

People's Education Council of Rabindranath Tagore: A model of Distance Education

Dr. TAPAS PAL

Visva-Bharati, India

Dr. SHYAMSUNDAR BAIRAGYA

Associate Professor

Department of Education, Visva-Bharati, India

Abstract:

'Yatra visvam bhavati ekanidam' 'Where the whole world forms its one single nest'. Thus he always entitled to make a Nest for Life, Mind and Soul of Indian novice here, which became translucent from the logo of Visva-Bharati. Rabindranath Tagore was exposed deeply to universal education through distance education model of Lok-siksha samsad (People's Education Council) in 1936. Lok-Siksha Samsad was a society which organized home study and examinations for persons who could not attend school. During that time, there was no open university or there was no well-established distance education centres in India as well as world. Tagore wrote a letter to Sir Aziul Hauque, then Education Minister of Bengal on 18 September, 1936 for promoting distance education in Bengal requesting change in the law so that the following provision may be possible: 'all male-female who are presently out of education would have the opportunity for education; they would study at home; they would sit for examination at the local town; there would be prescribed textbooks from lower to upper grades; the certificate will be coupled with livelihood and life skills; the cost of the programme delivery will be recouped from the money generated from the students; it would expand the opportunity for the writers to earn money through writing textbooks; and the certificate will provide students with the job markets as they graduated under the government accreditation'. This article discusses the

Tagore's Lok siksha samsad model for distance education and how it supplied to spreading out of education among mass.

Key words: Lok-Siksha Samsad, distance education.

Preamble:

Distance education as a common idiom used to identify the field or distance learning is a form of delivering education and instruction, often on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in a traditional setting such as a classroom. Distance learning provides access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both. Distance learning may enable students who are unable to attend a traditional school setting, due to disability or illness such as decreased mobility and resistant system repression, to get a good education.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the first Nobel Laureate of Asia, was one of the education reformers in the Bengal basin (Bangladesh and West Bengal) and beyond in the undivided India. He shared the experiences with his fellow colleagues through letters; and was exposed greatly to universal education through distance education during his trip to Russia and the great poet implemented open non-formal education by organizing *jatras* or folk-plays and *melas* or fairs. An early form of distance education was initiated in 1936 through the Lok-Siksha Samsad, a society which organized home study and examinations for persons who could not attend school. It is reported that the government didn't implement the Tagore's DE model in Bengal though Tagore he launched open schooling programmes at the Lok-Siksha Samsad. It is reported that, this time, there was no open university or there was no well-established distance education centres in the world. But he did

it. Text materials as print media were used to implement the open schooling programme from Lok-Siksha Samsad.

Objective:

To discuss the Tagore's Lok siksha samsad model for distance education and how it supplied to spreading out of education among mass.

Result and discussions:

Loka-Siksha Samsad 'to discover the true India':

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. At Sriniketan 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. In a speech delivered in 1928 on the seventh anniversary of Sriniketan, Tagore wrote: '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' (Tagore, Rabidranath (1961) Towards Universal Man. Asia Publishing House, New York (p.322). There was a mobile library-the first of its kind in Bengal [still in operation in many districts of Bengal (especially Birbhum) and different states as well]. An early form of distance education was initiated through Lok-Siksha Samsad (Peoples Education Council, 1937), a society which organized study at homes and examinations for persons who could not attend school. A special education section was added later to handle some other educational areas. The *Lok-Siksha-Samsad* was included under this section; so was training centre for primary school teachers, called *Siksha*

Charcha Bhavan. In training primary teachers, the centre supplemented the government curriculum with music, agriculture, sanitation, scouting and craft-training to create a more holistic approach.

Tagore's letter about to spread the education:

The great poet travelled to Socialist Russia in 1930 and was highly impressed and motivated to see the implementation of mass education covering all the citizens and providing equal opportunities. The letters he wrote from there were published in the collection called 'Letters from Russia'. In a letter written to his son Rathindranath, he wrote: "Education is the best road to solve all our problems. For so long, most of the people in the society have been deprived of the opportunity for getting education – in case of India, totally deprived. How this education is spreading with great energy in all parts of the society here surprises me – not only in number but in fullness and without work. Not only in white Russia but also among the half-enlightened peoples of Central Asia, they are spreading education like a great flood – there is no dearth in their endeavour so that these people receive the best of the latest scientific discovery." (Source: *Letter from Russia, 1930*).

