

# **Rabindranath Tagore's Rural Reconstruction: Achievements and Failures**

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I'm very happy to be included in this very important celebration of the development efforts in the villages of Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati, and I wish to congratulate all those who have been involved in the steady progress that has been made in these two villages in the areas of cultural preservation and development, education, agriculture, and general self-reliance.

I would especially like to pay tribute to Martin Kaempchen for his vision and dedication to the impressive development that has taken place over a quarter of a century. My personal acquaintance with Martin goes back many years to the 90s when I came out to Santiniketan to do my doctoral research on Rabindranath's educational ideas and practice, and I have able to witness first-hand how the villages have thrived through his gentle but abiding involvement. For my presentation, I've been asked to give an overview and brief assessment of Rabindranath's Rural Reconstruction ideals and practice.<sup>1</sup>

Historically, we know from Tagore's writings that his concern for rural problems began in the 1890s, when at the age of twenty-nine, his father put him in charge of the family's estates in East Bengal. At first his poetic imagination was inspired by the beauty of the countryside, but gradually he became aware of the poverty and oppressiveness which permeated the villages. He felt guilty in his role as zamindar<sup>2</sup> and began to formulate methods for social and economic change.<sup>3</sup> He put up a small centre-cum-library for a village inhabited by some of his Hindu tenants, but it went unused. He engaged a teacher, but the pupils stayed away on various pretexts until, finally, the Muslims from the next village came and asked for a school, and it was established there. Efforts to develop cooperative farming, common water supplies and road-building also met with failure because of fears that someone would get greater advantage. These and other experiences led him to formulate an approach that emphasized community responsibility and transformation of individual consciousness at all levels through education and grass-roots involvement.

Prior to 1921, Tagore had urged mass education in the vernacular through *melas* (country fairs), folk plays, songs, and lantern slide exhibitions.<sup>4</sup> He had also put forth a constructive program, which included merging villages into regional units, under reliable leaders, which would include schools, workshops, granaries, cooperative stores and banks, as well as common meeting places for enjoyment and the settling of disputes.<sup>5</sup>

Though Rabindranath had earlier urged each zamindar to accept responsibility for a village, by the time Sriniketan was inaugurated, he had come to see this type of patronage as destructive to the self-esteem--or *atma-shakti*, as he called it-- of the villagers. As he stated:

I have seen for myself the insults borne by the poor, and the oppression practised by the powerful. Then again, these same powerful men have performed all the public works of the village. This oppression and this patronage have combined to destroy the villages' self-reliance and self-respect. They believed that their hard fate is the result of the *karma* of a previous birth, that if they are re-born in a good family their lot may be bettered, but that no one can save them from the sorrow and poverty of their present life--and this turn of mind renders them extremely helpless.<sup>6</sup>

His son Rathindranath and Santosh Majumdar had been sent to study agriculture at the University of Illinois-Urbana in 1906, and Tagore later put them in charge of the land in Surul which he had purchased in 1912.<sup>7</sup> When Rathindranath returned from Urbana, his father took him on a tour to examine the needs of rural welfare. Tagore had been disappointed with the response to his 'Swadeshi Samaj' and later address at the Pabna Provincial Conference. Not content with mere theory, he set out to create the kind of society he had in mind. He brought some workers including Kalimohan Ghosh to help him in his work at Shelidah and Potisar.

More success was achieved in Kaligram Pargana, which included Potisar with its mixture of Hindus and Muslims and the proximity of several provincial towns like Kustia.<sup>8</sup> For efficient management, he divided estate into three zones (Vibhagas) each with a self-governing organization, but federated to a central administrative body called the Hitaishi Sabha. Each village elected headman. Ten headmen elected a Pradhanan. The Pradhanas again elected five headmen to represent the total estate, called Panch Pradhanas.

