

Sriniketan : Its Aims And Achievements

Sriniketan was founded by Rabindranath Tagore for the same reason as he founded the sister Institute at Santiniketan, namely, to help his countrymen to build their national aspirations on the genuine and self-respecting foundation of their own creative and constructive activities, and to prevent those aspirations from missing their completeness in partial satisfactions in mere industrial and political channels. Just as Rabindranath was too good an educationist to limit the activities of the University at Santiniketan to the development of the mere intellect and widened them to include artistic and emotional training as well, so he proved too great a humanist to restrict the scope of the Visva-Bharati to the making of mere cultural contributions to the life of the people. He never could forget that after all he belonged to a people, the great majority of whom lived in villages, in poverty and ignorance, neglected by the small minority in the towns whom they fed with the toil of their hands. He therefore aimed at linking the educational activities of the Visva-Bharati to the economic and cultural life of the surrounding villages and was fortunate in securing the assistance of that generous-minded Englishman, Mr. Leonard Elmhirst, whose donations have made our rural work on the present scale possible.

Considering the impulse that led to the creation of our Organisation, it was to be expected that the emphasis in our activities would be laid, not on the scientific aspect of the rural problem, on mere survey work and the collection of statistical data, but on the establishment of human contact with the villages so as to

arouse and stimulate in the people a consciousness of their own needs and a capacity to understand and direct their own good. (For it has been an unhappy experience for us to discover that the majority of our people have to be persuaded and worked upon to wish themselves well.) It has been a difficult task to decide in each particular case how much of external material aid the villager requires in order to be able to direct his own activity. The task of directing material aid as a psychological and moral incentive has not been an easy work and has often proved a thankless one, but we have held steadily to it and have never tried to escape this fundamental human responsibility to our village folk in the detachment of a purely scientific survey.

A brief description of some of our main activities is given below :

Our educational programme is three-fold. (i) Our teachers keep in constant touch with the already existing schools in the surrounding villages and hold regular teachers' classes in which methods of instruction and of psychological approach to the pupil are explained and particular cases discussed. (ii) We maintain an experimental residential school of our own in which a limited number of pupils drawn from the neighbouring villages, of various castes, are given instruction in which acquaintance with local conditions and training in village crafts form an important part. (iii) The Government have recently entrusted us with the charge of training teachers for village primary schools from all over Bengal. The scheme has not yet come in full operation but we hope to evolve soon a course of instruction

suiting to the rural life of our province, and adapted to its cultural background and its economic needs. Linked to the school is also a *Brati-balak* or Boy Scout movement which has organised the younger element in the surrounding area into a growing nucleus of social service. Connected with the training of crafts in the school, though run as an independent concern, is the Village Crafts and Industries Department. Under its auspices, many of the decaying crafts of rural Bengal, like weaving and leather work, are being revived, new ones like *batik* introduced and the artistic influences of Santiniketan incorporated in new and original designs and patterns. Students from villages are given scholarship during their period of training and are then helped in setting up as independent workmen.

To help in the improvement of the main occupation of the villagers, agriculture, we maintain a farm, in which improved seeds and crops are tested in local soil and conditions and the results demonstrated to the villagers before the latter are persuaded to use them. For major experiments in agriculture we rely on the results of big government farms. A dairy is maintained with Sindhi cows and bulls, which has helped in introducing a better breed of cattle in the villages. An economic survey is also being conducted in the cost of production of agricultural crops in six specified villages.

But the most vital part of our work has been to help the villagers to organise themselves for their welfare. For example,

after providing them with free medical relief for several years and so getting them used to the benefits of prompt and scientific treatment of diseases, we have now succeeded in persuading groups of villages to organise themselves into "health units", each unit maintaining, with yearly contributions from its members, a doctor and a dispensary; so that villagers now control their own medical relief instead of depending on the charity of outside agencies. This scheme of co-operative health societies has succeeded so well that the Government have also recognised its advantages and are now subsidising the scheme with a yearly grant. We have so far established 6 such units. We are also running a Co-operative Bank to save the needy villagers from the clutches of private money-lenders, and have even succeeded in persuading the Santhals (a primitive tribe) to start and work a Co-operative Purchasing Stores.

