

Knowledge Communication through Rural Library Services: Tagorean Concept and Experiments of Department of Lifelong Learning and Extension, Visva-Bharati

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Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the famous poet and writer, is also regarded as a pioneer in rural development programmes and library movement in India. Aiming to make villagers self-reliant as well as self-dependent to make efficient use of resources for the fullest development of their physical, social, economic and intellectual potential and abilities, and get them acquainted with the cultural tradition of their own, Rabindranath initiated rural reconstruction programme at Sriniketan in the year 1922. To eradicate illiteracy in the villages around Sriniketan, he emphasized on collection and dissemination of information through the introduction of “*Chalantika*” (Mobile Library) services. This service continues through 38 village libraries (presently 34 are functioning) under the control of the Department of Lifelong Learning & Extension (formerly Rural Extension Centre) of Visva-Bharati with the financial assistance of Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF). This paper gives an overview of the rural libraries year-wise, number of Gram Panchayats served. Also discusses the growth of collection, use of books by readers, provision fund based on the five years Annual Report (2009-10 to 2013-14).

Keywords: *Chalantika Library*, Department of Lifelong Learning & Extension (DLLL&E), Lifelong Learning, Mobile Library, Rabindranath Tagore, Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF), Rural Development, Rural Library, Visva-Bharati

1. Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), is known as a great poet and writer, but he was also an educator, a social reformer, a musician, a composer, an actor, a painter and philosopher, and is also considered as a pioneer of mass literacy movement and rural development programme in India, as well as of Indian Library Movement. At a time when the country was under colonial rule, he made attempts to put forward before his countrymen the idea of village welfare. He made his pioneering efforts before Indian independence in the field of rural development, which was started at Silaidaha, now in Bangladesh and took proper shape at Sriniketan (*adobe of Lakshmi*), the poet's laboratory for his work in relation to rural reconstruction, long back in the year 1922.

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 acquaint them with the tradition of their own country and competent to make efficient use of modern resources for improvement of their physical, intellectual and economic condition (Tagore, 1928)¹. Tagore in his rural development project laid emphasis on economy (with special emphasis on agriculture and local handicraft), education, health, village organisation, research and training and on different methods in knowledge communication mainly based on traditional folklore of Bengal. Tagore considered educational development as foundation of rural reconstruction as he observed: “reform of education and generation of villages are the major tasks of my life” (Tagore, 1972)⁷.

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2. Department of Lifelong Learning & Extension (DLE & E), Sriniketan, Visva-Bharati at a Glance

DLE & E (formerly known as Rural Extension Centre), under Palli Samgathana Vibhaga is one of the oldest departments under Visva-Bharati, listed in the Visva-Bharati Act, 1951. It has been actively engaged in improving the socio-economic condition of the villagers in its vicinity since its inception. Over the years, the centre has been giving emphasis on extension programmes to encourage the villagers to become self-reliant through their own enterprises and in different spheres of their life. DLE & E is actively engaged in Village Development Societies (VDSs), strengthening Self Help Groups (SHGs), Youth Organisations, Mohila Samities (women’s forum) as well as rural library services at village level.

2.1 Establishment of Rural Libraries Under DLE & E, Visva-Bharati

Tagore’s philosophy regarding rural transformation becomes clear from his writings such as ‘Palli Prakriti’ (Nature of the Village), ‘Atma Shakti’ (Self-Empowerment), ‘Samabay Niti’ (Co-operative Policy), ‘Rasiar Chithi’ (Letters from Russia), etc. as well as from his speeches in some conferences (viz., Provincial Conference at Nator (1897), Provincial Conference of Pabna Congress (1908)), and from ‘Pitrismiti’ (Memoires of my Father) written by his son Rathindranath. Tagore believed, “If we could free one village from the shackles of helplessness and ignorance, an ideal for the whole of India would be established ... Let a few villages be rebuilt in this way and I shall say they are my India. That is the way to discover true India” (Tagore, 1928)¹. Tagore also realized about the retention of the acquired knowledge and the literacy skills without which the goals of human life could not be achieved. For that he suggested, “the highest educational institutions should assimilate knowledge from all sources and disseminate it for the benefit of the masses in order to strengthen their own foundation” (Tagore, 1931)⁴ as it has clearly been stated in one of the objectives of Sriniketan “to carry the knowledge and experience gained in the class-room and farm to the village” (Tagore, 1976)⁸.

Tagore was in favour of community education through library services. To fulfil this motto Tagore opened a new horizon of library services establishing “*Chalantika Granthagar*” (mobile library services) or “*Circulating Library*” in order to support his rural reconstruction

activities at Sriniketan in 1925, with initial collection of 200 books. In this programme, books were circulated from one village to another round the year through those in-charges of *Chalantika* Branch Library/Centre; the purpose was to create enthusiasm among the rural people having no opportunity to avail the facilities of a library.

