

SANTINIKETAN
AND
SRINIKETAN

UMA DAS GUPTA

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VISVA-BHARATI
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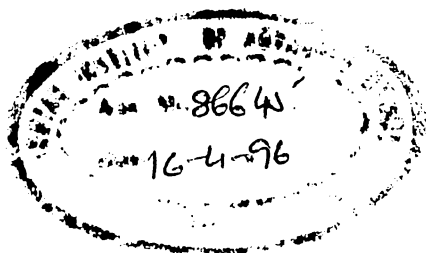
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This essay of mine on Santiniketan was first published as a chapter in the book *Introduction to Tagore* (Visva-Bharati, 1983). This book is the text for a Foundation Course introduced at Visva-Bharati University since last year. Some years earlier I had published a similar essay called *Santiniketan and Sriniketan : A Historical Introduction* (Visva-Bharati Quarterly Booklet, 1977). Since then I have worked more on the subject and have endeavoured to go deeper into Rabindranath Tagore's ideas in making these institutions and the history of how they were developed. This essay is a brief outline of that endeavour. I am indeed grateful to Visva-Bharati University for their generosity in publishing the essay independently.

RABINDRA-BHAVANA
VISVA-BHARATI

UMA DAS GUPTA

Visva-bharati represents India where
she has her wealth of mind which is for all.
Visva-bharati acknowledges India's obligation
to offer to others the hospitality of her best
culture and India's right to accept from
others their best.

Robinranath Tagore

What we know as Visva-Bharati today was begun only as a small school in 1901. Rabindranath Tagore was the founder of this school. He named it *Brahmacharyasram*. It was established in the *Santiniketan asram* which his father Maharshi Debendranath Tagore had founded many years earlier. That was in 1863, the beginning of the *Santiniketan asram*. In that year Debendranath had bought twenty bighas of land from Bhubanmohan Sinha, landlord of Raipur. A house was soon built on it. It was to be a guest-house, a garden-house. Debendranath called it Santiniketan. That was how it began, Santiniketan as we have it today. The *Santiniketan asram* was intended for meditators, as a retreat for householders who wished to spend a little time prayerfully away from their preoccupations. It was the Maharshi's intention that the *Santiniketan* house, the *Santiniketan asram*, would enable its guests to have a short break of strict and spiritual living. That was why he also established a hall of prayer, *upasana mandir*, and a library in this retreat. There is a description of the place in the memoirs of Aghornath Chattopadhyaya, first resident of the *Santiniketan asram*. He writes in his *Santiniketaner Smriti* :

"Gradually this empty uninhabited land was turned habitable at great expense. First a one-storied brick building came up to which a second storey was added. The house was furnished, trees were planted around it— *ām*, *jām*, *coconut*, *jackfruit*, *āmlōki* and *sāl*— to give fruit and shade. The dry and stony earth around was made beautiful with flowering creepers of *mālōti* and *mādhōbi*..... It was no easy task to turn this infertile land into a garden. The cost and the effort were considerable. The stony soil had to be dug out and filled with earth brought from far. A tank was to be dug at great cost but without success in order to water the garden. The land dug up became something like a hillock¹ but there was no sign of water from below. The idea of a tank² had to be abandoned. Instead one had to depend on the old Bhubandanga tank and deep well for water-supply to the garden. Round the garden were planted various timber trees— *sāl*, *ségūn*, *mōhuā*, *kéndh* or *āblus*. But the garden was not fenced in."³

Rabindranath built his school with whatever there was at

Santiniketan. He has described what the place looked like then, a century ago.

“You would probably all know there was a time when there was nothing here except that ancient pair of *chhātīm* trees which you now see all swamped under *mālōti* creepers.”⁴

Again he wrote :

“I used to live quietly at Silaidah following my literary pursuits by the banks of the river Padma. There I felt the urge to do something creative. With that I came to Santiniketan. At its southern extremity were rows of tall *sāl* trees. There was a *mādhōbi* creeper over the gate. Behind, in the east, was the mango grove. In the west were some palm trees, some *jām* and some *jhāū*, set off by scattered clusters of coconut. In the north-western corner was a simple marble seat underneath those ancient *chhātīm* trees. There were no trees in front of it. There were only open fields stretching to the horizon. Those fields were yet uncultivated. In the north was the two-storied guest-house in a grove of *āmlōki*. Adjoining the guest-house was its kitchen in the shade of some ancient *kadōm* trees. There was one other brick structure, a one-storied building. This was a library⁵ containing an old bound set of *Tattvabōdhinī* and a small collection of other books. Later this house was somewhat extended and another storey was added to it, and that is the present library. Outside the *asram*, to its south, was a tank, then large and full of water. And to its north, on its high banks, a very old row of tall palm. All this was clearly visible from the *asram*. A shadeless red-earth road led to Bolpur along the eastern edge of the *asram*. Few used that road as the town was still uncrowded with only a small number of houses in it. The rice mills had not as yet started to darken the skies with their smoke or to poison our food. There was total rest and quiet everywhere.

“The *asram* used to be guarded by old Dwāri Sardār, tall straight and vigorous. He would always carry a tall stick of old bamboo, a memento of his younger days of brigandage. The gardener was Harish, Dwāri’s son. Dwipendranath with his entourage occupied the ground floor of the guest-house. I with my wife had taken shelter on the upper storey.

