



**Running the network of rural  
libraries through voluntary effort  
to extend the education at the  
door step of the community**

Visva-Bharati University  
(A Central University)  
Santiniketan, West Bengal-731235

## Best Practice

### **1. Title of the Practice:**

Running the network of rural libraries through voluntary effort to extend the education at the door step of the community.

### **2. Objectives of the Practice:**

The objectives of running rural libraries are to develop knowledge through regular reading habits among the village readers, dissemination of information and creating a progressive outlook and thereby enhancing the capabilities of the villagers and empowering them. It is an innovative approach to extend education at the door step of the community by providing all updated information regarding modern and advanced science and technology. It intends to providing space for sharing ideas and views with others and creating the scope for healthy cultural exercise as a cultural and continuing education centre. It emphasizes on retention of acquired literacy skill for the neo-literates. Rural library as a centre for sharing, sustaining and strengthening the knowledge base of the people in general and students in particular also improves the quality of rural life.

### **3. The Context:**

Education, Tagore felt, was not only essential for development but was an important tool for establishing human relationship. Therefore, from the very early period effort was made to extend education. Adult Education Centres were established during the early period. In the later phase, *chalantikas* (circulating library) were established with a view to provide books to villagers for exercising their acquired literacy skill. In the next phase, rural library buildings are being constructed with the help of Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) under the Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India to provide a permanent platform to villagers, where they can come together, especially the poor SC & ST families for development of their cognitive faculties, space for information sharing and healthy cultural exercise.

### **4. The Practice:**

Rural Library services are one of the important services through which literacy and education movement are carried out in the villages. Apart from this, another objective of this programme is to develop rural library as an information & cultural centre in the respective villages. Initially the programme was launched as mobile library services in the nearby villages of Sriniketan, which was popularly known as "*Chalantika Granthagar*". To strengthen the programme as well as to extend the services with a motto to facilitate and equip the rural libraries even in the remotest village areas as a centre for learning and store houses of information, Department of Lifelong Learning and Extension (REC), Visva-Bharati collaborates with RRRLF since 1975. Starting with eight permanent rural libraries in 1975, presently the centre has extended it upto 35 in the adjacent rural areas of Sriniketan and Santiniketan within the radius of 10-15 kms. These rural libraries at present are located in two Community Development Blocks of Bolpur Sub-Division namely Bolpur-Sriniketan and Illambazar in Birbhum District.

These libraries are run and managed by the Village Development Societies (VDS), apolitical village level organisations registered under Society Registration Act

1960. Two volunteers usually nominated by the VDS, who act as librarian and manage all library related affairs without any remuneration. Presently, there are 12 children's libraries attached with rural libraries situated in 12 villages. These libraries are equipped with children books, Joyful learning materials, playing materials etc.

Different awareness programme/ seminar /workshop are organized time to time such as strengthening "Swachha Bharat Avijan" and "Beti Bachao and Beti Padhao" in collaboration with Govt. and Non-Govt. organization.

### **5. Evidence of Success:**

Library buildings are constructed in 27 villages with the grant of RRRLF, Kolkata following a participatory approach through active support of VDS and villagers. The villagers become the stakeholders of these initiatives as they themselves contribute in building up their own village libraries in terms of labour, donation and collection.

Each year RRRLF & Visva-Bharati jointly provide books & furniture to each of the 35 rural libraries. The recurring cost of running these libraries has also been provided by the department (REC). These activities include readers meeting, monthly meeting of the librarians with the department, conducting cultural programme on different occasions, binding of soiled books, etc. A total of 1,42,578 books (average 4073 books for each library) of different titles are provided to the rural libraries and initiatives are taken to equip all the rural libraries with computers phase by phase. Computers and printers are also provided to the rural libraries in order to extend the computer literacy of the students and youths of villages; through internet connection the remote villages are made connected to the outer world.

*Sahitya Sabhas* have been organized on cluster basis involving villagers and rural readers, where quality writings from the readers as well as villagers have been presented and deposited in the department (REC). Initiative has also been taken to print these writings after duly compiled in form of a magazine "SRISTHI".

### **6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required:**

Electronic revolution and digital expansion around the world bring adverse effect on libraries especially in the habit of reading books. Rural areas are also affected with this digital movement. Rapid use of mobile (android phone) and other electronic devices reduces the use of village library by younger generation as a result number of readers are declining.

This problem is general and common in respect of all libraries in the world. Extensive digitization of rural libraries is needed to encounter these problems. Computers along with internet facilities and proper digital infrastructure needed, which attract the readers to come in the library. Healthy cultural activities like *Sahitya Sabhas*, Debate, and Quiz competition need to promote in order to encourage the readers apart from book reading.

