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Rural Libraries in support of Rural Reconstruction: Tagores' thinking and reality.

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Abstract

It is admitted that to make overall development of any citizen rural and urban areas are to be given equal importance and sometimes rural areas may be given more emphasize than urban areas to confirm all wide development. Gurudeva Rabidranath Tagore was one of the pioneers who have given enough attention for the rural communities and to materialise his dream of rural reconstruction he has introduced several project for the welfare of the rural people. To reach the village people and also to eradicate the illiteracy he introduced 'CHALANTIKA' library which was meant for the dissemination of library services to the nearest village people. At present, there are total 38 village libraries are existed but 34 are in functioning conditions which was managed and controlled by the Rural Extension Centre (REC), Visva-Bharati and jointly funded by Visva-Bharati and Raja Rammohan Roy Library Foundation (Kolkata). In the present electronic information era, these village libraries are under great challenges with the competition of different electronic Medias. But, both the authority Visva-Bharati and RRRLF are trying their level best to meet the challenges with the help of cordial and active support by the REC, Visva-Bhaarti. In view of the above the present paper is an attempt to explore the genesis and growth of rural library services as introduced by Gurudeva Rabindranath Tagore.

Key words

Rabindranath Tagore, Chalantika Library, Area Library, Rural Development.

0. Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore was one of the pioneers of education as well as of Indian Library Movement. He also made pioneering efforts before Indian independence in the field of rural development, which started at Silaidaha, now in Bangladesh and took proper shape at Sriniketan, the poet's laboratory for his work in relation to village upliftment. Rabindranath used the term "Rural Reconstruction "instead of rural development. He wanted "to bring back life in its completeness into the villages, making them self-reliant and self respectful, acquainted with the natural tradition of their own country and competent to make an efficient use of modern resources for improvement of their physical, intellectual and economic condition." The poet initiated rural reconstruction programme at Sriniketan in the year 1922. The programme included development of agriculture, animal husbandry, education, health and sanitation; rural crafts and industries. To regenerate village life and cultivate the spirit of self-reliance, co-operatives and other organizations were formed in two-dozen villages

surrounding Sriniketan and Santiniketan. Some of these activities including the mobile library services are still continuing with some modifications according to the present day need [1].

1. Emergence of Chalantika in support of rural reconstruction

Rabindranath Tagore invested entire money he received from Nobel Prize for building up a Co-operative Bank for the villagers at Silaidaha. He wanted to remove the miserable condition of village life. But the villagers did not response to this noble rural development activity at all and as a result the entire project went in vain. Gurudeva identified that due to the illiteracy, lack of awareness, superstition and ignorance of the village people his noble project had become to an end fruitless. He was very much aware of these factors of rural life while he initiated again his rural development programmes at Sriniketan for the second time in 1922. He felt that library is the only panacea against these hindrances to overcome and it would be a strong support to his rural reconstruction project. Thus he opened a new horizon of library services establishing the "Chalantika Library" in order to support his rural reconstruction activities at Sriniketan in 1925. Chalantika Library has become a burning example of mobile library services in India for building up a new society with quality of life for rural people [2].

2. Special feature of Chalantika

He also felt that traditional library services would not be helpful in rural areas to achieve his goal. Because as villagers they were not aware of library services and its advantages it would be the task of the library itself to go to serve the villagers with their required documents and information. Such type of library of mobile character would be effective in that purpose. With this view in object Tagore established Chalantika Library at Sriniketan with a revolutionary idea of mobile library services in society with a message of change, progress and upliftment of rural life in India [3].