“In this quiet and sparsely populated garden of *sāl* trees I started, with the help of Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya, and with

a handful of boys, a school for children. I used to teach underneath an old *jām* tree.”⁶

Elsewhere he wrote :

“I remember how in 1870 at the time of the Franco Prussian War a French soldier had taken shelter in our house. The Frenchman used to cook for my brothers and also teach them French. My brothers had then come to Bolpur once and he had come along with them. With a hammer in his hand and a bag hanging from his waist he used to go into the *khōāi* looking for rare stones. One day he had found a crystal which he had set on a ring and sold to a rich man in Calcutta for eighty rupees. I would also spend all my afternoons in the *khōāi* collecting many stones not for money but for the stones themselves. There was a spot where water seeping through the fields above had formed itself into a brook. It gathered into a small muddy-whitish pool deep enough for me to take a dip. Water would overflow the pool and trickle along in many tiny transparent streams with small fishes swimming against the current in them. I used to explore along the edges of the water to discover for a child’s geography so many newly-born mountain streams. Sometimes there were caves in the banks. I would hide in them and feel the thrill of an explorer’s discoveries. Stunted wild *jām*, dates and tall *kāsh* would sprout out of the mounds dotted in the *khōāi*. Away and at a higher level cattle grazed in the fields, *santals* tilled the earth while carts squeaked along through trackless expanse. But there was never a human in these *khōāi* caves.”⁷

What did Rabindranath want to do at Santiniketan ? What was that creative urge which led him to abandon his peaceful literary pursuits ? A simple answer to this question is that he wanted to establish an ideal school. But if we understand the background to this effort many answers emerge. We know from his *Reminiscences* how unhappy he was with the kind of schools he was sent to in his childhood. The Santiniketan school was perhaps an answer to that childhood grief. Secondly as a child he was miserable in the confines of the city and the house in the city. In choosing Santiniketan he may have looked for a place where his children would grow up touched by nature, beyond the restrictions of urban living. Thirdly Rabindranath

had been brought up in a remarkable cultural milieu, in the cosmopolitan household of the Jorasanko family. His education too was distinctive. While Indian culture was fundamental to that education so was its wide acceptance of the outer world. Emphasis on Indian culture was strong in early Santiniketan modelled on the forest schools of old, a hermitage.

To that was later added Visva-Bharati. This was to be an expression of India's other soul, that which would represent India's hospitality to the world at large, India's culture, its receptivity of world cultures, its love of man, Indian integrity. The Santiniketan school was started at the inception of the *Swadeshi Movement*; it was turned into Santiniketan-Visva-Bharati at the end of the first World War with a determination to build friendships with nations despite the prevalent Non-Cooperation. In Swadeshi times the need was for Swadeshi schools to replace the English ones. That aspect was also fundamental to the founding of the Santiniketan school.

What must also be said in concluding this discussion is that the Santiniketan school established in the Santiniketan *asram* and Visva-Bharati together make up the totality of Rabindranath's thoughts on education. They were not separate and disconnected although the Santiniketan *asram* was established in 1863, the school in 1901, and Visva-Bharati in 1918. The first was exclusively spiritual while the second aimed at children's education based on the discipline of *brahmacharya*. The last aimed at cooperation between the East and the West in humanism and culture.

There was however one other vital element in Rabindranath's thinking. Rabindranath wanted to bring education close to life. What he objected to in the Western education imposed upon India was just that it was cut off from India's living. This kind of education he felt had divided Indian society even more. He sought for an alternative through his scheme for a complete education. Rabindranath had no objection to the English language. Sanskrit and English were part of his daily reading. In Rabindranath's own words "We can learn much that is essential in the English language."⁸

His objection lay elsewhere. English education, the education of the *Raj* had brought an emptiness in Indian life. After all

the sources of that education lay outside India. It was ignorant of and indifferent to India. That was why Rabindranath wrote :

“In every nation education is intimately associated with the life of the people. But for us modern education is relevant only to turning out clerks, lawyers, doctors, magistrates, munsiffs and policemen, the few favourite professions of the gentle folk. This education has not reached the farmer, the oil-grinder, nor the potter. No other educated society has been struck with such disaster. The reason for this is that our new universities have not been a growth from the soil but have been parasites feeding on foreign oaks. If ever a truly Indian school is established it must from the very beginning implement its acquired knowledge of economics, of agriculture, of health and all other everyday sciences in the surrounding villages. Then alone can the school become the centre of the country's way of living. This school must practise agriculture, dairy-keeping, and weaving on the best modern methods. And to obtain its own financial resources it would adopt cooperative methods bringing together students, teachers, and the people living around.

“I have proposed to call this ideal school Visva-Bharati.”⁹

From the beginning collecting information about the villages around was compulsory to the Santiniketan education. Afterwards a department of agriculture and a centre for rural reconstruction were started two miles away from Santiniketan, in village Surul, and called Sriniketan. Majority of Indians lived in the villages and lived in poverty. It was Rabindranath's conviction that an Indian education would be incomplete without knowledge of rural living and without an effort to rejuvenate rural life. Hence to Rabindranath one important aspect of the sense of Visva-Bharati was total activity. The other aspect of Visva-Bharati was to be its universalism, reflecting the spirit of the world. In the quest for truth at Visva-Bharati the East would meet the West. To Rabindranath Visva-Bharati was a nest for the entire world to meet. “Visva-Bharati” he wrote “was India's but it must be made into a centre for the spiritual endeavour of all mankind.”¹⁰ That was to be one important meaning of Visva-Bharati. It is in this sense that we generally understand Visva-Bharati. But to know it fully we must understand the

education of Santiniketan and Sriniketan together, in their totality. This education was an endeavour to relate closely to life beyond the confines of the class-room. It was to teach and practise total activity, build up a comprehensive acceptance of the world, bring integrity into life and relatedness into learning. Rabindranath believed that in this kind of effort the nation would recover its confidence and the people its self-respect. For this two things were necessary, he felt : a knowledge of India and a real link with world learning.