An agricultural bank was set up at Potisar with borrowed money, and later Tagore donated some of his Nobel Prize money to the bank. A village society called the Hitaishi Sabha was initiated to provide educational facilities for children including Pathsalas and a high school at Potisar. Other activities included the implementation of crop diversification and the establishment of a weaving school.<sup>9</sup>

It should be noted that the success and continuity of these programs has not been sufficiently researched or assessed.

### **Leonard Elmhirst and the Inauguration of Sriniketan**

Rabindranath's rural reconstruction efforts gained momentum in 1919 when he met Leonard Elmhirst, a British agronomist studying at Cornell and invited him to oversee the rural program at Sriniketan. Elmhirst accepted Tagore's invitation, and with about a dozen students helped to open the Rural Reconstruction Centre in February 1922, which would later be given

the name Sriniketan. The "Aims and Objects" for the Sriniketan workers were stated as:

1. To win the friendship and affection of villagers and cultivators by taking a real interest in all that concerns their lives and welfare, and by making a lively effort to assist them in solving their most pressing problems.
2. To take the problems of the village and the field to the class-room for study and discussion and to the experimental farm for solution.
3. To carry the knowledge and experience gained in the class room and the experimental farm to the villagers, in the endeavour to improve their sanitation and health, to develop their resources and credit; to help them to sell their produce and buy their requirements to the best advantage; to teach them better methods of growing crops and vegetables and of keeping live-stock; to encourage them to learn and practice arts and crafts; and to bring home to them the benefits of associated life, mutual aid and common endeavour.<sup>10</sup>

During the next few years, numerous educational, cultural and developmental initiatives were undertaken through Elmhirst's pragmatic insistence upon increased crop production and Tagore's equally strong insistence that each village must be studied and treated as a whole if long-lasting results were to be gained.

Tagore was sixty-one years old when Sriniketan was inaugurated, and his failing health and age prevented him from taking an active physical part in the affairs of Sriniketan. Elmhirst later observed that, while Tagore's ideas "inspired and penetrated every corner of Sriniketan," he was not involved with the day-to-day problems. For Tagore, the practical steps forward were only a means to the rejuvenation of the villages, and he used to remind Elmhirst and the other workers that practical achievements such as clean milk, fresh eggs and flourishing co-operatives were only a means to a greater end, which was to liberate individual consciousness. Elmhirst writes that from the earliest days Tagore would urge them to draw upon all resources, "in music, song, drama and dance, drawing and design at Santiniketan in order to enrich our lives, to liven our aspirations, to inspire our leisure and to increase our delights in every kind of artistic expression, until we and the cultivators could produce a richness and a wealth of cultural life of our own, and a rejuvenation of those ancient art forms that still survived, but so tenuously, in the villages around us."<sup>11</sup>

From the beginning, the Sriniketan project was one of international cooperation. England was represented by Elmhirst, C.F. Andrews<sup>12</sup> and W.W. Pearson; Japan by wood-working expert Kim-Taro Kashahara; the U.S. by nurse Gretchen Green, followed later by Dr. Harry Timbres and benefactor Dorothy Straight. Sweden was represented somewhat later by weaving instructor Miss Jeanson.<sup>13</sup>

On the Bengali side, Elmhirst had the assistance of an able team. His closest associates were Rathindranath Tagore and Santosh Majumdar. Another invaluable worker was Kalimohan

Ghosh, who had begun some experiments on the Tagore estates in East Bengal and had been sent to England by Tagore to study primary and adult education. Another energetic member of the team was Dhirananda Roy, who helped organize the Brati-Balakas/Brati-Balikas, a group patterned after the boy scouts/girl guides and the American 4-H movement.<sup>14</sup> Their work helped the village children develop various practical skills and overcome caste prejudices through group participation.