During the initial period, total number of books of the library and number of books issued has been shown in the Table 1.

Table 1. Collection development and its use at the initial period (1929-1934)

Year	No. of Books	No. of Books Issued
1929	450	729
1930	390 (including 5 periodicals)	709
1931	400	600
1932	461	950
1933	512	1474
1934	1087	2457

[Source: Visva-Bharati Annual Report, 1929-1934].

In the year 1984, Govt. of Japan, donated a Mobile Van to the Department of REC. The programme was running successfully for a long period, but, unfortunately, from 2001 the service of mobile library was disrupted due to break down of the van.

DLE & E of Visva-Bharati collaborates with RRRLF under Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India RRRLF and since then RRRLF came forward to finance establishment of permanent rural libraries in the villages with library building, furniture, books, journals and equipment.

Starting from nine permanent libraries, presently the number has grown to 38. Beside this, there are: 1 Health Library, 12 Children’s Libraries and 1 Children’s Corner which are running within the radius of 10-15 Kms, out of which 38 are in the adjacent rural areas of Sriniketan and 1 in the Visva-Bharati area. These libraries are situated in 8 Gram Panchayats of two Development Blocks, viz, Bolpur-Santiniketan and Ilambazar of Birbhum district of West Bengal. Out of the 38 rural libraries, 2 libraries are temporarily suspended and 2 show-caused as they are incorrigible in terms of their functioning like regular opening up the libraries, move the readers fro library, enthusiastic about acquiring books and furniture and attending monthly seminars, etc. Thus number of functioning libraries is 34 at present.

Establishment of the rural libraries is shown in the Table 2.

Table 2. Establishment of the rural libraries

Year	No. of Libraries Established
1975	9
1977	2
1980	4
1983	3
1986	4
1987	1
1991	6
1994	4
1999	2
2002	1
2005	1
2010	1
2012	1 (Health Library)

The basic objectives of the programme of the rural libraries under DLLL & E, Visva-Bharati are:

1. Development of knowledge power and dissemination of information and a progressive outlook and thereby enhance the capabilities of the villagers and with the ultimate objective of empowering them,
2. Promotion and retention of acquired literacy skill,
3. Development of reading habits among the rural people,
4. Nurturing the cultural instinct by enriching indigenous culture,
5. Open up a platform for sharing ideas and views with others,
6. Creation of logical thinking and scientific attitude of the villagers, and
7. Dissemination of knowledge aimed at enhancing income and quality of life.

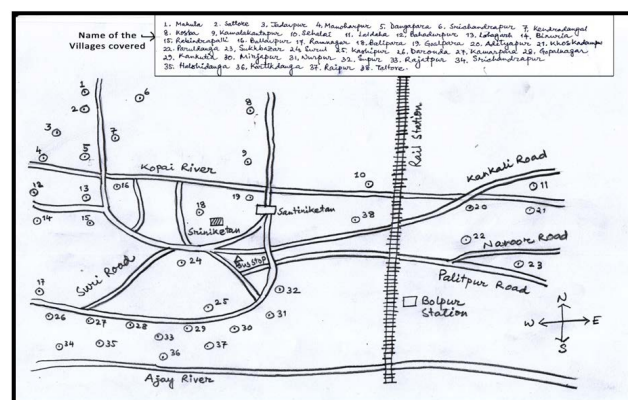
Geographical distribution of the rural libraries under DLLL & E, Visva-Bharati has been shown in the Table 3 and in a pictorial form under.

Table 3. Geographical distribution of the Rural Libraries under DLLL & E, Visva-Bharati

Name of the Block	
Bolpur-Santiniketan Block (32)	Illambazar Block (6)
Seven Gram Panchayats (G.P.) Visva-Bharati Area (1) under Bolpur-Santiniketan Block (30)	Illambazar Gram Panchayat (6)
Ruppur G.P. (9)	
Sattore G.P. (6)	
Raipur-Supur G.P. (8)	

Kosba G.P. (3)	
Konkali G.P. (3)	
Sian-Muluk G.P. (1)	
Albandha-Sorpolehna G.P. (1)	

Note: Figures given in the Bracket denotes the number of rural libraries under that Panchayat.

**Chart 1.** Villages covered under rural services of DLLL & E, Visva-Bharati.

3. Objectives of the Study

Objectives of the study includes:

1. To study the average number of readers of these libraries,
2. To investigate gap between the Male and Female readers of the libraries,
3. To give an outline of the growth of collection during the last five years,
4. To trace out the use of books by the readers of the libraries, and
5. To study the provision of fund during the last five years.