In the context of Visva-Bharati Rabindranath wrote :

“Our problem is that we wish to remain isolated from the world imprisoned in our own scholarship. We remain obstinately satisfied with whatever food the prison warden gives us. It is not easy to free India from this spirit of isolation. We must build up a relationship with the world, to serve and to be served, to give and to receive. India has been cut off from the world’s scholarship, treated only to trifles in the name of education and relegated to a perennial primary school. We now want freedom from this spiritual and intellectual humiliation. We want to be one with the world’s learning.”¹¹

In 1921 Rabindranath wrote :

“I have taken courage to invite Europe to our institution. There will be a meeting of truths here.”¹²

It was also Rabindranath’s intention to free the Indian mind of its slavishness through education. He sought an education that would reveal the fundamental aim of life, give life a direction beyond the mere needs of livelihood. Rabindranath believed

“Livelihood is concerned only with meeting the negative demands of life, but life itself aims at fulfilment, beyond all needs. Our ideal of fulfilment may be different from Europe’s but if we do not accept that there is an ideal which is beyond feeding the body and making money, we make ourselves small.

“I established the school here with the thought that we shall accept this essential meaning and we shall teach it. The first step towards this was to set the mind at rest disengaging it from outer distractions, and that was why we came to this abode of peace.

“Many of those who are present here today have not known

its beginnings. Whatever there was then it did not smell much of a school. The call which was the strongest here was that of Nature and never of the school teacher. The pupils were then not required to pay their tuition. I even provided them with food bedding and furniture.

“But it is not possible to go too much against the current of the times. If we have an arrangement in one place which has nothing corresponding to it then that is a loss, it cannot survive. That is why this school is now much different from what it used to be before. Still the basis is the same. Here the boys feel freedom as much as possible. Our outer freedom is in Nature. And that freedom is vast.

“What I wanted along with it was to free the students’ minds through education. But it is difficult to come completely out of the net in which the system of education has enmeshed our country. There was always the fear in my mind about the consequences of a failure to connect our school with the royal gateways established by education in this country and abroad. I did not have the courage to go all the way and especially as my resources were limited as indeed was my experience. That is why the school had to be equipped for matriculation. But I have tried to keep it as distinctive as possible within those limits. That was why I could not bring our school under the discipline of any university.”¹³

All in all the Santiniketan school was conceived to be more than a school, a society in itself where teacher and pupil, householder and visitors, Bengali and non-Bengali, Indian and non-Indian would all live as neighbours. Rabindranath desired that boys and girls would learn to know their neighbours, love them, serve them. He wanted children to feel the meaning of cooperation and friendship from the very beginning. He kept a close watch to see an intimate relationship develop between the teacher and the taught. It was in this spirit that he entrusted the education of his son Rathindranath to the first teachers of the Santiniketan school. To Satish Chandra Ray, a teacher at the school, he wrote :

“I can depend on no one but you to initiate Rathi into literature. Why literature alone ? You will be able to help him develop into a man. I have written to him today and given him

much necessary advice. He may even show the letter to you. We waste ourselves by simply sitting in and reading. If only I could read into the green earth lying on my back underneath the wide open sky, I would feel ever so privileged.”¹⁴

Rabindranath emphasized freedom and self-discipline for the students. Simple life on the ideal of *brahmacharya* for both teacher and student. Classes would be held out of doors underneath trees, with only *āsanas* for seats. This was how they would connect with Nature. Waking with dawn, cleaning up taking exercises, bathing by the well and then prayer. The morning prayer was,

- I. Thou art our Father. May we know thee as
our Father. Strike us not. May we truly bow to thee.
- II. O Lord O Father take away all our sins and give
us that which is good.
We bow to Him in whom is the happiness.
We bow to Him in whom is the good.
We bow to Him from whom comes the happiness.
We bow to Him from whom is the good.
We bow to Him who is the highest good.
Shanti Shanti Shanti Hari Om.

After prayer, classes in English, Bengali, Arithmetic, Sanskrit, History, Geography and Science. Besides these the school also taught singing and drawing, carpentry and weaving, book-binding, carving and games. The Santiniketan football team was reputed in the area. Surveying villages and collecting specimens from Nature was also an important part of the Santiniketan curriculum. Those collections made up the school museum. The older boys had also to learn about the lives of the farmers, the potters, the blacksmiths and the weavers. These boys were also to serve the poor taking care of Bhubandanga's health and education. They took part in repairing the roads within the *asram* as well as in gardening. In Rabindranath's words :

“I have sought in my school to push aside the vigil of cramming lessons and make mutual service and building up the environment the most important objects.”¹⁵

From the beginning Rabindranath was also very keen on

education for the girls. In 1908 he was able to make separate arrangements on a small scale for the girls in Santiniketan. Though this did not last long he always remembered the need. The daughters of the teachers and other workers of course continued to be taught in the school. But a separate section for the girls, *Nari-Vibhaga*, was organized only in 1922.

By 1922 the Santiniketan school had expanded considerably. Visva-Bharati began functioning from 1918. In 1921 the first assembly of the registered Visva-Bharati *Parisad* was held. In this phase the Santiniketan school attained its full stature. Rabindranath's resolve was to make Visva-Bharati a centre for studying all the different religions which had mingled in Indian culture. In Rabindranath's words :

"In Indian education we shall have to collect together treasures of Vedic, Puranic, Buddhist, Jaina and Islamic minds. We shall have to find out how the Indian mind has flown along these different channels. By some such means India will feel her identity in her diversity. We must understand ourselves in this extended and interlinked way or else the education we will receive will be like that of the beggar. No nation can be rich on begging."¹⁶

On that note the Santiniketan school launched its effort to become a great centre of learning. Mainly the teachers of the children's school became the students of the new institution. Rabindranath has written in detail of one such teacher .

"Sometime ago our respected *pandit* Vidhusekhar Sastri mahasay was resolving upon a plan. Our *tols* and *chatuspathis* concentrated on the learning of Sanskrit ignoring all other knowledge. The education they gave was therefore incomplete. Education will be complete and true only when we draft all kinds of learning on to a genuine Indian education. We must first build a receptacle for knowledge of our own and then gather the material to be put into it. Sastri mahasay began to put this plan into operation. But he could not do it then for many difficulties came in his way. He even left the *asram* for a period in order to work on it.

