CHAPTER IV: VILLAGE UPLIFT AND SOCIAL TRAINING

Section I: Rabindranath's Love for the People and Culture of Rural Bengal

While wandering in boats on the river Padma, when he was looking after the Tagore family zamindari in Silaidaha in Pabna District in Central Bengal that Rabindranath first came into contact with the village people of Bengal. In 1893, he was writing: "I feel very sorry for these poor ryots of my country - they are as helpless as a new-born child sent by God. They have got no other recourse than to rely on the mercy of God for food. I do not know whether it is possible to distribute wealth in the Socialist pattern, if it is not at all possible, I should say it is a very cruel principle of God — men are really very helpless. Let agony be there, but there should be at least some means left for men by which men can aspire for betterment."

In some of his poems of 'Chitra', specially in the poem 'Ebar phirao more' can be found Tagore's sympathy and concern for the condition of the poor. He wants to give them health, wealth and education, but then it was probably too early for him to think of a way out for them.

What Rabindranath felt and what he wrote about folk people and culture was sincere. He wrote in his article 'Gramya Sahitya' that it is the duty of a poet to knit together the people.
scattered ideas of the common people and give shape to a kind of literature.  

In analysing the origin of folk culture, Rabindranath analysed the changing phases of history and the changing outlook of men from time to time. He saw the injustice inflicted upon the common people from very early times. He wanted to immortalise the low caste people through his writings. In his poem 'Bhasa O Chhanda' he expressed his saying through Valmiki where he wants to turn men into God through rhythm and song. Rabindranath said that there was an explicit sign of revolt in Michael Madhusudan Dutta's 'Meghnad Badh Kabya' - there the poet not only brought about a revolt in the field of rhythm, but he broke the traditional idea about Rama and Ravana imagined by the people. In other words, he has broken the age old idea about the *Aryas* and the *Anaryas* and by showing the noble virtues in Ravana and his son Indrajit, Madhusudan led to a new challenge in the Bengali literature of the time.

Rabindranath also saw that this *Arya-Anarya* concept of the common people gave rise to certain confusing ideas and even to a series of conflicts amongst them. Rabindranath says that the *Mangalkavyas* which were composed approximately in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, for example, 'Chandimangal', 'Manasamangal' or 'Dharmamangal' reflected the distrust of common men in so called Aryan Gods. There, *Siva* was regarded as the God of the upper class and the common people found their

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solace in the worship of mother Goddess, who was representing the non-Aryan cult. The common people worshipped their deities for specific reasons. Manasa was regarded as the symbol of snake; Chandi was the healer of poverty and Dharma was the symbol of power. According to Haraprasad Shastri, the worship of Dharma reached its culmination in Buddhism. The ignorant mass idealised these deities out of fear, awe and reverence.

Rabindranath analysed this concept in the Mangalkavyas by saying that the peoples' desire for this 'Sakti Sadhana' devoted deification of power in female anthropomorphism was an indication of their discontent and revolt against the ruling class. He also saw the gross inequality which prevailed in the society, as the cause of dire poverty of the common people. In fact, in some of the pieces of Mangalkavya, we get this picture of extreme despair and poverty, for example in the piece called 'Phullarar Baramasya', in Chandimangalkavya, where Phullara, a poor housewife describes how the twelve months of her year are spent in extreme agony and distress. Rabindranath also saw how the creed of untouchability had turned the low-caste people to be treated almost like animals.

According to Rabindranath, the spirit of strength which gained its priority through the worship of mother Goddess in the age of the Mangalkavya, could not linger for a very long time. Men could not remain satisfied worshipping a terrible force, so
gradually altered forms of Chandi and Siva were being worshipped by the common people. Traces of this thought could be found later in the Annadamangalkavya. This new tune in literature was best expressed through the Gitikavitas composed by Vidyapati, Chandidas and others. Rabindranath, to a large extent was influenced by these poets and his entire 'Rahusinher Padavali' was based on the language and ideas of Vidyapati. The new form of religion was now Vaishnavism which consoled the common men and brought about a tide of love and fraternity after a long period of woe and suffering. The poet expressed his idea in this way:

"Vaishnavism, by its emotional tide overwhelmed the existing social order. It gave unbounded joy and exemption to common men after a long period of constraint. God was brought down from his royal throne to the playroom of the common men. As a result of this, the low caste people, the beggar and the infidel got the same status in the society."  

So, Rabindranath tried to find out a rational as well as a socio-economic basis for every religious movement in Bengal and how the people reacted in each field. He has commented that Bengal came to realize her proper self in the vaishnava era. Rabindranath tried to prove that the literature of an era reflects the sentiment of the common people — their fear, their anguish, their love and tears, their struggle for life. Rabindranath says that Bengal in the past few centuries presented a kind of literature which is very valuable for studying the socio-economic condition of the rural people of the present era.

with its manifold problems. After his visit to Soviet Russia in 1930, he gave a memorable speech to the village at the annual function of Sriniketan. "Those who study Economics or Ethnology in our college, depend on the lectures of the European scholars to know the social customs of our neighbouring village. The people of our villages are low caste people, so our college students are not interested to know anything about our local culture. The people of our country remain untouchable to us. Our students have only studied about the movements that had taken place in the West; in our country too, there were series of movements, but they are quite ignorant of the history. They are not interested to study, because that knowledge will not help them in any way to attain good marks in examination. There are so many cults in our community, of Auls, Bauls and so many others, their culture should have been studied with reverence, but the fact is, they are low caste people. In order to do away with this ignorance, we have taken up the meagre task of imprinting life in our village community. We, of course have the capacity to take up similar programme in all the thirty three million villages of India, but we should not feel ashamed for that. We should only remember that we must achieve every thing with reverence".

Marxists believe in digging out the history of mass struggle in all ages; Rabindranath also tried to perform almost similar task of portraying the picture of struggle and suffering of the common people, though perhaps in a more generalised way.

The love for his motherland was very deep. Even the glamour of the West could not reduce his feelings in any way. He wrote in 1890: "I feel for my poor motherland when I am here in the foreign land. My country is not enriched with power or prosperity, but she has got the capacity to love. I will never be allured or infatuated by the glamour of the foreign land, because I have dedicated my life to my motherland and I will remain contented with the love of my motherland." Rabindranath's love for rural Bengal is depicted in the memorable song where he says that he loves his dear Bengal with all his heart. His heart aches to feel the sweet tunes in the sky of Bengal, in the wind of Bengal.