3. Functioning of Chalantika

He organized village development centres with a committee of volunteers for child development projects, Bratibalak teams of youths for physical fitness, development in cottage industries, diary, animal husbandry, agriculture and campaign against illiteracy, superstition, awareness programmes for women education, health and co-operative systems. Secretary of the committee of each village development centre was empowered to perform the role of librarian of Chalantika for the villagers. Car, van, ship and other designed vehicles are used presently to run a modern mobile library. In Tagore's time such transport facilities were not possible and available. Therefore, the librarian or bearer had to carry the books from the main collection of Chalantika at Sriniketan on foot or by bi-cycle or bullock cart to their respective villages. That is why Chalantika was termed as Circulating Library instead of mobile library. In a modern mobile library librarian or their staffs goes to the door of readers with the mobile vehicle to delivery / issue books and documents. In Tagore's time on behalf of the villagers librarian of the village development committee would collect library documents from the main collection of Chalantika. However, Tagore wanted that Chalantika would be a cultural centre for the villagers. He wished and planned to extend education up to the grass root level of the society through the mobile library services. Spreading up of education from nearer

village to remotest villages was the mission of Chalantika Library services as Tagore designed since its inception [4].

4. Growth and services of Chalantika Library

However, 'Chalantika' started functioning in 1925 with an initial collection of 200 books. In the year 1927 Satish Chandra Mukhopadhyay donated 70 books to Chalantika [5]. The following table indicates the increase of collection and augmentation of its use by the rural masses in the initial years of its establishment.

Collection and use of books through Chalantika: 1929 – 1934

Year	Collection of books	Books issued
1929	450	729
1930	385 and 5 periodicals	709
1931	400	600
1932	461	950
1933	512	1474
1934	1087	2457

Source: Visva-Bharati Annual Reports: 1929-1934

In the year 1925, 1937 and 1940 the number of books was 200, 1200 and 1504 respectively. In the year 1939, the number of books issued was 2793.

5. Branches of Chalantika

At the initial stage there were only two mobile library branches at Bolpur and Goalpara in Birbhum district. For the extension of library services more three branch centres of Chalantika were set up at Bandgora, Santalpara and Benuria. The Bolpur and Goalpara branch centres had two sub-branches each for library services. However, gradually these centres increased in 15 branches and they are located at Dwaranda, Kalikapur, Kamarpara, Payel, Jadavpur, Sehela, Nurpur, Raipur, Supur, Rajatpur, Lohagarh, Salone, Goalpara, Ruppur, and Debagram.

6. Implementation of five laws of Library Science in Chalantika

Tagore implemented five laws of library science in practice through Chalantika Library services. The books were supplied to the villagers through branch and sub-branch centres round the year from its main collection at Sriniketan. It was aimed at that the books should be available to the remotest villagers, too. The villagers were issued books according to their choice, interest and demand for a certain period. The readers returned their books to the main collection of Chalantika Library via sub-branch and branch centres. Ranganathan advocated that "Library is growing organism" and Tagore made a library extensive and mobile in practice.

7. Variety in book selection and collection

The collection of books was mainly on fiction, biography, agriculture, epigraphy, health, nursing and children's books. School teachers help in supplying books to the villagers. Pamphlets on agricultural problems, health care, primary education, and rural reconstruction were published by the institute and circulated through mobile library. For establishing contact with the world of knowledge, a fortnightly journal Deshe-Videshe was published by the

institute. For attracting people towards the library regular lectures on various local problems and magic lantern show were organized. During the year 1929, twenty six lectures were delivered in nineteen villages, with a total attendance of 6000 people [6].

8. Additional library services of Area Library

Chalantika Library services did not come to an end after the departure of Tagore but its services were multiplied and extended more in numbers in the remotest villages surrounded by Santiniketan and Sriniketan while an Area Library sponsored by Government of West Bengal with staff and fund came forward to support Chalantika Library with additional library services in 1952. The Area Library set up six branch libraries called Feeder Library for extension of library services at Goalpara, Adityapur, Surul, Benuria, Laldah and Albandha villages.

