

a poet  
and  
a plan

tagore's experiments on  
rural development  
sugata dasgupta

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HACKER

"Shan't you find the poet in his biography" sang Rabindranath Tagore, discounting the premium that one should pay to his life chroniclers. This book is not a biography and not even an account of the physical structure of the rural reconstruction Institute which Tagore founded in 1922 at Sriniketan. The small treatise presents, on the other hand, in a sizeable compass, the history of the growth of an idea and a movement which lay behind Tagore's famous scheme of rural reconstruction and of the probable impact it might have thrown on the total clientel, whom it sought to serve.

It is a matter of some tragedy that even today only a few of his countrymen are aware that Tagore had, during the early years of his life, actually drawn up a scientific and precise plan of social reconstruction, and gave it a practical trial, first at his Zamindari at Selaidaha and then in a group of villages located near his international University at Sriniketan.

This book, which comes at the end of the year of Tagore's birth centenary, contains the first scientific study of this movement and is meant not only for the students and builders of the planning movement of this country, but for all applied social scientists as well, who are interested in acquiring a first-hand acquaintance with the cultural heritage of the planning process in India which, the author rightly claims, lies in Tagore's Sriniketan. For the admirers and students of life and work of Rabindranath Tagore, this book fills an important gap by providing data regarding a distinctive phase of Tagore's life which was till recently somewhat lost sight of. That Dr. Leonard Elmhirst, (Dartington Hall, Devonshire—U.K.), a co-founder of Sriniketan to-

# A POET AND A PLAN

( Tagore's experiments in rural reconstruction )

By  
SUGATA DASGUPTA



THACKER SPINK & CO. (1933) PRIVATE LTD.  
3, Esplanade East, Calcutta-1,

Published by  
Nagendra Mishra  
Thacker Spink & Co. (1933) Private Ltd.  
3, Esplanade East,  
Calcutta-1.

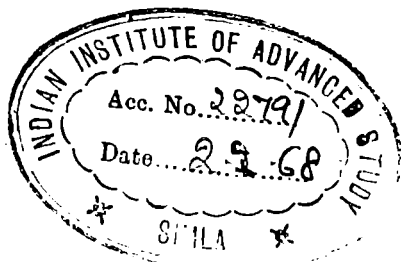
 Library IAS, Shimla



00022791

301.35  
D26P

Rs. 7.50 only.



Printed by  
Ranajit Kumar Dutta  
Nabasakti Press  
123, Acharyya J. C. Bose Road,  
Calcutta-14.

To my Parents  
Late Philosopher Surendranath Dasgupta  
and  
Himani Dasgupta

**“The necessity was my own, for I felt  
impelled to come back into a fullness  
of truth from my exile in a dream world.”**

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## FOREWORD

Reading "A Poet and a Plan" took me back to a discussion the poet Rabindranath Tagore had with me while he was convalescing in Argentina in 1924. I turned out my old notebook to find his actual words. We had been discussing the various aims of Sriniketan.

"These poor innocent children!" Tagore said, "Why should they be under teachers who do not love them? You must not insult the villagers with your help, nor must you make use of them to indulge your own feeling of superiority when you don't really want to help them." This is where", I said, "Kalimohan Ghosh was so valuable to us, from the outset in 1922. The villagers seemed to trust him from the moment he arrived in their village. He so enjoyed them and they certainly enjoyed him. How quickly the villagers spot whether or not you have a genuine respect and feeling for them". "They know instinctively", continued Tagore, "and the children know too, when, behind your offer of help, you are wanting something from them for yourself in return. The villager can refuse to give it, but too often the teacher, needing something for his own satisfaction from the children, can force it out of them. Our library shelves are loaded with books on peda-



gogy, but if you can once get through, to the children by your sympathy and love you can learn it all from the child”.

Our task at Sriniketan was to try and give effect and form to, what so many thought, were only a poet's idle dreams. Few people realised how fundamental and practical Tagore's ideas were about the villager and his needs. Sugata Dasgupta is right when he says that, in those early experiments of forty years ago, there must have been much trial and error. As a sociologist he is wise to try and assess values and results wherever he can and to ask for more, and more exact measurements, to be taken in the future. Where the human being is concerned there are so many delicate feelings and subconscious motives which can never be measured, but whatever we can legitimately measure must be measured, if, in our attempt to progress, we are to assess both positive and negative results. This is, I believe, a useful form of words which the sociologists, and the other social scientists, might well borrow from the physical scientist. When assessing error, mistakes and failure or successes, so-called, in any social experiment, it is wise I believe, to try, to use these terms, “positive” and “negative”. “Whenever” said Charles Darwin, “I ran into evidence that went against my own preconceived ideas, I found that I so easily and so quickly forgot it all, that I decided to keep a book in which I proceeded to record all the things that represented difference to what I had expected or hoped for. It was in

looking back, over these negative findings, and in trying to answer the challenge they offered, that I was finally able to formulate the theories I have presented in my "Origin of Species". "Please, Mr. Elmhirst, never let me hear you use the words success or failure in relation to an experiment like this, but always call what you see a positive or negative result", said Sir John Russel to me once. "I learn much more" he went on, "from facing and studying the negative results, which challenge me, than from gloating over the positive ones".

So many "negative results" we had at Santiniketan, in those early days! I still hope and think we faced most of them and learnt from them instead of trying to hide them away. Our funds were strictly limited, our staff was for the most part untrained, and yet, as Tagore warned us, only a many-sided approach would serve, that took account of the individual in all his aspects. Sugata Dasgupta's account rightly emphasises this point. He is correct also in his estimate of Tagore's faith in the capacity of young people to pioneer and even to carry their elders with them into new fields of adventure and of progress. Tagore picked two boys from the school at Santiniketan and sent them to a special course for Scout Leaders in the Central Provinces. Masoji, an art student, and Dhirananda Roy, came through the course with flying colours and Roy joined our student body immediately afterwards. But the officials of the Scout Movement in Calcutta objected to all the many adaptations, we realised, we would have to

make if the official ideas about Scouting were not to frighten the parents and repel our village boys. Tagore asked me to visit Baden-Powell when I was next in London and put this right. When I faced the founder of the Scout Movement with our problem, he immediately answered that "Scouting" was made for Boys, and not Boys for some official's idea of "Scouting", and that we must, of course, adapt to the need of the boys and the village as we thought fit. As Sugata Dasgupta says we made full use, even of the services of old gaol birds when they had something special to offer us. For some weeks Pulin Das, just released from twenty years imprisonment in the Andamans and a born leader, helped us to police the annual mela, at Santiniketan, with a troop of small village boys. To Dhirananda Roy, we gave the full responsibility of working out the Brati Balak plan and of adapting it to the use of the village girls as well. He did a masterly job and as soon as one village had accepted the idea and saw what it could do for their boys, other villages did not want to be left behind.

Tagore welcomed our attempt to introduce new machinery, to employ scientists, economists, technicians or sociologists, wherever we thought they could assist the villager in his fight against unnecessary suffering, grinding poverty, meaningless drudgery, or against social or political oppressions, but he never ceased to remind us that we must not forget the more ultimate ends and aims of life. At one point he was nervous, lest we should

let loose on the villages a too statistically minded sociologist who looked as if he was more concerned for his own reputation as a statistician, than with the human need and nature of the villager. Tagore wrote me as follows :—

“The ideal which I cherish in my heart for the work I have been struggling to build up through the best portion of my mature life does not need qualifications that are divided into compartments. It was not the Kingdom of the Expert, in the midst of the inept and ignorant that we wanted to establish, although the expert’s advice is valuable. The villages are waiting for the living touch of creative faith. . . . . You rightly named your work Village Reconstruction Work, for it was a living work comprehending village life in all its various activities and not merely a product of analytic knowledge”. And again :—“All the time when Sriniketan has been struggling to grow into a form, I was intently wishing that it should not only have a shape, but also light, so that it might transcend its immediate limits of time, space and special purpose. If Visva-Bharati comes to attain truth through the life of those who serve her then she will illumine the path of pilgrimage and not merely fill the storeroom with benefits. Herein lies the difference between America and ourselves. A lighted lamp is for the end of us and not a lump of gold”.

“A light” that might lighten “the path of

pilgrimage" through this difficult world! This was all very well as a figment of the poetic imagination but how were we to interpret it into a practical programme? "Your fresh eggs I believe in", he used to say "and your clean milk, your American ices and your Devonshire strawberries, with cream, but have you left room for an idle good for nothing poet like myself". He never lost an opportunity of challenging us to find an appropriate place for the arts, for the poet and artist in our own selves, as well as in the heart and mind of the villager; we tried to meet this challenge in part by our encouragement of the regular festivals and dramatic and recreational occasions, that Sugata Dasgupta describes as festivals for the seasons, for dance, for drama, for music, for poetry, where the artist in each of us, and the professionals too, could combine in some form of creative expression. "Invite our artist Nandalal to meet the village craftsmen" Tagore would say. "He may stimulate them into producing new and original designs". So often, Tagore was accused of an unpractical diletantism on this score of playing around with the Arts. So often, in our own experiment at Dartington, we have suffered from similar attacks by "practical men", and from sarcastic comment on our waste of time, money and effort on the Arts. In defence of our College of Arts, Dorothy Elmirst has written as follows:—

"If at Dartington we aim to provide a full and balanced life, then it would seem not only important but essential to include the arts.

For the arts are directly connected with the emotions, and as human beings, compounded of emotion as we are, we need some means of expressing in a creative way the experience that comes to us through our senses . . . .

If art, then is a process of discovery about ourselves and about life, if it brings us delight and joy, then surely it follows that we should not live without it. The great artists have always been able to communicate something new ; they have penetrated so deeply into an experience, that they have brought back some fresh vision : some new relationship of words, or new relationships of sound in music : a deeper insight into human beings : whatever it happens to be they have uncovered some intense reality that lies behind all the broken and dissonant life around us ; they have discovered a fundamental unity that lies at the heart of things. That is why art is so reassuring, such a source of comfort and peace. In a great work of art, all the conflicts are resolved : all the diverse elements are brought together and fused. Art is always a *bringing together* : a synthesis ; and that is why we need it so desperately in this age of division : of specialisation : of breaking up more and more into less and less : this difficult mechanised age ; when we focus on the atom, we need the other process, the process of integration, that art provides. We need the great artists ; but we need also to be artists in our own way—

taking time really to look at things around us : to listen, to feel, to relate one thing to another : to bring some order out of the chaos around us, and to express in some form the unity and the harmony that we feel. And that is why it seems essential at Dartington, to provide opportunities to develop the life of the imagination, and to offer the means of its expression through the arts”.

Tagore was chary about trying to put into English words his deepest hopes for man, his ultimate vision for the world and for all the villages and communities in it. He was fearful that he would only be misunderstood. He ends a talk he gave in the Argentine on “Meaning”, and not yet published, with words, which offer comment relative to the materials so appropriately gathered in his book by Sugata Dasgupta :—

“The perpetual process that is going on in the world around us is a struggle for the victory of love. If that were not true and if victory were not always being achieved by goodness and beauty, then long before this, everything would have been devastated. We are then faced with this great fact of the existence of the Universe and with the fact that this existence is good. Its whole meaning is that the world is good, otherwise it would not be. The further meaning is that this world is victorious over all that contradicts it. Death contradicts life, but if this were the final truth there would be no life at all today in the world. This, one fact,

that there is still life proves that life can be and is victorious over death. We must know that life not only exists but that it conquers, that good is there and exists to conquer evil, and that the victory of love manifests itself in Beauty. Love is therefore perpetually at war with the sin we have in our own human nature.

“This great idea of love, always fighting the sin we have in the heart of our humanity is the reason why we should not despair over sin. We know, perfectly well, that there is misunderstanding and conflict and mutual mistrust, but at the same time when we see that love is there, that Beauty is there and that joy in life is there, we need not be despondent, for we know that we follow a path towards victory.

When you asked me about love and death, your idea was that they were contradictory, and that love being one with existence could be contradicted by death. But this is not true, for love exists to conquer death and to win immortality.”

Here then is a poet's strategy for mankind. But an overall strategy has to be interpreted, as Sugata Dasgupta says, into plans, into tactics, and the tactics into changing means for changing ends, so that the plan can be suited to the individual ; for Tagore would argue that we must show respect to each individual personality. “It is the individual that really matters”, he said a few days later, “never the people, the race, or the nation”. “Govern the people as you fry a small fish”, says the



Chinese philosopher Lao Tse. That is a warning never to overdo it. As Tagore says, "Do not insult the villager with your help".

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Lenoard K. Elmhirst

## PREFACE

Rabindra Nath Tagore established an Institute of rural reconstruction at Sriniketan in the year 1922, as an integral part of his internationally known university located at Santiniketan. The Institute is now functioning as a Department of Visva-Bharati which has, since the late forties, become a centrally chartered university incorporating with itself all the institutions and activities of Santiniketan and Sriniketan. Visva-Bharati is situated at a distance of 99 miles from Calcutta and 3 miles from the nearest railway station Bolepur—on Sahibgunj loop line of the Eastern Railway (India). The institution at Sriniketan provided in early thirties, together with its counterparts at Santiniketan, a base for large scale experimentation of educational and reconstructional ventures and most of the plans of welfare and development concerning the small rural community, which are in wide spread use today had their rudimentary trial there. That Gandhi came to live at Santiniketan and worked as its Sarbadhyaksha, for some time, is a comparatively unknown fact but very few people are even aware that Sriniketan and Santiniketan provided experi-

mental laboratories to quite a few outstanding educationists and social workers who pioneered many schemes of education, reconstruction and welfare in course of their work at Sriniketan and Santiniketan.

Gandhi, it is said, once commenting upon the value and durability of Sriniketan's schemes of rural welfare had observed that Sriniketan's ideals will attract, even after the demise of Tagore, competent and efficient functionaries who will endow its contribution with a permanent and effective character. It is a matter of some importance that Sriniketan has, during the years 1953-61—a period when the national movement for rural reconstruction drew heavily from the experiences and endeavours of this institution, phenomenally expanded its activities and field of work. It has added new buildings to its fold, opened new departments and institutions, appointed new staff, increased volume of work and collaborated with the Government of India in introducing a number of schemes of education and reconstruction. Its participation, to say the least, in all programmes of local as well as of national importance has even in this decade been of substantial value.

A number of agencies known as rural institutes, C. D. Blocks, welfare extension projects and training centres for the preparation of personnel engaged in the various schemes of development, make it evident even to a casual observer that these have, in evolving their own pattern of work, drawn profusely from the aims, ideals and struc-

ture of services experimented upon by Sriniketan. At all the training centres which train C. D. personnel and almost at all institutes of education, social work and extension training, a detailed examination of the aims, objects and the process of evolution of the programmes and activities of Sriniketan is, therefore, now a compulsory subject for study. The present author has often been called upon to speak on this subject at a number of institutions, engaged in the task of preparation of such functionaries, located in various parts of the country ; almost every where, when a talk was over, one could see the evident interest of the young teachers and village workers for more information and facts regarding the philosophy and activities of Sriniketan. This publication, the author hopes will, therefore, fulfil a long standing need and be of use not only to those who are directly concerned with the rural extension movement of the country but to all serious students of applied social sciences as well.

The book is a product of continuous research work conducted by the author over a long period of time and the task was found to be particularly difficult in view of the fact, that few sources of written material were available for the preparation of the study. The author in acknowledging the liberal help that he has received from various quarters, wishes to record his grateful thanks to Dr. L. K. Elmhirst, who has very kindly written the foreword of the book and to late Sri Rathindra Nath Tagore, without whose inspiration

the project would not have been taken up at hand. Dr. M. Sen has read through the manuscript and given many valuable suggestions which has substantially influenced the character of the study. Gita Dasgupta and P. N. Nigam have helped to prepare the script in its present form. Sri Subhchari Dasgupta has prepared the cover page. To all of them, it is the author's duty to express grateful thanks.

Kahkashan, Mussoorie,  
August, 1962

SUGATA DASGUPTA

## CHAPTER I

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### THE GENESIS OF AN IDEA AND OF A MOVEMENT

(The establishment of Sriniketan)

#### A POET MAKES A PLAN

Rabindra Nath Tagore, born in 1861, a few years after the first Indian rising against the British rule, had, it seems, a spiritual affinity with this revolution. He thus arrived, on the scene, at a time when the Indian people were facing an all-round cultural crisis and lay steeped in poverty, ignorance, and disease. They were then passing through a period of intense social and emotional disorganisation; narrow-mindedness and superstitious beliefs had pervaded the entire scene. Dynamism and virility, the two signs of life and growth, seemed to be scrupulously absent. All through his life, Tagore had therefore addressed himself to the task of fighting these symptoms of decay and stagnation and ceaselessly attempted to create, with his multifarious designs of social activities and by the richly endowed pen he held,

## *A Poet And A Plan*

an atmosphere of radical rehabilitation, so that a reorganisation of both the material and non-material culture of the country could initiate a process of total recovery in the shortest possible time.

Tagore was, however, essentially a poet and an artist. He, therefore, necessarily dreamt of a new-vision and of a higher standard of life for the people of his country and wished to create conditions where such a life, full of vigour and joy, aesthetic beauty and sublime happiness would fall within the easy reach of his poverty stricken fellow beings. He wanted, as if, to create on this earth, once more the world of the 'ragas' of Tansen, of the poems of Kalidasa and above all a happy, vigorous and well educated people who could participate in an ever growing standard of life by their own efforts and strength. It will, however, be wrong to assume that Tagore, although essentially a poet, had merely thought of a cultural renaissance and worked to create only a spiritual, aesthetic and artistic civilisation. He was, one must feel sure, above all a humanist and a citizen of the world. His love and sympathy for the afflicted section of the people of his country was quite evident from his early manhood. As he grew up and established a close contact with the stark realities of a rural and peasant civilisation, during the period when he was entrusted with the responsibility of administering

his father's estate at Silaidaha,<sup>1</sup> he came to realise that the world of joy, vigour and aesthetic beauty, of which he was still dreaming, could not be realised in a country where people lay hungry, ill-clothed, uneducated and ignorant.

*The touch with life*

Disorganisation of life in the rural sector, both psychological and material, made a deep impression on Tagore, quite early in his career. The poet recognised that unless the problems of reconstruction of the social and economic fabric of rural India could be attended to and the farmer helped to obtain a decent standard of living for his family, the question of his participation in a bolder and a finer social order, envisaged by him, will remain an idle dream. Very few of his countrymen seem today to be even aware that this world renowned poet and internationally known humanist spent long periods of his life in the villages of East Bengal and this opportunity, more than any thing else, helped him to recognise the vital problems of the rural people. It was in these villages that Tagore came into contact with the farmer and his family, with the fisherman and the boat rower, with the Muslim peasant and the

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1 His Zamindari located in East Bengal, now a part of East Pakistan.



