

## **THE HERITAGE 'CORE', RABINDRA BHAVANA AND THE ASHRAMA**

The magnetic core of Visva-Bharati lies in these precincts which house the dwellings associated with Tagore, set among gardens.

*The Basic Facts :*

### Uttarayana Complex

Within walking distance from the house that Maharshi Debendranath had raised in the nineteenth century, are a set of houses and gardens. These were the residences of Rabindranath, his son Rathindranath and daughter-in-law Pratima. Rathindranath had an interest in furniture-designing low and elegant but not necessarily comfortable seats, while Pratima – knowledgeable about Java – was interested in textiles like batik. Together they set up the gracious *Udayana*, the 'main' dwelling, stage by stage, over the period 1921 and 1938. Designed by Rathindranath and Surendranath Kar, a talented painter and architectural experimenter, it was impressive. Rabindranath, however, preferred to live in a house of smaller size and moved to a mud hut *Shyamali* (The Dark One) built in 1935. Gandhi, visiting in 1940 and 1945 stayed there with great happiness. But Tagore had to leave it for a more 'solid' house, *Punascha* (Postscript) in 1937, where he could meet his large number of visitors. He moved finally into *Udichi* (To The North), in 1939.

These structures are collectively described as the *Uttarayana* Complex. Along with *Vichitra* – the Archive, Museum and Library – they are the setting for Rabindra Bhavana (RB) set up by Rathindranath as a research centre for Tagore Studies in 1941. RB is the 'still-centre' of Santiniketan. It is its memory, its mind and aesthetic conscience, all combined. It is also its sanctum where Visva-Bharati's initiator becomes a palpable presence, his memorabilia being the tangible representatives of his legacy.

No teaching institution, RB nonetheless provides both facilities and an ambience for a study of Tagore's life and works. Scholars from Visva-Bharati and beyond come to see the dwellings and work out of *Vichitra*, its museum, library and archives. For the written word they refer to RB's rich collection of manuscripts, letters, newspaper clippings, books, journals. For the imagic recollection of Tagore, they turn to his paintings, photographs and film strips. RB also has voice recordings and music to add a third dimension to accessing Tagore. Mementos, souvenirs and personal letters provide a tactile reminder. Altogether, the elegant site of homes and gardens Tagore lived in and worked from, RB is to Santiniketan what the Shakespeare home, with its own little garden, is to Stratford-Upon-Avon.

RB's heritage appeal cannot be overstated. The RB's buildings are described as follows :

### *Konark* (The Slanting Ray)

This building of 18 rooms was raised in 1919 to be Tagore's residence. Its historical value lies in its being the venue for poetry-recitation by Tagore and rehearsals for his plays. It is now a permanent display gallery for visitors. *Konark* was restored by the ASI at a cost of Rs. 12.23 lakhs in 2001.

### *Udayana* (The Dawning)

While Tagore first lived in the building, it was a relatively simple structure. But it was made more elaborate, gradually, by the Poet's son Rathindranath. It finally became a three storied building with an approximate floor area of 5910 sq.ft. It has been used for important events of the University and as the place of stay for the President of India and the Prime Minister of India.

### *Shyamali* (The Dark One)

Designed by Tagore and built in the year 1934, 'Shyamali' is made principally of earth. Rabindranath moved to this contrastive opposite from the larger and sumptuous Udayana.

He wrote a poem on it :

*I have built with mud a shelter for my last hours  
and have named it Shyamali.  
I have built it  
on the dust of this earth  
which buries in it  
all sufferings  
and cleanses  
all stains.*

It has a floor area of 1739 sq.ft. and seven rooms, all situated on the ground floor. *Shyamali* is chiefly remembered for its use as the guest accommodation for Mahatma Gandhi when he visited Santiniketan in the years 1940 and 1945. It is yet to be restored by the ASI for which a sum of Rs. 2,60,815 has been deposited. It is used, occasionally, as a backdrop for lectures.

### *Punascha* (Postscript or 'Once Again')

Built in the year 1936, it comprises four rooms and has a floor area of 774 sq.ft and is also at present used as a display gallery. It is under renovation.

### *Udichi* ( The 'North-Facing' )

Built in the year 1938 as a residence for Tagore, it comprises seven rooms and has floor area of 774 sq.ft. It is used at present for a permanent display for visitors. It urgently needs renovation.

The *Uttarayana* Complex has a team of maintenance personnel headed by a Superintendent and 4 Generator Operators/Fitters/ Helpers, apart from Gardeners.

### *Vichitra*

This building, raised in 1961 (Tagore's birth centenary year), is the venue of the Rabindra Bhavana created in 1942 by Rathindranath to study and research his father's life and works. It houses the RB's archives, the paintings, memorabilia and the RB library.

The RB has an elaborate staff structure headed by the Director of the RB who is assisted by 3 senior colleagues, namely, 1) Professor, 2) Special Officer, 3) Systems Analyst (Multimedia).

RB has an office establishment comprising 9 individuals who include 3 senior assistants, 1 PA and 3 office assistants.

