

## **Rural Development through Youth Organization and Rural Library Services: Tagore's Idea on Rural Reconstruction**

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***Abstract** - The central theme of Tagore's philosophy of life was concerned with the creation of a synthetic and harmonious way of living which he tried to bring back to the rural life through self-reliance and co-operation among all sections of people through his rural reconstruction programme. Tagore wanted to organize the villages so that the villages could supply all their needs on cooperative basis. The article highlights Tagore's concern and activity for village upliftment by the process of rural reconstruction. Youth and education both were always a concern for Gurudeva Rabindranath Tagore in his programme. Brati-Balaka Samgathana (Youth Organization) was pioneered by Mr. Elmhirst under the vision of Tagore. Chalantika - the mobile library first one of its kind was started by Tagore to reach the mass and disseminate information. The paper shows the model of rural reconstruction for community development and how dissemination of information could be possible through rural extension programmes, especially through Brati-Balaka Samgathana (at present 'Brati dal') and rural library services. Finally, the paper shows the area for social research and a model can be designed with the information provided in this article keeping in mind Tagore's model towards rural reconstruction.*

**Keywords:** Rabindranath Tagore, Brati-Balaka Samgathana, Chalantika, Rural Reconstruction, Rural Library Services.

### **1. Introduction**

*"The villages in the country must be built up to be completely self-sufficient and able to supply all their own needs. The villagers must be educated, assisted and encouraged to established primary schools, centers of training in arts and crafts, centres for religious activities, co-operative stores and banks. Our salvation lies in thus making our villages self-reliant and knit together by the ties of co-operative life". (Tagore, 1963, p. 19)*

Gurudeva Rabindranath Tagore was a believer in the right and freedom of the individuals to shape their life in their own way. Tagore's individualism defines belief in the fundamental unity of mankind and not only of mankind but also of the whole universe of nature and men. He emphasizes the need for social service not only for social uplift but also the spiritual uplift of an individual. Tagore's educational ideals are a part of his philosophy of life. The principles of his educational philosophy are: freedom, creative self-expression and active communion with nature and man. By freedom he means to learn freely and spontaneously from our natural surroundings. It is the freedom of mind, freedom of heart and freedom of will (Banerjee, 1966). So education is to be natural not only in context but also in its quality. Youths are always the representatives in Scout movement all over the world, as they have the heart of a lion and strength of an elephant. Many scout movements were there during that time, among them the famous are Baden-Powell Scout Movement and Bharat Yuvak Sangha

(Indian Youth Association) (Lal, 1932). Tagore under the leadership of Mr. Elmhirst developed Brati-Balaka Samgathana as per need of the reconstruction programme towards village development.

The introduction of Chalantika - a library mobile in nature in 1925 to reach the common mass who could not reach the library was the most important project taken up by Tagore in his rural reconstruction programme. It is found that Tagore paved the path of village upliftment through education and rural libraries play a pivotal role in the process of community development as Sriniketan remains an important model for community development. He initiated his vision to make rural India as a self-dependable and co-operative one which in turn is the responsibility of all to keep up with his ideas.

## **2. Objectives of the study**

- To get an insight about the Tagore's idea on rural development through his rural reconstruction programme.
- To highlight the idea of *Brati-Balaka Samgathana* and highlight their changing role as well as activities.
- To have an idea towards the present role and activities of rural library services, which were introduced by Tagore as *Chalantika*.
- To identify the scope for further study keeping in mind, Tagore's model towards rural reconstruction.

## **3. Tagore's Rural Reconstruction Programme**

Rabindranath Tagore's contribution is in the memory of millions as a poet, dramatist, cultural leader, painter but if we forget him as a dynamic social philosopher and a relentless crusader for social development. The basic inspiration for social work came to him from certain fundamental and personal urges from his early childhood. As mentioned by eminent authors, the central theme of Tagore's philosophy of life was concerned with the creation of a synthetic and harmonious way of living. That's why he tried to bring back rural life through self-reliance, co-operation among all sections of people for realizing its full potential. Disorganization of rural life made a great impact on Tagore's mind. Tagore identified that illiteracy, lack of awareness; superstition and ignorance are the chief drawbacks of rural people. Educating the villagers would overcome the evils of the caste system, superstition and hence uplift of village society would be possible.

### **3.1 History**

The idea of rural reconstruction came into Tagore's mind when he was in Silaidaha (now in Bangladesh) and Patisar (now in East Pakistan) looking after the family zamindari, as experiencing the socio-economic conditions of rural Bengal. It is his urge for service of God and he found the better way to serve God through service of the low-lying and under-privileged community. In his essay "*Swadeshi Samaj*" (Sen, 1991) he points out how he felt about the rural Bengal.