Section II: Rabindranath's Awareness of the Condition of the Villages of Bengal

Rabindranath was not only contented with admiring the beauty of rural Bengal and in analysing different characters in village set up, he was aware of the gripping problems of the villages and he devoted quite some time in his life in sorting out the problems and he also suggested remedies from time to time. In 1909, he wrote in 'Gora': "Gora for the first time saw rural Bengal isolated from our elitist society of Calcutta, for the first time he realised the real weakness of rural Bengal — her ignorance, her superstition, her incapability and her aloofness opened an inner eye of Gora. While Gora was staying there, one day a village caught fire. Gora was really surprised to see that there was even no combined effort to put down the fire. Every day, the women had to bring water from wells, but there was never any effort to make wells at low expense at home. Gora thought that it would be a farce to have political discussions with the villagers. He was more surprised to find that even Motilal and Ramapati thought that he was unnecessarily concerned. They thought that it was quite obvious that low class people would suffer in that manner and there was nothing unusual in it. Gora, with an anguished heart began to think how this extreme ignorance and misery had been slowly poisoning the entire society."¹⁰ In another passage the poet wrote: "Gora saw the inherent weakness of India in her village society which still

remained aloof from other contacts. The religion which expressed
love, generosity, sacrifice and respect had no place in rural
Bengal. The religion which was irrational, rigidly conventional
had an enormous appeal to the village people. Gora could no
longer remain in his illusionary world when he saw that these
rigid values had been spreading in an infectious manner, depriv-
ing men of their reasoning sense".11

One of the most valuable materials available in this
connection is a printed translation of an address by Tagore,
to the workers at Sriniketan in 1939. The value of this address
is twofold. It has a sentimental value, as it was delivered on
the occasion of his last visit to Sriniketan and secondly no-
where else has his attitude and approach towards rural develop-
ment and the work at Sriniketan ever been so concretely and
clearly expressed. In this connection we may also point out that
this address was given by him at the end of his life when
Sriniketan had already been operating for eighteen long years
and had gone through various experimental stages to a planned
stage of action. Therefore the statements made by him in this
address, are not just visions, but conclusions arrived at,
after a life-long experience in village work in Sriniketan and
also in Shelaidah before.

In this connection he said with reference to his early
life in Shelaidah, "I was filled with eagerness to understand
the villagers' daily routine and the varied pageant of their.

lives...Gradually the sorrow and poverty of the villages became clear to me, and I began to grow restless to do something about it. It seemed to me a very shameful thing that I should spend my days as a landlord, concerned only in money making and engrossed with my own profit and loss. From that time onward, I continually endeavoured to find out how the villagers' mind would be aroused, so that they could themselves accept the responsibility for their own lives. Rabindranath just did not remain restless; he made efforts and those provided him with invaluable experiences. His attempts to build wells in the villages failed because of lack of collaboration with the villagers. He made a road from his Outchary (headquarters) up to Kushtia and asked the people living in adjacent villages to maintain the portion of the road passing through their villages to facilitate their own communication. The answer was, "Very fine, we are to repair the roads, and then the babus can go and come from Kushtia in comfort". Tagore rejoined, "It is very difficult to help those...who have been completely unaccustomed to any kind of self-reliance". "But we cannot" he further observes, "help merely by our willingness to help. There is nothing so dangerous as inexpert service". He said after that he made up his mind to do some village work through trained personnel. He sent his son Rathindranath Tagore, and Santosh Chandra Majumdar, abroad to learn agriculture and animal husbandry. Then he bought the famous house, which became the headquarters in Sriniketan, because in his words, "I thought that here I could continue the work which I had begun in Silaidaha".
In the same address he concluded, "We have to work out from here, and along with that we have to carry on our own study". "If we want to serve we must learn" and "we must so endeavour that a power from within the villagers themselves may be working along side us, albeit indiscernible by us..... There is no need for us to think in terms of the whole country. I cannot take the responsibility for the whole of India. I wish to win only one or two small villages. We have to enter into their minds, to acquire strength to work in collaboration with them.... If I can free only one or two villages from the bounds of ignorance and weakness, there will be built, on a tiny scale, an ideal for the whole of India".

These quotations from Tagore show the systematic evolution of his theory of rural development for the betterment of the life of the people of rural India. The mission of Sriniketan had not been just to give some welfare service to the villages adjacent to it, but to develop a technique with a practical bias to be made use of, for the whole of India. Unlike most of the workers of his time Tagore recognised through his deep insight, the importance of developing a method before undertaking a large scale programme for the uplift of the village people. He knew that it is the human element which is more important than material achievement, like digging wells and building roads. For those are meaningless, till the people who are going to use them, learn how to maintain them and have sufficient confidence in their capacity to do so.

In his introduction of the book, 'The co-operative Principles', Rabindranath says: "In every country the poorer classes make a far larger sector than the well-to-do. Then, which countries in particular may be named as poor? Is it where the means of livelihood are the fewest and even those are often blocked where the 'have nots' can aspire to a better life; hope itself is a real asset. It is not enough to say that there is a shortage of funds in our country; worse, there is a shortage of hope. We cast all the blame on fate as we bear torments of hunger. We grovel in the dust, assured that only the mercy of Heaven or of people from outside the remedy is in our hands. That is why it is better to instil hope in the heart than to offer alms. It is our own deficiency and no decree of fate that makes men sink into depths."\[13\]

Rabindranath has pointed out that the most acute problems of villages is dire poverty. According to him, this poverty was, to a certain extent, caused by British exploitation which practically exhausted the rural economy of Bengal based on small scale industries. It was from 1757, that is after the Battle of Plassey, that the drain of wealth began. Bengal once had been very rich for her agricultural products. Britain took this advantage and began a rich trade in rice, cotton, sugar, salt, tea and indigo. The ryots were harassed beyond measure and they were not only made to produce crops in proper time, but they were immiserised for paying their taxes. Moreover, the

lands were never measured or nothing was done in order to improve the fertility of land. The internal trade barriers, custom walls soon disappeared, the diverse systems of paper currency soon gave way to one single uniform system of paper currency and coinage all over India. Local village economy slowly broke down before the pressure of new forces. Glut of foodstuffs were lying idle and severe famine was at the door of Bengal. The whole character of famines underwent an altercation; it was no longer a case of food famine, it became a case of scarcity of money, of purchasing power. The result, therefore was the sudden entry of cheap, machine-made products into the Indian markets, facilitated by the adoption of the doctrine of free trade by Great Britain, the revolution in communication and the industrialization of England, led to the gradual destruction of indigenous industries in India.

The famine of 1770 (1176 B.S.) particularly gave a shattering blow to the village economy of Bengal. In Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's 'Anandamath' we get a vivid description of the famine. The people out of their hunger and despair began to eat all kinds of rubbish, even the insects and the plants. N. K. Sinha, in his Economic History of Bengal (Vol. I) has very aptly shown the process of economic degeneration that set in Bengal after the British encroachment in trade and commerce and the clever application of the drain theory by them. In a minute written in 1790 on the economic condition of Bengal,

bare hands had yielded to the hands equipped with tools. The time has come even for our cultivators to consider these facts. These machines, it is true can be put to work only over large tracts of land and considerable funds are needed for their procurement and use. But if therefore we give up all hope by saying that our peasantry cannot afford them, it will simply mean inviting ruin. In the present age of mechanization, our men, cultivators as well as artisans must accept the machine or step back and further back until they topple into a perilous chasm.  

Rabindranath writes in 1918: "I used to visit a village very often and there were vast tracts of farming land towards the south. The lands had been unevenly distributed among the farmers. Some got two acres of land, some got ten acres of land and some others had four acres of land. The cows had been also utilised in uneven way. The farming started somewhere in fixed time, somewhere it was delayed. It all depended on the ryot. If the ryots could avoid this individual farming system and concentrate on co-operative farming, half of their labour and capital could be saved. The crops were also shared on individual basis and the sale of crops was also done in the same way. But if this collection and sale could be done on co-operative basis, much benefits could be acquired. Here only the men with sufficient capital could gain, others were always deprived."  

