

## RABINDRANATH'S THOUGHT ON RURAL RECONSTRUCTION WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON RURAL LIBRARIES

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### ABSTRACT

*Rabindranath spent several years in villages. His father sent him to Selaidaha to live within village to look after his family property but Rabindranath began to meet realities of villages and gained experience to live within the villages. He shared his joys and sorrows with the villagers. This was what the culture of his family. Rabindranath was a keen observer of the life around him. He understood that without the development of villages a nation like ours cannot be progressed. Rabindranath Tagore first started his experiments with various crops at Selaidaha in 1899 with a view to accelerate productivity and increase food production. He was a dynamic planner and optimistic and he got success in his zamindari areas particularly in Patisar, Selaidaha and Sajadpur. When Tagore initiated his rural reconstruction programme at Sriniketan, he already passed the prime period of life. He was then at 61 but he did not lose his hope to get success in Sriniketan and Santiniketan (Visva-Bharati area). To regenerate village life and cultivate the spirit of self-reliance among villagers co-operative and other organizations were formed by him in two dozen villages surrounding Sriniketan and Santiniketan. In his dream projects Rural library appears to be a critical component in achieving farming objectives and improving the lives of farmers. He thought that only through rural libraries rural people can get their correct and desired information. Village library Services are still continuing with some modifications in meeting present day needs. Tagore firmly believed that rural development cannot take shape without proper use of information and it can only be possible through public libraries especially rural libraries and agencies in rural development.*

**KEYWORDS:** Rural Development, Rural Reconstruction, Public Libraries, Rural Libraries, Food Production.

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### Introduction

The world famous poet, Asian first Nobel laureate, our beloved "Gurudev" Rabindra Nath Tagore aptly perceived that without the development of the poor villagers a nation cannot be developed. The sprits of rural reconstruction was strongly rooted up in young Rabindranath when he was 19 years old in the initial stage of his village life. He began realizing and experiencing the joy and sorrows of rural life.

Gurudev wrote "people used to come with their joys and sorrows their stakes and complaints enabled me to form a true state of villages...". He continued "gradually the sorrow and poverty of the villages became clear to me and I began to grow restless to do something about it... from that time forward I continually endeavored to find out how villagers mind could be aroused so that they themselves could accept and take up the responsibility for their own lives".

He applied the idea that villagers themselves had to stir themselves and cooperate with each other in order to get out of the social and economic degeneration in his zamindari areas particularly in Patisar, Selaidaha and Sajadpur.

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Rabindranath Tagore first started his experiments with various crops at Selaidaha in 1899 with a view to accelerate productivity and increase food production. He begun cultivating finer varieties of paddy, American Maize, at least two varieties of potatoes in eight acres of land as well as peas collected from Patna, tomato and banana.

### **Beginning of Rural Reconstruction**

His formal work of rural reconstruction in his estates, spanned in six related areas as drawn below

- Health and prevention of disease by arranging treatments of the villagers.
- Education, especially primary education.
- Improvement of village environments and public works such as building roads, digging tanks, wells etc.
- Protection of villagers from the clutches of the mahajans.
- Agriculture and cottage industries and several new businesses such as jute production, silk.
- Forming model villages, instilling co-operation in the minds of all the villagers and introduction of natural settlement of village disputes.
- **Birbhum at That Time:** The district acquired its present geographical boundaries from 1878 having area of 1753 square miles (455 square k.m.) after a spell of alteration through division or addition of areas from the contiguous districts. Changes in the socioeconomic structure, however began only after the imposition of colonial rule in the area. One of the important changes that occurred was the gradual disappearance of collective life from the social life of the villages. From the historical point of view, the pre-colonial, pre-capitalist economic system of the village began to change with the coming of British.

### **Rural Reconstruction Programme at Sriniketan**

Tagore initiated his rural reconstruction programme at Sriniketan in a house at Surul, which he purchased from Lord S.P. Sinha of Raipur in 1912 that formed the nucleus of his rural reconstruction model, the poet's laboratory for his work in relation to village upliftment. But his dream of Sriniketan Model could not take shape until Mr. Elmhirst arrived at Santiniketan in November 1921 and later took over charge of Sriniketan as its first director. We cannot forget the contribution of Mrs. Straight, she gave all her money for this noble mission. Thus Sriniketan model is the output/result of the three great personalities—our Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Elmhirst and Mrs. Straight.