"Then again we invited him back to the *asram*. This time we spared him from taking classes. He devoted himself to the study of languages. It seemed to me that this was a proper undertaking

at a centre of learning. If those who are truly willing to learn will gather round such savants that would be good ; and if our country is unfortunate and such gatherings do not happen even then the effort will not be wasted. This is much better than getting the boys to learn vocabularies and foreign clichés by rote and thus turn into parrots.

“This is how our work began. This was the seed for Visva-Bharati.”¹⁷

Rabindranath associated four kinds of people with Visva-Bharati. First there were the *acharyas*, the learned savants from abroad. They were among the most eminent scholars of the world. Of those who came to Santiniketan were Sylvain Lévi (1921-22), Moritz Winternitz (1922-23), Vincent Lesny (1922-23), Sten Konow (1923-24), Carlo Formichi (1924-25), Guiseppe Tucci (1924-25), and the Malariologist Dr. Harry Timbres (1928-30). Secondly, there were the students or *chhātra*, those who had already attained proficiency in any one discipline but joined Visva-Bharati for furthering their knowledge as students or *chhātra*. As we have mentioned earlier the main body of the students were the learned teachers of the Santiniketan school. A few devoted ones came from outside. Some of them came weekly from Calcutta University to join the Visva-Bharati classes. Needless to add they were themselves researching in their special fields. Thirdly, there were the eminent teachers, *adhyāpaka*, on whom depended the Visva-Bharati curriculum. We come across references to them in Rabindranath’s writings. He wrote :

“Our teachers are assembled. There is Vidhusekhar Sastri-mahasay as well as the Mahasthabir (High Priest) from Ceylon for teaching Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit and the Sastras. Kshitimohan Babu has enriched us with his presence, as has Bhimsastri-mahasay. At the other end all the enthusiasts of English literature have gathered round Andrews. Bhimsastri and Dinendranath have the charge of teaching music, and Nakuleswar Goswami from Vishnupur is coming to join them with *surbāhār*. Sriman Nandalal Bose and Surendranath Kar are ready to teach art. Students have come to them even from far-away lands. Besides this we shall all join the work and contribute as we can. A

friend from Bihar will soon be with us. He will be teaching Persian and Urdu and will work on old Hindi literature in collaboration with Kshitimohan Babu. Teachers from outside, we hope, will also come occasionally and help us with their advice.”¹⁸

There was a fourth group of persons whom Rabindranath associated with Visva-Bharati. They were the *bāndhab*, those who were Friends of Visva-Bharati, well-wishers from all over India and abroad. From time to time they would be invited to write, to lecture, to donate and to raise funds for Visva-Bharati. Thus the Visva-Bharati household would welcome not only those who would devote their life's work to it but also those who would remain outside and still support its activities. In this context the Santiniketan Asramik Sangha, an association of former students and friends of Santiniketan, formed in 1911 deserves mention. 'Monetary help', as Rabindranath put it 'is not the only kind of help.'¹⁹ Even now it supports Santiniketan in many ways. After Visva-Bharati was established an association of Friends in Calcutta was formed called Visva-Bharati *Sammiti*. Both Rabindranath and Elmhirst spoke at its meetings on the ideals and work of Santiniketan and Sriniketan.

In these various ways Visva-Bharati was to be made into a seat of Indian cultures; it was to be an unconventional centre of learning, and a pioneer in rural reconstruction; in addition to all this Visva-Bharati was to acquire an international persona. These however were not separate conceptions. They did not necessarily come to Rabindranath in chronological succession. Rabindranath had always carried this totality of Visva-Bharati in his mind. There are many instances to show that. We may refer to Hori San who came from Japan in 1902, the first foreign student of Santiniketan in its early years as a *brahmacharya-sram*. He was a Sanskritist who came to work further on Sanskrit at Santiniketan. Rabindranath and his friend Jagadish-chandra Bose were very enthusiastic about Hori San. They had plans of getting Hori San to copy out for Santiniketan the Sanskrit texts preserved in the temples of China and Japan. Santiniketan would then go beyond India and reach out to another end of the world. We find Rabindranath writing to Jagadish-chandra on 20 June 1902,

“A Japanese student has come to my Santiniketan school to

study Sanskrit. He is a good boy. He has become almost one of us.”²⁰

In answer Jagadishchandra wrote on 1 January 1903,

“I am constantly thinking of your school. The more I think the more I am convinced that out of it will arise a great national centre of learning in the future. There is much to talk about on this ; that will be when we meet. But one thing we must soon do. That will be easily done, later we can do it on a larger scale. But we must not lose the present opportunity.

“Satish (Satishchandra Ray) will go to Java. But we must collect copies of manuscripts from China and Japan very soon.

“This is my plan. Get a student knowing both Sanskrit and English to spend six months in the Asiatic Society to familiarize himself with Buddhist manuscripts in Tibetan and in other languages. Then along with Mr. Hory he can go to the monasteries of China and Japan and copy out the manuscripts in Bengali and Devnagari scripts. We must get Hory to agree to this. We must pay the expenses for it. We may be able to enlist Hory’s sympathy for this noble purpose. And we must start establishing contact with important people in Japan and China right away. We will collect enough information from these first explorations. After that we must launch out on a more systematic enquiry. This preliminary work will indicate further fruitful lines of enquiry.”²¹

At every step Rabindranath tried to associate Santiniketan with the world at large. He wrote to his son Rathindranath in 1916 :