The poet was astonished to find the slow progress of India in the agrarian market. When all the world powers were doubling their production in leaps and bounds through all scientific and modern devices, India still depended on her traditional agricultural tools. The poet said that the British would never help us in a genuine way to modernize our agrarian structure. So, it would be entirely our task to take up the programme of self-help. "We will now have to think not only from our village point of view, but from the view point of the world. We can no longer grow crops at home and take handful of rice, we will have to think in the context of the world market. We can no longer be narrow or sectarian in our outlook and we must look forward to start our dealings with the world powers. Today, the educationists and the scientists will also have to join hands with the farmers for betterment and sufficient output. It is for this reason, that I am appreciating so much the magazine 'Bhumilaxmi' published from the Birbhum district. I welcome this good venture and let us look forward for a brighter future in our agrarian field".\(^{195}\)

Though Rabindranath encouraged machine production in our country, he was also aware of the evils of this mechanical device. He appreciated the rejuvenation of the Charka by Gandhiji, because he believed that India's prosperity mainly depended on her small scale industries. But he also had faith in industrialization and mechanization which was the symbol of dynamism.

"It is true that the machine age has its evil effects. Even the

\(^{20}\) R. R. - XXVII, Bhumilaxmi - Palliprakriti, 1918, pp.526-27.
West cannot remain immune to the evil effects. Crudity, dissention, disease are all the evil effects of the machine age. But the natural resources are not responsible for these blemishes, the insatiable lust of men is responsible for this tragedy.  

The villagers in the past centuries were not only underdeveloped, but they were devoid of all kinds of amenities of life. They led a dull, colourless life, they had no education or culture, the only recreation was religion and the people had a crude kind of pleasure in distorting religion to its most vulgar form. Ignorance and superstition ruled the minds of the people, so there was very little scope for any kind of intellectual penetration into the villages. "I have come to know of a village where there is always an atmosphere of unhappiness. The people there, cannot have any healthy food for thought. So, people are engaged in all sorts of ill-excitements and disruptive tendencies. There is not even any scope for religious interests to be found. Of course, it is not true that religion will cure their diseased minds, this disease has become inherent in their minds. On the other hand, we find a different kind of excitement and ill-feeling in the towns. The reason for this distorted state of mind is that we never try to realise the real root of pathos in our country. We shout, we are in dispute or we express our agony in writing, but we are not yet able to grasp the desperate condition of the country."

and that stand in our way to stand beside our own countrymen. I know a group of boys who came to serve villages swayed by the ideas of non-cooperation. But the programme was only temporary. Could they really mix with the low class people and give any proper aid to them? Today, we are all under the spell of wine; it has intoxicated the entire society and the society is in real want of mental food.22

Apart from this wanton misery, the villages were the centres of all sorts of diseases which some times led to epidemics. There was no proper cure; there was want of doctors, medicine and hospital. So, the people in their despair and gloom became victims of diseases. Malaria was one such gnawing disease. "We will have to gather courage for fighting against mosquitoes in the villages and that self-confidence will give us inspiration for fighting against greater cause. The villages will no longer depend on the pity of the middle class babus of Calcutta. The Visvabharati has also taken up a programme of curing Malaria in certain nearby villages and at least the Visvabharati's effort to make the village people understand of their real intention has proved successful. The problem is, that middle class workers who usually take up relief work are always in a competitive mood and they are in constant feud with each other. Unless and until this feeling of dissention is wiped out, no noble work is possible in our country. Moreover, the village people still cling to their traditional ideas and

it is very difficult to bring them out from their customary religious beliefs.23

Indians, particularly in the earlier centuries were born with certain religious beliefs which could not be erased out of their minds in their entire life span. "When I was in the village, I often used to have discussion with a Vaishnava saint. Once I asked him that why he was not doing something for the degenerating brahmin locality. He was quite surprised and replied that he was trying to avoid the company of those who hindered the path of his meditation. God is like a play model to them; the play God is depriving the human God. The God of Madura is only a show piece clad with ornaments supplied by men and there also is competition amongst them in decorating God. Our lust for wealth is being projected through God. Jagannath is being bathed, dressed and nursed by the priest — we have got no right in that sphere. So the priests are quite contented with their job and income and the real God is found among people in wretched clothes and rickety health."24 This letter addressed to Hemantabala Devi reminds us of his poem 'Dhulamandir' written in 1317 B.S., where he says that real salvation lies in the service of mankind.

Untouchability, caste barrier, seclusion of women, scanty female education, torture on widows were all practiced in the name of religion, in the name of Sastras. Rabindranath tried his best to enlighten these people with some rational

thinking when he was engaged in his tour of different villages, but he failed in his mission. He expresses this vital problem of communication with the village people in this way: "I have been asked to say something about the development of villages, some people may question, how can I place my opinion about rural development with my urbanised outlook. But I can emphatically say that I have ample knowledge about rural area and in that way I can claim to say something, whereas the rural people may not have the same knowledge about their living. For quite sometime I have become fed up with the high sounding words about village development and I am compelled to suggest some ideas of practical aids to the village people. The problem is that whenever the middle class people intend to do something for the rural people, they show their contempt for them and they cannot fully trust these middle class babus. I do not cherish any contempt for the village people, but my middle class education and norms stand in my way. Even then I believe that I will have to achieve this difficult task. There was a terrible water crisis in the village where I was working, I suggested that if they dig a well, I will pay the expense of cementing it. They just laughed at my suggestion, by saying that was it not 'frying fish with the same fish oil?' The villages are in such a distressful condition. Those who could do some benefits to the villages, have also migrated to towns for their own living. Time has changed, things have changed. The village people can no longer be dependent on a group of people who will look after their living. The villages will have to become self-sufficient.
and independent. We will of course give aid to them, but we must never give them any scope of becoming dependent on us. My suggestion is that, we can open a night school in Calcutta and the workers who are interested in rural development work to join the school. Here knowledge of rural development will be imparted. If the workers start this work with such an enlightened outlook, I hope they will also be able to enlighten the people of the rural area in someway or other. 25 Though Rabindranath was disheartened from time to time in his programme of village uplift, he really undertook certain concrete measures in this scheme.

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Section III: Rabindranath's Scheme for Village Uplift and Social Training

The purpose for Rabindranath's village uplift programme can be surmised in the following passage: "In the West, the cities are the main centres of life, whereas in the Asiatic countries like India or China, the villages always played the significant role. But unfortunately that old social system has crumbled down and the cities with their artificial glamour have come into limelight. If we could get sufficient food, water, and education in the cities, our grievances could be minimised. The cities can offer us only its highly mechanised pattern with a strict official stamp. We cannot get any spontaneous fountain of life there. How can we be liberated from this distressful condition. Our first and foremost task will be to gain self-confidence and to become self-reliant. Moreover, co-operative work is very much needed, otherwise we cannot give shape to any creative faculty. One may ask the question that is it possible for a few individuals to achieve any benevolent task of the society, but the co-operative work of the individuals will only signify a better future".

Karl Marx's description of the pre-British village communities of India has been summarised as follows: "These small and extremely ancient Indian communities, some of which have continued down to this day, are based on possession in common of the land, on the blending of agriculture and handicrafts,
and on an unalterable division of labour, which serves, whenever a new community is started, as a plan and scheme, ready cut and dried. Occupying areas of from 100 up to several acres, each forms a compact whole producing all it requires. The chief part of the products is destined to use by the commodity itself, and does not take the form of a commodity. Hence, production here is independent of that division of labour brought about, in Indian society as a whole, by means of the exchange of commodities.

Since all production was mainly for use, in pre-British India, before the penetration and domination of the economic life of the Indian people by capitalist economic farms, there was no mass unemployment, no permanent or cyclic economic crisis, no paupers or peasants in a process pauperization as today. Nor was the monstrous phenomenon of the peasant producer, in mass, caught in the grip of indebtedness, as today. True, these 'stereotyped farms', as Marx calls these village communities, 'where the strongholds of passivity and intellectual reaction; still they were economically free from such contrasts of poverty and wealth as we witness today' 26.