## *A Poet And A Plan*

village artisan, whose skills had become completely outworn. From then onward, it became evident to him, that he must, side by side with his effort to create a more aesthetic, cultural and humane social order, try and help to reconstruct the social and economic conditions of living of the villagers as well. He felt convinced that since the majority of his countrymen lived in the villages, village life had to be rebuilt in order that some semblance of a livable and worthwhile standard of living was brought within the reach of his fellow countrymen. Few people know that Tagore was engrossed with this idea for long years of his life and never rested till he drew up a complete plan of rural reconstruction and gave it a practical trial, under his own supervision, first in his father's estate at Silaidaha, and then in the villages, which lay in the neighbourhood of his international university known as Visva-Bharati. He held this task of rural and agrarian reform so important to the mission of his life, that he sent his only surviving son the late Sri Rathindra Nath Tagore and his son-in-law Dr. N. Ganguly for undergoing training in agriculture in the United States of America.

Although a poet, Tagore was deeply appreciative of the contributions of science and he wanted that his efforts of rural reconstruction should be well-planned and systematic. It should draw, he emphasised, from the experiences gathered and

experiments conducted in other parts of the world and combine the benefits of scientific knowledge with the lessons drawn from the cultural heritage of his people. The plan, which Rabindra Nath Tagore later prepared and will be discussed in the pages to follow, accordingly drew its inspiration from the experiences of scientists working in the various fields of social reconstruction of many advanced countries of both the western and eastern hemispheres. He toured almost the whole of the world and wherever he went he made a special study of the problems, programmes and methods of working with people. He acquired a first hand acquaintance, with the Folk High School movement of Scandinavia and agricultural extension work of the United States of America. He invited trained farmers from Japan to come and help in his work at Sriniketan. He called experienced extension workers from India and abroad to assist him in his agricultural and welfare activities, which he was seeking to promote in the villages near Visva-Bharati. He brought the skills of craftsmanship of Italian leather workers, Manipuri weavers and the artists of Java, to bear upon his planning for rural industrial development. The plan was thus well conceived and almost perfect to the minutest details.

The central theme of Tagore's philosophy of life was concerned with the creation of a synthetic and harmonious way of living. In evolving

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this philosophy, Tagore drew from all the cultures of the world and blended it with the genius of the time-honoured civilisation of India. Similarly his programme of rural reconstruction also drew its elements from a number of experiments conducted in the various parts of the world, but his success lay in rooting the plan to the cultural soil of the country. With the magnificent touch of his creative genius he made the plan an altogether Indian product which laid the most careful consideration to the needs and aspirations of the people of his country. What was however of unique importance was that, although he brought many foreign experts to advise and assist him in his task of rural reconstruction, the workers who implemented the plan were all Indians, some of them ex-revolutionaries and politicals, whom he succeeded in winning over for a more constructive and fundamental experiment. Although a poet, he approached the task of planning with the objective and analytical approach of a scientist and in laying down the details of activities, which could improve the social, economic, cultural and health conditions of his people, the poet in him displayed no emotional flutter.

### *The basic inspiration*

One must however admit that his basic inspiration for social work came not only from an

objective realisation of the needs of the time, but from certain fundamental and personal urges which had been haunting him from his early childhood. - Basically a humanist, Tagore was moved by the problems of ailing humanity, wherever he came across situations of social, economic and physical maladjustments. The need for helping people, it seems, was thus ingrained in him. His son writes, in his memoirs, of an anecdote where he recalls his father prepared to jump into a turbulent river to rescue a drowning woman at the cost of his own precious life. The plan which he drew up in later years, does therefore heavily bear the imprints not only of scientific knowledge gathered from all over the world, but also of his very sensitive mind which was at once full of both intuitive, and meditative thoughts concerning problems of human distress. His plan was accordingly divided into two parts, one, which laid down certain basic ideals, principles and postulates of rural reconstruction and the other which was composed of actual schemes of social welfare and community development. The Government of India, in initiating its own plans of community development in 1952, has openly acknowledged that it had found in the experiments of Rabindra Nath Tagore a forerunner of almost all its schemes. His plan of rural reconstruction cannot, therefore, but be of very vital importance to all social workers of the contemporary field. It

has, however, to be borne in mind, before one turns the pages of this book, that his plan had, not only a philosophy and a body of guiding principles, but also incorporated in it the resultant findings of an intensely realistic and practical experiment.

#### EARLY HISTORY OF SRINIKETAN

Although Rabindra Nath Tagore will be cherished in the memory of the millions of his countrymen as a poet and a cultural leader, it will thus be a major tragedy in the life of our nation if we forget that he had given to his afflicted country a dynamic social philosophy and a programme of reform and total welfare. Tagore's social philosophy was a product of close study of the history of his own country, as well as of the opportunities he had of coming into close contact with the people of the rural areas. "The history of India," said Tagore, "has been the history of the struggle between the constructive spirit of machine which seeks the cadence of order and conformity in social organisation and the creative spirit of man which seeks for freedom and love for expression." In his great and eventful career, in which Gurudev did 'flood the whole world with his huge rays', he relentlessly tried to establish the right of expression of man by breaking through 'the heap of refuse, gross and grotesque,

that has not yet been assimilated in one consistent cultural body'. Tagore, just a city born townsman, says, in his own memoirs, that he established for the first time in his life a direct and intimate contact with the rural areas when he came to Patisar<sup>1</sup> and Silaidaha in connection with his work of Zamindari. This grew in him a gradual realisation that nothing but a complete reconstruction of rural life, in all its entirety, could restore this cadence of order and synthesis in the total civilisation of the country. From then onwards, he held the task of rural reconstruction as very vital to his own mission of life. What villages and their reconstruction meant to him will be evident from the following statement, where he admits: "My path lies in the domain of quiet integral action and thought, my units must be few and small, and I cannot but face human problems in relation to some basic village or cultural area. So in the midst of world-wide anguish and with the problems of over 300 millions staring us in the face, I stick to my work at Santiniketan and Sriniketan, hoping that our efforts will touch the hearts of our village neighbours and help them in reasserting themselves in a bolder social order."

Tagore therefore established, in close association with Santiniketan, where a group of educational Institutions of his famous international

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1 A part of Tagore's estate now in East Pakistan.

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University were located, the Visva-Bharati Institute of rural reconstruction at Surul, a place which lay two miles away from Santiniketan. The institute, to start with, operated under a separate governing body, although it had almost identical aims and objects as those of the institutions located at Santiniketan. The purpose of the institute was to initiate a programme of rural welfare and reconstruction in the villages of the surrounding area in order to bring "back life in all its completeness." This, Tagore envisaged, would help to fulfil, what he chose to describe, as, one of the two great purposes of his life. The programme of rural reconstruction, to be initiated at Sriniketan, was in fact to act in harmony with and as a complementary process to the activities he had earlier initiated at Santiniketan. The new experiment conducted at Sriniketan was to ensure that the boys and girls, who came for their education at Santiniketan, and the whole institution itself had kept their feet on the ground and made a realistic appraisal of the conditions of life, which prevailed in the villages of the surrounding area. One of the purposes for the establishment of Sriniketan was therefore to endow his whole educational experiment of Visva-Bharati with its fundamental objective, which was to root its educational process into the realistic and socio-cultural conditions of the country. The early beginning of Sriniketan, may

indeed be found in the attempts made by the students of Bramhacharya Ashram<sup>1</sup> to go out, in off hours, to the villages of Bhubandanga, now a suburb of Bolepur and render social services to the villagers there. The other early traces of the activities of Sriniketan are found in the efforts of the students and teachers of Santiniketan in regularly visiting the Santal villages, which lay on the Western side of the Ashram, as early as in 1910, in order to understand and probe into the problems of their retarded neighbours, as an integral part of their total educational programme. The most important purpose of Sriniketan was however to develop a well laid out, systematic plan for rural reconstruction, so that the poet could possibly offer a healing balm to certain glaring problem of the rural society, which he had come across during his stay in the villages. The institute at Sriniketan was not an isolated experiment, but an integral part of his total educational and reconstructional work, which he embodied in the institution known as Visva-Bharati and now came to fulfil an important mission of his own great life. Sriniketan, at the same time, was certainly a product of his restlessness to do something about the villages, as quite early in his career the sufferings of the village people had become inter-

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1 The earliest institute at Santiniketan—a school run along the lines of forest schools of the old.



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twined with all his intellectual and cultural pursuits.

### *The Institute of Rural Reconstruction*

This is how Rabindra Nath Tagore established Sriniketan, in 1922, as an Institute of Rural Reconstruction. He had already founded his "Brahmacharya Ashram" near Bolepur, on a strip of land where the building called "Santiniketan" constructed by his father Devendranath stood in isolation. As has been noted earlier, Tagore had first hand experiences of rural reconstruction work earlier at his estate in East Bengal. He had just gone there to work as a landlord, but had, through force of circumstances, changed his role into that of a social worker. "It seemed to me a very shameful thing," said Tagore, "that I should spend my time as a landlord, concerned only with money-making and engrossed with my profit and loss." He publicly affirmed his faith in rural welfare, when in 1904 he delivered a speech from an open platform outlining a comprehensive programme for reorganisation of rural Bengal, on the basis of self-help and total development of its rural areas. But, as he did not get sufficient response from the leaders and people of Bengal, he decided to do something by himself. He began to think of a number of alternative plans, when in the meantime he pur-

chased, from the estate of Baron of Raipur, a big building in the village of Surul. This was then a jungle infested and a malaria ridden area. Everyone advised him that the place was haunted and he should abandon it. But, as Andrews<sup>1</sup> says 'it seemed to come like a flash to our founder that here on this very spot something great was going to happen, what was likely to prove an important event in the history of Bengal.' The village of Surul, then in a serious state of decay and disorganisation, lay within two miles of Santiniketan, where the Visva-Bharati with its various departments was then firmly established. The building, purchased sometime back from the neighbouring landlord, previously belonged to the Eastern Railway and provided spacious accommodation. It was in this building that the Institute of rural reconstruction, now a department of Visva-Bharati, was then established as an Institute of Agricultural study and research.

Tagore sent along with his eldest son Rathindra Nath Tagore one Sri Santosh Majumdar to Illinois in U.S.A. to study Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, so that both of them could come back and join him in his work of rural reconstruction. The real opportunity, however, came to him when he visited U.S.A. and met Leonard Elmhirst, a young Agricultural Scientist,

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1 C. F. Andrews : See Glossary of names.

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who agreed to collaborate with him, to build his Department of Rural Reconstruction.

L. K. Elmhirst, a Yorkshireman, was son of a Parason land owner in West Riding, and had studied Theology and History. He had one time seriously considered entering the church, but destiny brought him to India during World War I, where he came into close contact with a peasant and village civilisation. This made a deep impression on Elmhirst and after the war was over he proceeded to America as a Ship's Writer to study Agronomy at Cornell. In America, Elmhirst came into contact with Tagore, who commissioned him to pioneer an Agriculture Department at Sriniketan, which would also train students and carry on experiments in the whole field of rural reconstruction. This meeting between a social philosopher and an inspired scientist and their collaboration, more than anything else, made the development of Sriniketan into a full fledged Institute of Rural Reconstruction a possibility. When Tagore met Elmhirst in U.S.A. and saw the promises he held in him, he straightaway invited Elmhirst to start an Institute of Agriculture near his educational centre at Santiniketan. But Elmhirst, although completely sold to the idea, wanted to wait till he could complete his studies. Elmhirst came to India in November 1921 at his own expense and started on the 6th of February, 1922 the Institute of Agriculture at Sriniketan, which later came to

be known as the Institute of Rural Reconstruction. Elmhirst became its first Director. Tagore says, it was he who developed this place into a separate field of work'.

In two years' time Elmhirst had to move out and feeling that the Institution was put on a more or less sound footing, he handed over its charge to his Indian colleagues who were trained under him. From then onwards Elmhirst settled down in Devonshire (U.K.) at Dartington Hall in order to experiment with the same principles that, he says, he "learnt from the poet". Elmhirst however went on maintaining his contact with this great Indian experiment and offered the Institution all the help in the shape of advice and financial aid which it required from time to time. After Elmhirst left Sriniketan, Rathindra Nath Tagore, the son of the poet himself, became the head of the Institute.

### *The beginning*

Not much authentic record is yet available about the early days of Sriniketan excepting that the work in this direction was started with ten students of Santiniketan school, three teachers and Tagore's son himself joining the first team of workers. It seems however quite certain that Elmhirst came in February, 1922 to occupy the new building with these handful of boys, who had

originally come to study at Santiniketan but were found too turbulent or unmanageable. The boys came in a lorry driven by one of them from Santiniketan and the first task to which they addressed themselves was the cleaning of the jungle infested surroundings of the place. Tagore, although physically kept away from Sriniketan during these early days, had, it seems, himself joined the group in sympathetic cleaning of one of the most difficult spots at Santiniketan, a latrine which was then in an absolutely unusable state. An agricultural farm was to be shortly started on a piece of almost barren land which lay nearby. A tractor was secured and the idea was to experiment and demonstrate new methods of farming to the villages of the surrounding area. The people of the nearby village, Surul, were however not altogether excited about the new settlers and to say the least, doubted their bonafides. Quite often the boys of Elmhirst's team would also get exasperated at the behaviour of the villagers and bickerings would ensue between the two groups. Mutual understanding between the villagers and the new guests did not however start developing, until one day, it seems, a mock fire broke out in a nearby village called Mahidapur and the boys, trained in fire fighting, demonstrated how one could, in such circumstances, save a major disaster. This worked. The villagers came in numbers to request the 'babus' of the Kuthi (sett

lers in the building) to teach them fire fighting and gradually fraternisation started. Elmhirst, one of these days, dressed in his own hands, the wounds of an old villager, who had suffered badly. The boys slowly began to move out and start fighting malarious mosquitoes and visiting the surrounding villages. The early attitude of cold disregard, on the part of the villagers, started melting and the two groups began to collaborate further and further, as boys got trained to understand the neighbours and to work with them patiently. Gradually, a small dairy and a poultry farm came to form an integral part of the Institute and long discussions between Tagore and Elmhirst started giving shape to a complete scheme of rural reconstruction. A few dedicated men, wanted by the police, most notable among whom the late Sri Kalimohan Ghose, came to join the team and the rank of workers started to swell. From the very beginning, the Institute at Sriniketan was organised under a democratic 'Karma Samity' (working committee), on which the representatives of local workers and many eminent men of the time, came to serve. That was the beginning of Sriniketan.

In no time, however, the programme started developing by leaps and bounds. A complete plan of rural reconstruction, which included experiments with seeds, manures, rotation of crops, cattle and poultry farming, was drawn up

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by 1928. Efforts to base village plans on a realistic appraisal of the village needs, estimated by methods of rural survey, came in vogue as early as in 1923. References could be found which indicate that a well developed cooperative society, if not many others, charged with the responsibilities of promoting programmes of health, education, agriculture and rural industries for a particular area was functioning in an interior village in 1934. The Society maintained a grain bank, offered arbitration in cases of local disputes and carried on educational propaganda, for ensuring people's participation with the help of public lectures and magic lantern shows. The Institute at Sriniketan and its founder were deeply concerned, from the very inception of the programme, with the solution of the economic problems of the village, and although, with the passage of time, the programme assumed a multipurpose character and followed multilinear dimensions of development, it never lost sight of the fact that reconstruction of the village economy was the first and foremost task.

## CHAPTER II

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### PRINCIPLES, METHODS AND AGENCY ADMINISTRATION

#### THE BASIC APPROACH

When Tagore established Sriniketan, he had a two fold aim in view. The primary objective of the Institute was to offer immediate and long term help to the villagers of the neighbouring area to solve their multifarious problems, each of which was found to possess various dimensions of social, economic, physical and educational nature. But this, as has been stated earlier, Sriniketan tried to achieve, not in an haphazard way, but in a systematic and scientific manner by application of certain principles and methods of work, which Tagore had earlier evolved in his own mind, and sought to experiment fully by wider application. The other, and may be the more important purpose of Sriniketan, was to pass on the knowledge, which it thus gained in course of experimentation in the neighbouring local community, to the rest of the country for its adoption. The mission of Rabindra Nath Tagore's life was certainly not to



develop only a few villages in India, but since he knew that it was not possible for him to develop all the villages of the country by his own efforts, he sought to evolve certain basic principles, approaches and programmes, in the background of a guiding philosophy, which could be applied under similar circumstances in other parts of the country as well. Sriniketan was thus largely an experimental venture and the results, which were obtained in the course of experiments, were to modify and develop certain generalisations and approaches, which he considered were basic for the purpose of programme making and could be adopted with profit by the rural social workers functioning in any part of the country.

In developing the rural community, which was the chief aim of Sriniketan, Tagore however believed that the process was more important than the product. His study of history had grown in him a conviction that although from ancient times the people of our country had dwelt in peace and harmony with each other, this harmony and adjustment came from a regrettable situation when men resigned to fate and looked for charity and mercy from the public works of the exploiting and privileged classes of the society. This dependence had crushed the power of self-expression and self-sustenance of the people and retarded the growth of their social organisations and initiative. 'I have seen for myself

the insults borne by the poor and the oppression practised by the powerful, then again the same powerful men have been responsible for the public works of the village. This oppression and patronage have combined to destroy the villagers' self-reliance and self-respect so much so that they would say 'we are dogs, only whipping and beating would keep us right.' In sharp contrast to a charitable and altruistic approach to social work, Tagore, as a result of his rural welfare activities, wished to create an atmosphere by continuous village action, in which the villagers' mind could be aroused so that they could themselves accept the responsibility for their own lives. "If we merely offer them help from outside it would be harmful to them." He, therefore, recommended to his fellow workers that they must so endeavour that "a power from within the villages themselves may be working alongside" of them, albeit indiscernible.

Tagore had thus decided to base his main attack on the multifarious ailments of rural society by creating a whirlwind of activity, full of joy and vigour, which could break through the prevailing inertia and create a process by which the villagers would cure their ailments by their own efforts.

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### *An approach of completeness of life*

Tagore's conception of a village plan was based upon an effective realisation of the village needs, which gradually grew in him, as he came in closer contact with the village situation. To start with, Tagore's estimate of village problems led him to believe that the economic factor was of the utmost importance in village development and it was due to this realisation that Tagore trained a number of his immediate associates in agricultural science and wanted them to introduce better methods of farming in the neighbouring villages. He had, in fact, worked out in details the structure of a cooperative farming society and that of a cooperative credit bank in late 19th century in his estate at Silaidaha. But as Tagore's associates went ahead in the villages with their agricultural plans, they found that most of the able bodied villagers lay low in sick bed and no agricultural improvement was possible unless the problem of malaria, which was then haunting the place, could be effectively handled. To do this, the workers at Sriniketan however found that it was necessary not only to offer medical aid to the ailing but also to spread education in general and health instruction, both curative and preventive, in particular, among the villagers of the area, most of whom then lay in a moribund condition of physical and psychological existence. Tagore's

appraisal of the village problems, thus gradually grew in him the faith that the approach to rural reconstruction should be one of integrated and total development and that the village problems could not be treated in isolation from each other. At any time, a particular village situation may appear to be malignant and the village worker may naturally have to start work by attacking the same, but even the solution of that specific problem will, Tagore emphasised, ultimately depend on the efficacy of the worker in attending to a number of other allied and interconnected series of village problems.