“The Santiniketan school must be made the thread linking India with the world. We must establish there a centre for humanistic research concerned with all the world’s peoples. The age of narrow chauvinism is coming to an end for the sake of the future, the first step towards this great meeting of world humanity will be taken in these very fields of Bolpur. The task of my last years is to free the world from the coils of national chauvinism.”²²

The new idea was one of coordination and cooperation of the cultures of the world. A true centre of Indian culture would foster the creative and the universal, first in India’s many cultures, and then in those of the world at large. It was this idea

that gave birth to Visva-Bharati, the International University, 'where the whole world finds its nest'.²³

Establishing a link with the world was one aspect of the Santiniketan Visva-Bharati ideal of totality from its very inception. On the other hand was its ideal of total activity, the attempt to make education relate to life in all its aspects. Sriniketan was deliberately made into a laboratory for this endeavour although the spirit of it was always there in the Santiniketan education. Visiting the villages and getting acquainted with them had for instance been part of the curriculum for the students and teachers of Santiniketan. In 1906 Rabindranath had sent two boys of the Santiniketan school, his own son Rathindranath and his friend's son Santoshchandra Majumdar and his son-in-law Nagendranath Ganguli to America to study agriculture and dairy-keeping. A year before, in 1905, he had started a scheme for rural reconstruction not at Santiniketan but in his ancestral estates of Silaidah and Patisar. In 1912 he had bought the Surul *kuthibari* for ten thousand rupees from Colonel Narendraprasanna Sinha of Raipur. The old decrepit building was restored and the surrounding overgrowth cleared to start work on Rabindranath's long-resolved plan for rural reconstruction in the surrounding villages. Rathindranath and Nagendranath started the work but were stricken with malaria and had to return. In 1913 Santosh Mitra, a teacher of the Santiniketan school, was sent to live in the Surul *kuthibari*, start some agriculture and establish contact with the neighbouring villagers. In 1921, at the time of the Non-Cooperation Movement, C. F. Andrews and Nepalchandra Ray as well as some boys from Santiniketan went to the villages to preach Non-Cooperation and had camped in the Surul *kuthibari*. The rural reconstruction programme as envisaged by Rabindranath took its full form when Leonard Elmhirst came from England and joined it at the end of 1921. Kalimohan Ghose and Gourgopal Ghosh, two teachers from Santiniketan along with ten students started the work with Elmhirst. The name 'Sriniketan' came into use in 1923. In that year the Institute of Rural Reconstruction was established. The Surul *samiti* which came into existence in 1922 had already started the Sriniketan work under the Surul Department of Agriculture. At the beginning Elmhirst took the

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major thrust of the programme to be the improvement of agriculture. But Rabindranath wanted a total improvement in the village taking in agriculture, education, health and social living. Elmhirst soon appreciated the importance of this approach. Sriniketan's contribution to village reconstruction work is this concept of a total approach. Within this approach however laboratory research was throughout a major objective at Sriniketan.

The idea was that the fruits of this research were to be carried to the villages. For research and experiment in agriculture the Surul farm was started in 1922 and during the first year²⁴ new crops like millet and jute were grown on this farm. Chemical manure was used here for the first time in 1926. Villagers from the surrounding areas watched the results keenly. Needless to add increase in the productivity of land was the primary object of the Sriniketan work. At the same time organizing a health programme for general medical care and the eradication of malaria were equally important. The Sriniketan dispensary was established in 1923 and the cooperative health societies from 1932. All this work was not limited to Sriniketan boundaries. Implementation went beyond, like sanitation work in the villages, the clearing of jungles, the spraying of kerosene into *dobas* and pits. These measures were taken in the villages but Sriniketan was the centre from where all of it was organized.

At the centre economists, agriculturists, social workers, doctors, midwives and specialists in various fields of rural industry and education experimented and worked together to solve different aspects of the rural problem. Villagers came with their problems and tried out some of the results of the experiments in their fields. Research and the application of research made up the Sriniketan method. That was its Extension work. In addition a scout movement was organized, known as the *brati-balaka samgathana*. It was started at village Mahidapur in 1922. The aim was to make the village self-reliant. It was hoped that mobilizing the children would draw in the elders. As more villages joined the Sriniketan experiment, an approach had to be devised to involve the boys in each village and the *brati-balaka* method was found to be the simplest and the least expensive. The objective was to awaken in the minds of the village

elders, torn by disputes among themselves, the need for cooperation as well as to remove from their minds suspicion over Sriniketan. In the decade of the thirties there were *brati-balaka* organizations in nineteen villages.

In our discussion of Sriniketan's activities we have identified till now two different approaches. First, the emphasis on the importance of Sriniketan as a centre from which rural reconstruction services would overflow into the villages; and second, the emphasis on Mahidapur and its scout movement. One was complementary to the other. Besides these two approaches, education in itself became a major part of the Sriniketan organization in the first decade of its existence. There were different levels at which education was imparted. The *brati-balaka* method was one. There was also Sriniketan's extension service mentioned earlier. In addition, the Sriniketan authorities invited apprentices from villages on stipends of twenty rupees to be attached for a year or more to the different departments of village organization, agriculture and industries, health and sanitation. Besides, training camps of one month's duration were organized. In 1924 Kalimohan Ghose had organized three such camps to which thirty-four trainees from twenty-two villages came. At Sriniketan itself there were four different educational institutions: the Siksha-satra (1924) for village boys, the Loka-Siksha Samsad (1936) for those who wanted to study without going to school and college, the Siksha-charcha Bhavana (1937) for village school teachers and the Diploma (1922) in Rural Reconstruction for college students. A fundamental premise of the Sriniketan education was in its teaching of handicrafts. These included leather work, weaving, book-binding, needle-work, pottery, wood-carving, lacquer craft, *durrie*-making, and block-printing. The learning of at least one of these handicrafts was compulsory for the students in all the departments. Handicrafts were taught at Silpa Bhavana (1922).²⁵