With the rapid industrial development in Britain, started the process of progressively increasing influx of the products of British industries into India, the steady transformation of India into a market of manufactured goods from Britain. British capitalism pursued ruthlessly the policy of converting India into its monopoly market. The interests of the British industries

came in collision with those of the Indian Handicraft which supplied mostly the cloth need of the Indian people practically concentrated in villages."  

Some intellectuals of the 19th and 20th century pointed out that as India's fate primarily depended on her small scale industries, there is no point in introducing the modern and scientific instruments in agriculture and industry; India could simply rely on her old style of living. But Rabindranath reproached this attitude in these words: "Some people suggest that if we can get back to our old style of life, we can probably, get rid of many of our modern problems. But human history is a history of progress, it is not a history of decadence. With the advent of new age, people will also have to think about new ways of leading life. We cannot, in any way go back to the past, rather we will have to adjust with the modern ways of living."  

Rabindranath regarded the task of village welfare as a very noble duty of each and every individual. "Though we are born in this country, we have not yet learnt to love our country, we do not know our country properly, we do not feel for our countrymen — some people are dying in poverty and we just remain placid by giving the entire blame on others. We are once again declaring that we will have to bring back health and wealth at least in 12 villages. We cannot even get God's favour, if we refrain from our duties. Even England has asked her people to depend primarily on their own products in order to fight  

against poverty. It shows that the English also possess fellow feeling. But we are still lacking in that spirit of co-operation. We have imitated the west in many ways; but once again we will have to learn the motto of becoming self-reliant from them. We will also have to depend on our own products and launch the programme of co-operative work."

Newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, public meetings — all these were forms of mass communication taken from the west, useful and even indispensable, but felt increasingly to be not quite sufficient or suited to the new age. Rabindranath in his famous Swadeshi Samaj address (July 1904) had combined the central plea for self reliance with a host of concrete suggestions, regarding ways of bringing the gulf between the English educated elite and the masses. Instead of European style conferences, he wanted the bhadralok to take an interest in and transform the age old fairs or melas of the common people. At these melas, exhibition of swadeshi goods could be organised and patriotic sentiments broadcast through yatras (the traditional folk drama forms), songs and talks illustrated with magic lantern slides. Side by side with this appeal to the imagination should go on the unostentatious, difficult yet indispensable work of rejuvenating village life through organised self-help. In the mind of Tagore of 1904, this entire scheme was associated with revival of the traditional Hindu Samaj; the orthodox religion would provide the way for ending the alienation of the elite. So great was the popular interest, that Rabindranath had to deliver the—

same address twice, the second time (at the Curzon Theatre) to an audience of 1200. The debate on new techniques was resumed in the pages of the first number of Tagore's monthly Bhandar (Baisakh 1312 B.S. - April-May, 1905). 30

Constructive work in the villages was taken up in earnest during the swadeshi period by many samities as well as by individuals like Rabindranath. But Rabindranath was no innovator in this field. It was long before Rabindranath's scheme for swadeshi mela, that is in the 1880s, that some intellectuals were undertaking some patriotic work. Brajendranath De, an early member of the I.C.S. (he had joined it in 1873), was never afraid of utilising Bengali reform movements in the welfare of the districts with whose government he was entrusted. In the 1880s we find him as Additional District Magistrate in Chinsurah attending an annual function in connection with the Uttarpara Hitkari Sabha (An association for the promotion of female education and general social improvement) which used to be held in some eclat in the house of Babu Bijoy Krishna Mukherjee, the president of the sabha. On a later posting as Acting Commissioner of Burdwan Division, he paid a visit to the Swadeshi Bazar at Uttarpara, which had been established under the aegis of his old friend Raja Peary Mohan Mukherjee and expressed his satisfaction that it contained imported as well as indigenous articles. This was the year of Curzon's Partition of Bengal and 'Swadeshi' was a great bug bear to European officials. A report came out in vernacular newspaper that De had expressed

great satisfaction with what he had seen in the Swadeshi Bazar. Walsh (commissioner of Hoogly before 1905, that is before De, and he was on leave at that time at Darjeeling) wrote him a demi-official letter informing him of the Lt. Governor Fraser's displeasure at reading this news and for De's visit to a Swadeshi Bazar. De's views on his reply to Walsh bring out clearly the conflict that an Indian I.C.S. felt in having to support the Government during the Swadeshi Movement. "I should have gone to inspect it, even if it had not been connected with a loyal and distinguished zaminder like Raja Pearymohan Mukherjee even if it had been established by a most rabid extremist. I considered it my duty to go and inspect every institution in my district or division, even if it was actually and avowedly hostile to the Government." 31

Reverted to the post of Magistrate, De concerned himself with an annual series of Exhibitions in Chinsurah in the teeth of considerable opposition, this time from Indian vested interests.

The lengthy advertisements of the four exhibitions held in February in 1907, 1908, 1909 and 1910 appeared in local newspaper the Chinsurah Bartabaha under the name of B.De, Treasurer. 32 It was always organised on one of the halves of the 'Kutir Maidan' the core of the Dutch Settlement in front of the Chinsurah Collectorate and the Commissioner's House. The

Exhibition always consisted of shows of handicrafts, horticulture, vegetables, crops, animals and other commodities produced in the district of Hughly: and of all night theatrical performances by leading Calcutta Companies of plays, such as D. L. Roy's 'Mebar Patan'. These shows gave to the Chirsurah region, a sense of participation in the culture of Calcutta, as well as knowledge about economic advancement in the villages of the region itself. De notes that these and other similar exhibitions gave a considerable impetus to various industries. There was of course general awakening among the industrial classes. This was noticeable even among the most ignorant and conservative amongst them, the common ryots or cultivators of the soil. De's faith in mafussil agricultural and industrial Exhibitions as the best demonstration for stimulating a desire for democratic agrarian growth and capital formation dates back as early as 1890, when as Magistrate and Collector of Khulna, he had organised the first such exhibition there. He took the help of Dr. K. D. Ghose — the father of Sri Aurobindo — the Civil Surgeon and first elected Chairman of the Khulna Municipality. De added to the existing yatras etc. shows of garden produce, cattle manufactures and also sericulture and silk weaving, the main crash crop of the region. These exhibitions made large financial profits, which were devoted to various useful purposes and they were favourably noticed in the news columns of the Bengalee, the leading vernacular newspaper in Calcutta, which was edited by Surendranath Banerjee.
What De lacked was the power and the opportunity, as well as the support of enlightened public opinion, which was very small and perhaps even more the imagination to break out of the colonial system which maintained Britain's metropolitan hold over the colonies. This was the basic dilemma of many of the genuinely patriotic early Indians in the I.C.S.\textsuperscript{33}

From 1907 onwards, Rabindranath was developing this same theme of the inadequate mass contact and need for quiet work in the villages, but few paid heed to his words of warning and advice. The failure was not merely a subjective one, as Deviprasanna Roy Choudhury and Rabindranath evidently thought it to be. It is true that the young men found constructive work in villages dull and far less attractive than radical politics and eventually terrorism. But deeper failure, and from which critics like Rabindranath also suffered — was the inability to integrate the nationalist cause with the economic demands and aspirations of the common people; the swadeshi leaders failed in other words, to develop a real peasant programme. Some swadeshi leaders at this time were actively helping the workers to organise trade unions and strikes. But in the case of the peasants, even Deviprasanna went no further than famine relief and suggestions for rural banks to fight money lenders, while Rabindranath's vision was the rather utopian one of benevolent zamindars encouraging village self-help efforts.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, pp. 149-51.
At two meetings during the last week of September, 1905, Rabindranath put forward his plan for observing Rakhi Bandhan on the coming Partition Day transforming a traditional popular rite into a symbol of brotherhood and unity of the people of Bengal. With 16th October, 1905 is associated above all Rabindranath's magnificent hymn to the motherland —

"Let the earth and water and air and the fruits
Of Bengal be holy, my Lord,
Let the minds and the hearts of all brothers
And sisters of Bengal be one, my Lord".