*Self-help and self-assurance*

A few other principles of rural reconstruction, which Tagore held as important, clearly affirmed that whatever may be the aim of the development programme, its first task is to enable the villagers to help themselves, and to take up the leadership of the village on their own shoulders. Their initiative and self-respect, and the power of the people to organise development work by their own efforts will have to be, first of all, enlivened. Referring to an early experiment conducted in his own estate, Tagore says that he had once promised to construct a road and locate it in such a village, where people were prepared to offer half of its cost in terms of their own labour.

The first village approached with the request, flatly turned down the offer, sharply retorting 'you wish to bring your own vehicle on a road to be constructed by our labour. We will give you nothing.' A Muslim village then came forward agreeing to pay the contribution and the road was made ready for them. Tagore later writes that the road remained in good condition, for a long time, in view of the fact that the road was built with the contributions from the people themselves. Out of this and many such experiences which Tagore had of working with the villagers, a firm conviction grew in him that the aim of all rural reconstruction activities to be initiated by him would be to help arise the power of the people to help themselves.

*Scientific aid and inter-relatedness of problems*

By virtue of his intimate contact with the western civilisation, Tagore acquired a vigorous scientific mind and an appreciative acquaintance with the benefits which science could gather for the villages. He, therefore, emphasised that the rural elite in their effort for total recovery should utilise the fruits of science, although he did not forget to warn at the same time that all new plans and innovations, to be thus drawn up, should take into consideration the indigenous needs of the areas concerned and be built, as far as possible, on

the local and cultural resources available within the village community. In giving practical shape to his plan of rural reconstruction, Tagore, therefore, aimed to create a fusion between an all round awakening of the human resources, findings of science and the local and cultural resources of the country as a whole. His maximum emphasis, of course, lay in recognising that the development of the human factor was of the utmost importance in the task of implementation of a village plan. This becomes particularly evident, when we find him continuously endeavouring to create cooperative organisations so that advanced services could be brought to the villages through the joint effort of the villagers themselves. It was Tagore's conviction therefore that the problems of rural development, although needing a technological and scientific approach, could not be viewed in an isolated manner from the problems of social and cultural development. The creation of a new standard of life, full of beauty, virility, joyous existence, lustre and life was to him intertwined with the tasks of acquiring bountiful crops for the farmer, reorganisation of rural industries, restoration of public health and opening up of educational opportunities in rural areas through the extension of scientific and technological aid. The problems of material development was however to him essentially interconnected with the problems of human and cultural development. Tagore laid

very great emphasis therefore on creation of a change in the values, tastes, attitudes, manners and outlook of the people and on initiating a climate favourable for change, throughout the whole country, so that changes in particular sectors may become possible. His efforts to create a total atmosphere of social change through his songs, dramas, dances, poems and paintings, were therefore to act as a catalyst and a complimentary process, to the fundamental programme of village change, which he sought to initiate as an experimental measure, in the villages located near Sriniketan.

*Respect for individuals*

Elmhirst brings out the other most important factor underlying his principle of rural reconstruction, when he says, 'First and foremost was the poet's emphasis upon the need for a fundamental respect for and the readiness to appreciate the individual, whether man, woman, boy or a girl., This principle of respect for the individual and of refusal to impose upon him some system is basic in the whole approach of Sriniketan to education, to extension work and to life.' Tagore brings out another important aspect of his work when he emphasises 'we cannot help, merely by our willingness to help.' "There is nothing so dangerous as inexpert service," says Tagore, "in

our country now-a-days, the young students of the towns have taken up village service. The villagers laugh at them, how can they help." Tagore viewed the whole process of rural reconstruction work as a continuous in service training. He says 'we have not only to carry on our activities, but must continue to learn all the time. If we want to serve, we must learn.' Tagore, as has been noted before, not only had great faith on application of science for development of the material resources of the village community, but also had discovered, quite early in his career, that the success of rural reconstruction activities needed trained and well equipped functionaries, who would possess adequate insight into human behaviour, acquaintance with village problems, and a sympathetic and inspired understanding of the people who lie in distress. They also must acquire, Tagore recognised, ability to work with the people in a well defined and systematic manner. From the very start of the institute at Sriniketan he therefore insisted that his workers hold regular training camps, where experts from various fields were to be invited for training the whole time workers, as well as the cooperating village leaders, drawn from the surrounding locality, in philosophy and methods of work.



GENERAL AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

In the light of the principles stated above, Tagore evolved the general objective of Sriniketan in the following words :

The object of Sriniketan is to bring back life in all its completeness, making the villagers self reliant and self respectful, acquainted with the cultural tradition of their own country and competent to make an efficient use of modern resources for the fullest development of their physical, social, economic and intellectual conditions.

The above general objective was further detailed and the village workers were directed to take the following specific steps to reach their goal :

- 1) To win the friendship and affection of villagers and cultivators by taking a real interest in all that concerns their life and welfare and by making a lively effort to assist them in solving their most pressing problems.
- 2) To understand the villagers' daily routine and the varied pageant of his life ; to form a picture of the village, of its outward form, the rivers and the wide plains, rice fields and huts and of 'its inner story'.
- 3) To take the problems of the village and the field to the classroom for study and

discussion and to the experimental farm for solution.

- 4) To carry the knowledge and experience gained in the classroom and the experimental farm to the villagers.

The workers posted in the villages, called Social Workers or Samaj Karmis and the more senior ones known as Kendra Karmis or Centre workers, were warned that they were not to impose their decisions on the people, but merely to act as consultants and guides and to place, as a result of their own scientific study, their estimate of the prevailing problems of the village at the disposal of the village leaders and induce them to attend to these by their own organised efforts. Where individuals acted in isolation, Sriniketan workers urged them to combine and where organisations had been set up, workers helped to strengthen the organisations. The leaders of Sriniketan were thus to help the villagers to identify their problems and to diagnose them with scientific apparatus and resources available at the Institute headquarters. Village workers were to place their findings at the disposal of the villagers and enable them to make use of these to their best advantage.

### *Fields of Work*

With the above principles and methods of work as its beckon light, Sriniketan carried on its

activities in a wide field of work to help the villagers "to improve their sanitation and health, to develop their resources and credit, to help them to sell their products and buy their requirements to their best advantage, to teach them better methods of growing crops, vegetables, and keeping livestock, to encourage them to learn and practise arts and crafts and to bring home to them the benefits of associated life, mutual aid and common endeavour."

As the Sriniketan workers entered the villages to cover the above fields, they found that the village problems were interlocked with one another and needed not only a scientific but also a human effort to solve them. Quite early in its career, Sriniketan had thus realised that the village was an organic whole and that the village problems could not be compartmentalised and separated from each other. A total reconstruction of life with an integrated programme, laying due emphasis on the development of the human factor, was therefore the main stay of Tagore's approach to rural reconstruction. In fulfilment of the above line of thinking, while in the institute headquarters, the expert agronomists, economists, agriculturists, dairymen, educationists, physicians, pathologists and rural industry technicians were busily engaged in their own particular fields of investigations, study and research, their services came to the villagers in a combined manner so that

the village problem was attacked in all its entirety. All over the modern world welfare services cover the whole field of human activity from 'cradle to grave', and from 'womb to tomb'. Sriniketan's activities covered all these aspects as well.

### *Agency Organisation and Area of Operation*

To begin with, Sriniketan had started its work in a limited area of three neighbouring villages and proceeded with hesitant and cautious steps, through the path of trial and error. Later by 1953, there were about 85 villages comprising an area of about 60 sq. miles, where it had extended its field of operation and the entire area was divided for systematic gradation of services, into three zones—intensive area, extensive area and the area of radiation. In the intensive area, all the services referred to above, were organised by the Institute, of course through the initiative of the local villagers, whereas in the extensive zone, Sriniketan attacked only isolated problems, the main attempt being to get the people to join together in a particular programme of work. In the area of radiation, that is, in the villages at the periphery of the extensive area—the villagers organised solely by themselves by hearing and learning about Sriniketan from their friends of the extensive and intensive areas, as well as from the casual visits of the Institute's welfare personnel.

Not infrequently, however, the villages in the radiation unit came into the intensive zone and those of the area of radiation into the unit of extensive operation.

The Institute of Rural Reconstruction started operating through two broad divisions of work. It maintained at the headquarters, located at Sriniketan, a number of demonstration and service units concerning agriculture, animal husbandry, cottage industries, health, education and village organisation. Each of these sections also organised a replica of its service units at the village level through the initiative of the people of the area and led by the village worker of the Institute. The centre thus maintained a demonstration farm, a dairy and poultry unit, an outdoor clinic, a department of cottage industries, a village school, and a number of other institutions, at Sriniketan.

The organisation manifested in three different types of activities namely research, extension and education. The centres at Sriniketan were to carry on research and experimentation for demonstration purposes in advanced techniques of agrarian production and in devising educational and other aids to village work. It then sought to extend the knowledge, thus gained, through its extension department to the village itself by organisation of demonstration units, social services, and educational centres. The Institute, in its turn, derived new education by its first hand contact

with village problems. The educational institutions functioning at Sriniketan, tried to interpret this knowledge and pass them on to its students along with the other scheduled curricula of studies. The institute thus maintained a number of organisations in the villages such as demonstration farms, youth clubs, cottage industry centres, health societies and schools. The idea was that the groups of institutions located at the headquarters, would deal with the more complicated of village problems and furnish necessary guidance to the above mentioned organisations in the villages, for their reference. The agencies at the centre were to treat the villages as their laboratory from where they found problems which were to be looked into; the villages in their turn were to treat the agencies at the centre as the source of reference from where they could obtain solution of their more pressing problems. This collaboration between the village and the welfare agency, was the key to the development of Sriniketan's main emphasis of work. This was made possible by the establishment of a well devised agency of administration, which connected the distant village with the headquarters in the matter of communication of needs and services to and from the village community.

## THE SOCIAL WORKER

The social worker was the last link in the chain of agency organisation and the Institute's immediate mouthpiece in the village. He lived in the village working with the people of the area and neither "for them" nor "on behalf of them", in isolation. His efforts were to mobilise the people, so that they could build their own leadership and institutions and make an effective use of the services, provided at the headquarters, for solution of their problems.

The instructions passed on by Tagore to the workers were however clear. He was asked to live in the village, and to bring the living touch of creative faith to the help of the people of the area. He was to come in close touch with the people realising that the village was not merely an intellectual problem but 'a living being'. With instinctive humanity, the worker was to attempt to know the man himself, human sympathy acted as his principal motive power which, Tagore thought, would carry him across all difficulties.

The worker, it was desired, must possess a balanced personality, instinctive humanity, infinite amount of tact and patience and adequate insight into human nature. He was to win the affection and confidence of villagers, and interpret the projects and programmes of scientists and experts to the people in a language which they recognised

as their very own. He also acted as the peoples' agent interpreting peoples' problems to the experts so that the planning was democratic and not superimposed from the top. He was not to distribute material benefits but to help the villagers to make an efficient use of modern resources for the improvement of their total cultural conditions.

From the description of a social worker given above, one can conclude that Tagore placed great emphasis on the qualities and performance of his worker. For, on him, Tagore thought, depended much of the success of work which he undertook, with so much of interest and passion, at the most matured stage of his life.

The intensive and extensive areas of operation were further divided into a few smaller and larger units of work. A village worker, called Gram Karmi, was placed in charge of each smaller unit and a centre worker, called Kendra Karmi, took charge of a larger unit, which federated a number of small orbits of villages. When Tagore had thus turned to rural reconstruction, the national movement for freedom had by then reached a great height. He was therefore searching for an army of workers who would sever their direct connection with this movement and come forward to help him in implementing his plan of total reconstruction in a particular group of villages. There were only a few, who could be found to respond to this call for hard and patient constructive work,



especially at a time, when there was plenty of opportunity for lightning and fire in the wake of the national non-cooperation movement. Yet quite a few old revolutionaries and 'wanted men' of the police turned to Tagore and joined him as his village workers and centre organisers. A number of others, who came to learn weaving or agriculture at his institute, in Sriniketan, gradually turned their attention to rural work. A third group of people, who were invited by Tagore to participate in his rural reconstruction activities, were experts in different fields of agriculture, rural economics, public health and extension services. The three types of personnel mentioned above, cooperated to give a practical shape to his rural reconstruction programme. There were yet a fourth category of functionaries, cooperating village leaders, who lived as integral part of the village society in the local community itself, and were drawn into the vortex of the programme. They, voluntary leaders, came forward to work as part time paid employees and helped the full time paid professional workers, the generalists and technicians, in their multifarious scheme of work.

All the various categories of workers were trained from time to time, as Tagore realised that they were called upon to perform a skilled job. Sriniketan organised, from the very start of its career, a number and variety of courses in the subject matters of agriculture, animal farming, fire

fighting, Brati Balaka (Village scouts) organisation, adult education and extension work. The training courses were held for short duration of ten to fifteen days, but they recurred every year. Tagore did not believe that learning, specially in the field of rural reconstruction, could ever reach a saturation point. He therefore emphasised that his workers should never cease to grow but go on refreshing their skill through perennial schemes of training and education. The most important sources from which the workers at Sriniketan drew their inspiration and training were, however, the speeches and discourses delivered by Tagore from time to time and his writings on rural reconstruction. Regular staff meetings were held at periodical intervals, which the founder attended from time to time and where the problems of the workers were discussed threadbare. The idea was not only to grow among the workers an urge for higher accomplishment, but also to secure in them the necessary equipment and technical know-how, which they could apply for solution of the complicated and intricate problems of work, with which they would be confronted in the surrounding villages.

The workers were asked to submit regular reports and maintain diaries, which were commented upon by the senior leaders of Sriniketan and sometimes by Tagore himself. Whenever a number of problems would thus accumulate,

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Tagore could take the opportunity to meet the workers and in a general discourse point out to them the weakness of their work and show them the correct path. The approach of the village welfare workers, therefore, took a definite scientific and systematic turn, and the type of aid offered to the villages were sought to be given by trained and experienced hands. Workers were warned not to have an altruistic or paternal attitude towards the village. They were mainly to help with their scientific knowledge and consultants' services, if and when, their help was called for. In-service training camps for village youth and adults, in order to help them to assume responsibilities of village work, have therefore, always been an integral part of Sriniketan's plan of work. The village organisation wing of the department of rural reconstruction, which will be referred to later, it may be noted here, continues to organise a series of training camps for its own workers, rural teachers and village leaders even upto this day.

As will be evident from the above, the focus of rural reconstruction activities at Sriniketan was laid not only on reconstruction of the material but on the human and social aspects of village life as well. Maximum emphasis was therefore necessarily given on the training and preparation of the workers, at the village level. The apprehension of the poet, that it was on the merit of the

workers that the efficacy of his whole scheme of rural reconstruction mainly depended has been borne true by the findings of the later years. The plan of rural reconstruction, initiated by Sriniketan, one finds, had yielded outstanding result in the hand of workers who were well trained and equipped. The plan failed miserably in areas where the worker was ill-equipped and therefore remained static, intriguing and incompetent.

## CHAPTER III

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### FIELDS OF WORK

#### BASIC SERVICES—ECONOMIC & HEALTH

The institute, as has been mentioned earlier, attacked the village problems not in a segmental manner but directed its total effort to combat almost all the major ailments of the village people. It initiated, in the words of its founder, a 'complete' programme of rural reconstruction to help solve the chronic problems of the rural society, with special reference to the fields of agriculture, rural industries, health, sanitation and education. In the pages to follow, we have endeavoured to offer a short review not so much of the historical evolution of the subject matter programmes of Sriniketan, but an analysis of their aims and contents vis-a-vis the method of their application in the limited geographical region which was its area of work. This brief acquaintance, with various fields of work will, one hopes, provide the readers with an estimate of the magnitude of the rural problem, towards whose solution Sriniketan had addressed itself.

AGRICULTURE

As in other fields, so also in agriculture the Institute at Sriniketan had introduced a three fold programme of education, extension and research. The Agricultural farm at the centre, attached to the institute, was therefore, from its very inception, concerned with a variety of agricultural experiments, which had direct bearing on the problems of the local area. The aim was to prove to the local farming community that agriculture could be a profitable vocation, to the cultivators, given the required attention and help. The experiences, thus gained at the farm, as a result of series of advanced experiments, were to be extended to the villages by organisation of demonstration farms, owned individually or collectively by the villagers themselves. At the final stage, the results were to reach the doors of individual villagers, through the medium of the Samaj Karmi, posted at the village. One of the fundamental objective of the programme of work, initiated by the Institute was to mobilise all available resources of the society, including those of the government in order to step up the speed of village development. The authorities of Sriniketan had, therefore, realising quite early that the problem of soil erosion in the area was a major hurdle to all development work, approached, invited and collaborated with the Government of

West Bengal, and initiated necessary researches to check its onslaught and devise ways and means of improving the conditions of the soil of the local area. At a later stage, Sriniketan collaborated with the Government of West Bengal, in starting an afforestation unit near its area of operation. Tagore was not a believer in piece meal approach to planning. True to the spirit of a revolutionary, Tagore endeavoured to remove the fundamental obstacles, which confronted the rural communities and retarded their growth. Sriniketan, a hand made of the poet, therefore, directed its primary efforts for mobilising governmental resources in order to radically change the environments of village production, although it continued, side by side, its ceaseless efforts to find out how better manuring, better seeds and better cultural practices could help to improve the level of village production within the existing limitations. A series experiments on paddy were, however, a few of the most important activities of the farm and a number of trials, were made, from time to time. These included, manuring trials on paddy strain, varietal trials on drought resistant varieties, and late maturing varieties, study of residual effects of manures and trials on sugarcane and cotton, in order to determine the possibilities of growing commercial crops, in this area, where no trace of commercial crops could be found in the last 100 years.

Along with these efforts and in order to endow all its preachings with a realistic meaning, Sriniketan struggled to raise the average yield of paddy in its farm to 9 to 10 mds. per bigha\* as compared to the yield of 5 mds. (per bigha) which was the average of the region.

The institute at Sriniketan, apart from the activities mentioned above, have also been carrying on multi-farious extension activities in the field of agriculture, which included distribution of vegetable seedlings, fruit grafts and saplings, introduction of improved strains of paddy and other crops to the cultivators of the locality. It did also endeavour to persuade the villagers to join hands together and form model lift irrigation societies and other cooperative organisations of allied nature to solve the problems of water supply for steady improvement of agriculture.