9. Culmination of Chalantika Library services

Without library services rural development activities are not possible even today. The library services have become part and parcel of Sriniketan experiment of Tagore. The demand of library services was getting more and more importance at the adjacent villages. So, further initiative was taken for enriching Chalantika Library services in order to cover more new areas. In 1975 Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) came forward at Sriniketan for the fulfillment of this demand. Visva-Bharati with the collaboration of RRRLF began to finance for establishing permanent rural libraries in the villages with library building, furniture, books, journals and equipments. Presently 38 rural libraries, 12 children libraries and 1 children's corner are running in 8 gram pantalets of two development blocks of Bolpur-Santiniketan and Ilambazar of Brigham district of West Bengal. Total acquisition of books under the 38 rural libraries is 1,06,606 and in children libraries is 2090 up to March 2011. Total 26970 books have been issued to the villagers from the rural libraries during 2010-2011[7].

10. Rural Development

Development refers to the process of progress and advancement in any field. In the context of a nation or a society ' development must …be conceived as a multi-dimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes and national institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth the reduction of inequality and the eradicating of absolute poverty. Development must (be) turn to diverse basic needs and desire of individual and social group". Development of any community or area involves the following:

- **Physical development** i.e. development in the fields of communication, transport, sewage, irrigation, energy, forestry, environment and conservation of natural resources and livestock;
- **Economic development** i.e. development in the fields of agriculture, animal husbandry, fishery, business and industry including Cottage and small-scale industries and trade.
- **Social development** i.e. development in the fields of education, culture and political activities and
- **Health development** i.e. development in the fields of nutrition, sanitation, community health, prevention of water and air pollution.
- **Women development** i.e. raising consciousness about gender justice, self-help group for thrift, credit and self-employment, women employment generation.

Rural India is still lagging behind in almost all the above sectors. But exactly to what extent is possibly not known even to the government as it does not have sufficient information,

some time for lack of efforts and sometimes lack of coordination among the concerned people. As a result, the development plans are often drawn either on the basis of presumptions, or on the basis of incomplete or outdated information. The outcome will be well imagined [8].

11. Present preview of Rural / Village Libraries

Gurudeva Rabindranath Tagore realized that education is an essential component in human life to move forward. We all know that, only education can bring the human being from the unknown knowledge world to the known one. Subsequently, Gurudeva also realized about the retention of the acquired knowledge and the literary skills without which the goals of human life could not be achieved. But, even in the 21st century it is an admitted fact that rural areas of India till today is one of the most neglected sectors in terms of getting the basic amenities to fulfil the objective of life. Keeping in mind the views of Gurudev, Visva-Bharati is still continuing the Rural Library Services to the nearest villagers through the Rural Extension Centre (REC) as extended services for the development of the village people. With the help of the following, paper would like to represent the present scenario of the rural library services;

- Number of Blocks - 02(Bolpur-Sriniketan and Illambazar)
- Number of Gram Panchayets - 08
- Number of Villages Covered - 38
- Number of Village Development Societies - 38
- Number of Functional Libraries (2010-11) - 34 (2 temporarily suspended, 2 Show-caused)
- Number of Children Libraries - 12
- Number of Children's Corner - 01
- Number of Computers - 05
- Book Acquisition:
  - Total Books in Libraries - 1,06,606 (up to March 2011)
  - Books in Children Libraries - 2090 (appx., up to March 2011)

11.1. From the above it is seen that total 38 numbers of libraries are running properly. All the libraries have to organize different programme to draw attractions of the village people in addition to their library services (e.g. lending service and reading at library service). The following table is used to represent the name of the libraries as well as programme organized by the concerned libraries [7].

Sl. No.	Name of the Libraries	Cultural program me	Discussi on with readers	Wall Magazin	Meeting with the village people
1.	Adityapur Sadharan Pathagar	1			
2.	Ballavpur Jyoti Sangha Granthagar				
3.	Rabindrapalli Granthagar				
4.	Dwaranda Chandimata Granthagar	1		4	
5.	Goalpara Atulendu Pathagar				
6.	Laldaha Granthagar				
7.	Nurpur Netaji Granthagar	1			
8.	Srichandrapur Granthagar	1			
9.	Surul Anandamoyee Granthagar	4			