In 1905, an attempt was made to make Tagore's programme of Swadeshi Samaj more concrete. One of the chief organisers of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Byomkesh Mustafi tried to work out a detailed blueprint for the constitution of a swadeshi samaj. The intention was to print this plan, and then set up a kind of pilot project in a selected area. Even Barindrakumar Ghosh's group of young revolutionaries was attracted for a brief while by Rabindranath's scheme and interested enough to send a few of its representatives to talk things over with the poet. It seems not unlikely that the programme for a Pallisamaj later reproduced by Hemendraprasad Ghosh in his History of the Congress was the outcome of the efforts of Byomkesh Mustafi and those working with him. This document bears the clear stamp of Tagore's ideas. A committee of five would be chosen by the inhabitants of each village to promote Swadeshi art and craft, set up schools, gymnasiums and dispensaries and undertake drainage, irrigation and road

construction projects. There would be provision also for articulation courts, model farms and dharma golas to fight famine; and a machinery would be set up to collect information about all aspects of the life of the villages. Significantly enough, there is no mention of the boycott or for that matter of any kind of direct political activity, except for vaguely worded general pledge to support the aims and programmes of the Congress and provincial and direct conferences.\textsuperscript{35}

The draft for village uplift chalked out by Tagore can be remembered in this context: "The villages in the country must be built up to be completely self-sufficient and able to supply all their own needs. For this, village groups should be formed, a few villages going to form each such group and the headmen of each group should make it self-sufficient by providing work for all and seeing that all their wants are met. In this way, self-government can become a reality all over the country. The villagers must be educated, assisted and encouraged to establish primary schools, centres of training in arts and crafts, centres for religious activities, co-operative stores and banks. Our salvation lies in thus making our villages self-reliant and knit together by the ties of co-operative life. Our main problem is how to build up model village communities."\textsuperscript{36}

An almost similar scheme was taken up by Gandhiji after 1930, known as the Wardha Scheme. In pursuance of the Congress

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
Resolution passed at Bombay, the All India Village Industries Association was born amid calm surroundings, and without any fuss on December 14, at Wardha, by the initiative of Jamnalal Bajaj who set ample ground with buildings for the use of the association. Its object was defined as village reorganization and reconstruction. Under its constitution, it was to work under the guidance and advice of Gandhi and was empowered to carry on research work, publish literature, organize propaganda, establish agencies, device measures for the improvement of village tools and do everything that may be necessary for the furtherance of its objects. Among the prominent members of the first board of management were J. C. Kumarappa, the organizer and the secretary, Dr. Prafulla Ghosh, Shankarlal Banker and Dr. Khan Sahib. The board had on its list expert advisers, namely Rabindranath Tagore, Sir J. C. Bose, Sir P. C. Ray, Sir C. V. Raman, Dr. M. A. Ansari and others.

The association, though a creation of the Congress, was made deliberately non-political and autonomous. Its members were pledged, whilst they remained such, to abstain from participating in any campaign of civil disobedience. There was a permanent board of management which again was responsible to a board of trustees who were incharge of the funds and property of the association. As the scope of the association was extensive and covered the entire field of social and economic life of the village, it was not the closely knit body that the All India Spinners' Organization was. The range of its activities
in the direction of production and distribution had been restricted. Apart from the boards of trustees and management, the association consisted of two grades of members, ordinary members and agents. Persons who subscribed to the creed of the association and promised to devote the best part of their energy and talents to the furtherance of its objects — the relief and service of the poor in the villages — were enrolled as members. They had to pledge themselves to live up to the ideals of the association and to prefer village manufacturers to any order. Agents had to sign a similar pledge and in addition they had to render honorary service in the village or villages or district where they chose to work. They were selected by reason of their knowledge of the area of their jurisdiction, their organizing capacity and their local influence.

An exhibition was arranged by the All India Spinners' Association and the All India Village Industries Association. Opening the exhibition on March 28, Gandhi said: "This exhibition, to my mind, brings out concertedly for the first time the conception of a true rural exhibition, I have nursed in my breast for several years. In 1921, when we met in Ahmedabad in the first year of the new Congress Constitution, we took the first step towards rural-mindedness and the exhibition organized under the auspices of the Congress held there was the beginning of the process which you find reaching its maturity today after 15 years. I have believed and reported..."

times without number that India is to be found not in its few cities, but in its 700,000 villages. But we, who have gathered here, are town dwellers. We the town dwellers have believed that India is to be found in its towns and that the villages were created to minister to our needs. We have hardly ever paused to inquire, if those poor folks get sufficient to eat and clothe themselves with, and whether they have a roof to shelter themselves from sun and rain. Now, I do not think that any Congress worker has travelled through the length and breadth of India, as much as I have done, during the past twenty years.

Where Rabindranath failed, was in developing direct communication with the mass. He had an utopian streak. But let us see the opinion of L. K. Elmhirst, who was one of the closest associates of Tagore about the rural outlook of these two men. It is an extract from Romain Rolland's Diary:

18-19 February, 1925 — Visited by L. K. Elmhirst, Tagore's companion in China and Buenous Aires. He is profoundly convinced that he (Tagore) understands the Indian peasant better than Gandhi and that his plan of rural reconstruction is better and more efficient than Gandhi's system. He never tires of criticizing the charka (the spinning wheel) and L. Elmhirst repeats his criticisms on his own account. He claims that Gandhi's plan is valid only for country areas close to towns. But the whole of Gandhi's policies meet with Tagore's disapproval.  

38. Ibid, pp. 80-81.
a principle with me that I should not think of inflicting
myself upon those who view my going in their midst with mistrust,
misgivings or apprehension. I should not think of coming here
except to serve you. But in many places, my presence and the
programme I stand for are viewed with considerable dread. At
the back of this dread, is the fact that I have made the
removal of untouchability a life's mission".

Gandhi's idea of settling down in Segaon village did not
appeal to some of his colleagues....And there at Segaon,
Gandhi was soon at work, though his hut was not yet ready. A
place to sit in and work had been rigged up out of split bamboo
matting, which served as roof and wicker work walls fastened to
the tree which protected him from the sun. A well with crystal
clear water made the place slightly cooler than its warm
surroundings.