Constantly a thought for development of the rural community runs into his mind and he formed Sriniketan (Adobe of Prosperity), Institute of Rural Reconstruction. Sriniketan was founded ceremonially on 6th Feb, 1922 as the Institute of Rural Reconstruction under Visva-Bharati. With the vision of Rabindranath Tagore and leadership of Leonardo Elmhirst,

experiments in rural reconstruction started functioning at Sriniketan. The mission of Sriniketan had not been just to give some welfare service to the villages adjacent to it, but to develop a technique of community development for the whole of India.

### 3.2 Activities of the Institute of Rural Reconstruction

The seed of rural reconstruction was started with three villages at the initial stage. The Institute of Rural Reconstruction, Sriniketan was the pilot research centre. Number of demonstration units were setup where economists, agriculturists, social workers, doctors, midwives, teachers and voluntary workers, skills to solve different aspects of the rural problem.

<b>It can be sub-divided as</b>	<b>Programmes on</b>
Economic improvement	Agriculture Activity, Industrial Activity
Health and Sanitation	Malarial Control Activity, Leprosy Control
Research and Training	Social Work Research, Rural Survey
Education	Lok Siksha Samsad, Siksha Shatra
Information & Awareness	Mobile Library – <i>Chalantika</i> , Area Library

### 3.3 Rural Extension Centre: (REC)

In order to have a better socio-economic situation of the village people Visva-Bharati developed Rural Extension Centre (REC). Visva-Bharati (a central university) follows the UGC guidelines of 1988 and 1992 i.e. an area based approach to rural education and extension.

Activities of REC:

Brati-Dal	Rural Library Services
Self-Help Group	Adult Education
Continuing Education Programme	Agriculture Extension
Innovative Community Learning Programme	Women and Child Welfare Programme
Mahila Samity	Tranning Programme
Health and Sanitation	Environmental Education
Promotion of Art, Culture, Folk culture	Economic Development Programme

### 3.4 Present Scenario

The current name of REC is “Department of Lifelong Learning and Extension, Rural Extension Centre”. Operational area of REC comprises of 02 (two) blocks: Bolpur-Sriniketan & Illambazar, 08 (eight) Gram Panchayats and covering 50 (fifty) villages (Visva-Bharati, Annual Report 2014-15).

### 4. *Brati-Balaka Samgathana*: Youth Organization

According to Tagore *Brati-Balaka(s)* are termed as “*desh sevak*”, as the activities of these youths are not restricted to mere scouts but much more. The focus of *Brati-Balaka Samgathana* is to involve different classes of youth in the development of their community, to act as a bridge between the institute (Institute of Rural Reconstruction) and the villages to eradicate racisms. The introduction of scout activities is essential in the programme of rural

reconstruction and rural education. It has been recognized that educative values plays an important role in development and sustainment of the organization. The programme and aims of *Brati-Balaka Samgathana* were adapted from 4-H Clubs in America with modification according to local conditions. 4-H stands for *Health, Hands, Head and Heart*.

The idea of introducing scouting among the village boys was started during the initial stage of the institute by Elmhirst as he had the insight into human nature that effective work would be done in the villages only if the youths would be interested in the welfare of their own communities. Since there were no trained leaders to guide this work, four students from the institute were sent to a Scout camp in the Central Provinces in order to receive training in the organization of Scout troops. *Brati-Balaka Samgathana* was started at village Mahidpur in 1922. There were numerous difficulties which the institute faced while making effectiveness of the scout troops, like: a) the unsympathetic attitude of the parents due to caste and class prejudices, b) involvement in scout may lead to join in war, due to illiteracy among the villagers, c) the conflicting views of various movements already in existence (Lal, 1932).

#### 4.1 Activities and Enrolment of Brati Balakas in earlier days

- To break down caste and religious differences through group games, music and plays.
- Water purification.
- Sanitation and policing.
- Firefighting.
- Supervise the *melas* (Fair).
- Repairing of buildings.
- Assist in famine relief in the district through distribution of food and clothing.