### *Dairy and Poultry*

The dairy and poultry unit attached to the Institute was started at Sriniketan likewise to demonstrate the practical implications, of the principles of better feeding and breeding and of scientific management of animal farming, to the villagers of the local area, where the indigenous cattle were of a very poor quality. The hope, as

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\* A bigha is 1/3rd of an acre.



in the case of the agricultural programme, was that the villagers, when they found cattle rearing practically possible and beneficial, would take to the same in large numbers and improve their economy. The experiments regarding cattle improvement therefore concentrated on finding, what breeds were best suited for adoption in the local area, and the results pointed out that both Haryana and Red Sindhi breeds thrived well under local conditions. As a consequence, Sriniketan took up the programme of distribution of Sindhi bulls in a systematic manner to the villages for upgarding the indigenous stock and found that the campaign yielded encouraging results. Lack of green fodder, had been a standing problem of the locality and efforts have therefore been made to grow not only seasonal but perennial fodders as well, at the institute's own farm and efforts have also been made to extend the knowledge of this cultivation to the villagers of the locality.

As a result of Sriniketan's continuous experiments two things stand out, as most important, to the villagers of the locality today ; these concern the results achieved at Sriniketan's own demonstration farm as well as the process and actual impact of the new techniques, recommended for adoption under village conditions, both of which have considerably influenced the villagers line of thinking regarding the problems of animal farm-

ing. As a result, the average yield of milk per cow per day, at Sriniketan has shown considerable improvement during the last few years and it has gone up to 8 lbs. in comparison to  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. per cattle, which is the average yield of the locality. The maximum yield from a cow at Sriniketan dairy in 1959 has been 38 lbs. per day. The purpose of maintaining the dairy, on commercial lines, at the headquarters is to bring home to the people of the locality the truth that dairying could become a useful home industry, in every village, if the required opportunities and resources could be provided to the willing individual farmer. Similar attempts have accordingly been made, for improvement of breeding and feeding methods and of scientific management of birds, for it is the institute's conviction that poultry, if reared properly, could go a long way to substantially augment the income of the farmer. As a result of the demonstration units maintained at the village centres Sriniketan has been able to induce a number of individual villagers to start poultry units at their homes, although one can easily find that poultry farming, as a cottage industry, has not yet been taken up by the villagers on mass scale.

It is, however, evident that Sriniketan has not been able to secure any spectacular results in the sphere of agriculture and animal farming of the surrounding areas of work. This is due to a number of basic obstacles

which retarded its pace of growth; lack of irrigation facilities, low soil fertility and the onslaught of soil erosion, being a few among these. The area, in which Sriniketan had started its work, was also particularly poor in the quality of soil and neither any ready irrigation facilities were available near at hand to aid the experimental process. The Institute, therefore, had perforce to wait till it could remove some of these fundamental difficulties so that its plan could bring fair results to the local farming community.

Many schemes of economic development, which Sriniketan has thus sorted out in collaboration with the villagers will, one hopes, before long reveal their full significance and bear, when these basic obstacles are removed, far reaching results. The fullest benefit of the Mayurakshi canal and the afforestation work, which are now in a nascent stage will, it seems, in course of time, remove these apparently formidable obstacles and bring to the villagers their much awaited reward. There are many who had criticised the poet when he came to settle on such a barren piece of land for carrying on experiments in agriculture. A better soil would have, they point out, produced impressive results and his agricultural experiment, with bountiful success to its credit, could win general admiration, which it has failed to achieve now.

But Tagore, essentially, was never a strate-

gist. He came to settle on this soil, first, because he had no other alternative open to him and then, wasn't his the charge to sow the seeds of life in the midst of all dreary deserts? How could he had run away from a piece of land, merely because it was not fertile enough? So was the land of most of the surrounding villages and it was Tagore's contention to demonstrate to the average farmer what could be achieved under the worst conditions of soil and climate. One must admit that, viewed from this angle his success was both empirical and inspiring.

#### RURAL INDUSTRIES

It is universally admitted today that agriculture in India can no longer support her growing population in isolation from other alternative sources of employment, both whole time and part time. Tagore recognised this factor earlier than many did, and set up at Santiniketan a 'Silpa Bhavana' to revitalise the decadent cottage industries and train local artisans and village youth, so that they could make use of the new innovations. The purpose was to reorganise cottage industries in a manner that it could be a perennial source for creation of village wealth as well as open up a number of new vocations. The emphasis of Tagore's scheme of rural industries, therefore, lay on bringing in wealth by exploita-

## *A Poet And A Plan*

tion of out side markets into the empty coffers of the rural artisan.

Tagore drew great inspiration from the lessons of history, while framing his plans of industrial reorganisation, and recalled that the village artisans in India had once upon a time, sent their wares all over the country, and earned immense wealth thereby. A continuous process of disorganisation in course of time led to a gradual deterioration in the techniques and skill of production of these artists, sapped the vitality of the organisations of craftsmen and in effect made their produce out of use in the markets of the rich. Tagore's endeavour was to win back, once more, that pride of place for the Indian craftsmen by teaching them better techniques of production and by endowing them with the benefits of a strong knit industrial organisation, so that they could acquire the requisite strength of finance, leadership, and organisation. Tagore sent his emissaries all over the country and to various parts of the world to learn new techniques of production and accordingly started a training centre, which would process these research findings and initiate training schemes for the local artisans in order to help them utilise these new techniques in their day-to-day production. This, he thought, would enable them to turn out better products for financially well off consumers, who preferred goods of taste. Tagore's plan did

not aim at village self sufficiency, in as much as, he did not want his scheme of production to meet only the needs of a particular village. His effort on the other hand was to ensure that the villagers would turn out objects of beauty and utility for the luxury demands of the distant markets so that wealth could flow into the village treasury which had by then gone completely bankrupt. Tagore was also not against application of power and introduction of machine for increasing efficiency of production. He, on the contrary, welcomed modern researches and use of scientific resources for the development of the industrial sector of the village society. In the 'Silpa Bhavana' he gave a practical trial to a well devised scheme which utilised small power driven machines and findings of new experiments for increasing efficiency of industrial production. It was his endeavour to build a balanced industrial economy which will not bring in its trail the many disturbing features of an urban society but turn out increased wealth in an efficient system of production.

A two-fold approach to the village industries programme, as a result of above realisation, was therefore adopted. In the first place, the aim was to train the artisans, in what has since then come to be known as a Cottage Industries training programme, in order to infuse an element of functional beauty, utility and efficiency of production in the making of handicrafts. The other aim

of Silpa Bhavana, was to establish an extension and rehabilitation wing to provide the artisans, thus trained, with an agency for supply of credit and with a marketing organisation for buying their requirements and selling their produce. A steady supply of credit was ensured through the help of a cooperative bank, and the marketing organisation established a number of sales emporiums at all such places where capital was concentrated.

The training wing aimed to experiment with new designs to suit and elevate the changing demands of the market and to help its trainees, drawn from surrounding villages, to produce better standards of commodities by employing superior techniques of production. A systematic effort was made to offer the artisans of the locality, regular instructions to improve their efficiency of production by incorporating in their skills, a variety of new techniques and methods which were still then found prevalent in the various parts of the world. The local weaver was thus trained to improve his workmanship by employing skills which were in vogue in China, Manipur, Japan and Rajasthan. In the business part and in marketing endeavours, as Elmhirst puts it, "the disciplines of trade and economics have worked a proper check upon the overflowing idealism of our earlier days. The poet never hesitated in advising us to launch some new business enterprise, if he

thought there was good enough human, social and economic reason behind it." The handicrafts programmes of Sriniketan were, therefore, prepared for initiating a process of all round recovery of the people of the surrounding area ; the facets of change covered a wide ground including economic, social, artistic as well as psychological development of the participating group.

Rathindra Nath Tagore, the son of the poet, and his eminent wife Pratima Tagore, brought from Italy fine touches of craftsmanship in leather work. Shri Manindra Nath Sen was sent to Japan to learn techniques of weaving. Shri Nandalal Bose and his art section at Santiniketan, went on supplying better designs of functional beauty. The collaboration of the artists and craftsmen worked wonders. The goods produced at Silpa Bhavana, by the villagers of the surrounding area, flooded the markets of all major towns and villages of India ; these not only introduced a radical change in the tastes and attitude of the people, in as much as the average middle class and rich citizen became appreciative of goods of simple taste and beauty produced by indigenous craftsmen, but the flow of income thus initiated also helped to fill in the purse of the village artisans. Silpa Bhavana made a bountiful trade and accumulated considerable profit for its business section, specially during the period of World War II.



A new chapter however opened in the history of Silpa Bhavana when Visva Bharati became a university in 1950 and the emphasis shifted from research, extension and village production, to education and training.

The cottage industries training section or the Silpa Bhavana, now called Silpa Sadana, introduced a number of professional training programmes in fulfilment of its new role as a university department. The aim, in the set up, was training, not only of the artisans of the locality, but of others, drawn from distant states as well, in the professional field of rural industry. Professional training offered in a number of crafts, including wood work, weaving, pottery and leather work, thus started attracting apprentices and trainees from a variety of fields.

As the emphasis changed from the local to the national scene with the Visva Bharati becoming a university, the professional training programme aimed to turn out technicians to man the many development programmes, which were being introduced as parts of the Five Year Plan activities. Consequently efforts were also made to help the artisans, now equipped with better techniques, to start industrial production units in their own villages. It is encouraging to note that the training courses for professional preparation have, in the new set up, attracted students, not only from the surrounding areas but from the

various parts of the country as well. The total number of trainees in each subsequent course, in the last five years, have accordingly gone on increasing. There is still, however, a good deal of scope for expansion of its activities and if adequate resources are made available, the craft training programme of Sriniketan could, it seems, grow into a centre for industrial training not only for this country but for the whole of south east Asia as well. An illustrative study of the follow-up data of the former trainees of Silpa Sadana makes interesting reading. A detailed perusal of the follow-up records, in the year 1959-60, regarding the employment conditions of the trained artisans reveals that a little more than 60% of those trained have been rehabilitated either as independent artisans or employees at the industrial establishments which have recently developed in the rural areas, while another 10.5% have gone in for further training in higher educational institutions. It is found that, out of a total of 19.5% of those trained and unemployed, 3.5% were women who could not have taken to any employment outside their homes.

The cottage industries training wing have recently organised a one year study, entitled as leisure time occupational course, in order to provide the women folk of the villages an opportunity to work at their own homes. The centre, in this field, offers courses in weaving, elementary

and advanced tailoring and cutting, toy making, embroidery and batik.

The department's workers have, however, gradually discovered that it is difficult for the women of the rural areas to come out of their villages and attend even these exclusive courses, set up for them at Sriniketan. As a consequence, a number of extension centres for offering similar training to women, as near their homes as possible, have been organised in the interior villages of the surrounding area. It is interesting to find that these extension wings of the training centre have become very popular amongst both refugee and non-refugee sections of the population and are paving the way for the rehabilitation and development of the former. Five different centres were thus started in 1953, having a total number of 101 trainees, out of which only 46 were refugees. Today with increasing willingness of the women folk to come out of their homes and assemble at central places, only two separate centres are working and the number of students have gone upto 160. Out of this number 131 are refugees.

The curricula of craft training programmes, both for the professional and leisure time trainees, include, apart from craft subjects, emphasis on activities like community work, cultural programme, games, sports and community services so that the training acquires not only a technique bias but an education orientation as well. As Visva

Bharati became a university and the institute of rural reconstruction, of which the Silpa Sadana was a part, became a university department, offering training and service in a limited manner, the emphasis on educational aims of craft training became more and more pronounced.

### *Educational Craft Training*

In order to fully realise the social, artistic, psychological and educational value of craft education, the Visva-Bharati University thus introduced craft lessons as an integral part of curriculum of studies of almost all its departments e. g. Patha Bhavana, Vinaya Bhavana, Siksha Satra, S.E.O.T.C. and the Institute of Rural Higher Education. As a result, a huge number of students started entering folds of the Cottage Industries' Training Centre, to receive part time instruction in craft and this common core of training helped to create a generic feeling of common cultural orientation to all young wards of the University and acted as a powerful force for integration of their social and cultural interests.

### *The follow up of Cottage Industry and Rehabilitation work*

Through a follow up wing of the training section, the department emphasised organisation of

industrial training-cum-development centres in the surrounding villages. The purpose was to enable the ambitious village artisans and others, who could be attached as apprentices with these centres, to work in their own village homes and learn to revitalise their industrial techniques in order to acquire a better living for themselves. All available credit and other facilities were also mobilised from government and placed at the disposal of the village craftsmen. In the next phase, attempts were made to organise cooperative societies and run industrial centres in the villages with the help of village artisans themselves and under the inspiration of the department.

A number of such centres now exist at Surul, Goalpara, Adityapur, Bagdogra, Laldaha, Illambazar and Koridha. These are spread over an area of 24 miles and turn out a variety of goods, ranging from high class fabrics to utility products in cotton, wood and metal work. In the centre located at Goalpara, attempts to experiment with wood work for local consumption have been made. With further development grant received from Government of India, additional work sheds have been set up, all over these areas, fitted with implements and accessories and local artisans have joined these work sheds in large numbers. It is necessary to mention that Sriniketan continues to organise centres for commercial production in weaving and carpentry, whereas in subjects

like pottery, leather craft, bakery and handicrafts, the emphasis is only on educational training, in view of the fact that organisation of production in these crafts, on a small scale basis, is becoming increasingly uneconomic.

If one attempts to review objectively the impact of Silpa Sadana or of the craft programme of Sriniketan, it will be evident that it has, to say the least, revolutionised the taste and attitude of an entire people and shown a new line of industrial development to the planners of the country. The common consumer has now been won over on the side of the home market. He now patronises and has learnt to appreciate the beauty and utility of indigenous production. The planner has learnt to think of rural industrial planning as an aid to development of village economy and as an instrument for importing wealth into the village, as compared to its limited role as a programme of relief and self-sufficiency.

In the new set up, when the craft programme came to be incorporated as a part of the university activity, the movement with sufficient experience at its command, has come to establish that craft has not only an economic and vocational value, but its importance for educational and personality development of the young wards needs to be adequately acknowledged.

These are some of the findings of the contributions made by the craft programme of

Sriniketan. A systematic evaluation and a more detailed and objective appraisal of the impact of the craft programme of Rabindra Nath Tagore on the neighbouring villages and on the society at large, is bound to reveal interesting and far reaching data, which will, one hopes, be of vital use to the social and economic planners of the day. The study will be of special interest in a country where two sets of planners, one wishing to go the whole hog for mechanisation of industries and the other opting with vigour for labour intensive village production of indigenous variety, have not yet been able to come to terms. A careful study of the rural industrial programme of Rabindra Nath Tagore, the present author feels, will provide a synthetic approach to both these schools and offer the country at least a temporary panacea.

#### HEALTH WELFARE

When Sriniketan entered the arena, the district of Birbhum, where it was located, was highly malarious, the spleen index being about 80% in most of the villages. The people helplessly suffered and could not secure proper treatment, as they were unable to meet the fees demanded by private medical practitioners. This caused loss of human life, sapped the vitality of the rural areas and accentuated the pace of economic disorganisation. Epidemics, like cholera and small-pox, were

frequent visitors; infant and mother mortality rates were equally depressing.

Sriniketan attacked this problem of rural disorganisation, with a comprehensive scheme, for the introduction of cooperative health services, offering both preventive and curative care, which still remains a unique feature of this area: excepting the municipality of Mahuva, in Gujrat, it does not seem that any health organisation has yet been introduced, on this basis of self-help and voluntary membership, in any other part of the country.

At the early stages, the programme was merely curative. "Our problem for some months," writes Leonard Elmhirst, "was to find a professional doctor willing to reside with us and who could be counted upon not to despise and insult these simple and sometime primitive village people. An American lady, Miss Gretchen Green, with considerable knowledge of nursing and first aid, filled the gap for a time and opened our first clinic." "But soon the movement took a new turn and the emphasis was laid on enabling people to be aware of the problems which caused ill health and providing them with the necessary resources to take care of their health." Shri Kalimohan Ghose, realising of what tremendous value a cooperative approach of services could be, "adopted the method and approach of the Anti-malarial Cooperative Society of Bengal, into the



founding of cooperative village Health Societies" in the villages of the surrounding area.

Sriniketan, when at a later stage initiated this programme of health cooperatives in order to protect the villagers from recurring ailments, laid equal emphasis on the curative aspects of work and accentuated the programmes of preventive health education among the villagers of the cooperating communities.

Added to the preventive and curative aspects of Sriniketan's work of health welfare, a vital programme of fundamental research, for finding out the possible effects of anti-malarial drugs, was introduced. Dr. Harry Timbers, an American worker, took charge of this work of research and experiment into "the life, health, and control of the malarial mosquitoes." Sriniketan's contribution to rural welfare was therefore fundamental, in as much as, it not only offered direct services to a community but recognised and demonstrated that equal emphasis had to be laid on adoption of results of research findings for development and organisation of particular aspects of services to a given community, as well as for helping the total process of village recovery. The health programmes of Sriniketan was no exception to this scheme of experiment and research.

The villagers of an area, where a health society was located, were called upon to enroll themselves as its members by payment of fixed

annual subscriptions, the rates of payment being linked to the economic conditions of the contributors. The members were also allowed to offer their subscriptions in cash, kind or in labour of equivalent value. At a later stage, villages as a whole, especially tribal and poorer villages, were allowed to become members enblock. This system of community membership opened the path of entry into the society, of many families who belonged to the weaker sections of rural population and ensured that considerable community integration and cohesiveness was generated before groups, belonging to various economic and social strata, could come together to form into one community of clientele. Membership conferred upon the individual and his family certain privileges, which took the form of almost free treatment at nominal charges at home, facilities for buying medicines at cost price, and other benefits of a more permanent character, such as those that are likely to accrue from preventive operations done at the society's cost.

The story of the establishment of the first health society in the village of Benuria makes interesting reading. Sri Kalimohan Ghose, a worker of revered memory, was deeply distressed with the prevailing problems of physical ailments of the people of the area. He visited the village of Benuria in the year 1922, and initiated the scheme which envisaged the establishment of a

Health Society. He started by meeting groups of villagers and later called a meeting of all the leading groups of the area ; it was decided, as a result of discussion in the meeting, to start a health society which would raise subscriptions to maintain a dispensary and employ a doctor. The Society was started in a house, made available to it by one of the leading villagers. The house, soon after the society started, got burnt and the villagers, who had by then become very much aware of the benefits of the scheme contributed labour, thatch, bamboo and cash to raise a new house. At the next stage, the organisers of the health society, led by Sri Kalimohan, extended their contacts to other villages and secured more members. A sub-centre of the Health Society was later started at Nachan Sha, a village located about four miles from the headquarters. The sub-centre was wound up in 1954, although the main unit, now reinforced and strengthened, continued to exist. Seven other Health Societies were soon started, out of which, three were wound up for lack of continued membership.