It was Mr. Basil Mathews, when he visited Gandhi, who
used the word "Constructive revolution" and wanted to know from
him the whole perspective of rural development work. "I cannot
speak with either the definiteness or the confidence of a Stalin
or Hitler", said Gandhi, "as I have no cut and dried programme
which I can impose on the villages. My method, I need not say is
different. I propose to convert by patient persuasion. This is a
kind of practical adult education to be put to use as it
progresses. The centre is automatically shifted from the cities
to villages. They will be taught to know what they should want

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and how to obtain it in the shape of sanitation and hygiene, improvement of material conditions and social relations. If this primary education is taken by them in its fulness everything else follow. But in indicating the ideal, I have told you of the difficulties of this stupendous task. For, you should know that we have smaller, more illiterate villages even than Segaon, where people hug their ignorance and dirt, as they do their untouchability.\footnote{Ibid, pp. 130-31.}

We can singleout the contrast between Rabindranath and Gandhi's view about co-operative banks also from another study. Mathews, who had interviewed Gandhi, asked him about the place of the money-lenders and the zamindar in the village economy. "The money-lender, who today is inevitable", replied Gandhi, "will gradually eliminate himself. Nor are co-operative banks needed, because when I have taught Harijans the art I want to teach them, they will not need much ready money. Besides, those who are today deep down in mire cannot make use of co-operative banks. I am not so much concerned in getting them loans of money or plots of land, as I am about getting them bread, butter and even a little cheese. When people have learnt the art of turning idle hours to wealth, all the adjustment will follow". "But what about the zamindar? Would you eliminate him?" "I do not want to destroy the zamindar but neither I do feel the zamindar is inevitable. I will illustrate how I work out my trusteeship theory here. In this village Jamnalal has a 75 percent share. Of course, I have come here not by design, but by accident. When
I approached Jamnalal for help, he built me the required hut and the out houses and said, "Whatever profit there is from Segaon, you may take for the welfare of the village." If I can persuade other zamindars to do likewise, village improvement becomes easy. Of course, the next question is that of the land system, and that of Government exploitation. I regard the difficulties surrounding that aspect of the question as, for the moment, necessary evils. If the present programme is carried through, I shall perhaps know how to deal with the Government exploitation". "Your actual economic policy would differ from Mr. Nehru's? He, so far as I understand him would wipe out the zamindar". "Yes", replied Gandhi, "We seem to differ in our ideas of village uplift and reconstruction. The difference is of emphasis. He does not mind the village movement. He believes in industrialization; I have grave doubt about its usefulness for India".

Rabindranath's outlook did not differ much regarding zamindari from Gandhi. Gandhi never did explicitly advocate abolishing zamindari, neither did Rabindranath. Rabindranath himself was a zamindar, and he used to say that zamindari was his occupation and dreaming was his infatuation or a kind of fad. One well known author says that he saw, one of Rabindranath's contemporary note books carried poems on one page and the calculation of revenue collected from Birahimpur Pargana on another page. Rabindranath did not go to Silaidaha for

Tagore raises the question of private property while speaking of the general demand for a higher standard of living. He detects greed behind this demand, with which he has no sympathy because it violates his doctrine of the "simple life in the village". He however, does not impose this beneficent doctrine upon those fortunate ones "whom wealth gives opportunity for self-sacrifice". While benevolently condoning the excesses of wealth "restricted to limited regions", he shakes his moral mane at the "epidemic of voracity that has infected the total area of civilisation". The burden of his philosophy is obvious. He does not consider the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a small class to be objectionable; in fact, he declares that in a society which permits such a state of affairs (with some modifications, namely, that the rich give a part of their wealth to charity etc.), "property is the pillar that supports civilisation". But he holds that civilisation to be damned which demands such a distribution of the social wealth as will raise the standard of living of the people at large. Hurling his anathemas against "modern civilisation" the Poet cries: "The intemperance which could safely have been tolerated in a few, has spread its contagion to the multitude". That is, comfortable living, normal enjoyment, even debauchery can be tolerated in the fortunate few, who throw alms out of their bounty to the needy; but the desire of the multitude who have toiled from time immemorial to produce the wealth appropriated by the few, to share in the enjoyment of that wealth, is deemed to be damnable greed which makes for the collapse of civilisation.
The class character of this philosophy is unmistakable. Following up his line of reasoning, Tagore discovers that it is not the expansionist tendency of capitalist industrialisations, but the "greed" of the European working class, that is the root cause of the Imperialism which subjugates Asia and Africa.

The poet's opposition to industrialism leads him in such questionable directions, because he is activated by a reactionary social ideal. Had his criticism of the industrial system been revolutionary — even progressive, he would find that the root of all trouble lies in the right of property. But he frankly believes in the eternal nature of property. His solution of the present social problem is to replace the existing form of property relations by an earlier form, already left behind in the evolution of modern civilisation. He would replace capitalism by patriarcho-feudal aristocracy. He begrudges the working class that relatively higher standard of living which incidentally follows an improvement in social production. He is against modern industrialism because it disrupts the class of landed aristocracy to which he belongs. He is against the "gluttonous" demand for a general rise in the standard of living, because an improvement in the material conditions of life correspondingly quickens the intellectual aspect of human existence, making the ancient benevolent patriarchy of Tagore's ideal, a thing of the dead past.
To prove his thesis that the form of property-relation which makes for the accumulation of wealth in "limited regions" is highly beneficial for society, Rabindranath conjures up the picture of ancient India. Obviously he is unaware that the picture he points was not peculiar to India alone. The same conditions prevailed in Europe under the feudal aristocratic regime of the Middle Ages.

Tagore finds himself in such an anomalous condition because of his incoherent theories. He believes in private property, but is opposed to the evolution of property forms and relations. He affirms the existence of property to be a "moral force", yet denies the essential "morality" of the present form property-relations, capitalist industrialism, which rests upon and is a product of the sacred right of private property. Not knowing how to extricate himself from this dilemma, Tagore postulates that property-relations should develop as far as feudal patriarchy, and stop there. But this is impossible.

But the most significant feature of the Tagorean philosophy is the fact that he takes exception, not to the present form of property-relations, but to the general demand of the masses for a rise in their standard of living. The Poet laments: "With the rise in the standard of living property changes its aspects. It shuts the gates of hospitality, which is the best means of social inter-communication". The standard of living of the people at large should not be elevated, because it deprives the "fortunate few" of the pleasure of
feeding the poor. The great mass of humanity should remain in a state of "simple poverty", so that the moral stamina of the rich may be raised by acts of charity, hospitality, self-sacrifice, etc. If this is the "special genius" of Indian culture, India is indeed obsessed with an evil genius!

According to the Poet, the curse of industrial civilisation is not its capitalist character; it is the "popular claim to the right of freedom to be extravagant in our enjoyment, to the extent that we can afford it".45

Rabindranath's repeated pleas for constructive non-political village work — the most passionate of these being the Presidential address at the Pabna provincial conference met with little response as is well known from political leaders whether of the 'old' or 'new' variety. The poet's efforts were confined to his own zamindari, scattered over the three districts of Pabna, Rajsahi and Nadia. Even before 1905, he had set up an arbitration system at Silaidaha (Nadia) and at Kaligram (Patisar-Rajsahi district). Petty disputes were settled by the pradhan of each village, chosen by the inhabitants themselves, while more serious cases went up to the pancha pradhans of the pargana elected by the village pradhans. The final court of appeal was Rabindranath himself — zamindari officials were excluded, though records were still kept with their help. Faijādari (criminal) cases however were still tackled by the official courts and thus the system did not involve any direct violation of the law of the land.

The Sriniketan programme was in the beginning limited to three villages in the south-west of Santiniketan. Rabindranath was not ashamed of the smallness of the work. "I alone cannot take responsibility for the whole of India", he wrote, "But even if two or three villages can be freed from the shackles of helplessness and ignorance, an ideal for the whole of India would be established. These two or three villages must be liberated fully; all must have education, there must be joy in these villages with songs and readings as in the past".  

