THE 21ST CENTURY MOBILE LIBRARY: REDEFINING THE CONCEPT WITH RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S CHALANTIKA

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Abstract: Rabindranath Tagore was one of the pioneers of education as well as of Indian Library Movement. He made pioneering efforts before Indian independence in the field of rural development, which started at Silaidaha, now in Bangladesh and took proper shape at Sriniketan, the poet's laboratory for his work in relation to village upliftment. He wanted "to bring back life in its completeness into the villages, making them self-reliant and self-respectful, acquainted with the natural tradition of their own country and competent to make an efficient use of modern resources for improvement of their physical, intellectual and economic condition." Some of these activities including the mobile library services are still continuing with some modifications according to the present day need. Rabindranath wrote only two articles on Library: "Library", in the year 1908 and the other one "Function of a Library" in 1928. In these two articles, the concept of modern library and their ideal functions were distinctly stated in such a way that the Library of modern times not across much ahead in respect of introducing new functions and services except by inclusion of computers and information technology. Library in the words of Tagore was a repository of knowledge that had to be properly organized: The bigness of the library is estimated by the number of its volumes. In order to bring a library into the fullest use, it is necessary that its contents should be clearly and specifically brought to notice, otherwise it is difficult for the ordinary man to find his way about them, and the library is left as a city of vast accommodation that lacks sufficient means of communications. According to Tagore, library works very praiseworthy and he categorically mentioned about the functions of a librarian in this way: the librarian's duty does not end with the acquisition, classification and caretaking of the volumes in his charge. In other words, it is not exhausted by mere multiplication and division; he must have a proper understanding of his books as well. Tagore believed that librarian should always invite its readers to the library and should introduce readers on library books or collection. Thus he opened a new horizon of library services establishing the "Chalantika Library" in order to support his rural reconstruction activities at Sriniketan in 1925. Chalantika Library has become a burning example of mobile library services in India for building up a new society with quality of life for rural people. Since the creation, and especially since the beginning of the internet or Information Age, mobile libraries have adapted to changes in technology and clientele. A bookmobile or mobile library is a <u>vehicle</u> designed for use as a <u>library</u>. It is designed to hold books on shelves in such a way that when the vehicle is parked they can be accessed by readers. Tagore's plan for the library was very unique not only in those days but also in the present time. He was in favour of 'Community Education' through the library. He had established a system of Community Education through Library at Sriniketan, which may be accepted as a model of 'community development process' and the 'mass literacy movement' and his 'Chalantika' as a modern mobile library.

1.0 Introduction:

Rabindranath Tagore was one of the pioneers of education as well as of Indian Library Movement. He made pioneering efforts before Indian independence in the field of rural development, which started at Silaidaha, now in Bangladesh and took proper shape at Sriniketan, the poet's laboratory for his work in relation to village upliftment. Rabindranath used the term "Rural Reconstruction "instead of rural development. He wanted "to bring back life in its completeness into the villages, making them self-reliant and self respectful, acquainted with the natural tradition of their own country and competent to make an efficient use of modern resources for improvement of their physical, intellectual and economic condition." Some of these activities including the mobile library services are still continuing with some modifications according to the present day need.

2.0 Library and Rabindranath Tagore :

Rabindranath wrote only two articles on Library: "Library", in the year 1908 and the other one "Function of a Library" in 1928. In these two articles, the concept of modern library and their ideal functions were distinctly

stated in such a way that the Library of modern times not across much ahead in respect of introducing new functions and services except by inclusion of computers and information technology. Library in the words of Tagore was a repository of knowledge that had to be properly organized: The bigness of the library is estimated by the number of its volumes. In order to bring a library into the fullest use, it is necessary that its contents should be clearly and specifically brought to notice, otherwise it is difficult for the ordinary man to find his way about them, and the library is left as a city of vast accommodation that lacks sufficient means of communications. According to Tagore, library works very praiseworthy and he categorically mentioned about the functions of a librarian in this way: What a great function is that of the librarian! His duty does not end with the acquisition, classification and caretaking of the volumes in his charge. In other words, it is not exhausted by mere multiplication and division; he must have a proper understanding of his books as well. Tagore believed that librarian should always invite its readers to the library and should introduce readers on library books or collection. In Tagore words: The worth of a librarian I would gauge by his power of attracting and looking after such circles, of acting as the intermediary for an intimacy of relationship between the reader and the library.