The preliminary efforts of the team met with opposition from all sides,<sup>15</sup> and Elmhirst noted that his agricultural skills from Cornell University were of less use than his training in observation. Three common problems were targeted: "monkeys, malaria and mutual mistrust". Elmhirst writes:

.....Results, notable results, were achieved in a small area and in a few villages. Economic returns were such that the rising standard of living in the area was very noticeable. New confidence arose among the villagers.....But time and again the problems baffled us. Without much more university research on the one hand (whether scientific, economic or sociological) and without more intimate contact between us and Government officials, and between officials and villagers at village level, on the other, there could be no progress over the wider areas around us...Another major difficulty was that, from 1920 on, the Government machine under the British tended to work with a mechanical routine and on a day-to-day basis, with much form filling. So many of the rural problems we uncovered needed understanding by officials, who had little or no experience in sitting down with village people in order to get at the root of the trouble.<sup>16</sup>

### **Developing the Sriniketan program**

The Sriniketan program covered four general areas: agriculture, crafts and industries, village welfare and education.<sup>17</sup> The **agricultural unit**--under Elmhirst's zealous direction--included: farming, vegetable gardening, orchards, dairy and poultry, with the later addition of sericulture and a fishery. Soil depletion and erosion were a major problem of the area,<sup>18</sup> and methods such as crop rotation and use of fertilizer were introduced to the villagers through demonstrations and experiments on the Surul farm.<sup>19</sup>

In terms of **cultural enrichment around the agricultural environment**, new festivals such as Hala-Karshana (a plowing ceremony), Briksa Ropana (a tree planting festival), and Nabanna (a fall festival for the new harvest of rice) were introduced.<sup>20</sup> An annual Sriniketan mela (county fair)--which has continued to the present--was inaugurated to celebrate the achievements of Sriniketan and encourage social interchange and cultural initiatives among the villagers.

The **revival of cottage industries and crafts** had been a major goal of Sriniketan, and this department sought to resuscitate and create local industries, initiate new artistic designs<sup>21</sup> and train apprentices. In the craft area, training centres were set up to restore local industries and crafts such as leather work, tailoring, carpentry,<sup>22</sup> lacquer work, raw silk production, pottery, tile-making, canework, tailoring, embroidery, book-binding and so forth.

A separate unit known as Silpa-Bhavan was begun on a small scale in 1922 with the goal of providing vocational training to village apprentices and providing crafts training to the students of the academic departments of Santiniketan and Sriniketan. Silpa Bhavan proved to be one of the most economically successful in Sriniketan and it became an independent unit in 1937. But, its emphasis on economic returns and increased marketing represented a shift in priorities that worked to the detriment of some of the other self-help programs.

An important function of the **village welfare section** was rural health, which like the other initiatives, began on a small scale. Gretchen Green--who opened the first dispensary--indicates in her account that there was a shortage of personnel and medical facilities for treating vast numbers of patients.<sup>23</sup> With the dispensary as a base, Kalimohan Ghose began to organize co-operative health societies in which villagers took out membership entitling them to a limited amount of free treatment.<sup>24</sup> By 1933 three health cooperatives had been established in the villages of Ballabpur, Bandgora and Goalpara. In 1930 Dr. Harry Timbres<sup>25</sup> joined the staff and took over the anti-malaria program. A twenty-seven percent reduction of deaths by malaria was reported between 1928-1948.

Considerable gains were also made in the area of preventive medicine as drains were opened up, tanks disinfected, trenches dug, quinine distributed and small-pox vaccinations administered. Many of the health initiatives were carried out by the Brati-Balakas/Brati-Balikas.

Another aspect of village welfare was the building up of **co-operatives**, though, again, the team had to overcome considerable opposition.<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that the Santals organized a successful cooperative by themselves with assistance from the Institute in 1936. The most successful cooperative, in terms of fighting rural indebtedness, appears to have been the Visva-Bharati Central Co-operative Bank, stated in 1927, which had 236 Agricultural Credit Unions attached to it.

Economic research and rural surveys were also carried out by the welfare-section. There was some attempt at land distribution, at least in the early period.