Of course, what we have accomplished so far falls far short of what is needed to bring back, to use the words of our Poet, "life in its completeness into the villages". But then, as our experience has familiarised us with the relentless truth, no single private agency can bring back life in its completeness to the people. That can only be done when the people and the State combine their resources and their earnestness in ceaseless efforts of creative reconstruction. Until such a happy conjunction is possible for India, we can only go on patiently digging the ground, and be content with not looking for full results.

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VISVA-BHARATI NEWS



Volume II.

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Number One

Raidas, the sweeper, was a tanner by caste
whose touch was shunned by the wayfarers
and the crowded streets were lonely for him.
Master Ramananda was walking to the temple after his morning bath,
when Raidas bowed himself down before him from a distance.
"Who are you, my friend?" asked the great Brahmin
and the answer came,
"I am mere dust, dry and barren,
trodden down by the despising days and nights.
Thou, my Master, art a cloud on the far-away sky.
If sweet mercy be showered from thee upon the lowly earth,
the dumb dust will cry out in ecstasy of flowers."
Master took him to his breast
pouring on him his lavish love
which made a storm of songs
to burst across the heart
of Raidas, the sweeper.

May 10, 1933.

Rabindranath Tagore

(Sent to Mahatma Gandhi in reply to his telegram).

VISVA-BHARATI NEWS



By Nandalal Bose.

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Number Three

EDUCATION AND FOREIGN CULTURE

Let me state clearly that I have no distrust of any culture because of its foreign character. On the contrary, I believe that the shock of such forces is necessary for the vitality of our intellectual nature. Though our assimilation of the European culture is imperfect and the consequent aberrations numerous, still it is rousing our intellectual life from its inertia of formal habits into glowing consciousness by the very contradiction it offers to our own mental traditions.

What I object to is the artificial arrangement by which this foreign education tends to occupy all the space of our national mind and thus kills or hampers the great opportunity for the creation of a new thought power by a new combination of truths. It is this which makes me urge that all the elements in our own culture have to be strengthened, not to resist the Western culture, but truly to accept and assimilate it, and use it for our food and not as our burden ; to get mastery over this culture, and not to live at the outskirts as the hewers of texts and drawers of book learning.

Rabindranath Tagore



By Nandalal Bose

Volume I.

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Number One

FOREWORD

From a secluded shelter of a few students and educators the Santiniketan school has grown into an Educational Colony of varied departments of activity attracting scholars from far and wide and maintaining a civic life intimately linked up with the wellbeing of villages beyond its confine. The ideal of complete education that lies at the heart of our Institution has taken shape in classes for academic as well as applied knowledge, extending its zone from a wide range of artistic and scholarly activities to practical work in agriculture, dairy, tannery, weaving, as well as in medicine and sanitation. Due to this rapid growth along diverse paths of self-expression it has now become increasingly difficult for members of our Institution to take a wide view of the Visva-bharati as a whole outside their own immediate spheres of work which in order to be fruitful must be informed by the pervading spirit of an inner creative purpose. For friends who visit us for a short time there is a similar danger of emphasizing upon isolated items of work or forming a vague idea of our *Ashrama* life by a hurried attempt to deal at once with all its functions.

I welcome, therefore, the publication of this News Sheet which will fulfil a longfelt need if it can adequately acquaint us with details of work carried on in the different departments of our Institution presenting them in their natural co-ordination in an endeavour to realize the complete personality of Man.

SANTINIKETAN,

June 26, 1932.