One other major effort of Sriniketan's was in setting up co-operative societies. The Visva-Bharati Central Cooperative Bank was established in 1927 with jurisdiction over the three southern Birbhum *thanas* covering an area of three hundred square miles and a population of two lakhs. In all two hundred co-operative societies were established in this area for agricul-

tural credit, irrigation, granaries etc. This kind of work could only be done on the basis of village-surveys. Sriniketan took up such surveys from the beginning. In 1926 an important survey of village Ballavpur was conducted by Kalimohan Ghose. Specialists depended on these surveys for their total approach to the village. The Sriniketan programme underwent a change in the late thirties. The comprehensive development of a few selected villages continued as also the idea of making villages self-reliant. But they were no longer the important aspects of Sriniketan's work. The main effort was to produce and market the handicrafts of the Silpa-Bhavana so as to earn a significant revenue. The idea was to make Sriniketan financially viable, in fact profitable.

Now let us turn to the teaching and the life on Santiniketan campus. Santiniketan curriculum included music, dance and drama, drawing and craft right from its inception. Village work was equally a part of this programme. In the Visva-Bharati phase all these activities came to be specially cultivated. There were several institutions or departments of learning under Visva-Bharati. These taken together made Visva-Bharati into a world of its own. If we now review the institutions of Visva-Bharati functioning at Santiniketan at the time of Rabindranath's death in 1941 then the school Patha-Bhavana commands our first attention. In the early years during 1901 to 1921 this school was known as the Santiniketan *brahmacharyasram*, during 1921 and 1924 it came to be called the Visva-Bharati *purbavibhaga*, and from 1925 it became Patha-Bhavana of Visva-Bharati. Among other institutions there was Siksha-Bhavana or the Santiniketan College. It was established in 1921. According to the ideals of Visva-Bharati the college ran what was known as the Visva-Bharati course consisting of studies in culture, art, and social work. Many who took up this course were from nationalist background, even contemporary Non-Cooperators who had left government schools and colleges spurning university degrees. In 1925 however concern for the students' livelihood led to the introduction of Calcutta University courses at the I.A., I.Sc., and B.A. levels in Siksha-Bhavana. The examinations were conducted by Calcutta University and the degrees were given by them. Above Siksha-Bhavana was Vidya-Bhavana, the centre for

research and higher studies of Visva-Bharati. It had started under the designation of the Department of Advanced Studies in 1921. The name Vidya-Bhavana was used in 1925. The subjects of study included Hindu philosophy, medieval mysticism, Islamic culture, Zoroastrian philosophy, Bengali literature and history, Hindusthani literature, Vedic and classical Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, Chinese, Tibetan, Persian, Arabic, Hindi, Bengali, German and Latin.

Apart from Patha-Bhavana, Siksha-Bhavana and Vidya-Bhavana the other important institutions of Visva-Bharati were Kala-Bhavana, School of Fine Arts, and Sangit-Bhavana, School of Music and Dance. We have said earlier that music and drawing and crafts were important to the school from its inception. At the time Visva-Bharati was projected Rabindranath wrote emphatically, "The teaching of Indian music and art would be the two important limbs of Visva-Bharati when it is established."²⁶ Music and art were being taught at Kala-Bhavana from 1921. Sangit-Bhavana as a separate faculty was established only in 1933. Sangit-Bhavana curriculum included *Rabindra Sangit* and Hindusthani classical music, Manipuri and South Indian dances, the teaching of *Isrāj*, *sitar* and the *tabla*. Courses at Kala-Bhavana were in painting, sculpture, wood-carving, lithography, *ālpanā* or floor-painting, needlework, batik or wax-painting, and leather work. Other institutions were added to Visva-Bharati in the 1930's. Cheena-Bhavana, Department of Sino-Indian Studies, came into existence in 1937 with assistance from the Government of China. The courses at Cheena-Bhavana included Chinese language, literature, philosophy, history and culture. Many students came to Cheena-Bhavana from Tibet, Thailand and Sri Lanka (Ceylon). Hindi-Bhavana, Department of Hindi Studies, was established with the aim to link Santiniketan with the literatures and philosophies of other Indian regions through the medium of Hindi.

All these institutions comprised Santiniketan, and Santiniketan and Sriniketan together comprised Visva-Bharati. There were however facets of Visva-Bharati's activities not included in this enumeration. An important part was its publication programme. Books from Visva-Bharati have become a part of Bengali life and Bengali culture. We shall discuss the publication of the

collected works of Rabindranath as also the series called *Visva-vidya Samgraha* later. Let us mention here the work of the school committee by the name of the *Patha-Bhavana Prakas Samiti*, now called *Santiniketan Prakasan Samiti*, which began publishing school textbooks during Rabindranath's life-time. Some of these texts have been accepted as texts for the use of other schools, the *Schaj Path* for example. Parts I and II of this book were written by Rabindranath and Parts III and IV of the book as well as *Itihas Parichay* Parts I and II were selections edited by the teachers of the school. Another early publication of this committee which still continues is the journal *Amāder Lékhā*. Its most recent publication is *Santiniketan Vidyālayér Sikshādarsa* (The Educational Ideals of the Santiniketan School).

