of 'sound and fury'. He will be on fire exploding like a dormant volcano. The call of the wild, the dark nocturnal abyss has invited him. He will forgive none who will pull him back.” (Trans-creation by this author from the original in German)

In the Ninth Symphony, the great master is at his volcanic best – it depicts his fervent and passionate struggle to find and evolve new forms and themes in music. Haunted with deafness he had challenged his Creator: “I will take Fate by the throat”. And his Ninth will ever bear testimony to his endless struggle amidst the vagaries of a turbulent life towards transcendence through unveiling and welcoming the descent of Divine Grace and offering the message of universal brotherhood to humanity at large.

Amidst all his trials and tribulations Beethoven found his perennial source of inspiration from Mother Nature. In the Vienna woods he would go out on long walks. These were the times when his creative forces would be at their lowest ebb, when in utter desperation, he would grope in the depth of darkness in the lap of nature to find a glimmer of hope and light. The trees of the Vienna woods may still be alive with memories of his passionate kisses and warm, endearing embraces.

The Ninth Symphony of Beethoven is indeed the celebration of his ever-exuding passion rising from the dust of the earth, then ascending to the stars in heaven and finally reaching out to constellations and galaxies. Beethoven epitomized a grand

synthesis of the Apollonian mind, the razor of reason and the Dionysian heart, the flame of emotion. Romain Rolland, who also created his immortal hero Jaen Christophe with inspiration from Beethoven's life and his music, wrote a glowing tribute to this great maestro who ever remained an enigma to history and the world of music:

*“Like a whirlwind, strong and fierce,
Reaching the depth of the ocean,
His music touched the earth,
And kissed the mighty heaven,
Like the dance of Fire amidst destruction,
Steers along the lonely boatman –
The one and only Beethoven.”*

(Trans-creation by this author from the original in French)

Beethoven's fire and passion for 'Creative Destruction' finally consumed his body at the age of fifty-seven but his Ninth Symphony and so many works will inspire humanity for all the time to come. In the field of business, the great intellectual giant Clayton Christensen succumbed to cancer at the age of sixty-eight but his pathbreaking concept of 'Disruptive Innovation' will ever remain a guiding light for all future innovators and entrepreneurs.

Art of Questioning: Exploring Tagore and Dylan

Millennia ago, Socrates had sounded his message of caution: “An unexamined life is not worth living.” Such a process of examination begins with asking questions – deep and fundamental, sharp and unsettling to strike at the roots of our comfort zones and release the gushing flow of creative energy.

On July 27, 1941, about ten days before his death, Rabindranath Tagore composed a poem that read:

*“The first day's sun
At the new manifestation of life
Asked a question:*

'Who are you?'
No answer came.

Year after year went by.
The last day's sun
The last question asks
In the western seashore
On a silent evening
'Who are you?'
There was no answer. "
(Translation by Amiya Chakravarty) (Robinson 1989: 42)

Does it mean that the poet never found answers to his questions throughout his life? That would be a rather simplistic conclusion not free from errors. Probably he wanted us to keep the burning quest alive within us all lifelong so that someday we may find our own answers and make life a creative journey of evolution of our consciousness towards joy and freedom.

A truly creative person will be ever willing to challenge himself or herself. This often begins with raising some deep, critical and somewhat uneasy questions on our conventional ways of thinking and living. It prevents learning and creative pursuit from degenerating into an engagement with the 'sound and fury' of discussions and arguments that generate a lot of heat and dust but no light!

Awakening of creativity is essentially the intense pursuit of self-discovery culminating in Self-realization. Hence it is important to keep some fundamental and powerful questions alive and aflame in the inner world of the creative person.

But where then do we find the answers? Let us listen to another Nobel Laureate in Literature, Bob Dylan - a lyricist, composer and a singer par excellence. In his famous song 'Blowing in the Wind', he raised nine deep questions about life and human values. But like all great leaders and teachers he never gave an answer to any of them. But he left us with an assurance: "The answer, my

friend, is blowing in the wind. / The answer is blowing in the wind."