4. Methodology

In this study, data has been collected and consulted from Annual Reports of DLLL & E, Visva-Bharati of the year 2009-10 to 2013-14⁹ and different library records such as accession register, users' register, issue records, etc. Data includes information about the background of the DLLL & E, Visva-Bharati and its activities, average number of readers of the libraries, size of collections, use of books by readers, and provision of funds.

5. Data Analysis

5.1 Present Scenario of the Rural Libraries Under Dlll & E, Visva-Bharati

The rural libraries are managed by the Librarians and

Assistant Librarians under control of DLLL & E, Visva-Bharati. Every month, they attend the monthly seminars organised by the DLLL & E, Visva-Bharati. This seminar provides a platform, where they can exchange the views about the functioning of the libraries.

Average number of readers can be traced out from the Table 4.

Table 4. Average number of readers

Year	Male	Female	Total	Ratio of Male and Female Reader
2009-10	1560	1280	2840	1:0.82
2010-11	970	700	1671	1:0.72
2011-12	1104	800	1904	1:0.72
2012-13	1394	1094	2488	1:0.78
2013-14	1036	873	1909	1:0.84

With the financial assistance of RRRLF and Visva-Bharati, the rural libraries procure a good number of books every year. Growth of collection of the rural libraries has been shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Growth of collection

Year	No. of Books	No. of Books Added during the Year
2009-10	1,02,356	5,082
2010-11	1,06,606	4,250
2011-12	1,12,216	5,610
2012-13	1,14,970	2,754
2013-14	1,18,438	3,468

Use of books by the readers during the last five years has been shown in Table 6. Unfortunately, it is observed that during the last year (2013-14) use of books was decreased.

Table 6. Use of books by readers

Year	Use of Books	Decrease (-) / Increase(+)
2009-10	32,520	-
2010-11	26,970	(-) 5,570
2011-12	26,784	(-) 186
2012-13	34,119	(+) 7,335
2013-14	26,069	(-) 8,050

RRRLF provides matching grant to Visva-Bharati for

maintenance as well as augmentation of library resources. The fund is mainly used for procurement of books and equipment. Fund provision for the rural libraries in the last five years is shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Provision of funds

Year	RRRLF	Visva-Bharati	Total
2009-10	3,50,000	3,50,000	7,00,000
2010-11	3,50,000	3,50,000	7,00,000
2011-12	5,00,000	5,00,000	10,00,000
2012-13	--	5,00,000	5,00,000
2013-14	3,51,078	5,15,000	8,66,078

Besides the above grant RRRLF regularly sanction grants for conducting workshop/seminar on rural libraries.

5.2 Suggestions and Recommendations

The following suggestion may be taken into consideration for offering rural library services in consistent manner based on the Annual Report of five years from 2009-10 to 2013-14³:

- The growth of rural libraries since 2000 has been very slow. There is a need for conducting a comprehensive survey of different surrounding villages to establish the rural libraries,
- In the year 2013-14 number of readers is lower than the previous year; this may be due to of e-media, timing of library hours, lack of motivated volunteers to facilitate library services, lack of professional staff, etc.,
- Necessary action is to be taken by authority to get the involvement of people from different sections of the society. A special drive is also to be taken to get involvement of the villagers as advisers,
- Proper action (e.g. user centric collections, collection and organization of some information dissemination programmes about health, transportation, employment etc., organization of lecture about the utility of library use on the different programme, etc.) is to be taken to increase the number of readers and also to enhance library use by the readers,
- Should provide an opportunity to the rural people who do not have education or are school dropouts to get functional literacy,
- Rural Libraries should arrange awareness programmes of various aspects related to women like health, nutrition, policies, laws as well as

- eradication of social evils,
- By establishing a nodal computer centre basic awareness programme or computer literacy programme is to be conducted (for the minimum knowledge of computer operation and scope & benefits of computer use) at a regular interval for the library managers and also for the library users, and
- Community Information Centres (CICs) play a vital role in rural areas by providing necessary information needed by people. In this respect, in the operational areas of the DILL & E, Visva-Bharati by establishing CICs may extend their services through mobile information kiosks, like 'Kiosk-on-Wheel'.

6. Conclusion

Tagore's writings on objective of education is "to give man unity of truth" and "the full realization of all the ideals in life through work and wisdom" (Tagore, 1959)⁵. 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" (Tagore, 1961)⁶. Tagore stressed on rural library services as he felt that "a natural bond between education in the schools and colleges and the country outside them is immensely necessary" (Tagore, 1972)⁷. 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" (Tagore, 1929)². For this, 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 Tagore believed "*Jannstam yanna deeyate*" (Tagore, 1929)³.

7. Reference

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