**Educational initiatives** were implemented at all levels. By 1929 there were night classes for children and adults unable to attend day school in twelve villages<sup>27</sup> and one day school for girls.<sup>28</sup> The curriculum included basic literacy, math, crafts and recreational activities. Pioneering work in adult education was carried on through various activities. There was a rural circulating library--the first of its kind in Bengal--which contained 1500 books by 1940. There were also lectures and recitations from the epics and scripture,<sup>29</sup> training camps,<sup>30</sup> *jatras* (folk-plays) and *melas* (fairs). An early form of distance education was initiated through

the Loka-Siksha Samsad, a society which organized home study and examinations for persons who could not attend school.

As well, there were special women's educational projects which were handled by the Mahila Samitis (women's groups) such as nutrition, maternity and child care, literacy and so forth.<sup>31</sup>

One of the most notable and successful educational projects of Sriniketan was **Siksha-Satra** ("where education is given freely"), which began in July, 1924, after six destitute boys were placed under the care of the Institute.<sup>32</sup> The learning framework--created by Rabindranath, Elmhirst and Santosh Majumdar--reflected a more practical adaptation to village life of the Santiniketan ideals such as natural environment, child autonomy, perceptual training, learning through creative activities, and development of social responsibility. Some of the basic assumptions underlying the Siksa-Satra experiment were that the program should give maximum scope to the child's imagination and that the child should learn by doing and by experiment.<sup>33</sup>

In 1928, on the seventh anniversary of Sriniketan, Tagore stated his goal of creating a model for village uplift, stating that:

If we could free even one village from the shackles of helplessness and ignorance, an ideal for the whole of India would be established...Let a few villages be rebuilt in this way, and I shall say they are my India. That is the way to discover the true India.

### **Assessing Sriniketan**

In terms of assessing Sriniketan, the most comprehensive analysis of Sriniketan during the 1930s has been done by Uma Das Gupta,<sup>34</sup> and she writes of some of the dilemmas which were being faced at that time. One of the dilemmas concerned the scope of Sriniketan's activities. In the initial stages, the objectives had been concerned with rejuvenation of the cultural and economic life of a few villages. By 1930, however, there were over two dozen rural village workers which were too many for a single village, but the annual income of about fifty thousand rupees was not enough for more extensive work. During the 1930s, under the leadership of Rathindranath Tagore, a new emphasis was put upon Sriniketan's economic self-sufficiency, thus causing a shift in policy away from the village self-help program. Writes Das Gupta:

Villagers continued to be employed as Sriniketan but now they were employees of the institution rather than men who were to be helped to organize themselves and become self-supporting...The change which Rathindranath pioneered may eventually be recognized as a landmark in Indian cultural history but in the context of our discussion it served to de-emphasize the older ideals and instil a different approach.<sup>35</sup>

In assessing the impact of Sriniketan, various aspects must be taken into account. There are the statistically verifiable achievements found in the reports of Elmhirst, P.C. Lal, and others such as greater crop output, soil reclamation and reforestation, upgrading of livestock, reduction of deaths due to epidemics, creation of cooperatives, revival and creation of cottage industries, establishment of schools and higher rates of literacy, and so forth. One of the most specific studies done by Sugata Dasgupta on the village of Laldaha notes that when Sriniketan started its work there in 1930, the villagers were "steeped in debt and lay shackled in the hands of indigenous money-lenders who controlled their social and political destinies as well." He reports that:

A comparative survey of the living conditions of this village carried out in 1959 with the base line date 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 to 100%. 100% of children of the school going age attended their school...income per capita is Rs 35/- as compared with Rs 16/- of the neighbouring villages.<sup>36</sup>

Dasgupta's survey of villages affected by Sriniketan programs also finds a proportionately higher number of democratic organizations in the villages.