All great leaders and teachers do not give the answers but help the students ask the deep and sometimes uneasy questions and guide them so that they may find their own answers. That is what ignites in the students the joy of learning when they find their own answers. A leader or teacher who dictates the answers puts an end to the learning voyage of the students and the team members and buries their creative potential in dry sand of arid desert that we may call 'rote learning'.

To find the answers, we must keep our senses alert, our eyes and ears open and receptive for complete and faithful reception of signals from the outside world, which, when processed in the brain space, generates knowledge that is reliable and authentic. The significance of proper sense perception has come out abundantly clear in Dylan's own poetic rendition:

*"How many times can a man look up/
 Before he can see the sky?
 And how many ears must one man have/
 Before he can hear people cry?"*

It is indeed heartening to see that in the organizational learning and training programs, modules on Art of Seeing and Art of Listening have been accorded priority these days for proper sensing of the problem prior to attempting its solution. Often, we don't see reality as it is but the way we want to see and fail to listen properly as our mind keeps on judging when listening takes a back seat in our conversations.

Tryst with Joy and Freedom: Creative Insights from Tagore's Life and Works

Let us now turn our attention for some insights into creativity from the great Nobel Laureate poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), a

multi-faceted genius, a master creator par excellence.

Ever since his childhood an irresistible attraction for 'the open' and 'the other' inspired and compelled Tagore to explore new and alternative forms and paths of learning and lead his life a little differently off the beaten track. This strikes hard and shakes the very foundation of the premises of professional education, the champions of which advocate 'the one and the only way' to excellence, nay success, in work and life. During his childhood, Tagore had such an insufferable claustrophobic experience of several schools to which he was sent that he ran away from all of them in no time. This has been vividly portrayed in a poignantly crafted classroom scene by Satyajit Ray towards the beginning of his masterpiece of a documentary on Tagore titled 'Rabindranath', created by the Lifetime Oscar awardee filmmaker in 1961 on the Birth Centenary of the poet. While mindless rote learning was going on in one such school, the audience could see Rabi (the young Tagore) looking out of the window watching birds flying, wind blowing and water flowing. When he grew up, Tagore was sent to study Law in England. Though he did not complete his studies, yet he returned deeply enriched with a comprehensive knowledge of western music that would find creative adaptations in his future musical as well as theatrical compositions. Throughout his life there was this passionate search for 'not this' but 'the other' in his creative content or form of expression always keeping a whole spectrum of multiple options wide open in front of him.

At the age of forty, Tagore made the most significant move towards this search for 'openness' and 'otherness' in the creation of his dream Institute of Higher Learning – Visva Bharati (Global India) at *Santiniketan* (Abode of Peace) in the district of Birbhum in West Bengal. The hallmark of this novel experiment was his pioneering initiative to impart education and create an ambience of

learning in open space in the lap of nature far from the humdrum of the metropolis of Calcutta. During the auspicious Inaugural ceremony of the institute, the poet made it abundantly clear to the students that they would have to learn from two sets of teachers – from those who were present in human form as well as from the trees around. This would be a completely new model of institution modelled by Tagore with inspiration from the '*tapovan*' or forest schools of ancient India, where the open fields under the trees would create the new learning environment instead of brick-and-mortar classrooms. Observation of nature and living in communion with nature would be integral to the learning process. Regular contact and intimate relationship with the teachers in the institute was considered essential for holistic education for all-round development as well as creative self-expression. The aim of the institute was to develop in the students a global mind with deep roots in Indian culture and heritage. Tagore's experimental model of education was aimed at achieving synthesis of the best of the East and the West and creating a bridge between ancient and modern culture, between the rural and the urban milieu for mutual enrichment of the apparent polarities. Where the world becomes a single nest (*Yatra Visvam Bhavati Eka Neeram*) was the motto he chose for Visva Bharati. Tagore's lifelong quest was to remain out of the common and banal rut right from his school days in search of something new and different. In *Santiniketan* itself he had built five houses but never lived in any one of them for long. Even in the same house he would frequently keep on changing the room where he would be staying. And to everyone's surprise at the ripe age of seventy he gave his creative spirit a new opening in a completely different expression – painting! His fervent search for 'the new, the different' and 'the other' throughout his life was the driving force behind it all. This spirit of freedom and joy in creativity also found abundant expression in the theme as well as the form of some of his masterpieces.