**Table - I: Works carried out by the *Brati-Balakas*.**

Name of the Village	Roads repaired & constructed (in yards)	Drains repaired & constructed	No. of 'Dobas' (Pond) filled up	Tanks cleaned	Jungle cleaning (in 'bighas')	Quinine distributed (in grams)	Kerosene sprayed (in seers)
Bandgora	1200	1500	-	9	-	8406	35
Bhubandanga	3620	4240	4	-	-	4243	26
Kasipur	1650	250	-	-	-	-	13.50
Benuria	465	2800	10	13	6	2449	18
Bahadurpur	200	1500	0	1	3	1317	5
Islampur	100	1000	-	2	-	-	10
Santhalpara	1000	2800	3	-	3.25	-	-
Gopalpara	75	400	3	50	.50	6832	8

**Source:** *Quarterly Report of the Village Welfare Department, April-June, 1927, Sriniketan Papers, PSV.*

From Table-I it is clear that Brati-Balakas used to carry out various village welfare works like repairing of drains, roads, cleaning of tanks, spraying of kerosene, distribution of quinine to the malaria affected area in eight villages.

**Table - II:** Enrolment of Brati-Balaka troop.

Formation year of Brati Balak troop	Village	No. of Boys (Age: 8-16)			No. of Boys attending school	No. of Brati Balakas		
		Hindu	Santhals	Total		Hindu	Santhals	Total
1931	Kutipnara	-	20	20	20	-	20	20
1931	Layekbazar	-	32	32	32	-	20	20
1932	Srinidhipur	45	-	45	45	25	-	25
1933	Ratanpur	38	-	38	30	20	-	20
1933	Albandha	36	-	36	25	27	-	27
1934	Bablabuni	-	20	20	13	-	20	20

**Source:** Information regarding Brati-Balaka troops, 1930 and numerical strength of Brati-Balakas, 1934, Sriniketan Papers, PSV.

Table 2 clearly states that people from two different castes – Hindu and Santhals used to carry out the jobs of Brati Balaka Samgathans. Under the supervision of the Educational, Agricultural and industrial departments of the institute these youths are encouraged and taught how to grow vegetables and flowers, make simple articles like cotton mats, money bags etc. Exhibitions are arranged annually representing their activities in gardening, hand-crafts, nature study and in social services. Later this organization got expanded incorporating girls for the same purpose and a separate body was formed - *Brati-Balika (Girls) Organisation*.

#### 4.2 Present Scenario of Brati-dal

For the welfare activities in the villages, rural boys and girls between age group 9 and 14 are mobilised into groups. At present 17 (seventeen) Brati-dals are active, covering 13 (thirteen) villages out of 50 affiliated villages.

Numbers of Brati dal				Number of members		
Boys Group	Girls Group	Mixed Group	TOTAL	Male	Female	TOTAL
02	02	13	17	170	170	340

#### Current Activities

- 5 day’s physical training programme was organised for the Brati leaders at Sriniketan.
- Special training for drill exercise was conducted with the Brati leaders at Sriniketan.
- Respective Brati dals conduct drawing competition, sports, craft making, cultural programmes, leaf collection for the children’s in their villages with aid from their VDS.
- In ‘*Brati O Yubo Samabesh*’ ever year the members of the Brati-dal performs cultural program in Sriniketan during Sriniketan *Mela* (Fair) on 7<sup>th</sup> February.
- Brati dal celebrates National Youth Day and Central Rally of Brati-Dal on Swami Vivekananda’s Birthday on 12<sup>th</sup> January.
- “*Sachhya Bharat Avijan*” was conducted by the Brati-dals of 13 villages by cleaning of drain, tube well platform, roads and ponds, etc. on 25.11.2014.

## **5. Rural Library Services**

It is identified that due to the illiteracy, lack of awareness, superstition and ignorance of the rural people Tagore's noble project (building up a co-operative Bank for the villagers earlier at Silaidah and Pastar when he invested 50% of his Nobel Prize money) had come fruitless. Aware of these factors of rural life while he initiated his rural development programmes at Sriniketan for the second time. It is library that can fight against these hindrances to overcome by disseminating proper knowledge to the villagers and it would be a strong support to his rural reconstruction project. In a way he assumed that traditional library services would not be of much help to achieve the goal. As villagers themselves were not aware of library services so it would be the task of the library itself to go beyond the walls and serve the village people with their required information. So Tagore introduced a library mobile in character as an effective medium named *Chalantika*.

### **5.1 Chalantika: The Mobile Library**

With the view to reach the rural people of Bengal, the emergence of *Chalantika* took place in 1925 at Sriniketan with a revolutionary idea of mobile library services in society and with a message of change, betterment of rural life. *Chalantika* has become a burning example of mobile library service in India for building up a new society with quality of life for rural people. Gurudeva wished and planned to extend education up to the grass root level of the society through the mobile library services. The mission is to spread up education from nearer village to remotest villages.