There are also the successes of the staff and students and the influences of Rabindranath's approach on other projects which, though less statistically verifiable, are generally acknowledged.<sup>37</sup>

The most difficult aspects to assess are the humanistic and cultural initiatives which Rabindranath felt to be so important. As he wrote to Elmhirst: "The valuable gift of sympathy in some of our humble workers has worked a miracle which must not be contemptuously mentioned because it has not been measured nor accurately recorded."<sup>38</sup> The achievement of cultural rejuvenation within the village, would, in his words, "impart life-breadth to the complete [hu]man, who is intellectual as well as economic: bound by social bonds, but aspiring towards spiritual freedom and final perfection."<sup>39</sup>

When one looks at all these aspects, the achievements of Sriniketan are considerable. Yet it is surprising--given the amount of talent, energy, good will and financial backing which went into the Sriniketan experiment--that the results were not more dramatic or far-reaching. It is puzzling that even within Tagore's lifetime, many of the most innovative programs such as Siksha-Satra and the village-self help schemes had been restructured in a less creative way, and that, in general, the transformation of consciousness that Rabindranath sought to achieve was not more evident. Tagore himself acknowledged some of the difficulties of Sriniketan in a letter to Elmhirst in September, 1932. Stating that "forces are working for creating a complete deviation from the path which we pursued when we first began our work," Tagore conceded that the unlimited freedom which he had given the staff had resulted in a fragmented program. He

also found that the approach of the "Experts" had undermined the establishing of sympathetic relationships with the villagers. As he wrote:

..The ideal which I cherish in my heart for the work I have been struggling to build through the best portion of 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 which we wanted to establish--although the experts' advices are valuable...You had human sympathy in abundance which was the principal motive power that carried you across all the difficulties that stood against you in village reconstruction work, for it was living work comprehending village life in all its various activities and not merely productive of analytic knowledge.<sup>40</sup>

That the Tagore-Elmhirst principles were viable ones can be seen in the present-day context of the Elmhirst Institute at Sriniketan.<sup>41</sup> One can also look to the various non-official initiatives involving both Bengalis and non-Bengalis that have developed around Santiniketan and have been inspired by the Tagore-Elmhirst principles. Within Santiniketan, there is the Antaranga School, which provides free primary education to children in the area, who would otherwise not receive schooling. At a distance from Santiniketan, there is the Suchana project that has been developed by Kirsti Milgard and Rahul Bose to provide educational enrichment and village activities for those in the area. One can also visit Sishu Tirtha, an orphanage and learning centre inspired by Tagorean principles that has been set up by Supriyo Tagore, former Principal of Patha Bhavan. As well, there are the special societies particularly devoted to village women such as "Ahimsa Trust" and "Alcha" that have been organized by Chandana Dey and Keya Sarkar to encourage the production and marketing of handicrafts and textiles.<sup>42</sup> One can also not discount the acknowledged influence that Tagore has had upon two Nobel Prize winners--Amartya Sen and Mohammad Yunus--in their efforts to alleviate rural poverty and extend banking services to the poor.

Of course, one of the most notable efforts in village uplift is the one that we're celebrating today in the Santhal villages of Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati. We can see how Tagore's ideals of cultural development, agriculture, crafts and industries, village welfare and education have inspired the development. But perhaps the most important of Rabindranath's ideals that we see at work in the villages is his humane holistic approach and notion of *Atma-Sakti* or self-reliance and the transformation of consciousness that was so primary in his vision for village uplift. These are things that we will be hearing about in the following presentations.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is drawn from material on Rabindranath's rural reconstruction efforts to be found in my book: *Rabindranath Tagore: The Poet as Educator*. Kolkata: Visva Bharati, 2002.



<sup>2</sup> "It seemed to me a very shameful thing that I should spend my days as a land-lord," he wrote, "concerned only with money-making and engrossed with my own profit and loss. From that time forward, I continually endeavoured to find out how the villagers' minds could be aroused, so that they could themselves accept responsibility for their own lives." Rabindranath Tagore [hereafter RT], "History and Ideals of Sriniketan," *The Modern Review*, Vol. 70, No. 5 (Nov., 1941), pp. 433-6.