#### RB's Archives

RB's archival section, which is an important wing is headed by a Superintendent assisted by 2 senior assistants and an archival assistant. The archives comprise 673 volumes of manuscripts, 154 files and as many as 1471 files of correspondence.

It is worth noting that the correspondence files have Bengali and English letters as well as letters in some other languages. They include papers not just of Rabindranath but also of his father Debendranath and his grandfather Dwarkanath.

They hold Tagore family correspondence Tagore Estate papers, and Visva-Bharati related papers. RB's 'Correspondence Files' contain papers of C.F. Andrews as well as those of P.C. Mahalanobis and Rani Mahalanobis and the collection of Tagore's daughter Mira Devi, her daughter Nandita and of Nandita's husband Krishna Kripalani, one of Tagore's early biographers.

The archives also hold – like illustrative plates in a book – 1581 paintings.

#### RB's Library

The Library is managed by a professional assistant (in-charge) with two other professional assistants and one semi professional assistant. The Library has 44691 books and bound journals, as also a rare pamphlet file that includes souvenirs issued at different dramatic performances and special occasions. It holds a collection of handwritten journals by students of Santiniketan which are now a major primary source of the history of Santiniketan. The Library also has personal collections (books of Rabindranath) and of certain other contemporaries of his.

#### RB's Museum

The Director-in-Charge of RB informed us that the Museum's inventory was updated in August 2004 (after the loss of the Nobel medallion and other articles in March 2004).

The Museum is headed by a Curator, assisted by 2 Deputy Curators, a Museum Guide, a Museum Artist and a Museum Attendant.

#### RB's Multi-Media Activities

The RB's audio-visual holdings are looked after and worked upon by a reprographer-cum-photographic officer who has the following technical staff under him:

Senior Technical Assistant 1  
Microphotographer 1  
Technical Assistant 1  
Darkroom Assistants 2

The RB's Preservation Unit is headed by a Superintendent who is assisted by preservation assistants (2), senior artist (1), junior preservation assistant (1), mountcutter-cum-lab assistant (1), senior bookbinders (2), mender (1).

At the time of writing (October 2006) the following positions at Rabindra Bhavana were vacant :

1. Director, Culture & Culture Relations, Visva-Bharati & Adhyaksha, Rabindra-Bhavana, VB.
2. Professor, Rabindra Bhavana
3. Special Officer, Rabindra Charcha Prakalpa
4. Reprographer-cum-Photographic Officer
5. Curator
6. Deputy Curator (Archives)
7. Senior Artist
8. Preservation Assistant
9. Junior Preservation Assistant
10. Senior Assistant

The 'Ashrama'

*It must be an ashram where men have gathered for the highest end of life, in the peace of nature; where life is not merely meditative, but fully awake in its activities, where boys' minds are not being perpetually drilled into believing that the ideal of the self-idolatry of the nation is the truest ideal for them to accept ; where they are bidden to realize man' s world as God's Kingdom to whose citizenship they have to aspire; where the sunrise and sunset and the silent glory of stars are not daily ignored; where nature's festivities of flowers and fruit have their joyous recognition from man; and where the young and the old, the teacher and the student, sit at the same table to partake of their daily food and the food of their eternal life.*

Rabindranath Tagore, 1917.

'Ashrama' is the term used with affectionate respect for the area that comprises certain open spaces with trees and buildings associated with the organizations of Santiniketan. These include the seven acres of denuded red earth which Maharshi Debendranath purchased to establish his Ashrama. They do not include the *Uttarayana* Complex

In order of broad chronology and importance, one needs must mention, as amongst the Ashrama's chief features as below :

- (i) The *Chhatimtala*, the spot amidst *Chhatim* trees where Maharshi Debendranath meditated, and the other trees such as teak, banyan, that stand guard around it;
- (ii) The exquisite *Mandir* or *Upasana-Griha* made in 1891 of plain and coloured glass on a wrought iron supports for inter-denominational prayer.
- (iii) The *Santiniketan Griha*, where Tagore lived as a child – now vacant but owning some beautiful ageing frescoes that need the urgent attention of an archaeological chemist.

The boundaries for this Ashrama area include the Nepal Road on the South, the road going by the east side of the playground right up to the *Uttarayana* gate is the boundary on the west, the main metalled road going past the *Chhatimtala*, the *Mandir* upto the Bolpur-Goalpara road forming the northern boundary and the Bolpur-Goalpara road forming the eastern boundary.

The Ashrama area includes also :

- i) Taladhvaj which houses the *Karu Sangha*, a centre for handicrafts by ex-students of Kala Bhavana
- ii) Natun Bari – office of the *Alapini Mahila Samiti* in which Gandhiji stayed on his first visit in 1915
- iii) Dehali – Mrinalini Ananda Pathsala
- iv) Santoshalaya – boarding house for girls of the Sishu Vibhag
- v) Satya Kutir – Patha Bhavana classes
- vi) Purva Toran
- vii) Paschim Toran
- viii) Sinha Sadan – a Hall
- ix) Dinantika – Closed now
- x) Benu Kunja – Alumni Association Office
- xi) Patha Bhavana office
- xii) The buildings that now house the Vidya Bhavana office and Sanskrit department
- xiii) Prak Kutir – Samindra Pathagar
- xiv) Ghantatala – the bronze bell site

This area, which is outside the *Uttarayana* Complex, is fenced but bereft, rather like Sakuntala during the period of Dusyanta's amnesia. There is no Trust, as such, or any empowered body for that matter, in charge of maintenance of the Ashrama area.