3.0 Emergence of Chalantika In Support of Rural Reconstruction

Rabindranath Tagore invested entire money he received from Nobel Prize for building up a Co-operative Bank for the villagers at Silaidaha. But the villagers did not response to this noble rural development activity at all and as a result the entire project went in vain. Gurudeva identified that due to the illiteracy, lack of awareness, superstition and ignorance of the village people his noble project had become to an end fruitless. He was very much aware of these factors of rural life while he initiated again his rural development programmes at Sriniketan for the second time in 1922. He felt that library is the only panacea against these hindrances to overcome and it would be a strong support to his rural reconstruction project. Thus he opened a new horizon of library services establishing the "Chalantika Library" in order to support his rural reconstruction activities at Sriniketan in 1925. Chalantika Library has become a burning example of mobile library services in India for building up a new society with quality of life for rural people. He also felt that traditional library services would not be helpful in rural areas to achieve his goal. Because as villagers they were not aware of library services and its advantages it would be the task of the library itself to go to serve the villagers with their required documents and information. Such type of library of mobile character would be effective in that purpose. With this view in object Tagore established Chalantika Library at Sriniketan with a revolutionary idea of mobile library services in society with a message of change, progress and upliftment of rural life in India.

4.0 Functioning of Chalantika

Rabindranath Tagore organized village development centres with a committee of volunteers for child development projects, Bratibalak teams of youths for physical fitness, development in cottage industries, diary, animal husbandry, agriculture and campaign against illiteracy, superstition, awareness programmes for women education, health and co-operative systems. Secretary of the committee of each village development centre was empowered to perform the role of librarian of Chalantika for the villagers. Car, van, ship and other designed vehicles are used presently to run a modern mobile library. In Tagore's time such transport facilities were not possible and available. Therefore, the librarian or bearer had to carry the books from the main collection of Chalantika at Sriniketan on foot or by bi-cycle or bullock cart to their respective villages. That is why Chalantika was termed as Circulating Library instead of mobile library. In a modern mobile library librarian or their staffs goes to the door of readers with the mobile vehicle to delivery / issue books and documents. In Tagore's time on behalf of the villagers librarian of the village development committee would collect library documents from the main collection of Chalantika. However, Tagore wanted that Chalantika would be a cultural centre for the villagers. He wished and planned to extend education up to the grass root level of the society through the mobile library services. Spreading up of education from nearer village to remotest villages was the mission of Chalantika Library services as Tagore designed since its inception.

5.0 Growth and services of Chalantika Library

However, 'Chalantika' started functioning in 1925 with an initial collection of 200 books. In the year 1927 Satish Chandra Mukhopadhyay donated 70 books to Chalantika. Collection and use of books .In the year 1925, 1937 and 1940 the number of books was 200, 1200 and 1504 respectively. In the year 1939, the number of books issued was 2793.At the initial stage there were only two mobile library branches at Bolpur and Goalpara in Birbhum district. For the extension of library services more three branch centres of Chalantika were set up at Bandgora, Santalpara and Benuria. The Bolpur and Goalpara branch centres had two sub-branches each for library services. However, gradually these centres increased in 15 branches and they are located at Dwaranda, Kalikapur, Kamarpara, Payel, Jadavpur, Sehela, Nurpur, Raipur, Supur, Rajatpur, Lohagarh, Salone, Goalpara, Ruppur, and Debagram.

Implementation of five laws of Library Science in Chalantika

Tagore implemented five laws of library science in practice through Chalantika Library services. The books were supplied to the villagers through branch and sub-branch centres round the year from its main collection at Sriniketan. It was aimed at that the books should be available to the remotest villagers, too. The villagers were issued books according to their choice, interest and demand for a certain period. The readers returned their books to the main collection of Chalantika Library via sub-branch and branch centres. Ranganathan advocated that "Library is growing organism" and Tagore made a library extensive and mobile in practice.

6.0 Variety in book Selection and Collection

The collection of books was mainly on fiction, biography, agriculture, epigraphy, health, nursing and children's books. School teachers help in supplying books to the villagers. Pamphlets on agricultural problems, health care, primary education, and rural reconstruction were published by the institute and circulated through mobile library. For establishing contact with the world of knowledge, a fortnightly journal Deshe- Videshe was published by the institute. For attracting people towards the library regular lectures on various local problems and magic lantern show were organized. During the year 1929, twenty six lectures were delivered in nineteen villages, with a total attendance of 6000 people

Chalantika Library services did not come to an end after the departure of Tagore but its services were multiplied and extended more in numbers in the remotest villages surrounded by Santiniketan and Sriniketan while an Area Library sponsored by Government of West Bengal with staff and fund came forward to support Chalantika Library with additional library services in 1952. The Area Library set up six branch libraries called Feeder Library for extension of library services at Goalpara, Adityapur, Surul, Benuria, Laldah and Albandha villages. The demand of library services was getting more and more importance at the adjacent villages. So, further initiative was taken for enriching Chalantika Library services in order to cover more new areas. In 1975 Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) came forward at Sriniketan for the fulfillment of this demand. Visva-Bharati with the collaboration of RRRLF began to finance for establishing permanent rural libraries in the villages with library building, furniture, books, journals and equipments.