<sup>3</sup> The efforts which Rabindranath had been making on the family's estates were verified by the account of L.S.S. O'Malley, an official for the British in Bengal. Writing in *Bengal Gazetteers--Rajshahi*, 1916, he observed: "It must not be imagined that a powerful landlord is always oppressive and uncharitable. A striking instance to the contrary is given in the Settlement Officer's account of the estate of Rabindranath Tagore. It is clear that to poetical genius he adds a practical and beneficial side as of estate-management which should be an example to the local Zamindars." The settlement officer pointed out how honesty and fair dealing on the part of the estate employees had been strictly enforced, how rent remission had been generously granted to deserving cases, and how education was encouraged and a charitable dispensary run. See Himangshu Bhushan Mukherjee, *Education for Fulness* (Bombay:Asia Publishing House, 1962), p. 315.

<sup>4</sup> RT, "Swadeshi Samaj" ("National Society," delivered in 1904) in *Towards Universal Man* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1961), p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> RT, "Presidential Address" (the first to be delivered in Bengali) to the 1908 Bengal Provincial Conference in Pabna, *Towards Universal Man*, pp. 118-9.

<sup>6</sup> RT, "The History and Ideals of Sriniketan," p. 434.

<sup>7</sup> Surul and its surrounding area had previously been a centre for the indigo factories of the East India Company. Mr. Cheap, the last of the Company's residents, sold the property to the Surul zamindars. They in turn sold it to the East India Railway Company. Workshops were built on the site, then removed. The property was then acquired by the Sinha family of Raipur who sold it to Tagore.

<sup>8</sup> Rathindranath Tagore, "Father as I Knew Him", *Rabindranath Tagore: A Centenary Volume 1861-1961* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1961), p. 53. The work at Patisar has also been described by Prasanta Pal, *Rabi-jibani* vol 3. See also: Shahida Akhter, "The Pioneering Role of Tagore in Mass Education and Social-Economic Development in Bangladesh", *Rabindranath Tagore: Reclaiming a Cultural Icon*, ed. Kathleen M. O'Connell and Joseph T. O'Connell (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 2009), pp. 250-8.

<sup>9</sup> For descriptions of these activities, which anticipated the work of Mohammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank, see: Chittabrata Palit, Manimanjari Mitra, Keya Banerjee, eds., "Co-operative Movement: Silaidaha, Patisar and Sriniketan," *Rural Reconstruction and Rabindranath* (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 2009). pp. 56-9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Leonard Elmhirst, *Rabindranath Tagore: Pioneer in Education* (London: John Murray, 1961), pp. 42-3.

<sup>12</sup> Andrews had spent some time on the Surul farm prior to Elmhirst's arrival, but his team had succumbed to malaria.

<sup>13</sup> Sweden donated looms and other weaving equipment and the expenses for an instructor, Miss Jeanson, who introduced the Sloyd system of weaving.

<sup>14</sup> Elmhirst writes that the group drew inspiration from the 4-H Club Movement which he had observed in America. See *Rabindranth Tagore Pioneer in Education*, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> There were even divisions within the team--especially regarding Gandhian policies--and some of the original members soon left to join Gandhi's political campaign. Elmhirst's diary reveals the political quandary which daily faced the staff and senior students. "Where did each one of us stand?", he writes, "We all listened to, and discussed in detail, the bold claim for instant freedom from British Imperial Rule that Gandhi was making." Leonard Elmhirst, *Poet and Plowman* (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1975), p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> *Rabindranath Tagore: Pioneer in Education*, pp. 40-2.

<sup>17</sup> Some of these areas overlapped and, over the years, there was considerable restructuring and subdividing of the various departments.