Eight Health Societies, covering an area of eightyfour villages and touching a population of 66,000, were affiliated to a health union which was located at Sriniketan with a Central Hospital and clinic attached to it.

A Chief Medical Officer supervised the work of the different units and offered free consulting

advices to the Village Health Societies. He was appointed and maintained at the cost of the Institute at Sriniketan. Each village Health Society however, appointed its own doctor and compounder and had a dispensary attached to it. The Health Societies were run on a cooperative basis, and nourished themselves, chiefly, from the finances contributed by its members in the shape of fees. Sriniketan helped these societies by providing small subsidies and ran the Central Hospital and clinic from its own budget. Medicines at cost price and at wholesale rates were supplied to these societies from the central clinic and Hospital. At the Institute headquarters the clinic received patients in its outdoor wards, and also directly ran a similar cooperative insurance scheme for the members of the staff and students working at Sriniketan.

The clinic was later incorporated with a maternity and child welfare centre set up in co-operation with the Government of West Bengal. A Lady Health Visitor attached to this centre, visits the villages of a specific area, offers antenatal and post-natal care and looks after the health needs of the new born babies. She also seeks to impart health education to expectant and nursing mothers.

The Health Societies, run by the villagers themselves, are an excellent example of self-help and cooperation, both from financial as well as or-

organisational points of view. Sriniketan acts in relation to the functioning of these societies, merely as a helper. It does this, not only by offering financial subsidy in small measures, whenever possible, but its major contribution lies in the matter of helping the society with its village workers and health extension organisers, to maintain the stability of its organisation. The Presidents and Secretaries of the Help Societies are, as a rule, elected from among the village members, but Sriniketan workers, some of whom serve on these committees as ex-officio representatives, offer all the necessary aid to these leaders.

As has been mentioned earlier, the societies offer both preventive and curative services. In the preventive field, mention must not only be made of the antimalarial, anticholera and antityphoid measures, but also of the steps which are aimed towards the improvement of sanitary conditions and spread of health education, among the villagers. In the sphere of preventive services, the village leaders work to clear jungles, fill up cesspools and provide pure water, through the mobilisation of voluntary services of the people of the locality.

A programme of distribution of milk powder and subsidiary diet, such as butter, oil, cheese, vitamin capsules, together with free supply of soap and garments for keeping children clean, has also been sponsored with the help of various

national and international schemes, of which Sriniketan seeks to derive the fullest benefit.

### *Leprosy Clinic*

Quite early in the thirties of the present century, Tagore visited Bankura, where the problem of leprosy patients attracted his closest attention. Although he could not establish any agency for offering direct services to these patients during his life time, the efforts soon bore fruit and a leprosy clinic was set up in Sriniketan in July, 1950 for the treatment of leprosy patients. The Clinic was reorganised in 1952 with the assistance of the West Bengal Branch of Hind Kusth Nivaran Sangha. The Gandhi Memorial Leprosy Foundation started its collaboration with the Institute from 1952; the unit was then strengthened with the addition of the services of a doctor, a medical social worker (trained at Sevagram) and two other clinics were opened in the interior areas. The Centre is, since then, operating as a control clinic, and the total number of patients who come for treatment has increased five fold in the last four years; out of these 40% have been women. This clinic answers an important need of the area and is increasingly becoming a useful tool of Sriniketan in combating the health problems of the area.

The scheme of Health Societies, initiated by

Sriniketan, has, it will not be unkind to say, hardly met with cent percent success. Some of the Health Societies, which were started at a time of urgent need, have died down. The reasons for their collapse had been many, the chief among these being a definite improvement in the general health of the people, and a consequent relaxation in the sense of urgency. All these made people averse to subscribing to a scheme of health insurance which demanded regular payments every year. The movement, it seems, was thus founded, more on an appreciation of a sense of urgency or fear of disease which haunted the place in early twenties rather than on an abounding and conscious need for security and service. The difficulties of securing medical practitioners for interior rural areas, financial stringencies from which the people of the area suffer in general, are among a few other obvious causes, which led to the disorganisation of the project in some of the villages. A scientific probe into the apparent and underlying causes which led to the disintegration of a few health societies will bring out, one hopes, important data, which may form a landmark in the history of the social work research in India today.

Health services envisaged by Sriniketan and organised through a series of cooperatives and social education activities, with all their limitation, however, offer an excellent example of how cooperatives could be geared to non-economic

needs and made to administer social services. As a result of the above, malaria had disappeared from the area, even before D.D.T. came to be of popular use, rates of infant and women mortality had gone down and the resistance power and general state of health of the people of the area have considerably improved. In the matter of organisation of village cooperatives this living example of a non-economic welfare cooperative should, if properly examined, offer adequate incentive and inspiration to the planners of the nation and the case for starting such schemes all over the country, may not be difficult to establish.



## CHAPTER IV

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### FIELDS OF WORK (SOCIAL SERVICES : EDUCATION, ORGANISATION, RESEARCH AND RECREATION)

#### EDUCATION

If the problems of economic reconstruction were interlinked with the achievement of physical welfare, neither could the process of total reconstruction of life be initiated without assuring a proper place to educational programmes. For, as Rabindra Nath Tagore felt, scientific education alone knew 'how to clear the path towards a definite end of practical good.' The aim of village reconstruction work initiated by Rabindra Nath Tagore was to create a responsible leadership in the villages of the surrounding area, who could take care of their own problems; it was therefore necessary to create an 'ideal Centre of Education' at Sriniketan and establish a group of educational institutions and a well thought out scheme of rural reconstruction.

Tagore elucidated the aims of his educational institutions at Sriniketan as "an ideal, which is not curtailed to the strictest narrow village

environment, especially set apart to be doled out as famine ration, carefully calculated to be just good enough for an emaciated life and dwarfed mentality." The educational programme initiated at Sriniketan, therefore, attempted to break through the stagnant and narrow mentality existing in the villages and develop an atmosphere wherein this emaciated life and dwarfed mentality would grow into a healthy and resourceful leadership. Tagore did not believe in double standards, either in education or in any other field. He did not therefore plan to offer two levels of education, one for the sophisticated people of the towns, and the other for the villagers of the area. Soon after the school, which he had established at Santiniketan, came to be monopolised by the young wards of the city intelligentsia, he started another school at Santiniketan and later shifted it to Sriniketan, so that it could be accessible to the children of the rural areas. The school was to strike a synthesis between intellectual pursuits and academic education, with manual labour and community programmes playing cooperating roles. This, Tagore thought, would develop, both physical faculties and social consciousness among its students and ingrain in their mind a sense of responsibility for securing reconstruction of their own villages. The idea was not, however, to make it incumbent on any student to go back to the village, but to ensure that those of the young wards who would go back

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and settle in the villages, could, if they wished, act as powerful catalysts of social change. Sriniketan's total programme of rural reconstruction, was thus pushed forward to the village by its appointed agents, full time and part time, while the ex-students of the school and of other departments, acted as powerful pressure groups from within. Objective commentators, on the scheme of rural reconstruction of Sriniketan, have openly acknowledged that the contribution of the village school at Sriniketan to the total programme of rural reconstruction and village development, have not been negligible.

The school offered academic education, as well as practical training in craft, manual labour and agriculture. The poet had no objection to, in fact, he welcomed, the bearing of academic pursuits on the life of the villagers, provided that it did not tear them away from the village and its interests. In the educational scheme outlined by him, he provided a programme of activity oriented study which sought to fulfil this aim. The present educational set up of Sriniketan could be divided into following parts :—

- 1) Siksha-Satra—a rural school,
- 2) Siksha-Charcha—a college of primary Teachers' training.
- 3) Loke-Siksha Samsad—the Popular Education Society, and
- 4) A Cottage Industry training programme.

As has been noted before, Rabindra Nath established Siksha-Satra in 1924, first at Santiniketan and later shifted it to Sriniketan in 1926 in order that it could maintain a close contact with rural life. Elmhirst writes of the early beginnings of the school in the following words.

“He had in the past encouraged Willie Pearson to start a school for the Santals in the Santal village close to Santiniketan, but Pearson was dead. It was to Santosh Mazumdar that he handed over this project. The first handful of boys were orphans or in charge of local guardians and when they came, they boarded at Majumdar’s house at Sriniketan. They shared in all the tasks of home and garden. Later this experiment developed into a boarding school. Tagore named it ‘Siksha Satra’.”

Gurudeva later described this institution as poet’s school and gave it a three fold ideal: First, he wanted that its students should be given full opportunity to enter into intimate relationship with the natural and social environment and draw education not only from written words but also from these two sources as well. Secondly, it was his wish, that the pupils should undertake a greater measure of responsibility, in meeting the requirements of individual and community life and that proper emphasis should be given on learning through creative occupation like craft, gardening, dormitory

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duties, poultry farm, and dairy. Tagore envisaged that he would be able to introduce in this school "an active vigour of work, joyous exercise of incentive and constructive knowledge that help to build up character." Here, as everywhere else, in his experiments with socio-educational programme, he sought to unite the ideals of the old with the western scientific genius. He requisitioned the help of a few of his ablest lieutenants in conducting this experiment. In Siksha-Satra, Rabindra Nath experimented and evolved some of the most advanced and progressive methods of what is known as 'life-centric' education. As will be evident from the above, Siksha-Satra sought to establish closest link with the rural areas. It drew its students, from the country-side from hamlets and villages of the surrounding areas and from the various social and economic strata of society, to whom equal opportunities of education and growth were now offered. The follow-up record of Siksh-Satra shows that those of its alumni, who have gone back and settled in their respective areas, have, more often than not, been able to lend useful helping hands for the implementation of Sriniketan's programme of rural reconstruction in their own villages. The school is a co-educational institution and functions as a part of the Institute, now known as the Department of Rural Reconstruction. There are many, who believe that in this attempt of Rabin-

dra Nath Tagore to draw up a life centric scheme of education, as early as 1922, could be found the early beginnings of the powerful movement for basic education, which later came to form the main stay of Mahatma Gandhī's programme of rural welfare.

Siksha-Satra has recently been reorganised as a multilateral type of secondary school, but yet it is not the purpose that it should just function like any other secondary school of the country. Dr. Probodh Chandra Bagchi, the former Vice-Chancellor of Visva-Bharati, sought to emphasise the practical difference this school possessed from all others, when he said, "at Siksha-Satra, the students seek to produce mostly their basic requirements of life. The poor students from the villages come to study here and although, according to the new model of basic education, the students should work to provide the salaries of their teachers. . . Gurudeva did not want to have it like that. To him, the joy due to creation should be the motive behind activity education" . . . "We follow" reiterated Dr. Bagchi, "these principles enunciated by Gurudeva, as the most practical truth. Even if the whole country shuts its door against this noble philosophy of basic education. . . here at Visva-Bharati we shall continue to practice it."

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### LOKE SIKSHA SAM SAD

Rabindra Nath Tagore, established as an important and integral part of the total programme of rural reconstruction, the Loke Siksha Samsad or the Popular Education Society in 1937 in order to extend the benefit of education, through self-study at home, to that mass of our population, both men and women, who cannot enter the recognised educational institutions for financial and other reasons. In order that they might study and test their knowledge, a number of educational and examination centres have been established throughout the country.

The Samsad, with its headquarters at Sriniketan, holds examinations and offers guidance for teaching, all through a few regular standards e.g. class IV to School Final, intermediate classes to post graduate classes (in History and Bengali), divided into following units: Akshrika, Prathamika, Praveshika, Adhya, Madhya and Antya. The medium of examination is Bengali and the Samsad grants text books to established centres in order to encourage private study for its vast army of students spread in the interior areas. The centre had enrolled 1528 candidates in 172 centres in the year 1952 all over India. The Samsad has greatly suffered in the recent years and its volume of activities has been considerably curtailed due to partition of India. The Samsad has been functioning,

from its very start, as a part of the Institute and provides a peculiar combination of a correspondence course on the one hand, and a well devised scheme of adult education and school extension movement on the other. It is, just as the Health Society is, a unique scheme, which has not yet been reproduced in any other part of the country. One must however admit that the Samsad merits the most serious consideration by all leaders of the country ; for this scheme provides, it seems, the only possible lever for spread of education in rural areas where in spite of the fact that new schools are being established every day, groups and classes of people continue to remain out of their fold. Although the institution offers an adult education and correspondence course the examinations held by the Samsad maintain high academic standards. It thus can claim today a number of distinguished ex-students, well-known in public life as its alumnus and a vast number of men and women have been initiated to literacy and higher education, through its help who would have otherwise possibly never seen the light of formal education in their life.

SIKSHA CHARCHA—A SCHOOL OF RURAL TEACHERS'  
TRAINING

The Siksha Charcha was established later as a result of collaboration of Sriniketan with the government of West Bengal.



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In view of the experiments of Sriniketan in the field of rural reconstruction and education, the government of West Bengal came forward in 1937 to set up a training institute for primary teachers. These teachers were mainly meant for rural schools and originally came for a two year training in the methods and principles of education, which constituted the distinctive features of Siksha Satra and other socio-educational experiments of the founder. The School later reduced its curriculum of study to a one year course, since the government of West Bengal, its sponsoring authority, wanted to bring it in line with the other primary teachers' training colleges of the state.

### BRATI BALAKA

As an adjunct to the Siksha-Satra and many other rural schools of the surrounding areas Sriniketan had started, from its very inception, the Brati Balaka organisation, an association of boys, adolescents and youngmen. Its aim was to grow a corps of disciplined social workers, alive to the problems and difficulties of the village, which they were to face and fight in order to aid the bigger movement for rural reconstruction.

It was found at the initial stages of the Institute's work that the aging population of the society did not respond readily to its challenging programme of rural reconstruction. The new

movement needed new blood and it was therefore felt necessary to galvanise the children, striplings and youth of the country side, who could carry the main bulk of work of rural reconstruction, on their shoulders.' A movement was therefore started, whose purpose was to bring into one organisational pattern the children, adolescents and the youth of the villages who would be disciplined and trained enough to implement the rural reconstruction programmes initiated by Sriniketan. Where the old and the aged faltered, it was felt incumbent that the new should be ushered in.

Rabindra Nath Tagore had realised, quite early, that the task of rural reconstruction would not have been possible without the help of an organisation of young villagers, and that one of the main purposes of his rural reconstruction programme was to reawaken and rebuild the villages. It was however evident that this could not be achieved without proper education of the villagers and even a cursory glance revealed, that the system of education prevalent in rural areas at that time, was, at least at its base, inadequate to fulfil its task. In the school, the children received instructions in literary subjects and in memorising from obsolete books under the care of uninspiring teachers. This made knowledge bookish, narrow and unrelated to every day needs of life and consequently inadequate to meet the demands of a growing society. The Brati movement was,

therefore, started with the purpose of bringing into being a potential youth organisation, which, through extracurricular activities, would develop the physical, social, vocational, emotional and aesthetic abilities of the young villagers and educationally equip them to meet the challenges of the growing society.

The movement aimed to develop the individual as well as the collective personality of the rural youth by developing their physical and intellectual abilities. Its other purpose was to stir them to action, in order that the youth could play a vital role in helping to push forward the general programme of rural reconstruction. The organisation, in the initial stages, was called the "Sahayak Sangha". It started in 1923 with the blessings of Rabindra Nath Tagore and under the direct leadership of Leonard Elmhirst. The present Director of Sriniketan, Sri Dhirananda Roy who became the first full time Director of Institute after L. K. Elmhirst, it is interesting to note, is no other than the first Bratinayak, who held the office of the Chief Brati Organiser, from the very year of the inception of the organisation till 1935.

The organisation at the initial period included children from primary stages and youths of quite advanced years, adopting the following as its general programme of work :—

A *Physical Programmes :*

1. Games, with apparatus and without apparatus
2. Drill
3. Swimming and tree climbing
4. Physical exercise
5. Health habits

B. *Intellectual programmes :*

1. Readings from suitable books
2. Story telling
3. Nature study
4. Collection of specimens
5. Music and dramatic performances
6. Excursions
7. Drawing

C. *Social Welfare programmes :*

1. Village sanitation and prevention of diseases
2. Fire brigade, life saving, first-aid and drill
3. Nursing
4. Musti collection
5. Mela and exhibition duties

D. *Vocational programmes :*

1. Agriculture, gardening and keeping of manure

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2. At least one industry to be selected by each Brati Balaka from among the following :—

a) Clay modelling

b) Basket making

c) Carpentry and wood work

d) Making of sundried bricks

e) Mat Making

f) Wool Shearing and washing and drying etc.

g) Weaving

To sum up, the aim of the organisation was to develop active habits and resourcefulness, scientific outlook and process of thinking, recreative and productive faculties together with an ardent spirit of social service in each of its participating member. This, the organisation sought to achieve through concrete programmes of action as mentioned above. The organisation in the beginning had no set rules and regulations and neither did it follow any stereotyped procedure or programme of work.

The movement, on the other hand grew its norms through the process of trial and error and learnt its lessons from the books of experience ; it was thus felt at a certain stage that the Sahayak Sangha, should become a Brati Organisation, as the founder desired that its members should, over and above serving as helping hands in the village movement, assume greater responsibilities of full

time work and dedicate themselves to fulfil the aims of total development work.

*Organisation and constitution*

In the new shape, the organisation was divided into three branches—the Bratidal, the Brati-Balaka and Yuva Sangha and hence in three sections—the junior, the senior, and the section for the youth.

The junior section comprised of children upto the age of eleven. The senior section admitted children of the age group of 12-14 and the youth section was open to people above the age of fourteen. Each section had a number of troops having a maximum membership of 64. Each troop had a maximum number of 4 patrol; each patrol had a maximum number of 16 members or less, but at any stage the number of members, in a patrol or in a troop, was to be divisible by four.

The junior and senior sections had two types of troops. The first category was built around the schools of the locality, their organisational pattern thus being school centric, these were organised under the direct guidance of a member of the teaching staff of the participating school. The non-school going children were mobilised in separate troops built on regional basis. The Brati Balaka or Bratidal movement thus received special impetus in places where schools existed and as

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schools developed, extra curricular and other social, emotional and vocational activities, the Brati movement of the locality came to receive greater recognition.

This stratification of the movement in age groups was followed by a reshuffling of the entire programme. While in the new set-up, the older manifesto, as given earlier, continued to hold good, work programmes were redistributed, to different age groups, according to their needs and abilities and as a Brati moved from the junior to higher sections, his participation in the whole programme became more and more pronounced both quantitatively as well as qualitatively.

At every stage of its evolution, this voluntary youth welfare movement was headed by specially trained workers drawn from its own ranks or from the rank of teachers of the sponsoring schools.

