

TRAN: THE RELIFE MISSION OF VISVA-BHARATI DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC

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

Visva-Bharati, steeped in history from beyond the independence divide of 1947 in its pre-university avatar of the *Brahmacharyasrama* and the fledgling concept of an indigenous institution of higher education eschewing the British educational system in vogue during those tumultuous times of socio-political upheavals and realignments, social-responsibility towards the people of the distinctly rural geographical hinterland has been one of the unique markers of this institution. Long before CSR and other related socio-cultural activities came to be regarded as being mandatory for all big educational and corporate institutions, Visva-Bharati – primarily through its Sriniketan campus and the departments and organizations based there – had a long history of successfully working among fringe and marginal people in and around Santiniketan-Sriniketan-Bolpur.

The help that has been meted out over the decades and years is hands-on practical training on the ground, corporate support of all kinds, knowledge nodes as well as structured education in the hierarchical nature of institutions. From helping out with health and domestic issues, employment skills, professional and expert advise and the likes, Visva-Bharati has always reached out to the neighboring areas and villages, many of which are already under its protective wings as part of the formal process of adoption. Visva-Bharati does not have any

boundaries – literal or metaphorical – and it is this connection with the world around the university that sets it apart as an institution of, by and for the people aside from its educational purposes.

It was in April 2020: the death toll from Corona pandemic was rising by leaps and bounds. People were stifled, homebound and kept apart. All the cities are silenced without their usual hustle-bustle; factories are forced to shut down. People were without their livelihood, daily labourers were without a way to provide food for their family. The social media was reflecting on the unprecedented crisis of hundreds and thousands of jobless persons.

These reminded us of the situation of the early twentieth century. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore didn't keep to himself in a crisis of this time, instead while abiding by governmental rules and regulations, he tried to help the people in their troubled times, built a hospital for all those infected by the plague with the aid of his family members and friends.

Inspired by his noble actions and judgement the respected Vice-Chancellor, of Rabindranath's own institution Visva-Bharati, Prof. Bidyut Chakraborty took two important decisions. The first was to arrange a 'fever clinic' with the cooperation of both Visva-Bharati officials and our resident Visva-Bharati Pearson Memorial Hospital for any and everyone affiliated to

Visva-Bharati; and also as Rabindranath Tagore always wanted Visva-Bharati to stand by our local villages in any moment of crisis, our Vice -Chancellor's second plan of action was to help the local jobless tribal communities of Birbhum district.

Visva-Bharati Karmi-Mandali's joint Secretaries Kishore Bhattacharya and Debasish Roy helped out in realizing and putting these plans into action. At this point, Soumya Bhattacharya and Jatindranath Saha, secretaries of Visva-Bharati Karmi-Mandali's Binodon-Sakha and Seva-Sakha came forward to strengthen the momentum of relief work.

An emergency relief fund of sixty thousand rupees was created with the contribution of Seva-Sakha, Karmi-Mandali, Visva-Bharati and Visva-Bharati Library Network in aid of the tribal communities of Birbhum district.

In the morning at 9:30 on 10th April, 2020, in the presence of our respected Vice-Chancellor a team consisting of Karmis and Adhyapakas was formed, led by Kishore Bhattacharya and Debasish Roy. While abiding by all governmental safety measures and regulations, this team went out to give emergency ration to 200 and more families in need of relief from four areas of nearby Birbhum district - Bakajol, Joljolia, Kapastikuri and Kankalitala. This set the beginning. After this, rations were also given out to

almost 220 families of indigent village areas like Balipara, Pearsonpalli, Kaliganj and so on. At this time, aid was again needed in Kankalitala area as many people there earn their livelihood from begging. Since due to the pandemic situation, the Kankalitala Temple was closed to visitors, so these people did not have their bare necessities of life. Aid was needed to relieve these people, as they solely depended upon this help to survive.