10.	Kamarpara Dharmaraj Granthagar		1	2	
11.	Kendradangal Sadharan Pathagar	2	2		
12.	Srichandrapur Chandrai Granthagar	1	1		1
13.	Halsidanga Palli Unnayan Granthagar	1			
14.	Ramnagar Rakskakali Granthagar	7	9	2	3
15.	Jadavpur Granthagar	1		2	
16.	Kishorimohan Granthagar, Rajatpur				
17.	Raipur Sadharan Pathagar	7	5	2	5
18.	Lohagarh Gramin Granthagar	5	5	3	3
19.	Swamiji Pathagar, Sukh Bazar	2			
20.	Paruldanga Pally Unnayan Samity Pathagar	5	2	1	1
21.	Kasba Jagarani Pathagar				
22.	Indira Pathagar, Monoharpur		1		
23.	Debdut Sadharan Pathagar	2	2	1	
24.	Kartickdanga Sadharan Pathagar				
25.	Kasipur Sadharan Pathagar				
26.	Bahadurpur Gramin Granthagar	1		2	
27.	Dangapara Rabindra Granthagar				
28.	Sattore Saptatri Gramin Pathagar				
29.	Mahula Mansamata Gramin Pathagar	1		1	
30.	Sehalai Gramin Pathagar	1			
31.	Mirzapur Gobindchandra Smriti Granthagar	3		1	
32.	Kojaguri Granthagar, Kankutia	3			
33.	Khoskadampur Palli Seva Pathagar	2	1	1	1
34.	Gopalnagar Tarasankar Granthagar	4	4		
35.	Balipara Rabindranath Granthagar				
36.	Jana Ajana Granthagar, Binuria	2			
37.	Kamalakantapur Palli Granthagar				
38.	Taltore Gramin Granthagar				

From the above it is seen that, most of libraries are trying to organize different programme except some of the libraries. Four to five libraries has organized several programmes and are running consistently. It is fact, that each of the above libraries are managed by one Librarian and one Assistant Librarian who must be the resident of the particular village and will be nominated/selected by the village committee. Therefore, total 68 candidates are involved to cater village library services and there is no provision to pay any remuneration or salary to them. They received very few amount as tiffin allowance only. Because, the concept was introduced by Gurudeva with a voluntary zeal to serve own village people as a part of rural development.

12. Future plan and prospects of Rural Libraries

The popularity of rural library services has been challenged recently by the emergence of electronic media and gradually the numbers of users of libraries are being deteriorated for TV channels, Mobile, Internet, etc. The following measures have been taken to overcome these challenges –

i) Some special sections like Children's corner, women's corners and old age corners are being developed in some rural libraries with special type of collection.

ii) Books are being selected, collected and purchased for students; illiterate, neo-literates, half-literates and literates.

iii) Some selective libraries are being supplied with computer, networking and internet connection. Computer literacy programmes for the members are also arranged.

iv) Rural libraries are being organized as a Resource Centre in the area for the NGOs and Government Agencies working for rural development there.

v) Every rural library will be self-sufficient with socio-economic resources.

vi) Some financial assistance (at least two thousand per month) may be given to Librarians and Assistant Librarians which will motivate them and at the same time this amount may come to their further educational assistance.

13. Conclusion

Tagore's writings on library and establishment of his experimental school and its library at Santiniketan are based on his educational philosophy of "freedom of mind, freedom of heart and freedom of will" [9]. His idea of a library was alike with his idea of rural development as he states "reform of education and regeneration of villages are the major task my life" [10]. Tagore gave stress on rural library services as he felt "a natural bond between education in the schools and colleges and the country outside them is immensely necessary" [11].This is necessary to fulfil the objectives of education as "the highest education is that which does not give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence" [12]. A library as the storehouse of the recorded knowledge has a tremendous role to play. But to ensure fullest use of its resources Tagore suggests, "it is necessary that its contents should clearly and specifically brought to notice" of readers with human touch because "the library by itself imposes a responsibility – the responsibility relating to riches. In so far as the library contains books, it attains fulfilment only through having those books read. It will not remain inactive; may it play an active role by issuing a call. Because "Jannstam yanna deeyate''[13].

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