Act of Lok Siksha Samsad in THE VISVA-BHARATI ACT, 1951 NO. XXIX OF 1951 :

"7A. Notwithstanding anything contained in section 7, the University may establish and maintain, at any place in India examination centres for home study courses conducted by its Lok Siksha Samsad (People's Education Council) and recognise, for such purposes as may be provided in the Ordinances, the certificates awarded by the said Lok Siksha Samsad (People's Education Council) on the results of examinations conducted by it" (source: THE VISVA-BHARATI ACT, 1951 NO. XXIX OF 1951 ,1. Ins. by Act 60 of 19961, s. 7. 83)³

Tagore's initiation to organize the Lok-Siksha Samsad:

In 1936 he addressed an Education Conference in Calcutta, in which he pleaded for a Home University scheme. The Loka-Siksha Samsad an organisation for the propagation of non-formal education amongst those who had no access to usual educational opportunities, was started in 1936; a society which organized home study and examinations for persons who could not attend school and Siksha-Charcha is meant for training the village school teachers. The syllabus, an organization for the propagation of non-formal education amongst those who had no access to usual educational opportunities, was started in 1936. The Lok Siksha-Samsad is an examining body formed with a view of encouraging home study among those who cannot afford to continue their study in schools or colleges. At the education conference during the Bengal Education Week celebrated in February 1936, Tagore made some proposals and among other observations made therein, he stated, "if examination centers are started in towns and cities of different states for those men and women in the country who are for various reasons deprived of the benefit of school education, then many will feel encouraged to educate themselves at home in their leisure hours. Their education can be properly directed if their syllabus and textbooks are clearly prescribed from the lowest to the highest stages. The degrees that will be awarded through these examinations will be valuable insofar as they will bring social prestige and will be useful for earning a livelihood. It can, therefore, be hoped that all its expenses will easily be met through the fees received from candidates all over the country. On this occasion, the field for preparing textbooks will be extended, and the material for mass education will increase. It will also provide the means of livelihood to numerous authors" (Tagore, 1936, pp. 38-39). He also added that this desire could not materialize at Visva-Bharati for want of funds, but once the proposal was turned down by the education ministry of Bengal, he placed it before the authorities

of Visva-Bharati who undertook to organize mass education on the lines suggested by him. Initially there were three examinations, "Adya," "Madhy," and "Upadhi," roughly corresponding to the Matriculation, Intermediate and B.A. standards, respectively. Later, some more examinations were added, corresponding to pre-Matriculation standard.

Syllabus, books and language:

The syllabus included Bengali language, Bengali literature. History, Geography, Arithmetic, General Knowledge, Elementary Hindi, Hygiene and Science in different combinations for different standards. Under Tagore's direction and editorship, Visva-Bharati undertook the publication of a series of books in Bengali known as Lok-Siksha-Granthamala, on various subjects of scientific and general interest, specially written in easy language for the general public.

Welfare approach of Lok-Siksha Samsad:

The Lokasiksha or Mass education programme organised by Tagore. Health related information got the top priority through ONFE (Rahman et al, 2012). The workers of the Village Welfare Department of the Institutes developed a programme to improve the health of neighboring rural population under ONFE. The ONFE programme included an outdoor dispensary, supplying expert advice and help from doctors and nurses, prevention of diseases by inoculation, anti-malaria measures, and training of village midwives. This department initially provided elementary education for boys and girls of the villages by establishing night and day schools with flexible learning approach coupled with vocational education on some useful crafts, and the department also incorporated some useful recreational activities. In the girls' school an emphasis was placed on house-craft and gardening. Besides the children's school, the department also provided opportunities for adult education through circulating libraries, lantern lectures and

conferences, recitations from Epics and scriptures under ONFE approach. The idea of educational extension programme also inspired him to set up the Lok-siksha Samsad which was designed to expand the network of literacy and basic education in the country. The Samsad in this way simultaneously became a council for adult education, mass education as well as distance education through correspondence. In order to make the project complete in all respects, he also initiated a series of books called Lokasiksha Granthamala and contributed the first book on physical sciences to it. The basic intention of the scheme was to reach out to would be students in their own home environment rather than forcing them to reach the school. Introduction of exam and study centres throughout the country was also one of the innovative aspects of the system conducted by Vishva-Bharati (Majumdar, November 2009).

