

## Miscellaneous Recommendations

### 1. The Visually Impaired

There is a famous photograph of Tagore in 1930 being lip-read by Helen Keller (whom Tagore had met twice – in 1921 and 1930). *Life* carried it as a full page illustration on 28 February 1938. The HLC cannot but contrast that picture with the existing standards of institutional care for the visually impaired in Visva-Bharati today.

The XIth Plan is now considering including a National Library Service for the Blind and Print-Disabled. Delhi University, thanks to the pioneering efforts of Professor Vinod Sena, has a state-of-the-art Resource Centre for the Blind (RCB). The HLC recommends that VB should depute a team to the DU's RCB to see what it can do to assist visually impaired students. It can begin the process by visiting a pioneering website for the benefit of blind professors and students in higher education : [www.shruti.org.in](http://www.shruti.org.in)

### 2. The Indira Gandhi Centre for National Integration

*I have it in mind to make Santiniketan the connecting thread between India and the world. I have founded a world centre for the study of humanity there. The days of petty nationalism are numbered – let the first step towards universal union occur in the fields of Bolpur. I want to make that place somewhere beyond the limits of nation and geography.*

- Rabindranath Tagore (1918)

The Indira Gandhi Centre for National Integration (established in Santiniketan in 1986) has been a non-starter right from its inception. The Centre has a building and 8 officers' quarters where invited Professors could come and stay. Of these, 6 are vacant now. The nodal authority for the Centre is the UGC, although UGC has not yet evaluated it. The Registrar informed the HLC that the expenditure for the Centre was met out of VB's 'revenue expenditure'. The Director's post had been filled up only two years ago. The Director is in the process of submitting a Plan for the "rejuvenation" of the Centre. Currently, cultural programmes, seminars, essay competitions between students of different schools, etc were organised by the Centre but, clearly, it is not functioning up to the desired level. To the Chairman's query as to the nature of research that a Professor desirous of coming to the Centre could do, the Registrar said that the person could be registered somewhere else and could come here "for studying, interacting and gathering information informally." The Centre cannot give Ph.D degrees on its own. The visiting person could be attached to a Professor here for his Ph.D.

There have been no visits by eminent Professors to the Centre, either from within the country or from overseas.

Professor Partha Sarathi Mukhopadhyay suggested to the HLC at an interaction on 22 June, 2006, that its extension programmes be revitalised to make the Centre viable, fruitful and effective. Professor Mukhopadhyay added that three teaching posts in the Centre were vacant and would need to be filled up in order to enable the Centre to function properly and effectively.

The HLC recommends that in place of the Centre, a new body called 'Indira Gandhi Centre for Visiting Scholars' (IGCVS) be set up for promoting a creative dialogue on international understanding and national integration. This Centre will identify and host scholars from abroad and within the country, invited by the University as a whole or by several departments together. Individual departments will continue with their programmes of inviting

visiting scholars. This Centre should be administered by a panel headed by the Director of the Tagore Memorial Institute, of which the other members will be the heads of the Vidya Bhavana, Siksha Bhavana, its convenor being the head of the IGCVS.

### 3. Visva-Bharati Centre for Management Studies

This MBA Course began in 2005 as a 'self-financing course' with 60 seats and a 'break-even' assessment that 'if 35 seats are filled it would run at no-profit, no-loss'. The numbers admitted the year are 21 leaving a 'break-even' shortfall of 14 and a consequent revenue loss of Rs. 15 lakhs approximately. An advertisement has been put up in August 2006 for further candidates.

The HLC feels this MBA Course is a shining example of a 'run-of-the-mill' mindset that is unworthy of VB and, after due formalities in the AC and EC, should be discontinued.

### 4. Womens' Studies

The HLC's Open Session at *Ratan Kuthi* on 24 June, 2006 brought an important perspective to its notice, namely, that VB lacked an important-enough programme of Women's Studies. Women's Studies should receive far more space than has been given to it. Turning attention to the gender aspect of many studies is important. Smt. Swati Ganguly of the Department of English suggested setting up an interdisciplinary School of Women's Studies which could undertake – a) research work and projects pertaining to women's issues in various liberal arts, visual/performance arts, social science and pure/applied sciences and, in the process, encourage interdisciplinary research; b) act as a bridge between the academia and women activists/voluntary organisations working in the district; c) will liaise with women members of the Panchayats, ICDS and Anganwari workers to facilitate and organise workshops and awareness building programmes on legal and political rights, reproductive health, education with special focus on women's issues.

The University should have, she added, a properly constituted cell to address issues of sexual harassment. Counselling centres for students, teachers and non-teaching staff, reviving the NSS programme at the high school as well as UG level so that students can participate in community building projects. She felt that there should be a change in the undergraduate curriculum to make provision for General Awareness course where students will discuss/debate on contemporary issues. The Chairman enquired whether the University has a proper mechanism viz., a Proctor (sufficiently authorised) to deal with cases of sexual harassment. Smt. Ganguly said that there were no guidelines to tackle such situations or complaints.

The HLC would recommend Smt Ganguly's suggestion unreservedly with the comment that the DSW can be the locus for activating the proposal.

### 5. Santhal Perceptions

At the same Session, Santhal women from Ballypada Adivasi colony said they wanted work in Visva-Bharati so that they could sustain their families as also to bring up their children properly. An Adivasi (of the same Ballypada Santhal colony) drew the attention of the HLC to the lack of medicare, school and other facilities in the adivasi areas around Santiniketan. He said

that if Siksha Satra curriculum could include more vocational courses, their children could learn those and be of immense help to the adivasi community. They were ready to form Self Help Groups but they need assistance from the University. He said that, earlier, the Palli Sangathan Vibhaga used to help the adivasi community in various ways, but its involvement was receding. Even if they want to sink tubewells or wells, he said, they have to answer a host of queries by the authorities and permission is delayed. He said that the adivasis in Teen Palli and elsewhere around Santiniketan-Sriniketan were illiterate (a sad commentary on the effectiveness of ‘Santiniketan – Visva-Bharati system’ itself.) He felt that if Sriniketan imparts vocational training to adivasis, like pottery, batik print, pottery, etc, it would be of immense help for the community.

The HLC recommends that the PSV and Siksha Satra engage the Ballypada Santhal community in a discussion, with the participation of Santiniketan’s longtime resident and Santhal expert, Martin Kampchen.

#### 6. Sanitation

Visva-Bharati has a sanitary department with a Deputy Registrar and other staff members. Apart from permanent sweepers, there were also part-time or casual sweepers. But it was clear that VB lacked a proper solid waste management and garbage-disposal system.

The Registrar informed the HLC that 10 March every year, being ‘Gandhi Punnaha Day’, is designated for “a thorough cleaning drive.” The HLC wondered if such symbolic gestures apart, could the sanitation system at Santiniketan not be stabilised? (It was subsequently ascertained that Santinketan did not even have a proper sewage system).

The HLC recommends that VB and SSDA have a tripartite dialogue on this with the Bolpur authorities and redeem sanitation from symbolism.