7.0 The 21st Century Mobile Library: Refining the Concept

Since their creation, and especially since the beginning of the internet or Information Age, libraries have adapted to changes in technology and clientele. Since the Internet has rapidly changed the distribution channels worldwide, libraries and their vendors have evolved by offering an increasing number of services online. In the developing world, where infrastructure is often prohibitive to high speed internet access, the use of cellular networks becomes an important source of information.

8.0 What is Mobile Library?

A bookmobile or mobile library is a vehicle designed for use as a library. It is designed to hold books on shelves in such a way that when the vehicle is parked they can be accessed by readers. Mobile libraries are often used to provide library services to villages and city suburbs that otherwise do not have access to a local or neighborhood branch library. They can also service groups or individuals who have difficulty accessing libraries, for example, occupants of retirement homes. As well as regular books, a bookmobile might also carry large print books, audiobooks, other media, IT equipment, and Internet access.

The present social development represents opportunities to deduce potential actions and fields of activity for libraries. Therefore, it is necessary to take a look at several aspects which examine and explain the social change in our modern society including changes concerning individuals.

Firstly, one has to take a look at the demographic change and the movement of the age pyramid due to the higher life expectancy and arising consequences. Secondly, it is important to notice that individuals cannot be "pigeon holed" as they behave completely different. Therefore, it is necessary to use lifestyle models to show the differences in a society. Libraries have already started to prepare themselves for this social diversity. They conduct systematic target group orientation or customer surveys to learn about their patrons' needs. The task-related change is also of importance: There are fewer employees who have to do more work. It is expected by many employers, that the employees are specialized in certain domains and simultaneously acquire a comprehensive knowledge in other areas of their respective field of work. Therefore, further training programs are necessary. Libraries already offer a variety of services here. As a "Teaching Library" they train many different target groups in information literacy.

The third relevant aspect for libraries is medium-related change. The Internet with its numerous interaction possibilities (web 2.0) and social networks is used widely by libraries, too. Additionally, there is the section of mobile devices which also represents a kind of mobile library. E-Book readers with a collection of digital book files are sometimes entitled as "mobile libraries". Libraries are already taking an active part regarding e-Book readers, iPhones and similar devices, primarily in the USA. Developers, technicians and librarians who are involved in the development of library services for these devices exchange experiences in the working group "m-libraries".

The term "mobility" is defined in the following. "Non-personal mobility" refers to the ability to work at a self-determined time and place. This is often referred to as "telework" in the working environment. Equivalents in library science are e-learning modules which are already used for teaching information literacy at many universities. The term "personal mobility" describes the mobility of individuals who finish their work at a place that is not their place of residence, e.g. commuters or field service representatives. These types of mobility will increase and influence everyday life significantly. Thus, libraries are required to customize their services and go to the user instead of letting him come to them. Defining today's society is essential. There are numerous definitions of different scientists who examine the many facets of today's society from their respective point of view. The authors have decided to favor the term "information society" which is also mentioned in the subtitle. Referring to libraries, it reflects that an individual continuously and critically faces the learning process and can generate knowledge from information independently. Here, libraries are able to relate the requested information to the patron and thus help her or him to recognize knowledge-related connections.

There are already numerous approaches considering the different mobility aspects and the change in today's information society.

8.1 Moving Libraries:
As said before, the term "Moving Libraries" combines two different ideas of "mobility" with "library" into one integrative concept. The term is based on library services which cover mobile libraries that actively approach their patrons as well as library services which are positioned at highly frequented metropolitan spots.

There are several criteria that define Moving Libraries, for example the mode of maintenance, the objectives and visions or the type of locomotion. Three divisions can be defined: Firstly, there are Moving Libraries which are mobile themselves. Secondly, mobile library services with which libraries can support and accompany the mobility of the society. Thirdly, there are virtual or digital offers which provide free access to information. Some examples are presented more detailed below.