The programme was started with a general survey of rural life and proper investigation into the economic and social problems of village life. The question of ignorance and diseases were addressed and solution to the problem of communication of knowledge to the villagers sought. The information thus generated was utilized as an essential tool for decision making before the real work started. The underlying principle was "We must liberate these few villages in every respect so that all may receive education, a breeze of joy may blow once again, songs and music, recitation from epics and scriptures may fill them, as of yore. Mould just these few villages"

Rabindranath used the term "Rural reconstruction instead of Rural Development. He wanted to "bring back life in 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 launched Rural reconstruction Programme at Palli Samgathana Vibhaga, Sriniketan, in the year 1922 including development of agriculture, animal husbandry, education, health and sanitation, rural crafts and industries. To regenerate village life and develop the spirit of self-reliance, co-operative and other organizations were formed in twenty-four surrounding villages of Sriniketan and Santiniketan. One of these activities, including the village library Services which are still continuing with some modifications in accordance with the **present day** needs. Tagore wanted to fulfil his dream, through public libraries particularly rural libraries by providing necessary information to the rural people and agencies in rural development work. For rural reconstruction or rural development, he organized mela (fair) Poush Mela, Magh Mela, Shilpamela where thousands of people assembled and exchanged their ideas. Rabindranath understood success of rural reconstruction programme largely depends on people's understanding of information and communication.

### **Value of Information and Communication for Village Development**

Proper use of information and communication can motivate and enthuse stakeholders to participate in the process of development in an expected manner. Particularly, it may influence the development of most of the rural folk who are either inaccess or not adequately access to this facility as they are living in lakhs of remote and interior villages relatively isolated and sparsely populated. Information and communication is one of the major elements of development of the people, especially the rural people. But in reality, less availability of information facility to a vast majority of rural folk certainly hinders their socioeconomic and cultural development.

Major information and communication needs of rural people may be described on the development of:

- Agriculture and allied activities;
- Self-employment and income generating programmes;
- Village industries along with their related activities;
- Rural Employment perspectives;
- Education;
- Health and family welfare programmes;
- Credit and infrastructural activities;
- Food and availability of cheap nutrition diet; and
- Public policy of information and communication for Government programmes, plans and projects etc.

### **Present Activity for Rural Reconstruction**

With the change of time Visva-Bharati/Rural Extension Centre (REC) laid greater emphasis on new programmes of rural education and extension keeping in view the changing socio-economic scenario. The idea is to encourage the villagers to become self-reliant through formation of Self-help Group. Youth organization, Mahila Samities, etc. Presently the institute follows the UGC guidelines of 1988 and 1992 i.e. the area-based approach to rural education and extension.

The present activities of Rural Extension Centre include the following broad areas on Tagore's model of rural reconstruction and knowledge dissemination.

These activities are:

- Broti Balak Programme
- Rural Library Programme
- Innovative Community Learning programmes
- Self Help group
- Adult Education programme
- Women and Child Welfare programme
- Continuing education programme
- Women Empowerment Programme
- Training programme
- Agricultural Extension
- Games & sports
- Promotion of Rabindrasangeet (Tagore songs)
- Promotion of art and Culture
- Promotion of folk Culture
- Awareness Programme
- Economic Development Programme
- Health Extension
- Environmental Education

Among the above all have more or less importance but to speak the truth rural libraries/public libraries have been playing the crucial role in his dream since Rural Reconstruction initiative (udyog).

- **Village Library Service**

Village library service is of utmost importance even today for spreading of education. Rabindranath firmly believed that village library was the only medium through which maximum number of villagers would be communicated with reliable information. They would be updated with the latest information, without which they could not survive. His idea of village library service was known as "Sriniketan Experiment", There are about 31 Adult Education centres covering many villages at that time. These centres offered literary instruction, promoting discussion on civic and social education group of subjects and also organized a network of cultural activities.

- **SikshaSatra**

Rabindranath established SikshaSatra in 1924, first at Santiniketan and later shifted to Sriniketan in 1926 in order to maintain a close contact with rural people. Gurudev thought students should come forward to fulfil the requirements of individual as well as community.

- **Sikshacharcha**

In collaboration with the then Bengal Government, Rabindranath established SikshaCharcha in 1937. These teachers were mainly meant for rural pupil, i.e. for primary school which are considered as to have great role in bridging the communication between Government and people particularly rural people.

- **LokeSikshaSamsad**

LokeSikshaSamsad was one of the most important and integral part of the total programme of rural reconstruction. It was established in 1937 and catered to all over India. It is mainly for the people beyond age who normally cannot come to school in formal system.

- **BratiBalak Organization:**

BratiBalak organization is an association of adolescent boys and young men. It was first started in East Bengal. About which Gurudev discussed in his "RussiarChiti" (The letters of Russia.)

- **Population Education**

Population explosion is still a burgeoning problem till today. It was no exception during the period of Gurudev apprehended this serious problem and wanted to develop a kind of population education in connection with adult and higher education. He realised only through education its consequences can be made known understood to the rural people, hence he stressed on population education.

### **Conclusion**

With the change of time, the needs of rural people have been changed considerably. Today they use information in a moderate way, they rely not only printed medium but also on electronic sources. Their usage of information is of great importance in the process of rural development. Our beloved Rabindranath Tagore also told that we have to adopt the new technique, new methodology, new idea, and new innovation with the change of time to cope up with needs of the present.

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