A Scout Movement was launched, locally known as the Brati Balaka Samgathana, starting at village Mahidpur in 1922. Elmhirst had picked this village in the neighbourhood of Surul inhabited by some 350 people. As more villages joined the Sriniketan experiment — an approach had to be devised to involve the boys in each village and the Brati Balaka method was found to be the simplest and the least expensive. There was no money to pay teachers, so it was decided to introduce the imperialist soldier Baden Powell's scouting system and principles. Two students were sent from Santiniketan to the Central Provinces, for a special course of the scout masters. As the poet has emphasized, the hope was that such boys and girls could play a major role in the village once they were stirred by an all round system of elementary education built around their own need to grow, to imagine and to explore. By 1930-34, large number of villages were taking interest in this movement.

At Sriniketan, as at Silaidaha and Patisar earlier, Rabindranath wanted to introduce the latest techniques of Western science to improve cultivation. A motor tractor costing Rs. 2,500 was bought for Sriniketan in 1927 (Minute Book, i, 184, Sriniketan Papers, PSV), which Rathindranath used to drive himself when he was at Patisar (Rabindranath - 'Cooperation', Towards Universal Man - pp. 245-6). It seems clear that Rabindranath's major objective in rural reconstruction was to bring back life to the village. He hoped that improved utilization and production would be the first step in the process. But the aim was "life in its completeness" and not charity (Sriniketan Institute of Rural Reconstruction, Visvabharati Bulletin, No. 11 (1928), p. 1). "Come all of you", he said in 1930 while addressing the villagers at Surul, not as beggars, but as co-workers. Be our partners in this effort; that alone will bring us success" (Rabindranath Tagore, "To the Villagers", Sriniketan Annual Fair, 1337 B.S. (1930), Pallindrakriti, p. 73).

Increase in the productivity of land was Elmhirst's primary objective. But at the same time he started organizing a health programme for general medical care and the eradication of Malaria. The Sriniketan dispensary was established in 1923 (Minute Book, i, 20) and the co-operative health societies from 1932 ("A scheme for Co-operative Health Societies in the Area around Sriniketan" - undated, Sriniketan Papers, PSV). The latter engaged in health activities of both preventive and curative nature ("Information on the First - Five Co-operative..."
Health Societies under Sriniketan" - Sriniketan Papers, PSV). Curative work involved giving proper medical care to poor villagers by setting up village dispensaries and providing maternity service. In September 1933, a trained midwife was appointed for the first time to work in three neighbouring villages (Project No. 11(3), Projects Book), Institute of Rural Reconstruction (hence forth Projects Book), Sriniketan Papers, PSV, pp. 75-7, cf. "Maternity and Child Welfare Activities, 1940", Sriniketan Papers, PSV). Preventive measures in the villages included sanitation work, the clearing of jungles, the spraying of Kerosine into dhabas and pits and distribution of quinine ("Statement of the quantity of quinine required through Village Welfare Department, 1924", Sriniketan Papers, PSV). A sample survey of the co-operative health societies routine preventive work is given (Quarterly Report of the Village Welfare Department, April-June, 1927, Sriniketan Papers, PSV) in Table-1.

Simultaneously a scout movement was launched, locally known as Brati Balaka Samgathana, starting at village Mahidpur in 1922 (Leonard K. Elmhirst's Diary - Poet and Plowman - p.159). The Table-2 showing Brati-Balaka enrolment during 1930-34 indicates the interest taken in this movement ("Information regarding Brati-Balaka Troops, 1930 and Numerical Strength of the Brati Balakas, 1934" — Sriniketan Papers, PSV).

At Sriniketan itself there were different educational institutions; the Siksha Satra (1924), for village boys (Minute Book - i, 49, 53; Cf. Siksha Satra : An Experiment in Rural Education at Sriniketan, Visvabharati Bulletin, No. 21,

Two kinds of results were certainly obtained. One was seen directly, whatever its scale, through the health work in villages which did reduce the number of deaths due to epidemic over a period of time (Deaths due to Malaria were reduced by 27 p.c. in the Sriniketan villages between 1928 and 1948, Cf. "Death rate charts Sriniketan Villages, 1928-48, also Malaria Papers - 1940", Sriniketan Papers, PSV) through the employment of a much larger number of villagers in the industries programme, even if helped by the outbreak of the Second World War, and through the introduction of rotation of crops in village agriculture. The other, evolved out of Sriniketan principles, was long term and can be seen in the work of the Government. The services offered to the villages by the Block Development Scheme are partly of a piece of the Sriniketan programme. The Government's community Project is also an echo of Rabindranath's idea as started in Swadeshi Samaj (Bhabatosh Dutta - Arthanir Pathe, Calcutta, 1977, p. 68).

This Brati Baleka Samgathana programme was later taken up by Gurusaday Dutt, I.C.S., one of the sons-in-law of Brajendra-nath De, I.C.S. to whom reference has been made earlier. His
Table-1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Roads repaired and constructed in yards</th>
<th>Drains repaired and constructed in yards</th>
<th>No. of Dobas filled up</th>
<th>Tanks cleaned in Bighas</th>
<th>Jungle distributed in grammes</th>
<th>Quinine spray distributed in grammes</th>
<th>Kerosine sprayed in seers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bandgura</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>1,520</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>8,406</td>
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<td>3,620</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Zenuria</td>
<td>465</td>
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<td>2,800</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Goal para</td>
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<td>50</td>
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<td>Village</td>
<td>No. of Boys (8-16)</td>
<td>No. of Boys attending school</td>
<td>No. of Brati Balakas</td>
<td>Year of organization of the Brati Balaka troop</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>Santals</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>Santals</td>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>45</td>
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<td>38</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Bablabuni</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
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<td>36</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td></td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>1931</td>
</tr>
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</table>
group was called the *Bratachari* organization. He was of course, inspired by Rabindranath to a certain extent (1862-1941). Gurusaday Datta was also affected by the British folklore revival typified by Cecil Sharp.\(^5\)

Gandhiji, on the other hand was undertaking an almost similar programme at Wardha. Gandhi's plans for reorganizing national education, popularly known as the Wardha scheme, were accepted by the Zakir Hussain Committee and the full report which appeared as a supplement to *Harijan*, on December 11, 1937, was a document of exceptional interest.

Three members of the New Education Fellowship, Dr. Zilliacus, Professor Bovet and Professor Davies, came on a brief visit to Gandhi. They expressed their deep appreciation of what he was doing in the cause of education. "I had been wishing all these years", said Dr. Zilliacus, "that leaders of opinion ought to turn their attention to education which alone can reconstruct society, and I cannot tell you how grateful I was when I found that you had turned your attention to education. We have studied your scheme and we must assure you of our heart-felt sympathy for its success". "The reason why it has appealed to you is quite all right", said Gandhi, "But the whole syllabus cannot centre round non-violence. It is enough to remember that it emerges from a non-violent brain. But it does not presuppose the acceptance of non-violence by those who accept it. Thus, for instance, all members of the

committee do not accept non-violence as a creed. Just as a vegetarian need not necessarily be a believer in non-violence, he may be vegetarian only for reasons of health — even so those who accept the scheme need not be all believers in non-violence" (1937).51

Rabindranath and Gandhi were very thorough about children's education and their environment. Probably it was Rabindranath, who gave more emphasis on environmental education. He himself said, "From the first the child should feel that this plot is a playground as well as experimental farm, where it will try its own experiments as well as carry out the planting, tending and harvesting of some definitely profitable crop. Under such a system, text books, class rooms and formal laboratory go by the board. There remain the garden plot, the potting shed and the workshop. Records are kept and reports and accounts written up, revised and corrected, giving scope for 'literary training' in its most interesting form. Geology became the study of fertility of the plot; chemistry, the use of lime and manures of all kinds, of sprays and disinfectants; Physics, the use of tools, of pumps, the study of water-lifts and oil engines, entomology, the control of plant pests (ants, caterpillars, beetles), ornithology, the study of birds in their relation first to the gardenplot and then to the world in general."52