Another facet of Santiniketan and Sriniketan which we must recall is its seasonal festivals. These festivals which were introduced by Rabindranath in the early years of the school are still a part of the life of the place. These occasions celebrate the seasons, commemorate great men, and represent some of the symbols of Man's religion. The year begins with celebrating the Bengali New Year, *Nababarsha*, on the First of *Baisakh*. Then comes *Varṣāmangal* celebrating the first rains. The full moonday of *Aṣār*, the day which commemorates the Buddha, is observed to mark the introduction of the wheel of Righteousness known as the *Dharmachakraprabartan*. In *Srāvaṇa*, July-August, the Tree Planting Ceremony, *Vriksharopana*, and the festival of the New Tillage or the Ploughing Ceremony, *Halakarṣana*, are held in Santiniketan and Sriniketan. On the last day of *Bhādra*, in August-September, the *Silpōtsava* exhibiting products of the Sriniketan industries is held at Sriniketan. In December, on the Seventh of *Pous*, a festival and a fair, *Pous-utsava* and *Pous mela*, are held commemorating the Maharshi's initiation into the Brahmo religion, the foundation of the Santiniketan *asram*, the Santiniketan school as well as of Visva-Bharati. Soon after follows *Christotsava* (Christmas) celebrating Christ's birth. On the Eleventh of *Māgh* in the month of February *Māghōtsava* is observed. Then comes the Spring festival, *Vasantōtsava*, on the day of the *Holi*. On the last day of the Bengali year, *Barsha-sésh*, there is evening service in the *mandir*, Santiniketan's hall

of prayer. The tenth of March according to the English calendar is Visva-Bharati's day for remembering Mahatma Gandhi. On this day in 1915 Gandhiji had introduced complete self-help for the boys and the teachers of the *asram* without the help of any servants according to his ideal of *swaraj*. This made for no permanent change in the life of the *asram* yet the day on which the experiment was launched is observed as *Gandhi-punyāha*. On this day every year the students and teachers of Visva-Bharati clean the grounds and classrooms themselves without the help of the servants.

More institutions were added to Santiniketan and Sriniketan in the 1940's, after the death of Rabindranath. One of the first was Rabindra-Bhavana, initiated in 1941, on the death of the poet, in memoriam. It became a Tagore repository with Rabindranath's paintings, his manuscripts, his letters, his books in their different editions and in their translations in many different languages. Over the years Rabindra-Bhavana also became the centre for research on Rabindranath for both scholars at Visva-Bharati and for those outside. In 1941 a Family and Child Welfare Clinic was started at Sriniketan with government aid. A teacher's training college, Vinaya-Bhavana, was established in 1948. In 1951 Visva-Bharati was made into a Central University. During the same year the Institute of Rural Reconstruction and the Silpa-Sadana were merged into the Palli Samgathana Vibhaga, Department of Rural Reconstruction, at Sriniketan. The departments of agriculture and dairy-keeping, health and education and rural survey as well as the Silpa-Sadana training and production units were all brought under the Palli Samgathana Vibhaga. In 1954 the Agro-Economic Research Centre was established with the cooperation of the Government of India. In 1955 the Siksha-Satra was transformed into a secondary school like Patha-Bhavana and brought under the Palli-Samgathana Vibhaga. A college of agriculture, the Palli-Siksha Sadana, was instituted in 1963.

After Visva-Bharati became a Central University it retained its Bhavana-structure as it was, till 1971. According to their levels students finished at the school or Patha-Bhavana, graduated from the college or Siksha-Bhavana and became post-graduates at Vidya-Bhavana or the department of research and higher

studies. Besides these, independent courses of studies were offered at Cheena-Bhavana, Hindi-Bhavana, Kala-Bhavana and Sangit-Bhavana as well as at Vinaya-Bhavana and at Palli-Siksha Sadana. This structure was rearranged in 1972. Since then Vidya-Bhavana has become the College of Humanities and Siksha-Bhavana the College of Science. Hindi-Bhavana and Cheena-Bhavana became departments of the College of Humanities but Kala-Bhavana, Sangit-Bhavana and Vinaya-Bhavana remained autonomous faculties as before. Physics and Chemistry, Mathematics, Zoology and Botany became departments of the College of Science, Siksha-Bhavana. Undergraduate and graduate courses in humanities are offered at Vidya-Bhavana and at Siksha-Bhavana in the sciences. There have been changes in the structure of the school too. In 1976 post-matriculation or *uchchya-mādhya-mik* classes were introduced at Uttar-Siksha Sadana, the Higher Secondary School. After finishing school at Visva-Bharati or elsewhere students come to Uttar-Siksha Sadana and from there go on to Vidya-Bhavana or Siksha-Bhavana.

However despite these changes earlier patterns of work continue. At Sriniketan for instance the Palli-Samgathana Vibhaga has undertaken village extension work in a group of twenty-five villages since 1974. The Palli-Siksha Sadana has undertaken the work of agricultural extension in these same villages. In 1974 also a short-term training programme was instituted at Silpa-Sadana. Several craftsmen are engaged in training in various crafts. A new addition to rural studies at Sriniketan has been the Palli-Charcha Kendra, Centre for Rural Studies, established in 1977.

Santiniketan and Sriniketan as we know them today are successors to Rabindranath's Santiniketan and Sriniketan. There is still the evident touch of Rabindranath in Sriniketan today. At Santiniketan too old ways have not been forgotten. Colleges of agriculture to take one example abound in independent India but a centre like Sriniketan with its training in agriculture and village extension work, its social work, and its rural studies as well as a school like Siksha-Satra is rare anywhere and still carries an imprint of Rabindranath's total approach. In Santiniketan the school reminds us of life as it was. Open-air classes go on as they did in the first days. Seasonal festivals, prayer

services at the mandir, its music, give us glimpses into the past life of the asram.

Besides the size of the institution which has grown many times over since Rabindranath began his school at Santiniketan, there has been fundamental change only in two things, the introduction of examinations and degrees and, secondly, in financial means. In Rabindranath's Santiniketan and Sriniketan there were no examinations leading to degrees. But Visva-Bharati today offers degrees in all subjects, in most subjects upto Ph.D., at par with other universities of the University Grants Commission.