#### **5.1.1 Services and Growth of *Chalantika***

The Sriniketan experiment of Tagore was accelerated with the extension of library services in villages of five branch centers in the adjacent area, which has increased to 15 branches. Bolpur and Goalpara branch centers had two sub-branches each for library services in those days.

With the collection of 200 (two hundred) books *Chalantika* library made its first move in 1925. The numbers of books increased up to 1504 (one thousand five hundred four) in the year 1940. The villagers were issued books according to their choice, interest and demand for a certain period. Return of books was made to the main collection of *Chalantika* library via sub-branch and branch centers. This shows that *Chalantika* satisfies the first three laws of Library Science (1931), propound by Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan i.e. "Books are for Use", "Every Reader his Book" and Every Book its Reader". Tagore had already implemented these laws in practice since 1925. The library extensive and mobile practice was introduced before S.R. Ranganathan advocated the fifth law as "Library is a growing organism" (Gurey, 2010).

#### **5.1.2 *Chalantika* & Raja Rammohan Roy Library Foundation(RRRLF)**

The demand of library services was increasing at the adjacent villages of Sriniketan. Further initiative was taken for enriching the library services by Raja Rammohan Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) in 1975. RRRLF came forward with the initiative to support library services rendered by *Chalantika*. Visva-Bharati in collaboration with RRRLF began to finance for establishing permanent rural libraries in the villages through providing matching grants.

## 5.2 Present Scenario of Rural Library Services

Out of 50 affiliated villages, 37 (thirty-seven) villages are aided with rural library services. These 37 villages have 38 (thirty-eight) Village Development Societies and 01 (one) Health Society. The 38 Village Development Societies and 01 Health Society have 38 Rural Libraries and 01 Health Library respectively. All the 39 libraries are provided with buildings, furniture, books, journals and equipment by RRRLF. One respective librarian and one assistant librarian from each village development societies provide rural library services on voluntary basis. At present out of 39, 35 libraries (including 01 Health Library) are in functional condition and the total collection of books is 1,30,882 (as on March 2017).

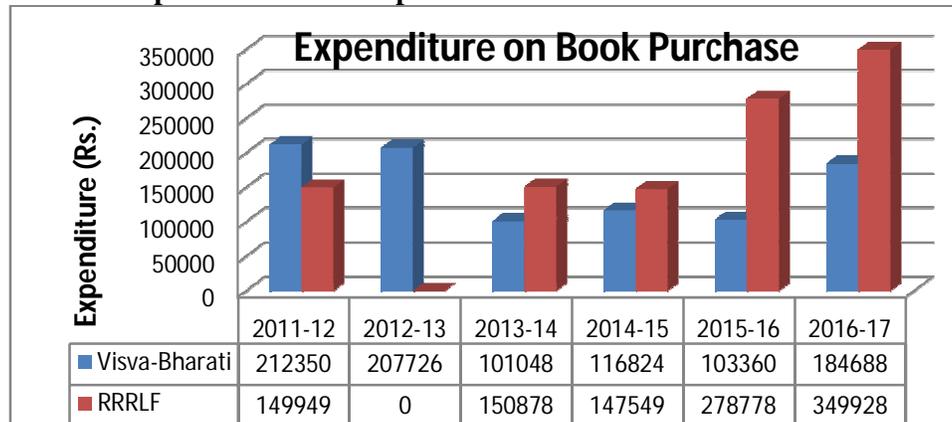
**Table-III: Year-wise affiliation of rural libraries**