Rabindranath Tagore

VISVA-BHARATI NEWS

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On Education

It is needless to say that the purpose of modern Education is to respond to the deepest urge of the present age which is to be rid of the suicidal aggressiveness of the collective egotism of the people. Human history is waiting for uniting all races in a bond of co-operation utilising for the common benefit the variedness of our circumstances and natural capacities. Those habits of thoughts and sentiments which go against it will make us unfit for that great tomorrow when it will be seriously admitted that the spirit of civilisation has its fundamental meaning in a perfect relationship of people based upon a comprehensive responsibility of mutual help. What has been said in the *Upanishads* in the following verse indicating the highest purpose of man is applicable not only to individuals but also to nations.

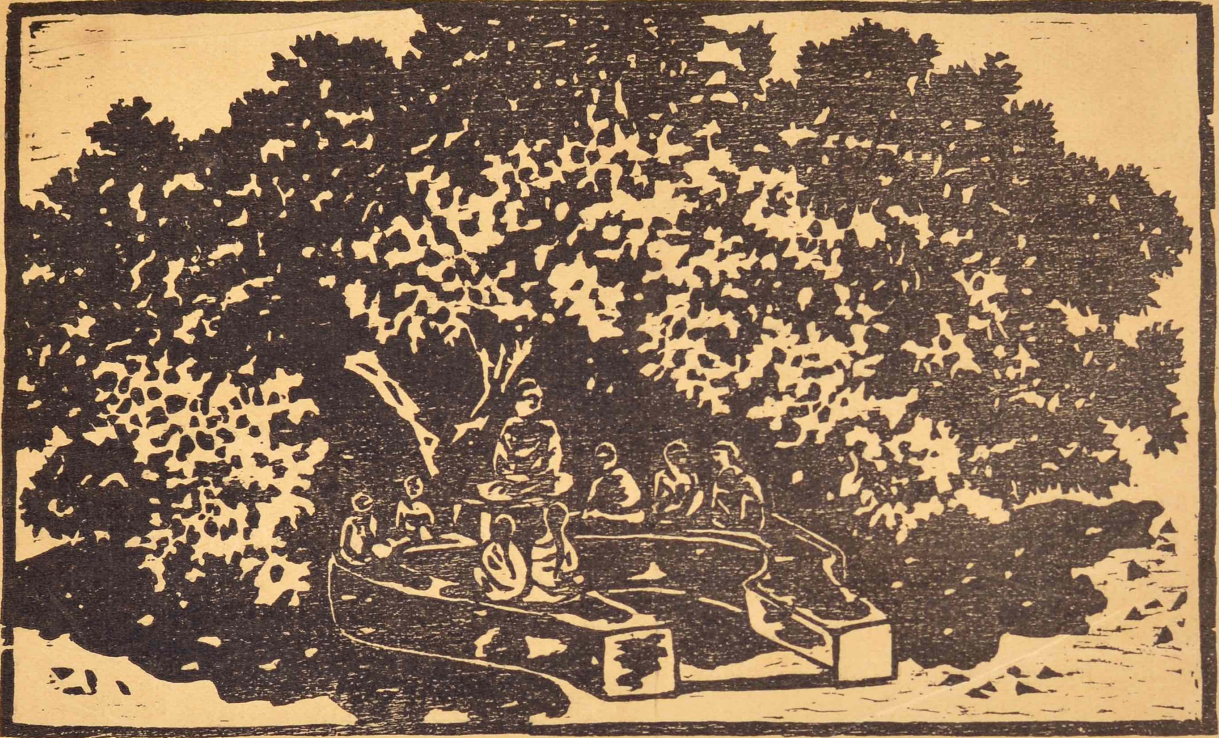
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He who finds himself in all beings and all beings in his own self is revealed in truth.

Rabindranath Tagore

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VISVA-BHARATI NEWS



By Kesava Rao.

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Number Two

IDEALS IN EDUCATION

In education, the most important factor must be the inspiring atmosphere of creative activity. And therefore the primary function of our University should be the constructive work of knowledge. Men should be brought together and full scope given for their work of intellectual exploration and creation ; and the teaching should be like the overflow water of this spring of culture, spontaneous and inevitable. Education can only become natural and wholesome when it is the direct fruit of a living and growing knowledge.

Rabindranath Tagore