The other change has been in the sphere of finances. Rabindranath started his school with only five boys depending upon his own limited resources eked out only to a small extent by support from others. In this work Rabindranath had with him Brahma-bandhav Upadhyaya along with his Christian desciple Rewa Chand. They expected nothing from the school by way of financial support. Other teachers who came later were content also with very little. In the earliest years no fees were taken from the boys. The school depended on the eighteen hundred rupees which came annually from Maharshi Debendranath's Trust. Rabindranath's own income then was no more than about two hundred rupees a month. Mrinalini Debi had sold her jewellery to meet the expenses of the Santiniketan school at its inception. Rabindranath sold his bungalow at Puri. Later he gave the entire money from his Nobel Prize to the school. A major problem of Santiniketan and Sriniketan continued to be financial stringency despite help from India and abroad. Such help came from individuals as well as from institutions. Among the institutions the Halwasiya Trust deserves mention. Donations from the Tripura Raj came to the school from the beginning. Generous help also came from the maharajas and rajas of Baroda, Jaipur, Pithapuram, Kathiawar, Porebander, Limdi, Awagarh, the Nizam of Hyderabad as also from some rich merchants and even some who were not so rich. Donations from abroad also flowed into Santiniketan. William Pearson gave his all to Santiniketan at the time of his sudden death. That went towards building the Pearson Memorial Hospital at Santiniketan. Deenabandhu Andrews not only gave his all but also raised funds for Visva-Bharati from all over the world. It is not an exaggeration to say that

he gave his life to Santiniketan. The work at Sriniketan was made possible only with the long years of financial assistance from Dorothy Straight, wife of Leonard Elmhirst. An unknown friend from France, Madame Dina, donated money for a dynamo in Santiniketan. The treadle-machine with which the Press was started at Santiniketan in 1917 was a gift from the American town of Lincoln.

In 1922 Rabindranath gave Visva-Bharati the copyright of all that he had written in Bengali till then and for the distribution of these works the Visva-Bharati Publishing Department (Visva-Bharati Granthana Vibhaga) was established in Calcutta in 1923. From 1939 this department has been publishing the complete works of Rabindranath Tagore (*Rabindra-Rachanābali*) in Bengali, twenty-nine volumes of which have appeared to-date. It has also fulfilled Rabindranath's cherished wish by publishing the two series, *Lokasikshā Granthamalā* and *Visva-Vidyā Samgraha*.

Money earned from the sales of Visva-Bharati's Publishing Department was an important support for Visva-Bharati throughout. Money however was always Rabindranath's problem. He toured India several times with dance-drama troupes from Santiniketan. This did more by way of spreading Santiniketan's culture than by way of raising funds. Gandhiji himself collected a great deal of money to meet Visva-Bharati's deficit. He did not want that Rabindranath should tire himself out in his old age. At his death bed Rabindranath entrusted Visva-Bharati to Gandhiji's care. Gandhiji discharged his responsibility fully. With Rabindranath and Gandhi and Andrews all gone it was not possible for Visva-Bharati to depend entirely on donations. So the Government of India responding to a plea from Santiniketan turned Visva-Bharati into a Central University. Rabindranath had never accepted money from the government for Santiniketan. But that was because India was not then a free country. Accepting government's help was no longer a problem in independent India.

NOTES

1. This place is now known as *tin-pāhār*.
2. This tank is to the right on the road leading to Bhubandanga from Santiniketan.
3. Aghōrnath Chattopadhyaya and Jnanendranath Chattopadhyaya, *Santiniketan Asram*, Calcutta, 1357, pp. 13-14.
4. Rabindranath Tagore, *Asramer rūp-o-bikāsh*, Visva-Bharati, 1967, p. 55.
5. This was the old library. The present Central Library Building is situated elsewhere. The old library building now houses the Patha-Bhavana office on its ground floor and Patha-Bhavana's History department on its first floor.
- 6-8. Rabindranath Tagore, *Asramer rūp-o-bikāsh*, Visva-Bharati, 1967, pp. 24-26; pp. 52-54; p. 47.
- 9-13. Rabindranath Tagore, *Visva-Bharati*, Visva-Bharati, 1963, pp. 9-10; pp. 13-15; p. 24; p. 31; p. 32.
14. Rabindranath to Satish Chandra Ray, *Visva-Bharati Patrika*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1354, pp. 202-03.
15. Rabindranath Tagore, *Asramer rūp-o-bikāsh*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
- 16-18. Rabindranath Tagore, *Visva-Bharati*, *op. cit.*, p. 8; pp. 16-17; p. 18.
19. "Rabindranath's Letter", *Sabuj Patra*, Asvin 1333, p. 6.
20. Rabindranath to Jagadish Chandra Bose, 20 June 1902 : Rabindranath Tagore, *Chitthipatra*, vol. 6, Visva-Bharati, 1957, p. 49.
21. Jagadish Chandra Bose to Rabindranath Tagore, 1 January 1903 : Jagadish Chandra Bose, *Patrābali*, Calcutta, 1958, pp. 149-50.
22. Rabindranath to Rathindranath, 11 October 1916 : Rabindranath Tagore, *Chitthipatra*, vol. 2, Visva-Bharati, 1349, pp. 55-56.
23. The English version of the Sanskrit motto of Visva-Bharati, *Yatra visvam bhavatyekanidam*.
24. This farm-house built in 1922 is now used by Palli-Siksha Sadana.
25. Pratima Debi, Rabindranath's daughter-in-law, initiated the work of Silpa-Bhavana.
26. *Santiniketan*, monthly journal, Agrahayana 1326, vol. 1, no. 8, p. 7

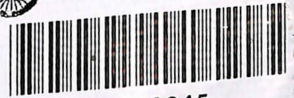
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3. Ajitkumar Chakrabarty : *Brahmavidyālay*, Visva-Bharati, 1358.
4. Rabindranath Tagore : *Visva-Bharati*, Visva-Bharati, 1963.
5. Rabindranath Tagore : *Palli-Prakriti*, Visva-Bharati, 1962.



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