<sup>18</sup> In his essay "The Robbery of the Soil," Elmhirst writes that "To continue indefinitely taking any of these life forming elements from the soil, without adequately replacing them, is robbery, not merely of the soil itself, but of the future generations who live upon it...In the olden days enough pulse and sugarcane were grown in Birbhum to satisfy the needs of the community...Now rice is, with a few exceptions, the only crop...Of this rice little or nothing finds its way back to the fields...Even of that portion which remains in the village and is consumed there, the waste is deposited round about the houses, or thrown into the tanks...The hides of the cows find their way to the West and the bones to Japan...Of all the thieves the cities are the most ruthless...The trees that once held the soil to the uplands which were not fit for cultivation found a value in the towns when the railways and roads made transport feasible, and were cut down mercilessly...Worst of all, perhaps is the continual drain of the best brains and bodies, all products of the soil, from the villages into the cities." Leonard Elmhirst, *Poet and Plowman* (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1975), pp. 46-8.

<sup>19</sup> The team learned by trial and error and found that, while demonstrations at the Sriniketan farm were well attended, the villagers argued that conditions were different on their own plots, and therefore the methods wouldn't work. The most effective demonstrations turned out to be those which were worked out in a home or garden plot in a local village, which could then be reproduced in the neighbouring areas.

<sup>20</sup> The Hala-Karshana and Briksa Ropana ceremonies were introduced in 1928; the Nabanna festival was initiated in 1935.

<sup>21</sup> Nandalal Bose was instrumental in the area of craft design at Sriniketan. In 1930 he founded Karu-Sangha, a handicraft cooperative associated with Kala-Bhavan, to help improve the economic life of the artisans.

<sup>22</sup> In 1929 a mechanical workshop was set up, and training was offered in mechanical drawing, smithy, lathe work, and wood and metal turning.

<sup>23</sup> She writes: "This year's statistics show 9,297 patients passing through the Dispensary doors. This isn't a bad record, considering the size, the amount of supplies and the infrequent attendance of the Doctor." See Gretchen Green, *The Whole World & Company* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1936), pp. 118-9, 148.

<sup>24</sup> The 1929 Annual Report states that during the year 6,760 patients were treated from 114 different villages. Of those 3,004 were non-members of the Health Societies, and 3,023 received free treatment. The number of malaria cases was 2,836 of which 1,517 were members. The number of surgical cases was 1,223. See "Sriniketan Annual Report, 1929, *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, vol VII (January, 1929), pp. 453-69.

<sup>25</sup> Harry Timbres, a Quaker had been involved in medical and relief work in Russia during the war.

<sup>26</sup> Elmhirst writes: "The struggle to achieve willing co-operation in simple ways, not involving money, was a long one. Faith in co-operative credit or money schemes had been in some measure destroyed before we arrived; so that it was a long time before the capacity for mutual trust developed to a stage where monetary contributions could be pooled and used for a common purpose, such as a health society, a village vermin proof rice-store, a marketing organization." *Pioneer in Education*, p. 39

<sup>27</sup> The 1927 Annual Report states that there were nine night schools for the depressed classes, and 40 students in the girls school, four of whom had appeared for the lower primary examination. By 1929 the number had increased to 52 under teachers Nanibala Roy and Mirchand Kashara.

<sup>28</sup> Prem Chad Lal reports that the girls came from all castes, and no discrimination was made, and that the school was located in the house of one of the teachers. The curriculum was of the holistic type and included basic literary, gardening, cooking and so forth. "Unfortunately," he writes, "on account of their extreme poverty, the girls of the poorest people have not been able to take advantage of this opportunity." *Reconstruction and Education in Rural India* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1932), p. 81.

<sup>29</sup> The 1929 Sriniketan Annual Report lists twenty-six lectures given in nineteen villages on such topics as Ramayana, the life of Chaitanya, cooperative health and hygiene and the work of Sriniketan and Santiniketan. Attendance was said to be nearly 6,000.

<sup>30</sup> The 1929 Annual Report lists two training camps where instruction was given in scout organization, cottage craft, first aid, elementary agriculture and cooperative organization.