8.2 Mobile libraries:
For the libraries which are mobile themselves, three different types can be identified: Bookmobiles, ship libraries and the so-called "living libraries". The last term was chosen to simplify matters. These libraries are not really "alive", but moved by human or animal strength.

8.3 Bookmobiles:
The example which is probably best known is the one of the bookmobiles. Their most important feature regarding Moving Libraries is that the library-orientated tasks like circulation and reference are taking place in the bookmobile itself and the vehicles are not only used for the transportation of the items. Bookmobiles can react to changes within the needs of their patrons more flexibly than stationary libraries. Their main tasks are the supply of literature and information for the population which can hardly or not at all be reached by stationary libraries. In this way, they support information literacy. Library trains also belong to this section of mobile libraries.

8.4 Ship libraries
Basically, ship libraries can be distinguished by their specific target group as well as the type of ship on which they are located. There are libraries which are mainly intended for the entertainment of the passengers but also special libraries for the crew on passenger ships (for example on cruise ships).There are also libraries which are set up for the needs of scientists on research vessels. Ship libraries in regions like Scandinavia or in Bangladesh have a similar function like bookmobiles, they guarantee the supply of literature in regions that can hardly or not at all be accessed by land.

9.0 "Living" mobile libraries:
Donkey, camel or elephant libraries are mainly found in rural areas of Africa, Asia or South America. The main task of these Moving Libraries is to teach information literacy and satisfy basic literary needs. Often,

these living libraries are maintained by idealistic individuals. Here the information is transported by humans, on the back of animals (e.g. in the Andes in Cajamarca) or by bicycle (for example in Indonesia).

9.1 Benefits of Mobile Library

More institutions are competing to gain the patron's time and attention, including libraries. Therefore, libraries have to find ways to save the patron's time when he or she uses the library.

9.2 Time Saving

➢ Firstly, delivery or pick up services (e.g. in the form of return boxes) represent an opportunity, because the patrons don't need to take a second trip to return the items. A cooperation with local retail trade would be possible – while going out shopping, patrons can return their books e.g. at the bakery or the mall.

➢ Time can also be saved by using the so-called Smart Shelf technology. These are intelligent information and guiding systems which lead the patrons to the very bookshelf that contains the requested item, but also make it possible for the patrons to get recommendations on other items like on amazon.com. The Smart Shelf technology is already used successfully in Singapore libraries. With the help of mobile terminals, the patrons are directed directly to the books, which are traceable via their RFID tags.

➢ Another concept is that of the "Roving Librarians". Additionally to time saving, it avoids potential frustration. Here, the reference librarians do not wait for patrons behind their desk, but are roving around the library to detect patrons in need of help.

9.3 Collection Management

Libraries have to think about the fact that information and news' life-time is shorter than ever. Patrons expect that libraries react to this as well. This can be achieved by an additional library unit with a mobile collection as an addition to the normal collection of a public library. This mobile collection, which is exchanged again after a few weeks or months, is relating to a current political, cultural or scientific topic or event. An example might be a kind of container with a collection of bestsellers where only the current bestsellers in fiction are available. The concept of the so-called "Floating Collections" represents another way to create a mobile collection. Allowing the concept of Floating Collections means a different approach to the traditional collection management.

10.0 Amenity Values

Libraries have to satisfy many different needs for which different rooms must be provided. They are used as a meeting place, studying place, communication place and as a social place. Their offer has to be a transition from privacy to a public area. Thus, libraries have to ask themselves, in which way they want to make which rooms available and provide the appropriate equipment. The design of the rooms also plays an important role as well as the functional equipment. This is for example a flexible furnishing with regard to the quality of stay for the patrons. It should motivate to sit down and study and also reflect the spirit and the vision of the library. The rooms should also have something "special" so that the patrons like to stay in the rooms.

11.0 Conclusion

Tagore's plan for the library was very unique not only in those days but also in the present time. The entire Library Programme that had been implementing in Visva Bharati by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore remains an ideal University Library System even today. Tagore's thoughts about the library was not only limited to his educational institute, but also extended for society education. He was in favour of 'Community Education' through the library. He had established a system of Community Education through Library at Sriniketan, which may be accepted as a model of 'community development process' and the 'mass literacy movement' and his 'Chalantika' as a modern mobile library.

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96 | P a g e

Riya Datta (Sengupta) and Dr. Biswajit Das- The 21st Century Mobile Library: Redefining the Concept with Rabindranath Tagore's Chalantika