"Along with this, there should be some common sharing of life with the tillers of the soil and the humble workers in the neighbouring villages; studying their crafts, inviting them to the feasts, joining them in works of co-operation for communal welfare, and in our intercourse we should be guided, not by moral maxims or the condescension of social superiority, but by natural sympathy of life for life, and by the sheer necessity of love's sacrifice for its own sake. In such an atmosphere students would learn to understand that humanity is a divine harp of many strings waiting for its one grand music. Those who realize this unity are made ready for the pilgrimage through the night of suffering, and along the path of sacrifice, to the great meeting of Man in the future, for which the call comes to us across the darkness."\(^5^3\)

Contact with village reality helped to dissipate Rabindranath's romantic illusions regarding virtues of the traditional Hindu samaj. In a letter to Manoranjan Bandyopadhyay dated 30 Asara, 1315 B.S. (July, 1908), we find the explicit recognition that the nature of caste ridden Hindu society as distinct from the Muslim was hindering at every step efforts at collective self-help in Silaidaha. "Having seen all this at first hand, I no longer feel any desire to idealise the Hindu samaj through delusions pleasant to the ear, but ultimately suicidal — a big contrast indeed to the Swadeshi Samaj of just four years before. The other illusion was not unnaturally more persistent — that of the benevolent zamindar, and that ———\(^5^3\) Ibid, p. 94.
too was broken soon by undertaking this programme of agrarian reform." His visit to Soviet Russia in 1930 was to bring a new awareness — "Today I feel ashamed of this whole business of zamindari ... my sorrow is that I have been brought up from childhood as a parasite ... The time is coming for a fundamental change in our way of life. Let me be able to accept with good grace and without regrets."54

Rabindranath himself often used this term 'parasite' in regard to zamindars. In his discussion with Pramatha Choudhury, who was a close associate of the poet, he described the zamindars as 'parasites'. They were having a discussion on the condition of the ryots in our country.55 Gradually, with the passage of time, the poet was becoming more and more irritated about the attitude of British overlords and the zamindars who were their pets. In his article 'Ryoter Katha' he wrote, "The throne should be upheld first, then the crown would be made, after that the royal banner would be held and Manchester would be clad with all kinds of decorations, then only the condition of the ryots would be considered. So, a country's politics should come in the forefront, and then the country people of course".56

Another obstacle, which the poet felt was caste-barrier. He expressed this problem to Elmhirst in 1922. "In India, the real cause of the weakness that cripples our spirit of freedom arises from the impregnable social walls we raise between the different castes. These check the natural flow of fellow feeling.

among the people who live in our country. The law of love and of mutual respect has been ignored for the sake of retaining an artificial order. This only serves to promote a sense of degeneracy and of defeat. The people of India, in this way have built their own cage, but by trying to secure their freedom from one another, they only succeeded in keeping themselves eternally captive.\textsuperscript{57}

He wrote to Elmhirst on 18th April, 1922 - "The work in Surul is a work of creation for in it you are not following some fixed path prescribed in books, but giving expression to your own creative personality, to which even the opposition of obdurate materials ultimately brings help for shaping the structure\textsuperscript{58}." 25th June, 1924 - "I believe, I have the power of vision which seeks its realization in some concrete form. Unless our different works in Visvabharati are luminous with the fire of vision, I myself can have no place in them. This is why all the time when Sriniketan has been struggling to grow into a form, I was intently wishing that it should not only have a shape, but also light; so that it might transcend its immediate limits of time, space and some special purpose .... Alighted lamp is, for us, the end, and not a lump of gold\textsuperscript{58}.

Tagore's book 'The Co-operative Principles' is itself a document of his progressive spirit. "In material affairs man has for long neglected his humanity, using his strength only in the furtherence of greed. It is our divided strength, 

\textsuperscript{57} Pioneer in Education, Cp. Cit., p. 23.  
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, p. 33.
concentrated in the hands of the mighty, which has given them power. By attacking the power, we can break it, but we cannot put it together again, so that it will not be good to us. We must, therefore try to combine all our labour power and thereby gain economic benefits to be shared by all. That is the co-operative principle. It is this principle which has made man great in knowledge and given a moral basis to his conduct of practical affairs', where it is lacking, there is suffering, malice, falsity, barbarity and strife. 59

Though Rabindranath had contributed much to the development of rural economy on co-operative basis, he always used to confess that the idea was not new. This co-operative principle was also practiced in ancient India, but with the complexities of life, this noble virtue was lost. At one time, the co-operative principle was followed to some extent in our village based economy. But life is not as simple as in those days. Besides it is now far more difficult for the rich to be self-less. So much the better though, the masses must now develop their own inherent strength that will be of more permanent worth. If the Indian economy is based once more on co-operation, the villages which are the nurseries of our civilization will be vitalized and the whole country will gain a new life. Poverty holds the scheme and there are as yet few towers of accumulated wealth standing as barriers on the path of the humble masses. So co-operation will have little challenge to face. And it is my earnest prayer that the 59. The Co-operative Principles, Op. Cit., p. 37.
liberation of wealth, its redistribution be carried on in this country to the fullest extent, so that through the united efforts of all the people, the Goddess of food and plenty may finally be enthroned for all time to come. 60

It was from 1335 B.S. (1928), that Rabindranath introduced a new aspect in the field of cultivation — this was the Briksha ropan Utsav and Halakarshan Utsav. The idea was very good. The planting of new trees every year would indicate new life and vitality in agriculture and vegetation. At the same time, the ploughing of new tracts of lands by cows would signify a better prospect in production. Rabindranath introduced this festival at Visvabharati in Bhadra 1335 B.S. The Girls clad in yellow clothes inaugurated the festival with songs. Two boys carried a little plant kept inside a decorated palanquin. And then some shlokas were chanted, the English translation of which are as follows:

1. The trees are the greatest of all creations. All the other living beings live by depending on trees. No one goes without any gain from the trees.

2. The trees fulfil the wishes of living beings by giving leaf, flower, fruit, shadow, root, skin, wood, juice, alkali, pith and sprout.

3. Like the saintly people who give shelter to others, they give shadows to others, standing in the Sun.

4. Trees are the key to prosperity. Let them live long as the

60. Ibid. p. 41.
life of all living beings.  

After this ceremony, cows were decorated with garlands and they were fed with good food and then several other hymns were chanted. One such hymn was — "Let the lands be filled with the beautiful coulters. Let the ploughmen go ahead with the oxen. Let the lands become fertile with air, sunshine and water and serve mankind with beautiful crops."  

Though all the ideas of Rabindranath regarding village reconstruction and cultivation could not be carried by his followers very fruitfully, his ideas remain immortal. The ideas could not be fulfilled for practical difficulties, but the fact remains, that the poet wanted to attach himself with the soil of this country and to do something for the people of the soil — for their education, nutrition and above all for better cultivation. The plants, he realised were the genesis of rural life and so he welcomed the kingdom of plants in one of his famous songs, where he says that the dumb soil should get our tender care so that it will give us new melodies and different kinds of fruits and flowers. The plants which will grow upon the soil, will give shadow to the wayfarers and they will give gentle breeze in the morning and in the evening.