'Achalayatan' (The Petrified Chamber) is a powerful play by Tagore where the rebel poet strikes at the very root of rote learning in a claustrophobic environment. In this creative masterpiece he offers a poignant portrayal of the lifeless education in a petrified palace that is cut off deliberately from the rest of the world and nature by the ruling forces of orthodoxy and dogmatism symbolized by strong brick walls rising high and a North window of the palace that was kept closed for ever to prevent entry of flow of any fresh air of natural life or a new ray of light of illumined knowledge. It was left to the open and questioning mind of the firebrand protagonist Panchak who, exasperated with the stifling ambience inside the palace, would wait to listen and respond to the call of the wild:

*"No one knows you called me at early dawn,
No one believes I cry to myself,
Roam about with a heart carefree,
Look at all faces around me,
No one draws me
The way you do."*
(Tagore 2006:1)

Then that day came. The seemingly comfortable life in the palace met with a formidable challenge when a young inmate Subhadra suddenly chanced to open the North window. It was then in that hour of crisis that Panchak gave him full support and protection from the raging elderly heavyweights of that citadel of power and authority. This was because he himself had found his own beckon light in the simple life of the rural folks with no formal education beyond the rigid boundary of stone walls of the palace, and their enlightened leader Dadathakur from whom he learns to experience the joy of living in the lap of nature. Panchak cries out in ecstasy to break off the shackles of stereotyped living and fossilized learning:

*"Hare-re-re-re-re
Let me go,*

*Let me go,
Like a free forest bird
In unbounded joy.*

*... Who can hold me back?
I dance like wild fire
That surrounds the whole forest,
I dance like the rushing thunder
That roars in stormy clouds
Its peals of laughter
Piercing all that stands in the way."*
(Tagore 2006: 52-53)

The play ends with the breaking down of the palace walls by the village folks, the band of Dadathakur, that liberates the inmates from the bondage of that stagnant chamber of learning. They would now begin their journey to a new life with the protagonist Panchak as their guiding light and leader as anointed by the Great Master, Dadathakur.

Drawing inspiration from Tagore, it is time we begin to break the walls of monotony, boredom and stereotypes in our learning path and education in which there is a misplaced and skewed thrust on 'rigour' and mechanical discipline of the system at the cost of vibrancy, spontaneity and creativity, and embark on this journey, rather a pilgrimage to the promised land of fresh air and new life, of love and light to herald an era of enlightenment. This holds good as much for academic institutions of higher learning like Management as for corporate training programs from design stage to delivery (pedagogy) and implementation of the curriculum and training modules for holistic development of the participants and flourishing their latent creative potential.

Tryst with Nature and Silence

Rabindranath Tagore would begin his day in the early hours of dawn when it was still dark. While watching the sunrise he would also wait to receive inspiration from Nature all alone in silence. His

state of mind, in his own words, was - “When I come to His door with a beggar's bowl”. One cannot reach there if the consciousness is limited within the frame of body and mind. Intense craving or heavy demands do not work here. Hence the poet has only the beggar's bowl to fall back upon. With the melting of the arrogant ego, one can feel the connect between the individual and the Universal Mind. From the treasure house of the Universal Consciousness precious gems of thoughts, ideas and inspiration are showered down filling the magic beggar's bowl of the poet in his elevated state of consciousness. But, even then, the realm of Universal Consciousness remains out of reach and touch of the poet's perception. This has found expression in his song – “My tunes flow to touch thy feet / But still you remain beyond my reach”. But when the connection between the two becomes strong and loving, one can only have a glimpse of Universal Being from a distance. Then divine music reaches the ears of the poet in silence, and he listens with rapt wonderment!

Having reached this state, a near deaf Beethoven had exclaimed: “I am listening to divine music.” The creative mind of Picasso, the pathfinder of the Cubism movement in Art, found his access to a rare all-pervading and integral vision that was to find expression in his timeless creative masterpieces. From that plane of supreme aesthetic consciousness, he could proclaim – “I do not seek, I find.”

The Child-like Creator

Leadership voyage towards Creative excellence often culminates in our 'Quest for the Child Within'. This has been covered in detail in a paper published earlier in *Purushartha* (Mukherjee: 2020).