The head of a patrol and of a troop was called 'Sahanayaka' and 'Nayaka' respectively. These 'Nayakas' were fully trained to initiate the Brati into varieties of programmes mentioned above through training camps specially organised from time to time under the direction of Sriniketan. At later stages Sriniketan gave equal emphasis to the organisational as well as the training needs of the movement, as it came to realise that the training of the 'Brati Nayakas' was the mainstay of the whole movement.

The overwhelming emphasis of the move-

ment has thus been on the organisation of children's groups and adolescent activities with a total programme of social service as their motto. The organisation of children and adolescents, built sometimes around the school and sometimes on a regional basis, are however educational endeavours par excellence, its members are encouraged to take up systematic nature study and collect samples of soil, food grains, cash crops, village crafts etc., for preservation in regional museums. The Brati Balakas have been likened to the scouts, but as Dr. P. C. Bagchi pointed it out, "it in fact cannot be so. The main purpose of the Brati Balaka organisation is to do away with caste prejudices.." and to "foster social welfare through voluntary services to the community."

The movement has steadily gained ground over the last thirty years and has spread its nucleus all over the entire operational area of the institute. As a result, it now maintains a large number of troops each with an army of members. With the starting of the community development projects in the state of West Bengal, the movement however received a special stimulus in as much as the social education organisers of the N.E.S. and C.D. areas of West Bengal, who were trained at Sriniketan, took active interest in spreading the movement far and wide. Brati troops in the new set-up thus sprang up in all the districts of West Bengal, till the government of West Bengal



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decided to integrate it with its own programme of setting up a state wide village youth organisation and approached Sriniketan to lend its ideas for the founding of its Youth Section. This, more than anything else, paved the path for the movement to grow as an all Bengal organisation under the aegis of its Development Department and brought its architects their much awaited award.

### *Adult Education and Library Service*

Another important and timely contribution made by Sriniketan is in the field of adult education and village library service. The Institute's village organisation section runs, with the help of the part time village workers, a number of adult education centres in the various villages. There are thus about 31 adult education centres covering 97 villages. These centres offer literacy instruction, promote discussions on civic and social education group of subjects and also organise a net work of cultural activities such as Jatras, Kavis, Kirtans, dramas, etc. Magic lantern shows, exhibition of films and other audio-visual aids are also frequently used to make adult education classes lively and attractive. Adult education had formed, from the very beginning, an important item of the Institute's rural reconstruction activities, but it assumed a formal structure with the attainment of independence, when the

Government of West Bengal came forward to offer a grant-in-aid to the Institute for this purpose. An important function of these adult education centres, run by the Institute, is to attend to village disputes voluntarily referred to it by the rural public. In the last three years, the number of disputes thus referred for arbitration to adult education centres has increased five-fold and only a few feuds in the area of operation of the Institute are being referred outside the villages today for the purpose of settlement. The adult education centres are managed by committees of villagers, and are supervised by a centre worker appointed by the village organisation section. To follow up, this work of adult education, a well knit system of library service, has also been organised in the villages of the area. Sriniketan maintains with the aid of the State Government a central library at the headquarters which is also the area library for its field of operation. The library supplies books to six feeder units located in the interior villages. The 'Feeder' libraries, in their turn, offer books and periodicals to eight 'Chalantika' libraries which are circulating units located in further remote villages. The number of readers in the 'Feeder' libraries have been more than doubled in course of the last five years. Not unlike the scheme of adult education, the library services are also a product of Government-Institute collaboration, but it is important to note that from the

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very inception of its work, Sriniketan had introduced its own scheme of 'Chalantika' services, which almost in every detail has been adopted today in the whole of the state, under the direction of the Government of West Bengal.

The total scheme of extension of education movement, initiated by Sriniketan, thus includes a variety of pioneering endeavours, such as the experimental school entitled Siksha Satra, the Loke Siksha Samsad, the Brati Balaka Organisation, the adult education movement and 'Chalantika' Services. There are many who feel that in this total and integrated scheme of rural education, offered by Sriniketan, one can find a forerunner of the present scheme of social education, which the Government of India introduced in 1952, in 55 pilot projects of community development and which was later adopted by the UNESCO under the name of Fundamental Education, for wide spread use in the developing parts of the world. To the extent, the aims of this all comprehensive scheme of education, are identical with those of the community development programme, many social workers feel that Sriniketan's educational experiments provide the earliest experience of community development work in the context of a sub-marginally developed disorganised economy and society.

*Village Organisation Section*

The method and approach followed by Sriniketan, described in earlier chapters, have assumed a systematic expression in the organisation of a specialised department termed as village organisation section. The purpose of this wing was to ensure that the village developed with the help of its own organisation and leadership. It accordingly set up a liaison service between the village on the one hand and the technical and subject matter specialists, attached to the various departments of the Institute, on the other through the medium of its social workers. It interpreted the programmes of the technical specialists to the rural people and helped to reach the latter's ideas to the doors of the Institute's laboratory. The organisation of this section is a new innovation and could, in the fitness of things, be regarded as a far reaching contribution of Sriniketan to the pattern of extension service administration of the country.

There was a time in our history when a number of well developed village institutions and an awakened leadership protected the village from unhealthy influences and maintained its pace of growth. The purpose of the village organisation section was to re-establish the lost role of village organisations and to ensure that the villagers did not act as passive recipients of the various deve-

lopment programmes which Sriniketan strove to introduce in the village. The aim has been, on the other hand, to create an atmosphere in which these programmes become villagers' very own and village organisations and village leaders implement them by their own efforts with the multi-technical staff of Sriniketan acting merely as helpers, advisers and guides.

The social worker attached to the village organisation section thus has a number of villages allotted to him. He lives in one of these villages and by taking a genuine interest in their welfare, work with them for the solution of their day to day problems. In his task of securing total development, he initiates the following measured steps and times them with the gradually rising expectations of the village community :

1. He contacts the individuals and groups in the villages in order to mobilise the community.
2. He surveys the village needs and tries to form his own estimate of the requirements of the village and of the causes of disorganisation.
3. He plays with the village children and organises recreation groups.
4. He tries to acquaint himself with the prevailing forms of village recreation, such as Jatras, Kathakata, Baul, Kavigan and Sankirtan ; while organising these indige-

neous forms of village recreation, in which villagers seem to readily participate, he tries to win them slowly towards the programmes suggested by him.

5. He organises the adolescents and the youth groups into drama parties, sports clubs and other forms of informal and formal organisations.
6. He sits down with the elders to help them to solve the village disputes and to effectively and creatively utilise their leisure.
7. He silently, yet gradually, ensures germination of ideas which leads to a consciousness of the village problems on the part of the village leaders and others. He then tells them how they could secure help from Sriniketan and other sources to solve these problems if and when they desired to do so.

The groups once organised for recreation and leisure time activities continue to work together, until the spirit of togetherness is sufficiently instilled and more effective organisations such as credit societies and health insurance schemes are set up to find ways for the solution of more basic and fundamental problems of the village community. The aim of the village organisation section was not to patronise the villagers or to offer them aid through charity. The purpose on the other hand was to help the villages to develop their own insti-

tutions and leadership so that the flow of external aid becomes unnecessary in the shortest possible time. In this process of village development the village workers may at the initial stages play the role of stimulators and catalysts but at the end the initiative has to come from the people and work must be done through their willing participation.

The village organisation section, through its net work of village workers who are a sort of specialists in methods of village approach and organisation, act as the link between the various technical services offered by other departments of Sriniketan and the villagers of the operation unit. It is done through the following specific steps initiated by this particular section entrusted with the task of village organisation :

1. The difficulties and problems of the village are studied together with the villagers and are referred to the centre for investigation and research by experts.
2. The results of research or investigation are carried from the experts to the villages.
3. The villagers are helped to contact government departments or other agencies to secure the necessary material assistance in the light of the above findings.
4. The villagers are encouraged to set up village organisations to fulfil the above needs and to ensure the continuance of these services.

The village organisation section has thus organised a number of Panchayats, Cooperatives, Pallimangal Samitis, Mahila Mandals, Youth Clubs and Brati Balaka units in the surrounding villages. In all these organisations, the villagers act (although at a later stage) as leaders and policy makers, while the village workers of the area concerned and the other technical staff of Sriniketan act as mere consultants, aiding them to nourish and develop their own organisation and leadership.

Such methods of approach make for slow and apparently formless work. Years of efforts go by, before the difficulties, which prevent the union of the villagers and retard the development of their leadership and joint action, are removed. Yet when the results come, they abide; because they have come through the villagers' own toil and efforts, the aim being to give these villages complete freedom and education for all, "the winds of joy blowing and recitations going on" as in the days of the old.

"Fulfil this ideal in a few villages only," commended Tagore to the workers of the village organisation section, "I will say that these few villages are my India and only if that is done, will India be truly ours."

### *Job Training for Village Development Work*

In the light of the above professed aim, it is



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essential that the villages must have well developed leadership and that leaders must come up from the ranks of the villagers as a result of the organisational action carried on in the villages. The approach of the village organisation section is also to be scientific and not haphazard. The type of aid to be given to the villages need thus necessarily come from trained and experienced workers. There is nothing so dangerous according to the Institute's founder, "as inexpert service." Inservice training for the personnel of the village organisation section and other divisions as well as training courses for the village youth and adults in order to help them to assume the responsibility of village work have, therefore, always been integral part of Sriniketan's programme of rural reconstruction.

The village organisation section of Sriniketan thus organises a series of training camps for its own workers, village teachers and other village leaders every year, in order to keep them in touch with the growing body of knowledge in the field of applied social sciences and of village approach.

### *Research*

It has been mentioned earlier that alongside with the above programmes of education and welfare, Sriniketan had constantly emphasised on the

need for experimental research into the various problems of the village as prerequisite to all social welfare work.

A department of economic research had thus functioned as an integral part of the institute from its very inception. Its work included survey of the surrounding villages and bringing in data relevant to the formulation of schemes by the village organisation section. As the role of the village organisation section was of a pioneering nature so also the role of the economic research work seems to be an original contribution of Sriniketan to the development of welfare agencies in the field of rural reconstruction. That village problems need be scientifically studied and carefully analysed for the formulation of village plans for development is admitted today as an universal and essential method of work. It is interesting to note that Tagore pioneered the way as early as 1923 and several regional studies were since then undertaken and the results were published from time to time. The earliest publication in this series was the survey of a village, named "Vallavpure", published in 1926. Later publications cover a wide range of topics such as "Economics of Paddy cultivation", "Marketing of Rice at Bolepure", "Land and its problems", etc.

In 1954, in recognition of this aspect of the Institute's work, the Government of India, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, requested the Visva

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Bharati to organise a full-fledged Agro-Economic Research centre which is now functioning as an independent department at Santiniketan to supply similar data on Five Year Plan activities to the Government of India. Inservice training and social research schemes have thus for a long time acted as two methods of Sriniketan's village organisation work. The training wing equipped the functionaries to perform the intricate task, whereas the research wing supplied data which determined what could be the structure and pattern of the service itself to be implemented by the department through its functionaries. If the main contribution of Sriniketan to the development of a pattern of rural welfare service has been the scientific nature of its work, the role of the research department, the scheme of personnel training as well as the entire programme of village organisation, have been, it could be stated without hesitation, the three essential prerequisites of its success.

### *Rural recreation*

Given above is a short review of the multi-faceted programmes of rural reconstruction which Rabindra Nath Tagore introduced in the villages of the surrounding area of the Institute. It was Tagore's contention that these services, although were to be introduced to the community at the

initiative of the experts and with the willing co-operation of the villagers of the area at the earlier stages, should ultimately become a part of the community's own resources and cultural pattern of life. For the achievement of the above aim, Tagore thought, while planning for rural reconstruction, not only of programmes of amenities and services but also sponsored specific schemes which would lead to formation of new groups, setting up of community institutions, training of leaders, and creation of necessary urge and where-withal which are required to enable the community to take to development and welfare work by its own initiative and effort. As an integral part of the above scheme, which aimed to route the services and amenities programme through the 'culture' of the community, Tagore drew up a comprehensive scheme for reorientation of recreational and cultural programmes of the local area. Recreation, Tagore knew, would be very near to the life throbs of the time honoured community which dwelt in the surrounding villages. He, therefore, planned to evolve a new scheme of cultural activities and festivals which would at once be linked to the social and economic needs of the village as well as combine in their operation a conscious urge for development of enthusiasm for meeting these very vital needs.

The recreational plan or scheme for social activities which Tagore accordingly drew up as

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an integral part of his rural reconstruction work were of two fold nature. He thus directed his workers to encourage at the first instance the existing physical, cultural and recreational activities of the village which were then in rapid decline and to introduce side by side with the above a number of new festivals for their observance. In the former event, Tagore's workers made a deliberate attempt to revitalise the traditional festivals which included recitations from Ramayana and Mahabharata, Kirtans, Bhajans, debate between poets (Kavir larai), Raibeshe and Lathikhela by recasting them in a manner that their weak, vulgar and unnecessarily expensive traits were gradually eliminated, although ensuring at the same time that their wholesome recreational and educational values were transmitted to the participating community as much as possible. The new festivals which he introduced were celebrated in their refined and reorganised form at the Institute headquarters itself by its staff with the villagers as participating members. These were, as a part of the extension programme, later held in the interior village areas in which the local village workers and villagers took active part and the staff of the Institute attended as invitees. The festivals, brief description of which are provided later, touched upon some of the vital needs of the society and were centred around essentials of vocational operations of life and their symbolic

presentation. He drew up, centering around these apparently humdrum activities of decadent vocational operations, a series of resplendent programmes. The festivals, thus introduced, made the fullest use of the resources available in the rural areas, and their colourful presentation attracted even people from nearby towns and far away areas, who travelled long distances to catch a glimpse of these beautiful ceremonies organised from time to time at the headquarters of the institute as well as in the interior areas. Some of the ceremonies or at least some part of their rituals and other decorative plans, were also reproduced in homes of the refined elite who were long used to scoff at the rural ceremonies and to generally look down upon the cultural values and practices of the village. The purpose of organisation of such recreational programmes were mainly two fold. First of all, ceremonies organised in recognition of what were apparently known as not only most commonplace, but sometime definitely rejected and neglected aspects of cultural life of the village, were now acclaimed, treasured and reproduced by the richer and more enlightened sections of the population living in towns. This led to the development of self-awareness on the part of the villagers and aided growth of the self-help process which were two of the main objectives of rural reconstruction work. The festivals in the next place, by presenting along with them, new ideas, urges,

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symbols and plans of development, went a long way in integrating and assimilating these urges and symbols and with them, the plans of development itself, with the culture of the community. Fuller participation in these festivals, which reflected through its well devised secular rituals, many essential elements of villagers' own life and needs, gradually made the villagers feel that most of the plans of development were a part of their own life and evolving tradition itself and no mere overt impositions of external experts. These made the objectives, programmes and process of development a part of the communities' own potentials and resources and this emphasis for development of the cultural life of the community along with those of other aspects of its society and economy, made development and reconstruction a popular cry almost in every village home. Apart from these festivals which Tagore devised for enrichment of social life, he composed innumerable poems, songs, dramas, and short stories, which reflected the cultural traits of the once despised and decadent village civilisation and gave these a high place of honour in his literature. In composing his songs Tagore drew heavily from village songs; his philosophy drew heavily from the philosophy of Bauls (a set of village mendicants, who travelled from place to place and sang their own songs) and pieces of decoration, made up of village crafts came to adorn, under his inspira-

tion and instance, the houses of the rich and the elite. The common culture of the masses of India, which were long neglected and shunned at, the various symbols of agricultural and economic life of the people, were now recognised, honoured and highlighted by the apostle of Indian cultural renaissance. As a consequence, a process of all round recovery set in as the villagers themselves started to take a new look of dignity and self-respect towards their once despised ways of life.

Tagore introduced five spectacular festivals known as (i) Varsha Mangal, (ii) Vriksharopana, (iii) Halakarshana (iv) Silpotsava and (v) Basanta Utsava, all of which were celebrated by the students and staff, residing at Santiniketan or Sriniketan. The 'Varsha Mangal' festival was a welcome to rain which was destined to bring welfare to the people. Vrikshoropana, now popularly known in India as "Vana Mahatsova" was a tree plantation ceremony, which offered a special impetus to the growth of vegetation in rural areas, and initiated a determined onslaught against the expanding pace of soil erosion. The Silpotsava made a dignified display of the equipments of the village artisans and celebrated the emergence of rural industries. Halakarshana—the ploughing ceremony ceremonised the most important cultural practice of agriculture; the Basanta Utsava—represented a refined way of celebration of the festival of colours, which had by then become, to a



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great extent, vitiated by innumerable vulgar traits.

Apart from these festivals, Tagore laid great stress on organisation of village fairs and was of the opinion that their value in integrating villagers' interests and in strengthening their contacts with the outside world was as important as their role of a powerful mass medium for dissemination of knowledge. Accordingly, he introduced two new fairs held in the months of December and February of every year, one of which was celebrated on the anniversary day of the 'Ashram' at Santiniketan itself, and the other on the 6th of February, the day when the Institute of Rural Reconstruction was founded. These fairs have since then become integral parts of the social life of not only the local community but almost of the whole of West Bengal. Both the festivals have thus become very popular and on both these occasions and specially when the anniversary at Santiniketan is celebrated, a large crowd of visitors, both urban and rural, assemble at Visva-bharati.

A detailed description of these festivals and a full length discussion of their significance and role in village development could form a separate subject of study. But it will be sufficient to mention here that these festivals have now become not only a part of the culture of the local community but that of almost the whole state. The way in

which these festivals are organised at Santiniketan, has indeed now become the way of the whole country.

In organising the village festivals, Tagore emphasised that these should chiefly draw on local resource and be inexpensive. A local man should be the president, a local party should stage a show and local flowers should be used for decoration. If flowers are not available locally, there is no harm in using fallen 'leaves' in their place, but the whole purpose of holding a festival would be defeated, if big equipments of decoration and flowers are imported from outside market. The show could thus be staged, right under the tree, and in the open, if there is no stage available. The music could be presented with local instruments. Artificial stage outfits, screens and harmoniums, are not only unnecessary, but are out of tune with the village environment and introduces, according to Tagore, bad taste in the mouth. Decoration must be as little and simple as possible and necessary display of colours should be moderate. Each ceremony may not only remind of one important aspect of the total programme of reconstruction but being by itself a point of community contact and action, could, by careful planning create group integration and community cohesiveness, as well as provide opportunities for development of local leadership. These in turn would lead to production of surplus wealth of the

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community, in terms of bringing out of dormant talents, integration of frittered uncrystallised and wasteful resources and development of capacities of planning and execution. The festivals were indeed to be the vehicles, through which some of the major objectives of rural development could be brought home to the participating community They represented, side by side with the above, a process of total enlivenment of the participating rural groups, so that their contribution to the whole programme of development could be vigorous, all embracing, spontaneous and self-helpful.