Year	Number(s)	Name of libraries
1975	09	Adityapur Sadharan Pathagar
		Ballavpur Jyoti Sangha Granthagar
		Rabindrapalli Granthagar
		Dwaranda Chandimata Granthagar
		Goalpara Atulendu Pathagar *
		Laldaha Granthagar
		Nurpur Netaji Granthagar
		Srichandrapur Granthagar
		Surul Anandamoyee Granthagar
1977	02	Kamarpara Dharmaraj Granthagar
		Kendradangal Sadharan Pathagar
1980	04	Srichandrapur Chandrai Granthagar
		Halsidanga Palli Unnayan Granthagar
		Ramnagar Raksakali Granthagar
		Jadavpur Granthagar
1983	03	Kishorimohan Granthagar, Rajatpur
		Raipur Sadharan Pathagar
		Lohagarh Gramin Granthagar
1986	04	Swamiji Pathagar, Sukh Bazar
		Paruldanga Pally Unnayan Samity Pathagar
		Kasba Jagarani Pathagar *
		Indira Pathagar, Monoharpur
1987	01	Debdut Sadharan Pathagar
1991	06	Kartickdanga Sadharan Pathagar
		Kasipur Sadharan Pathagar *
		Bahadurpur Gramin Granthagar
		Dangapara Rabindra Granthagar
		Sattore Saptatri Gramin Pathagar
		Mahula Mansamata Gramin Pathagar
1994	04	Sehalai Gramin Pathagar
		Mirzapur Gobindchandra Smriti Granthagar
		Kojaguri Granthagar, Kankutia
		Khoskadampur Palli Seva Pathagar
1999	02	Gopalnagar Tarasankar Granthagar
		Balipara Rabindranath Granthagar *
2002	01	Jana Ajana Granthagar, Binuria
2005	01	Kamalakantapur Palli Granthagar
2010	01	Taltore Gramin Granthagar
2012	01	Surul Health Library
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39</b>	* Temporarily Non-functioning

As already discussed earlier, Visva-Bharati in collaboration with RRRLF began to finance for establishing permanent rural libraries in the villages through providing matching grants. Many village development societies along with rural libraries were given affiliation.

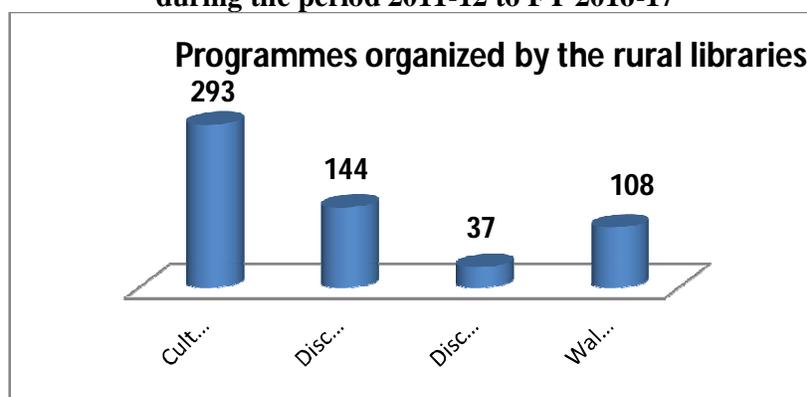
Table-III demonstrates year wise statistics of the affiliation provided to different rural libraries. Nine libraries were given affiliation in the year of 1975 and at present the total number of affiliated libraries is 39 which indicate an efficient growth and high demand for the library services.

**Chart-I: Expenditure on book purchase from the FY 2011-12 to FY 2016-17**



From the chart it may be stated that the average annual expenditure made on book purchase is near about 3.33 lakhs rupees. But during the year 2011-12 and 2012-13, Visva-Bharati itself has provided more than 2 lakhs rupees. It is because Surul Health Library and Taltore Gramin Granthagar got associated with REC.

**Chart-II: Total number of Activities/ Programmes organized by the rural libraries during the period 2011-12 to FY 2016-17**



The above chart shows many activities and programmes were organised by the rural libraries as a part of library extensive services. Total number of cultural programmes organised by all the rural libraries under study in a year is near about 50 on an average. The number of meetings/discussions with village people is very poor (30 per year) which indicates that many rural libraries were unable to arrange meeting with the village people at least once in a year.

## 6. Conclusion and Suggestion

It is found that Tagore paved the path of rural reconstruction and Sriniketan remains an important model for community development. The *Brati-Balaka Samgathana or Brati dal* was an important instrument in carrying out the programme of rural development. *Brati-Balaka Samgathana* was effective in those days and was much ahead of time. In present context youth still holds the key role towards development of a country as Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, former President of India states for the youth –

*“Youth should not accept any compromise or lower their sights. A society that makes its youth crawl in conformity and enforces dogmas on their aspirations can never flourish”- (Kalam, A.P.J.)*

Rural library services have increased but it is still far to achieve Tagore’s idea towards proper dissemination of information to develop a community. Rural education has undergone a change but how far Tagore’s concept of educating the villages as a part of community upliftment programme can be identified or of utility in the midst of present competition and change through research. A study can be done on the concept of Tagore towards community development and how rural library services functions from Tagore’s time and the present age at Sriniketan and in the neighbouring villages. Further an appropriate model can be designed, keeping in mind of Tagore’s model towards rural reconstruction.

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