Examination and degree from Lok Siksha-Samsad:

Tagore said the degrees that will be awarded through these examinations will be valuable insofar as they will bring social prestige and will be useful for earning a livelihood. It can, therefore, be hoped that all its expenses will easily be met through the fees received from candidates all over the country. On this occasion, the field for preparing text-books will be extended, and the material for mass education will increase. About the certificate and residence of students we got the information from THE VISVA-BHARATI ACT, 1951 ACT NO. 29 OF 1951 *“The purposes for which certificates awarded by the Lok Siksha-Samsad (People's Education Council) of the University may be recognised by the University;”* *“32. Residence. Every student of the University 1*[other than a student of its Loka Shiksha Samsad (People's Education Council)] shall reside in a [Chatravasa]2* or under such conditions as may be prescribed by the Statutes and the Ordinances.”*¹

Tagore had advised the Calcutta (Kolkata) University to introduce distance education:

An early form of distance education could be said to have been initiated in 1936 through the Lok-Siksha Samsad, a society which organized home study and examinations for persons, who could not attend the school. Bhattacharya (2009) states that Tagore had advised the Calcutta (Kolkata) University to introduce distance education way back in 1933. Tagore said: "the brain was connected by nerves throughout the body. The university had to act as the brain and spread nerves throughout. My suggestion is that a network of examination centres should connect the whole nation. It has to be done in such easy and widely available way that those outside the formal education system feel inspired --- The women in the house or the men who because of various reasons do not get the opportunity to go to school can utilize their leisure ... it is not necessary to award degrees combining all the subjects ... often an individual has the knack for a particular subject. If the person can show his or her grip on a particular subject, the society holds the person in high esteem. I do not see any reason why a person should be deprived of that opportunity." (Source: *Bhattacharya, 2009*)

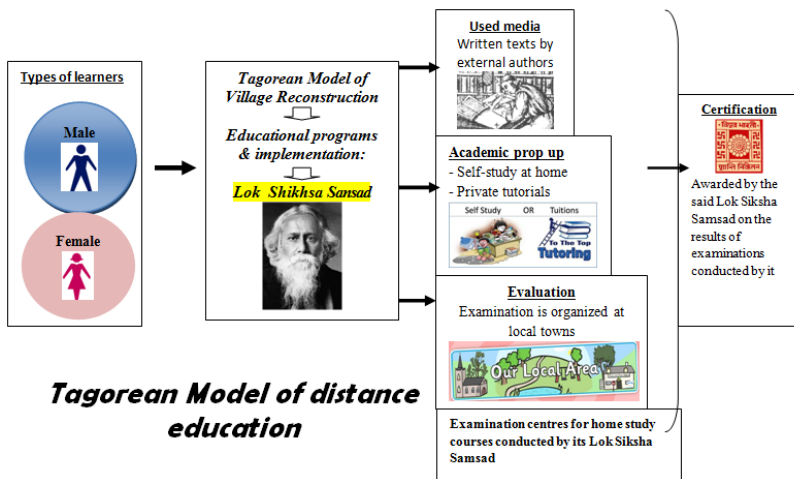
Tagore's request letter to Education Minister of Bengal:

On 18 September, 1936 Rabindranath Tagore wrote a request letter to Sir Azizul Haque, then Education Minister of Bengal for changing the law for promotion of DE in Bengal by incorporating the following possible provisions (Ansaruzzaman, 2011; Rahman and Panda, 2011; Rahman et al, 2011): All male and female, who are currently out of education, would have the opportunity for education; they would study at home; they would sit for examination at the local town; there would be prescribed textbooks from lower to upper grades; the certificate will be coupled with their livelihood and life skills; the cost of the program delivery will be recouped from the money

generated from the students; it would expand the opportunity for the writers to earn money through writing textbooks; and the certificate will provide students with the job markets as they graduated under the government accreditation.