## CHAPTER V

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### LESSONS OF THE EXPERIMENT

When Sriniketan had started its activities in 1922 and introduced a multi-pronged programme of rural reconstruction, all its efforts were in the nature of a pioneering venture. The government of the country had till then assumed only the limited responsibility for maintenance of law and order and collection of revenue. The value and contribution of an institution like Sriniketan which undertook to initiate a comprehensive programme for the development of life and welfare of the most vulnerable sections of our population could not have, therefore, in that context, been overemphasised. The Institute of Rural Reconstruction, accordingly introduced an experimental programme of education and reconstruction and almost single handedly carried on, its lone struggle for rehabilitation of the villagers of a particular area, with the hope that the results achieved there could ensure wide spread application of the institute's programme and policy. Free India's National Government, which was established in August 1947

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has now openly affirmed that, unlike its predecessor, its role is that of a welfare administrator and the new state, is thus well set today on the path for achievement of a social welfare society. With the starting of the C. D. Blocks, and other schemes of welfare and extension work, the responsibility, which Sriniketan had assumed over a limited region and in a pioneering and experimental way has now become the charge of the state and every village of this country, it has been authoritatively stated, will be brought under such a programme of common welfare in the shortest possible time.

What could be the role of Sriniketan in this changed set up? The Government of India while setting up its C. D. and other reconstructional services have openly acknowledged that it welcomes advice and assistance of Sriniketan in the field of training of its workers. A Social Education Organisers' Training Centre was accordingly started in April 1953 and the scheme was expanded substantially in 1954. Later, in the same year, the Government of West Bengal started a N. E. S. Block in the locality requesting the Vice-Chancellor of the University to become its Chairman. A Social Work Research Scheme to assess the impact of Sriniketan's programme of work in a limited group of villages was started in 1956. The council of Rural Higher Education, requested Sriniketan to run an Institute of Rural Higher

Education in the same year. The Agro-Economic Research Centre was set up in 1954—the Siksha Satra, a multi-purpose school was consolidated and its services expanded by 1955. The Social Education Organisers' Training Centre became a two-unit organisation in 1959 and added a department of research in 1960. All these brisk activities and developmental schemes make it evident that the country is well aware, that it must exert all its resources to draw from the experiences of rural reconstruction work initiated by this pioneering institution. The role of Sriniketan, as an educator of the future army of rural development workers, have thus been well acknowledged, although it may at the same time seem evident that the role of Sriniketan as an extension agency and welfare administrator is losing its importance. With the Government of the country taking active interest in development and welfare work, the responsibility of a voluntary organisation in this sphere is bound to assume a limited character. The task of a pioneer institution, which had carried on multifarious experiments in the field of rural community development and education, was hitherto that of a path finder, and most of the schemes of reconstruction and patterns of agency administration adopted by the government of the day, it will be a safe assertion to make, was drawn in some way or other, from the experiences of such a pioneer. One must yet

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understand that the task of total development of every rural community of this great country is a uphill task and it is not wise to assume that any one agency even if it be the government of the country itself, could fulfil the same single handed. Government planners and administrators have, on the other hand, openly acknowledged that it requires nay, it invites and welcomes and eagerly looks forward to the association of voluntary agencies and their help in the implementation of its total programme of rural welfare and reconstruction.

The experiences of Sriniketan's work and the results it achieved had enthused the planners of the day to draw inspiration for their own plan of work. If that has been the experience of the past, the role of Sriniketan in experimenting, with more advanced programmes of welfare, development, training and research in concentrated form and in a limited geographical region, the result of which could be utilised for the benefit of the future generation of planners and educators—may not be out of tune, from the point of view of the demands of time. If the past is any pointer, and morning shows the day, could not the role of Sriniketan, even in future, be a logical continuation of its past line of thought, action and movement?

An answer to this question is vitally inter-linked with a number of relevant enquiries, the most important of which could be a desire to find out what were some of the material and non-

material achievements of Sriniketan, in its area of work. The present author, who has been long associated with Sriniketan and its reconstruction activities, finds it somewhat difficult to answer this query and make a very objective estimate of the results of work of the Institute. One, however, wishes that elaborate data could be placed at the disposal of our readers to establish that all round development has taken place in every village of Sriniketan's operational area. But unfortunately facts are often stranger than fiction and realities of life do not always conform to the dreams of a pioneer. Even a casual review of the impact of the Institute's work of rural reconstruction will reveal that the activities of Sriniketan have not borne uniform results in all the 85 villages which lay within its area of operation. Standards of living have not everywhere shot up and reached the desired height. The face of the villages, lying within the area of Sriniketan, have hardly changed in all centres and sub-centres of work. The people, living in large number of villages, are still poor. Their roads are unnegotiable and conditions of housing and sanitation are still primitive in many respects. Agricultural and industrial production have not everywhere registered impressive rise.

The cause of these failures and inadequacies of the programme of rural reconstruction of the Institute were many, the most important of which,



it seems, were lack of financial resources and dearth of trained personnel.

Any programme of rural reconstruction, in order to produce tangible results, needs large financial support. No amount of correct methods and mere determined endeavour can substantially raise the material standard of living of a community which live on a barren piece of land and own only a bankrupt treasury. From the very beginning, Sriniketan had not only no access to financial resources of its own and to any fund of state patronage, but the government of the country had also viewed the activities of Sriniketan with suspicion and unconcern.

The workers, who came to Sriniketan from time to time, had also started with formidable initial handicaps, in as much as they were totally unaware and ignorant of the new approach of work, whose intelligent and faithful application could only account for the success of Sriniketan's rural reconstruction activities. Neither was it Tagore's policy to impose any of his ideas on the new entrants from the very beginning of their career. The founder of Sriniketan, on the other hand, preferred to wait silently with the hope that the new workers would take to his ways, in course of time, as the superiority of the methods recommended by him became self-evident. For, such a slow conversion alone, he thought, could make his workers firmly wedded to the new way and pro-

duce the desired results. Some of the workers did by this approach adopt, sooner or later, the methods recommended by him and took to his programmes and policies, while there were others, who required longer time to appreciate the principles upheld by Rabindra Nath Tagore and chose to pursue their own lines of action till their policies and workmanship met with disastrous consequences and they, at last by force of circumstances, had to abandon their erring methods and turn to Tagore. It, however, must be borne in mind that the results of these negative experiments although highly instructive in most cases, had not only upset the immediate programmes and disturbed the village communities where these were introduced but, more often than not, they did far reaching damages to the socio-psycho structure of the village communities involved. The negative experiences have thus sometime borne lamentably positive results in the opposite direction. Not infrequently, the villagers due to their frustration and disillusionment, created as a result of adoption of totally wrong methods, had turned hostile towards the programme operators and even after the policies were altered and correct line of action initiated at subsequent stages it took a long time to overcome their apathy and disregard.

The real tragedy in the position of personnel administration in Sriniketan, however, lay in the fact that the workers who had thus to be gradually

oriented and groomed to the new way of work did not, in most cases, stay long enough to give the total programme a systematic trial. The problem, further aggravated by lack of financial and technical resources, often frustrated even the good workers who were willing to carry on. A few outstanding people who had joined Tagore from time to time did not stay long enough in the service of the Institute to give his unique programme a fair trial over a period of time. Some of them leaned heavily on their own bias of work and pre-conceived motives and as they gradually came to realise their own limitations, and were ready to turn to the total plan of reconstruction suggested by Tagore, the time for their withdrawal came. From a close scrutiny of the work area of Sriniketan, and a study of its various reports and records of work, it seems evident that the total programme of rural reconstruction, based on principles recommended by the poet, had never had a systematic trial over a sufficiently long period of time to bear definite results. It is therefore a matter of no surprise that the programme had not been able to produce the desired results and introduce far reaching changes in all the 85 villages which represented Sriniketan's area of work. But no amount of scrutiny and challenge can however throw up any data which may indicate that the programme itself was fundamentally wrong or even inaccurate in its broad details.

The difficulty in making an exact or even approximate assessment of the results of the institute's activities lies in the fact that no specialised or systematic study has yet been attempted for a comprehensive appraisal of Sriniketan's programmes and methods of work by any agency competent by training and attitude to conduct such scientific investigations. It is therefore somewhat risky to attempt any generalisation regarding the success or failure of work of the Institute at Sriniketan. This is particularly so, in view of the fact that neither any attempt has ever been made in a systematic and regular manner to study the field results of Sriniketan's area of operation over a period of time. A few economists have however endeavoured to conduct sporadic studies for finding out the measures of success and the impact of work of Sriniketan in the limited sphere of physical and material development but even these were based on inadequate data and on the doubtful assumption that evaluation of material progress could be made of the impact of a programme, whose chief aim was to secure a balanced development of both material and non-material culture. A trained eye can yet easily decipher and as Leonard Elmhirst puts it, even tangible results were not far to seek in the area of Sriniketan's work. "Results, notable results," says Elmhirst "were achieved in a small area and in a few villages. Economic returns were such that the rising

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standard of living in the area was very noticeable. New confidence arose among these villagers. They felt able to tackle new things, to defeat pessimism and to achieve results together."

The success of Sriniketan's work lay concentrated in the area of its best worker. A definite relationship, it seems, can therefore be arrived at, from the lessons derived at Sriniketan, between correctness of approach on the one hand and the character of results on the other. The present author made a brief survey of the physical results of development in a few villages where work has been conducted in a regular and systematic manner by a highly efficient worker. In the village of Laldaha, located thirteen miles away from Sriniketan, there has thus been, by the sheer effort of the people, a thousand per cent rise in the per capita income of the people. There is 1.1 employment available for each individual in the village. No infant mortality has taken place in the area in course of the last 6 years, and the consumption pattern of its residents has been substantially augmented.

A comparative survey of the living conditions of this village carried out in 1959 with the base line data of 1939, recorded and maintained by the worker of the area, revealed that the people today use more clothes, furniture, utensils, torches and other equipments than they did 20 years ago and in comparison to other villages which either lay

outside the work area of Sriniketan or were manned by less competent workers.

The percentage of literacy for both men and women shot up here to 100% ; 100% of children of the school going age attended their school. The recreational needs of the village were mostly met in the village itself, and this was accomplished by the efforts of the inhabitants of the area themselves. The number of adults taking active interest in the development work of the area increased in the last few decades. In the cluster of villages, represented by hamlets of Benuria, Islampur and Bahadurpur, the percentage of literacy, both among men and women, is 80% ; income per capita is Rs. 35/- as compared to Rs. 16/- of the neighbouring villages.

One need, however, make no mistake that the real purpose of Sriniketan and what it aimed to achieve and secured to a very great extent in certain areas of its work was not so much the physical targets of external growth but non-material development of culture, initiative and group integration. The aim was to create the power of a community to lay down its own goals, and to enable the same to reach these by its own efforts. It is, at the same time, true that one could hardly make an objective assessment of the measure of non-material development arrived at in a particular society over a given period of time, although applied sociologists, who are specially concerned

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with the field of rural community development, have been endeavouring in various parts of the world to develop certain specific norms for the evaluation of this aspect of planned change.

The tables in Appendices 'A' and 'B' provide a list of organisations which have been functioning in two cluster of villages of the work area of the Institute. All these organisations have been set up by the efforts of the local communities and they represent, the sponsors claim, the basis of all organised life in the community and seek to fulfil its diversified needs. More than that, the organisations provide an expression of the integrated structure of the community's diversified interests and represent the most effective agency for ventilation of the community's wishes. A scientific scrutiny will reveal that these are not, what are usually known as, mere paper organisations, but all of them are democratically constituted self-governing units and are run, as far as possible, by local finances. Each of them, in terms of their area of operation, serves not one, but a number of villages. These three-fold criteria represented by their democratic structure, financial self-sufficiency and inter-community services fulfil, according to social work experts, the soundest criteria of community organisation in the context of a democratic society.\* Economically, these organisations, as we

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\* *Vide*, Community Organisation by Murrey Ross.

have stated earlier, are self-financing and although they have, in course of time, called for loans from the government, the initial fund have been raised by their own efforts and from within the participating communities. They have, as pages to come will reveal, refused to accept services for their villages which were to be fully financed and controlled by an external agency. The fund flowing from outside was always treated as supplementary aid called for by the community and accepted at the latter's own terms. They have also been found to conscientiously repay loans and provide their contributions to matching grants and aids at regular intervals. The oil pressing cooperative society of Benuria, took a loan of Rs. 40,000 in the year 1958 and within two years paid back Rs. 11,000 at regular instalments and is due to pay back the rest in course of time. The organisations are democratic in the sense that they are run by governing bodies elected at the general meeting of all its members and scrutiny of election results held over a period will reveal that these reflect the dynamic working of these institutions and demonstrate that the community instead of clinging to the same set of office bearers have changed its leaders from time to time. The outsiders—friends and well-wishers, whether representing Sriniketan or any government agency have been welcomed on their executives but are not allowed to



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function as voting members. They merely play, as they have been asked to, the role of consultants and catalysts, the institution reserving their ultimate right to arrive at their own decisions, independent of outside influence.

The organisations are also products of inter-group and inter-village integration of interests in as much as, they are not exclusively supported and maintained by a single village or two, neither do they cater to the needs of only identical groups or castes. The organisations, on the other hand, promote broad based approaches and programmes which seek to serve all the various strata of the society. These meet the needs of much larger rural areas than the specific villages, where the institutions are physically located and do not confine their services to suit only village or group considerations. They are, thus, the results of continued collaboration of people who represent different castes, political and interest groups and live over a large area but seek, at the same time, to fulfil their basic common needs by joint efforts. The villagers, could it be derived from the above, have developed secular loyalties and through an intelligent appreciation of the needs of general welfare of the people have secured inter-group and inter-community integration of the resources of the various sections and sub-sections of the community for meeting its multi-dimensional needs. And could we find, in all these,

some concrete evidence of the development of non-material culture of a community? The writer of the present treatise is aware that nothing short of a systematic and comprehensive study of the villages around Sriniketan could establish the validity of the observations made herein; yet the data provided above could possibly be regarded as indications of some of the broad trends of human and organisational development which has taken place in a few of the villages attached to the Institute's area of work.

The results achieved in Sriniketan, as has been mentioned before, have not been uniform in all the villages of its operational area. It, however, remains true that the workers of the Institute made a monumental effort, over the last 30 years, in experimenting with a number of schemes of village welfare and community development in order to enable the villagers to remove some of their vital handicaps. As revealed in the chart enclosed (vide Appendix 'C') it will be evident that the Institute introduced, from time to time, 47 schemes of varied objectives and descriptions each of which represent not only the creative ingenuity of its framers but also prove beyond all doubt that the workers who piloted these had intimate acquaintance with the nature of rural problems as well as deep insight into the needs of the rural people. Efforts have thus been made, despite the limitations mentioned earlier, by a set

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of well-meaning planners and workers to draw and explore every avenue for securing total development of the villages of the area. Case study descriptions of these programmes of work, some of which have secured success in great measures, will make interesting and instructive reading. It, however, seems evident that an analytical study of the inadequacies and failures of the programmes of Sriniketan in some of the fields will appear equally instructive to all field workers who have learnt to read in them what they should. For, lessons of failures of experimental field work, are bound to be both rewarding and educative.

It is difficult, if not impossible, in the absence of detailed data of above description at our disposal to come to any objective conclusion regarding the success or failure of Sriniketan's programme of work. A number of limited experiences reproduced below and embodied in a few stories of intense sociological and human interest will, however, bear testimony to the fact that the pace of cultural development arrived at the work area of Sriniketan have not been of doubtful value.

A student undergoing postgraduate training in social work was placed, as a part fulfilment of her course of studies, for her block field training in the village of Vallabhpur which lay within a mile of the headquarters of the Institute and belonged to the area of intensive operation. Vallabhpur is a small village with a population of 200. A lite-

rary survey of the adult women of the village was made, soon after the arrival of the worker, and it came to light that 12 adult women representing 6% of the female population of the village were still illiterate inspite of the long standing work of the Institute. The worker under field training was accordingly requested to take up at hand the work of adult literacy among village women and bring the percentage of literacy to 100% and thereby eradicate illiteracy from the village—a task which many thought the Institute ought to have accomplished much earlier in its intensive zone of work. The worker soon started her field work and after a more strenuous scrutiny and a series of home visits came to the conclusion that 6 of the about 12 persons were too old to decipher letters, one was mentally unstable and the other 5 had babies in arms. They were consequently unable to attend to literacy class and benefit from the services provided. The worker thus discovered that nothing could have been done at that stage to improve the percentage of literacy and took up other programmes of work leaving the percentage of educated females where it was. This example indicates that the optimum development of the educational potentialities of the community had been reached and although the exteriors of the community still looked rough, nothing could have done by any other agency to improve the prevailing conditions of literacy in the community concerned.

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In the same village where hardly 50 families live today, one can find installed at the centre of the village a grain bank locally known as a 'Dharma Gola' which stores paddy of Rs. 2,000/- in value. This represents the total savings of the village community and is maintained in a well protected store which is easily accessible to all the people of the area so that each could put his own savings in the bank and whenever required draw loans as well and pay back their dues with interest after their respective crises were tided over. The savings scheme was an indigenous endeavour and could claim substantial results to its credit. What was of the utmost significance in the scheme, was the discovery that no positive attempts were made by governmental or any other agency to improve conditions of saving in the village by special drives and campaigns; the realisation, that every body must save, had become a part of the community's sub-conscious will and the efforts to put these into action were as if a part of normal culture of the village community.

The Health Society, at the village of Benuria has been in existence for the last 30 years. Its finances are borne by the people who pay membership fee ranging between Rs. 5/- to Rs. 25/-, the exact rate of contributions being linked to the financial conditions of each subscribing family. Some of the villagers of the nearby tribal villages represented to the authorities of the Health Society

that they have to go without the facilities of health services, as they were unable to pay individual donations. Some other villages complained that not all the families of their area were able to pay subscription either in cash or in kind since their economic conditions were not too good to make any curtailment of their immediate consumption in order to finance the scheme of insurance. The villages who complained of lack of finances were mostly composed of so called lower caste groups and tribal members. The authorities of the Health Society, all local villagers, sat together with the Institute's representatives to discuss the situation and after a long deliberation, came to the conclusion that instead of individuals, villages as a whole should be allowed to become members of the Health Society and that poorer villages be entitled to pay their contributions in labour on the society's farm. The Health Society was a federation of eight villages of different size and population and drew its members from the different social and economic strata of the village community. The eight villages which formed the society's clientele were thus composed of Hindus, Muslims, Sadgopes, Doms, Bayens, Santhals, Muchis and Brahmins and almost all people belonging to the various castes and religious groups were members of the society. This timely decision of the society in terms of readjustment of its financial and membership policy helped in turn to

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keep within its orbit the poorer sections of their retarded communities and helped to preserve the tone of social integration of the villagers of the area. This dynamic decision, without which the society would have lost from within its fold a substantial section of Muchis, Bayens and Santhals, helped to maintain the integrity of the health services for the entire community—a rare feature in any of the villages in India.