At this stage the creator becomes child-like in nature. Swami Vivekananda, the patriot-prophet and the founder-leader of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, experienced this during the last part of his

life. In a letter to Josephine Mcleod, he wrote: “After all, Joe, I am only the boy who used to listen with rapt wonderment to the wonderful words of Ramakrishna under the Banyan at Dakshineswar. That is my true nature, work and activities, doing good and so forth are all super-impositions.”

He would spend a lot of his time in the garden of Belur Math those days. He became very friendly to a dog and a little goat. The legendary scientist Newton would realize that he was merely collecting pebbles in the shore of the ocean of Knowledge that remained unexplored. Endowed with supra-sensual perception Andrei Tarkovsky, the famous Russian film maker, had remarked – “A poet has an imagination and psychology of a child.”

With the 'Awakening of the Waterfall' in Tagore's consciousness one finds child-like ecstasy and exuberance in his matchless poetic expressions:

“I shall run from one mountain peak to the other,
And roll from one bed of earth to the other,
Laughing aloud, singing amuse,
Clapping with every rhythm of life.” (Translation by this author)

Epilogue: “Light! more Light!”

These were the last words of the German poet Goethe before his mortal demise.

As we stand in the third decade of the twenty first century, we see a world shaken and fragmented with violence. One can hear the suppressed agony of creative energy pining for expression – “Give me more life, more and more”. “Give light to those who are blind and life to those who are dead!” These were the prayers of Tagore. But “Who will give the light? Who will give the life-force?” asked Satyajit Ray (mentioned earlier) in his last film, '*Agantuk*' (The Stranger).

But India or *Bharat* is still the land of '*Bha*' meaning

light. On the one hand this is the radiance of perennial wisdom of our ancient sages and seers. On the other hand, this is sublime light of love in the simple life of an ordinary Indian. Even today we see this light in a village where the connection of electricity is poor. When evening falls, the ladies come out of their hut and light the lamp under a 'Tulsi' tree. This lamp of love brings light to the courtyard and the indoors while part of that light falls on the path helping a traveler to find his way. Sublime radiance of this Unconditional Love has ever been a precious abundant offering of illumined leaders of India through the ages till even today. This has been highlighted in an Interview based paper published earlier in *Purushartha* (Mukherjee: 2021).

But amidst the blinding glare and frenzy of the sound of modern life where do we find these harbingers of this sublime light - radiating love and wisdom? The answer comes from Tagore himself:

*"By what light do you kindle the lamp of life,
and come to this earth?
O thou the spiritual seeker, O thou the eternal lover,
O thou the crazy madcap - come unto this earth!"*

"Grown-ups are very, very strange.". This was a deeply poignant remark by 'The Little Prince' on the sordid state of practically oriented number crunching adults who never question their comfort zones trapped in their lonely, mechanized existence nor make any attempt to break free from such a purposeless claustrophobic existence towards liberation into the land of freedom and a life of joy. (Saint Exupery: 1974)

But the genuine spiritual seeker accords little or no value to material pursuits and possessions. The irresistible lover offers in abundance without any calculation of return breaking free from all bonds of conventional relationships. Finally, the crazy and somewhat eccentric creative mind, labelled as 'the madcap' by the seemingly pragmatic men of the

world, also breaks free from all outdated methods to unleash the creative spirit in learning and education.

All these three categories of mavericks yet pathfinders challenge conventional, outmoded approaches in their quest for creativity to experience joy and freedom and live life in fullness and vibrancy, natural and exuberant.

Tagore had his hopes and faith on these three vanguards of free and lively creative expression in our 'brave new world' – the seeker of spiritual liberation; the reckless yet abundant lover; and the eccentric weirdo! They would bring new light, fresh air and joyful life to one and all.

Notes

- *The present paper is thematically a sequel to my earlier paper titled 'The Quest for Creativity: Insights from Indian Wisdom' published in Purushartha (Mukherjee: 2023). While the previous paper explored the notion of Creativity from some authentic sources of Indian wisdom literature, the focus of the present paper is to present the saga of a creative voyage from inspirational sources of world literature.]*
- *All the quotations in the paper where references are not given are from my personal diaries over the last few decades.*

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