After this emergency rations were distributed to the indigent families from local areas of Layekpur, Tara Ma Danga, Ishapur, Mahodori, Chandpur and Kankalitala on 19th April, 2020. The ration-packs consisted of rice, lentils, potatoes, assorted vegetables, soya-bean, mustard oil, coconut hair oil and soap/s. As slowly our areas of relief operation expanded, the extent of negative effect brought by the spread of Covid-19 pandemic was being felt. On the other hand the shortage of relief fund was progressively becoming a problem. At this time, the workers from the Visva-Bharati Security Department and Karmi-Sangha, Sriniketan, Visva-Bharati came forward to contribute to the relief fund. This helped to distribute rations to 200 more domestic families of local areas like- Salone, Bandher Paar, Boral, Faridpur, Mahul and Rajaburo.

On 28th April our Vice-chancellor appealed to all well-wishers of Visva Bharati to contribute to the

relief fund to help distressed people. After this appeal many people including Visva-Bharati's staff, students, professors, officials, alumni members and residents of Santiniketan all came spontaneously to reinforce the fund as well as help with the relief work. This immensely helped to

continuously aid more families and people that were in crisis. In total almost sixteen lakh rupees were collected. From which fourteen lakh nine thousand two hundred twenty rupees were spent to aid five thousand eight hundred and twelve families from eighty local areas of Birbhum.

<div style="text-align: center;"> <p>अध्यक्ष श्री नरेंद्र मोदी ACHARYA (CHANCELLOR) SHRI NARENDRA MODI</p> <p>उपाध्यक्ष प्रो. बिद्युत चक्रबर्ती UPACHARYA (VICE-CHANCELLOR) PROF. VIDYUT CHAKRABARTY</p> </div>	<div style="text-align: center;"> <p>विश्वभारती VISVA-BHARATI (Established by the Parliament of India under Visva-Bharati Act XXXIX of 1951 Vide Notification No.: 40-550 Q.3 Dt. 14 May, 1951)</p> <p>संस्थापक रबिन्द्रनाथ टागोर FOUNDED BY RABINDRANATH TAGORE</p>  </div>	<p>सांतिनिकेतन - 731225 SANTINIKETAN - 731225 पर. बिरभुम, पश्चिम बंगाल, भारत DIST. BIRBHAM, WEST BENGAL, INDIA फोन: Tel: +91-3463-252 431/261 531 फैक्स: Fax: +91-3463-252 572 ई-मेल: E-mail: vice-chancellor@visva-bharati.ac.in वेबसाइट: Website: www.visva-bharati.ac.in</p>
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4 June, 2020

Valued members and esteemed well-wishers of the Visva Bharati family,

It is with heartfelt gratitude that I pen this missive--gratitude for the solidarity and fortitude we have displayed over the past couple of months as we navigate through the global crisis caused by COVID-19; gratitude for our insightful and timely response to the administrative issues raised by said crisis; and lastly, gratitude for our highly empathetic collective conscience, which has manifested itself in the 79 lakh rupees in relief money (38 lakh to the PM-CARES fund for COVID-19, and 41 lakh to the CM relief fund for Amphan victims) that we have raised thus far.

As a civic-minded educational institution, Visva Bharati has struggled to effectively address the distributive question raised by the pandemic. In other words, we have attempted to develop mechanisms and regulations that ensure that the dire economic, social, and health-related vulnerabilities caused by the pandemic are distributed more evenly than how existing socio-political hierarchies would have them. This can be seen in the ongoing relief campaign we have been running twice a week for the past two months, under which we have raised approximately 14 lakh for neighbouring villages and communities that have been disproportionately burdened by the pandemic and by Amphan--primarily the Santhals, among other vulnerable groups.

As always, I urge you to stay safe, and to stay connected amidst social distancing. Let us keep up the good work.