<sup>31</sup> Mrs. Lila Ray--one of the first American students at Santiniketan, and later a member of some of the Mahila Samitis herself--told me in an interview how effective the Mahila Samitis had been under the leadership of Pratima Tagore in bringing women's concerns to the proper authorities and handling various problems in an informal way.

<sup>32</sup> Tagore would have liked to have included girls from the beginning of the project, but village parents were unwilling to let them participate.

<sup>33</sup> Other principles stated:

3. That the text book and the classroom and the competitive examination forbid experiment, clamp down the mind and clip the wings of imagination, and that they must be replaced by cooperative enterprise and experiment in the kitchen, garden, farm and workshop.
4. That education must be for life and not merely for knowledge and livelihood, and therefore that every aspect of adult life, social and economic, shall in an embryo form be brought before attention from the children.
5. That the responsibility of the supervision of the Orphanage shall be to stimulate, to encourage and carefully to supervise, to see that the benefits of homelife, affection and careful attention to small bodily needs and troubles, are available without the limitation of parental conservatism, lack of faith and shortsighted discipline.
6. That the experiment must be primarily social and ethical, rather than economic, scientific or psychological, that is that the children shall be members of a family of their own creation bound by common enterprise, experiment and imaginative explanation, rather than specimens in a laboratory.

7. That the object shall be to promote the growth of citizenship and the cooperative ideal [of] life, in which the earning of a livelihood is subordinated to the fullest expression of individuality in an abundant life.
8. That the fullest life can only be the product of a fellowship in the winning of livelihood and that manual labour is a social privilege of which none shall be deprived.

This typed list of objectives (undated) was among Elmhirst papers in the Dartington Hall archives, England. At the bottom of the list--in Tagore's handwriting--was written that "Students other than orphans may be admitted whose guardians fully approve of this kind of education."..<sup>33</sup>

<sup>34</sup> See Uma Das Gupta, "Rabindranath Tagore on Rural Reconstruction," *The Indian Historical Review*, Vol. IV, no 2 (1979), pp. 354-78. She has also performed the valuable service of rescuing and helping to catalogue many of the Sriniketan records and reports.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 375-6.

<sup>36</sup> Sugata Dasgupta *A Poet and a Plan* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., Private Ltd., 1962), pp. 112-13.

<sup>37</sup> One such example can be found in the Navodaya Vidyalayas, which were established through the National Policy on Education, 1986. The priority of the Vidyalays is to promote education among the poor, rural masses through a scheme of residential schools. Rajiv Gandhi stated in his January 1988 Convocation address at Visva-Bharati that he had been inspired by Tagore's work while creating the scheme. See Kalyan R. Salkar, *Rabindranath Tagore: His Impact on Indian Education* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1990), pp. 137, 148.

<sup>38</sup> Tagore to Elmhirst, Sept 3, 1932. Quoted in Uma Das Gupta, "Rabindranath Tagore on Rural Reconstruction," *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. IV, no 2 (1979).

<sup>39</sup> See Leonard Elmhirst, *Rabindranath Tagore; Pioneer in Education*, p. 95.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Binoy Bhattacharjee, "Rabindranath's Ideals of Rural Reconstruction," in *Rabindranath Tagore and the Challenges of Today*, edited by Bhudeb Chaudhuri and K.G. Subramanyan (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1988), pp. 190-1.

<sup>41</sup> This program, modelled on the Siksha-Satra approach, offers places for fifty women--hindu and muslim--for a three month training period. The women live together in a community setting sharing cooking and gardening facilities. They attend seminars on child care, village health, nutrition, literacy and family planning and learn to give seminars on these topics. In keeping with Tagore's holistic approach, music, art and folklore are also emphasized. After successful completion of the program, the women return to their villages with stipends as village workers. The program has trained over 500 workers who have gone on to build a non-sectarian network in the villages surrounding Santiniketan.

<sup>42</sup> For a description of some of these activities, see: Martin Kaempchen, "THE OTHER SANTINIKETAN~An Alternative Way Of Life," *The Statesman* (12 April, 2009).