Government response:

It has been reported that the government did not implement Tagore’s Distant Education model in Bengal though he launched programmers at the Lok-Siksha Samsad. It is reported that, this time, there was no open university or there was no well-established distance education centers in the world. But Tagore did it. Text materials as print media were used to implement the open schooling program from the Lok-Siksha Samsad.



Conclusion:

Jalan (1976) states that the Lok Siksha-Samsad was an examining body formed with a view to encouraging home study among those who could not afford to continue their study in schools or colleges. At the education conference during the Bengal Education Week celebrated in February 1936, Tagore

made some proposals; and among other observations made therein, he stated, "if examination centers are started in towns and cities of different states for those men and women in the country who are for various reasons deprived of the benefit of school education, then many will feel encouraged to educate them-selves at home in their leisure hours. Their education can be properly directed if their syllabus and textbooks are clearly prescribed from the lowest to the highest stages". The Central Universities of India (Teaching, Research and Administration) Bill, 2013 highlighted: (to consolidate the laws relating to certain existing specified Central Universities and make provision for uniform legal framework for teaching and research therein and administration thereof and to protect additional provisions relating to certain existing specified Central Universities and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.). Special powers of existing specified Central University- "10(z) to establish and maintain, at any place in India, examination centres for home study courses conducted by Lok Siksha Samsad (people's education council) of any existing specified Central University and recognize, for such purposes as may be provided in the Ordinances of such University, the certificates awarded by the said Lok Siksha Samsad (people's education council) on the results of examinations conducted by it"²

REFERENCES

- Ansaruzzaman, M. (2011). Distance Education and Rabindranath. *The Daily Kaler Konta*, 27 July 2011, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- Basak, Tapan Kumar, *Rabindranath-Santiniketan-Sriniketan, An Introduction*, pp. 6–8, BB Publication
- Bhattacharya, A. (2009). Tagore on the Right Education for India. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Social Science*, 1(2), 21-47.

Available at: <http://www.socialsciences-ejournal.org/2.2%20Asoke%20Bhattacharya.pdf> [Last accessed on 26 September 2011]

Majumdar, Swapan. November 2009. Education as Empowerment Twins in Search of an Alternative Education. *Journal of Indian Education*. P.12.

Jalan, R. V. (1976). Tagore — His Educational Theory and Practice and its Impact on Indian Education. A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Council of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Florida, USA. Available at: http://www.archive.org/stream/tagorehiseducati00jala/tagorehiseducati00jala_djvu.txt [Last accessed on 29 September 2011]

Letter from Russia. (1930). Prabasi, Agrahayan.

Rahman, M. M. and Panda, S. (2011). *Open University-NGO Collaboration in Leveraging ODL Toward Open Schooling: Developments from Bangladesh*. Paper at ICDE conference held at Terbuka University, Indonesia. Available at: <http://www.ut.ac.id/icde2011/>

Rahman, M.; Panda, S. & Islam, T. (2012) Technology developments in Bangladesh and higher education through ODL. In Islam, T.; Lee, O.; Peerson, J. & Piscioneri, M. (Eds.), *Effectively Implementing Information and Communication Technology in Higher Education in the Asia-Pacific Region*. New York: Nova Science Publishers Inc.

Webliography:

¹*the* Visva-Bharati Act, 1951 ACT NO. 29 OF 1951 [9th May, 1951.]

<http://www.rishabhudara.com/sc/view.php?case=24035>

²<http://www.academicsindia.com/Central%20Universities%20of%20India%20%28Teaching,%20Research%20and%20Administration%29%20Bill,%202013.pdf>

³<http://www.teindia.nic.in/mhrd/50yrsedu/x/7H/8E/7H8E0101.htm>