Bidyut Chakrabarty
Bidyut Chakrabarty
Vice Chancellor
Visva Bharati

4/6/2020



Vice-Chancellor
Visva-Bharati
Santiniketan
West Bengal-731235

With the lead of our Vice-Chancellor and the constant sincere efforts of Kishore Bhattacharyya and Debasis Roy the Secretaries of Visva-Bharati Karmi-Mandali, karmis, adhyapakas and students were able to distribute relief rations to the remote areas of Birbhum for two days a week starting from 10th April to 25th June 2020 all the while abiding by the rules and regulations set down by the government to prevent the spread of the pandemic. All of this was achieved because of the glorious presence and very useful guidance of our respected Vice-Chancellor Prof. Bidyut Chakrabarty and distinguished members of Visva-Bharati Karma-Samiti Dr. Sushovan Bandopadhyaya, Professor. Dulal Ghosh and many others.

During all these days of relief distribution, the staff and faculties of Visva-Bharati used to give their moral support which was very much expressed in their presence at Visva-Bharati Cooperative from where the vehicles carrying the relief goods used to start in the morning at 9.30 am. During all these days adequate measures were taken to maintain COVID related hygiene and social/physical distancing norms. The staff associated with relief distribution used to give their sincere efforts to maintain the queue of relief distribution in proper way so that the social distancing norms were properly met. Efforts were also

made to make the villagers aware of the necessity of covering the nose and mouth with face mask or cotton cloth. Health staff associated with Visva-Bharati's Pearson Memorial Hospital (PMH) also went in relief distribution and contributed in raising awareness among the villagers regarding the mandatory precautions to be followed to combat the spread of COVID.

All relief measures were conducted after taking necessary permissions from the Sub-Divisional Office, Bolpur, Office of the District Magistrate, Birbhum and Superintendent of Police, Birbhum. All relief distributions were done very smoothly in a peaceful way without any law and order problem.

All Receipts and Payments related to COVID-19 Relief Fund had been maintained by Karmi-Mandali and has been uploaded on the University Website.

Throughout his life, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore encouraged collective thinking and collective work. He always desired that Visva-Bharati would never be detached from society at large. It is very inspiring that at this moment of national crisis due to COVID pandemic, Visva-Bharati under the leadership of the present Vice-Chancellor has risen equal to the occasion in translating the lofty ideals set by Rabindranath as a distinguished social reformer.



বিশ্বভারতী
শান্তিনিকেতন

কর্মসংকলী

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FINAL STATUS OF COVID-19 RELIEF FUND AT A GLANCE

(FOR THE PERIOD FROM APRIL 10, 2020 TO JUNE 25, 2020)

RECEIPTS		PAYMENTS	
DATE	AMOUNT (RS)	PARTICULARS	AMOUNT (RS)
10.04.2020 (SEVA SAKHA , KARMMONDALI)	30,000	<u>10.04.2020</u>	
10.04.2020 (CENTRAL LIBRARY MUTUAL FUND)	30,000	200 packets with essential food items & vegetables distributed in Bakajol, Jaajole Kapastikuri villages & Kankalitala	48,500
10.04.2020	34,500	<u>15.04.2020</u>	
15.04.2020	8,500	220 packets with essential food items & vegetables distributed in Balipura, Pearsonpally, Kaligunja villages & Kankalitala	52,080
18.04.2020	1,001	<u>19.04.2020</u>	
19.04.2020	23,000	200 packets with essential food items & vegetables distributed in Layekpur Taramaudanga, Ishupur, Mahodari (Labpur area), Chandpur villages & Kankalitala	49,000
20.04.2020	15,100	<u>26.04.2020</u>	
26.04.2020 (SECURITY DEPOT., V.E.)	15,000	200 packets with essential food items & vegetables distributed in Salon, Raipurdanga, Mahul villages (Sattor area)	49,000
26.04.2020	3,000	<u>28.04.2020</u>	
28.04.2020	9,400	230 packets with essential food items & vegetables distributed in Salon, Bandherpar, Baral, Faridpur, Muhu, Rajahuro Villages	54,900
28.04.2020 (SANTINIKEETAN TRUST)	94,000	<u>01.05.2020</u>	
29.04.2020	11,000	255 packets with essential food items & vegetables distributed in Sarpuerdanga, Bauliodanga, Panchabari villages (Kasha Area)	67,015
C.F.	2,74,501	C.F.	3,20,495

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