Many attribute this astute decision of the villagers not only to the well developed power of decision making of the community but also find in it the living symbols of a mature community which is prepared to provide services for an area irrespective of the social and economic status and political affiliations of its members.

The society could, however, never claim for itself a flourishing financial condition, as it always remained in acute economic distress, over the past 30 years and succeeded only to carry on a “hand to mouth” existence. The N.E.S. Block of area was started in 1954 and the authorities of the block offered to relieve the local villagers of their economic worries by proposing that the Government would be prepared to take over the Health Society now manned by the villagers and financed by them and set up in its place the Union Health Sub-Centre, a government’s scheme which would be fully financed and administered by the government. This would, in effect, have enabled the

people of the area to receive free medical services. The authorities of the society—all villagers who have been long carrying on the burden of the organisation, met again to review the situation and came to the unanimous decision that they would welcome a government grant to meet a part of their deficit but would not be prepared to set up a Union Health Sub-Centre in place of their own democratic organisation. The government in its turn had to admit that they inspite of their best wishes could not, as per rules, offer any grant to an institution of that type and even with the prospect of carrying on the whole financial responsibility on their own, the people preferred to continue their lingering organisation, taxing thereby every available resource of their own impoverished economy. As in the previous case, the present decision of the society clearly established that the community was not only interested in securing medical facilities but they were determined to secure the same only through a process of self-help. The people of the area displayed in this matter their unmistakable choice for self-determination and self-government, even at the cost of financial strain and sacrifice.

The villagers of Laldaha, when Sriniketan started its work in the year 1930, were steeped in debt and lay shackled in the hands of indigenous money-lenders who controlled their social and political destinies as well. The village



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maintains today a well organised cooperative credit society and a recent survey revealed that the people of the area owned the same volume of debts, despite the rise in prices, which they possessed in 1937. The total debt are however now contracted, not from any outsider or village money lenders but from their own cooperative organisation. The credit in other words have become self-financing and productive. Not a single dispute in the village of Laldaha has been referred in the last 10 years, to any court of law for its settlement, all cases of conflict being taken care of by the secular council of the village itself.

The incidents cited here provide interesting example of the type of development which has taken place in certain areas of the unit of operation and are drawn from the recent experiences of its present day workers. The true stories quoted above, have neither been selected from a few best villages of the area only, but incidents like these, it seems, are daily taking place almost all over the development area of the Institute. It will, however, be difficult to maintain that a uniform pace of growth of both material and non-material culture has been secured in every village of the area. Instances are not lacking when villagers of particular areas have continued to remain stagnant and were unable to secure any impressive results of development inspite of the best efforts of the Institute. In the village named

'X' where programmes have been sporadically introduced by casual contact of target minded workers, two groups of villagers have been found to be engaged in litigation over long years accusing each other of charges of murder, loot, theft and arson.

The villages where a number of social service organisations have been thus established, (as referred in Appendices 'A' and 'B') local villagers elected to these organisations at regular intervals have been entrusted with their administration. The village leaders of the area, some of whom incidentally were members of different political parties as well, have vied with their counterparts in almost all the villages for leadership of social service institutions of the area. They have, thus, in many villages fiercely contested each other and formed groups and cliques to further their own cause, from time to time. But yet it is a matter of some interest and satisfaction to find that never in the history of last 10 years, elections in any of these villages have been determined by external considerations of party politics. The associations catering to welfare services remained on the whole non-political and non-sectarian in character and their members had, inspite of their pronounced partisan sympathies, been able to move with secular and democratic considerations in their day-to-day functions. Not that the leaders in the discharge of their duties have not displayed

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their bias for particular village groups but village politics have scrupulously remained within village limits, inspite of the fact that its individual leaders had opposed each other, held pronounced political views and took part in the two general elections which were fought on the basis of party contests. There have been only a few cases when village agencies have been identified or linked to external politics and used as stooges in the hands of bigger interest groups. These are thus a few unmistakable signs of success and achievement which, a scientific and shrewd observer of events, could never forget to discover in many villages of the Institute's area of work. The pendulum, in almost all cases, had, however, inevitably swung towards non-material development and in favour of the social and cultural awakening of the rural elite.

The scheme of rural development, introduced by Rabindranath Tagore in the villages which lay around his international University, were however essentially experimental measures which sought to evolve certain general principles of village approach and indicate broad areas of development of village culture. Neither the founder nor any of his true disciples had any other end product in view. "Tagore's idea," say Elmhirst, "was always to illustrate a few basic principles so that objectives and methods which he would thus evolve could be used as tools for the benefit of the rest

of the country." Some of the ideas and methods which Tagore had thus held as important have been mentioned before. There were many others and some of these dealt not only with fundamentals of social philosophy and rural planning but laid down the detailed procedures of programme building in any specific social group or regional community, for the purpose of their effective development.

The discovery of these principles some of which have since the last one decade received wide spread application, might not seem of outstanding importance to-day; but their evolution in early thirties and the fact that most of these methods and techniques, which have today come to us through foreign experts and western schools of social practitioners, were tested on our own soil and arose as products of our own experience cannot but be of profound significance. These principles are not vague generalisations but could even provide guide points to social workers in evolving their day to day programmes. These, if properly practised, it will be obvious, are bound to throw their cumulative effect on the non-material development of the values and aspirations of human and social power of any community and could be summed up in the following words :

- (1) The onus of understanding the village and its needs must devolve on the local people themselves, the external experts

and consultants should only assist and aid.

- (2) Welfare planning involves constant co-ordination of human factors and has to be effected not so much by the technical knowledge of the specialist experts but by their personal contacts and wisdom, born of sympathy.
- (3) Boys and girls of a community, once stimulated by a desire to educate themselves and grow, can, in this context, play a very major role in as much as the indirect effect of their activities might cause revolutionary changes in the age-old customs and attitudes of their parents.
- (4) What is most important in the matter of village development is not so much the knowledge of agricultural science or rural technology but training in observation and methods of approach.
- (5) The success lies in the ability of a worker to make a definite contact with a specific social group or area and prove his utility so that the latter could win the confidence of the community and set its pace.

It is difficult to assess as we have maintained before what have been the results of the experimental programmes of rural reconstruction of the Institute specially in the material and non-material sectors of village development. The principles and

methods of village planning, some of which are being applied in various parts of the country and initially arose as a result of Sriniketan's experience of work seem, however, to be a major product of the Institute's process and programmes of rural development and could by no means be regarded as a limited contribution. It will, however, be obvious that these mechanisms of planning and the basic principles described earlier have thrown in turn their visible impact on the development of non-material culture of the village communities as well. If the effect of the total process on the material and physical aspects of the development programme, has not been equally evident, its reasons have been listed elsewhere.

It is at the same time important to question what is and could be the possible impact which one aspect of village culture will have on the other or in other words could a community achieve only non-material development in complete isolation from the physical aspects of the product? The evidences are overwhelmingly on the side of those who believe that the pace of material and non-material development are inevitably interlinked and the ultimate effect of one is bound to tell on the other. 'Given the right direction and with a scientific administration of the resources, it seems evident that any measure of non-material development must in its turn create the desired results in other sectors as well and secure material and

physical development as a logical corollary of what has already been achieved in the sphere of development of non-material culture. But will that marshalling be ever possible or in other words has such a combination been made easy by the efforts already put forward by the Institute at Sriniketan towards non-material development, of leadership, organisational pattern and educational opportunities, of its village communities? A fair answer to this question could only be secured if and when proper follow-up study of the results of Sriniketan's work is conducted by trained experts.

The nation must, however, acknowledge that it owes a great debt to Sriniketan for the ceaseless efforts it has already made to evolve and establish a number of basic theories of rural reconstruction through their practical application. The effects of its programme on the surrounding rural communities has been both positive and negative from the latter's point of view, but from the point of view of the benefit that such an experiment has acquired for the rural social workers of the country at large, both aspects of the results have only a positive significance. The lessons of success of this sublimely human and intensely democratic movement for planned growth have been highly instructive and its failures have almost in equal measures led the way for evolution of certain basic approaches and methods which are bound to serve as a beckon light to generations of rural social

workers of our country. Such have been the effects of this unique programme of rural reconstruction on the two communities, one, which lay at the immediate neighbourhood of the Institute and experienced the direct impact of the programme in all its aspects and the other, comprising of the future leaders of rural extension movement, and spread out all over the country, for whom the immediate experiments sought to evolve and compile substantial guide-lines for action.

But what was the impact of the programme on the founder himself, a person who according to many had been much greater and more sublime than any of his deeds? The programme of rural reconstruction certainly left unperishable mark on the poet founder. It threw its impact on every aspect of Tagore's eventful career and helped to mould the destiny of not only the social philosopher or worker in him but in a great way affected his literature, music, educational philosophy and the way of life which he carved out for himself and later bequeathed to the nation as his greatest gift. The young urban boy, as he grew into manhood, saw life in all its realities only when he came in close contact with the villages of Bengal. Consequently the poems he produced, the music he composed, and the vast movement of cultural renaissance which he initiated, all drew heavily from the cultural stream of the village communi-



## *A Poet And A Plan*

ties of his country. Without this vital connection which he succeeded in establishing with the physical and natural life, the greatest poet of the age might well have been the harbinger of a machine civilisation and only a poet of the city. That Tagore became a poet of India and the man of her cultural destiny may, therefore, in no small measure be due to the impact of the villages of India and of their time honoured civilisation.

## APPENDIX A

### Institutions at Benuria

(Including villages of Bahadurpur, & Islampur)

(1)

#### BENURIA

Name of the Institution	Nature of activity	No. of villages served	Formal/Informal
1. Co-operative Ghani Society	Oil Co-operative	All villages	Formal
2. Health Society	Health service	for all villages	Formal
3. Junior Basic School	Education	for all villages	Formal
4. Youth Club	Youth Welfare	One village	Formal
5. Intervillage Youth Club	Youth Welfare	All villages	Formal
6. Feeder Library	Educational work	All villages	Formal
7. Harinam Sankirtan	Indigenous recreational and cultural organisation	One village	Informal
8. Vadu Gan	do	do	do
9. Mahila Samiti	Women Welfare : Occasional meeting with other Samitees of other villages	One village	Formal

(2)  
**BAHADURPUR**

Name of the Institution	Nature of activity	No. of village served	Formal/Informal
1. Jatra Club	Staging indigenous drama etc.	All the villages (spe-	Formal
2. U. P. School	School	cially Bahadurpur) Bahadurpur only.	Formal
3. Youth Club	Youth Welfare work	Bahadurpur only but linked with Inter- Village Youth Club	Formal
4. Harinam Sankirtan	Indigenous folk recreation	All villages	Informal
5. Vadu Gan	do	do	do
6. Raibeshe	do	do	do
7. Card playing group	Recreation group recently formed.	Only one village	Formal
8. Defence party	Defence of the village	do	Formal
9. Mahila Samiti	Women Welfare work	Only one, but occa- sionally there are inter village meetings	Formal (Applied for grant to State Social Welfare Board and considered for the same.)

(3)

## ISLAMPUR

Name of the Institution	Nature of activity	No. of village served	Formal/Informal
1. Islampur Jai Kali Opera Party	Recreation Group. Formed in recent times ; not traditional.	All villages	Formal
2. L. P. School	School	One village	Formal
3. Children's recreation party	Recreation group. Formed in recent times : Not traditional.	One village	Informal
4. Islampur Kirtan Party	Indigenous recreation	All villages	Informal
5. Dom Bhajan Party	do	All villages	Informal
6. Village Defence Party	Defence of the village	One	Informal
7. Inter village Credit Society	Credit supply	All villages	Formal
8. Youth Club	Youth Welfare	One village but connected with inter-village youth organisation.	Formal

## APPENDIX B

### Institutions at Laldaha

1. Night School.
2. Brati Balaka Organisation.
3. Cooperative Credit Society.
4. Primary School.
5. Village Development Committee.
6. Irrigation Society.
7. Cooperative Stores.
8. Library.
9. Weavers' Society.
10. Fishermen's Society.
11. Multi-purpose Society.
12. Adult Education Centre.
13. Basic School.
14. Weaving Centre.
15. Carpentry and Blacksmithy Centre.
16. Health Society.
17. Talgur Training Centre.
18. Post Office.
19. Marketing Society.
20. Large Size Cooperative Society.

## APPENDIX C

### Rural Welfare Programmes at Sriniketan

#### **Economic Programmes**

1. Cooperative Credit Society.
2. Agricultural activities. (Distribution of seeds ; method and result demonstrations, etc.)
3. Irrigation. (Minor irrigation in villages)

4. Industrial activities. (a) Organisation of production centres in villages, (b) training of village artisans, (c) craft training of women, and (d) organisation of credit and sales.
5. Dairy and Poultry.
6. Tree plantation.
7. Dharmagola ( Cooperative grain bank )
8. Village Development Bank,
9. Control of Soil erosion and afforestation .
10. Tanning and shoe making.
11. Tal gur making.
12. Ornamental leather work.
13. Fishery.
14. Multi-purpose Society.
15. Economic Conference.
16. Oil pressing ghani cooperative society.
17. Organisation of relief in times of flood etc.
18. Construction and maintenance of roads.

### **Educational Programmes**

19. Night School.
20. Circulating Library.
21. Feeder Library.
22. Adult Education.
23. Lok-Siksha.
24. Village exhibition.
25. Celebration of festivals.
26. Intercaste dining.
27. Establishment of schools ( Balwadi—basic, post basic/High School )
28. Settlement of village disputes.

### **Health Programmes**

29. Anti-malarial activities.
30. Public Health Work.
31. Cooperative Society ( Rural Reconstruction and Health ).
32. Child Welfare and Maternity.

33. Cooperative Health Society.
34. Dietary Research.
35. Leprosy Control Measures.
36. Family Planning Work.
37. Compost pits, Soak pits and village latrines.

### **Village Organisations**

38. Brati Balak Organisation.
39. Women's Society.
40. Youth Organisations.
41. Children's Organisations.
42. Other Organisations such as given in Appendix 'A'.

### **Research Programmes**

43. Rural Survey.
44. Economic Research.
45. Land Tenure Research.
46. Social work Research

### **Training Programmes**

47. Training Camps.
48. Training of Midwives.

## **APPENDIX D**

### **A Glossary of names used in the book**

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. Rabindra Nath Tagore | The founder.  |
| 2. Devendra Nath        | Rabindra Nath Tagore's father.                            |
| 3. Rathindra Nath       | Rabindra Nath Tagore's eldest son                         |
| 4. Pratima Tagore       | Tagore's son's wife.                                      |
| 5. C. F. Andrews        | Tagore's friend and disciple.                             |
| 6. L. K. Elmhirst       | Founder of Sriniketan together with Rabindra Nath Tagore. |
| 7. Santosh Mazumdar     | Tagore's friend's son.                                    |
| 8. Miss Green           | One of the earliest Health workers at Sriniketan.         |

- |                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| 9. Harry Timbers    | A trained malaria specialist.              |
| 10. Manindra N. Sen | Weaving Expert.                            |
| 11. Nandalal Bose   | Master artist                              |
| 12. Kalimohan Ghosh | One of the earliest workers of Sriniketan. |
| 13. Dhirananda Roy  | do   |
| 14. P. C. Bagchi    | Former Vice-Chancellor, Visva-Bharati.     |

## APPENDIX E

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- |   |   |
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| 1. Siksha Satra—published by Visvabharati   | } All out of stock but available at Sriniketan) |
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| 4. Sriniketan do  |   |
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| 8. Tagore and Rural Reconstruction—by Sugata Dasgupta, Published by SEOTC Sriniketan  |   |
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3. Loka-Hita ( Welfare of the people )
4. Laraiyer Mool ( The roots of conflicts )
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7. Batayaniker Patra ( Letters from an on-looker )
8. Sakti Puja ( Worship of Sakti )
9. Sikshar Milan ( Cooperation on Education )  
Translated in Modern Review, November, 1921
10. Satyer Auhavan ( The call of truth )  
Translated in Modern Review, October, 1931
11. Samasya ( The Problem )  
Translated in Modern Review, January, 1924
12. Samadhan ( Solution )
13. Sudra Dharma ( The way of the Sudra )  
Translated in Modern Review, January, 1921
14. Charka ( 1332 Bhadra )  
Translated in Modern Review, September, 1925
15. Swaraj-Sadhan ( Achievement of Independence )  
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18. Hindu-Musalman.  
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20. Hindu-Mussalman.
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( Political Ideas of Rabindranath )
22. Nari ( Woman )
23. Congress
24. Sabhyatar Samkat ( Crisis of Civilisation )

### Russiar Chiti :

( 1931—English Translation : “Letters from Russia”

published by Visva-Bharati )

1. Russiar Lokasiksha ( Peoples' Education in Russia )  
Letter No. 1 and 9
2. Russiar Sarbabyapi Nirdhanata ( Equitable distribution of  
poverty all over Russia ) Letter No. 2
3. Russiar Sakal Manuser Unnatir Chesta ( Efforts made by  
every individual for over all development in Russia ) Letter  
Nos. 3 & 5
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Soviet Russia ) Letter Nos. 7 & 10.
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( Sadhana 1301 B.S. )
2. Chhelebhulano Chhara ( „ . . . ) No. 2
3. Kabi Sangit ( Folk Songs of the Kabis—a special feature of  
rural Bengal ) ( Sadhana 1302, Chaitra B.S. )
4. Gramya Sahitya ( On folk literature ) Bharati ( 1305, Falgoun  
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**Swadesh :**

1. Nutan O Puratan ( The old and the New )  
( Translated in Modern Review, May-July 1921 )
2. Naba barsha ( New Year )
3. Bharatvarsher Itihas ( Vision of India's History )
4. Deshiya Rajya ( Native States )
5. Prachaya O Paschatya Sabhyata ( Eastern and Western Civilisation )
6. Brahman ( The Brahmin )
7. Samaj Bhed ( Social inequality )
8. Dharmabodher Dristanta ( Examples of Religious Feelings )

**Siksha :**

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2. Chhatrader Prati Sambhasan ( To the students )
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4. Siksha Samasya ( Educational Problems )
5. Jatiya Vidyalaya ( National Institute of Education )
6. Abaran ( Covering )
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3. Bilaser Phas (Trap of luxury)
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5. Ajogya Bhakti (Undeserved respect)
6. Chithi Patra (Letters)
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2. Swadeshi Samaj Prabandher Parisistha (Appendix— Swadeshi  
Samaj)
3. Desanayak (The leader)
4. Safalatar Sadupaya (Right ways to success)  
(Translated in Greater India)  
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5. Pabnar Abhibhasan ( The Pabna Address), Translated in  
Greater India.

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2. Baroyari Mongal (Community Welfare)
3. Attyukti (Exaggeration)
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2. Rajniti r Dvidha (The Political dilemma)
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6. Attyuktti (Exaggeration)
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