*Observations :*

#### The Uttarayana Complex and its Buildings

By any standards this Complex is visually the most appealing part of Santiniketan. The buildings, at first glance, do not look as rundown as the others and the gardens seem, by and large, to be well tended. But the Director-in-Charge of RB had this to say to the HLC : “The houses are in deplorable condition. I have found that the buildings have never been thoroughly repaired in the last half-a-century; only piecemeal repair and face lifting has been done except in *Konark* and *Punascha*.”

Ironically RB earns a revenue of more than Rs. 12 lakhs per annum. Perhaps this is the only steady revenue earning institute of the University. It was resolved at one time in the apex body of the University, the Executive Council of Visva-Bharati that 75% of the gate money would come to RB for development. Unfortunately, this has not taken place.

There has, also, been criticism from time to time that the back-gardens, specially designed and laid out by Rathindranath Tagore, have deteriorated. It was ascertained that the problem in maintaining the back-gardens was the lack of adequate water supply, the Pampa lake, the main source of water for the gardens having dried over the years. An amount of over Rs. 4 lakhs had been arranged in 1996 to restore the lake but, as the Director-in-Charge of RB informed us, - “For reasons unknown, this money has not been utilized”. We were told that the CPWD had submitted an estimate of Rs. 22 lakhs for the *Uttarayana* Gardens (and Pampa) but “funds were awaited.”

In a comment of larger significance, she added, “Rabindra Bhavana does not fit in the University system because the University is run by grants received from UGC. As such UGC is primarily concerned about academics, hostels, libraries and various facilities to teachers and students. Heritage status of buildings were not on the primary agenda of UGC.” She felt that Visva-Bharati treated Rabindra Bhavana as one of its many departments and the Annual Budget

of Rabindra Bhavana at Rs. 7 lakh was hardly sufficient for the Complex's upkeep. The Gate Money earned at the Complex, she said, goes to Visva-Bharati. There was the Rabindranath Tagore Trust with a corpus of Rs. 1.5 crores to which Rs 10 lakh interest is accrued annually. The Upacharya is the sole trustee of the Trust.

A thorough renovation of the entire complex was due, she said, and urged that it should be taken up as early as possible. The Director has submitted a plan to Visva-Bharati. In this context the Committee would suggest that the Rabindranath Tagore Trust, of which the Upacharya is the sole Trustee, should streamline procedures for the performance of its financial responsibilities.

The Committee also found the following comment of the Coordination Committee comprising of Visva-Bharati Adhyapak Sabha, Visva-Bharati Karmi Sabha and Visva-Bharati Alumni Association interesting :

“As a matter of fact the activities and the financial behaviour of the Trust have never been exposed to the university finance which has time and again indicated by the statutory audit as is manifested in the last audit report 2004-2005 that Rs. 310.64 lakhs were not disclosed (Page vii of Audit Report). Even the direction of the Executive Council vide its Resolution No. 1 dated 24.8.85 to associate Finance Officer with Rabindra Bhavana finances has not been given effect to. Even the investment of Rs. 1.99 crore of Publishing Department remained out of accounts and an unfinished stock of *Rabindra Rachanabali* Popular Edition valuing Rs. 29.50 lakhs was not incorporated in the annual accounts.”

### The Museum

The annual budget allocation for the Museum is Rs. 12,000/- an incredible sum. The Director-in-charge of RB has described the present state of the museum as “deplorable” and has suggested “a complete make-over”. Two Committees have been formed, one comprising the Museum and the other Security Experts who will provide guidance to the project of designing and setting up a new museum.

### The Library

It is gathered that RB's library collection has been catalogued with a backlog in certain areas being attended to. Work on an on-line catalogue has commenced as part of the INFLIBNET Project which is supposed to be completed by 2011.

### Archives

The archives have a complete inventory of its holdings which is updated each time a new item is registered. RB publishes a list of all new acquisitions in its bi-annual periodical. The RB archives, however, have no on-line catalogue. It is planned to start it along with a digitization process.

The manuscripts, letters and paintings are kept in a Strong Room that is temperature and humidity controlled but only in the daytime. At night the air-conditioning is switched off. The Director-in-charge made the point : “It is very urgent to air-condition the entire building, which is housing the Museum and Library. Our archival materials are constantly taken out to non-air-conditioning areas. But we do not have funds for that.”

The manuscripts and correspondence sheets, including those of *Gitanjali* have been preserved in acid-free paper, while the paintings have been mounted on acid-free boards.

Micro-filming of all the manuscripts in the archives has been done for the period until 1994. The RB archives has colour-transparencies of all the paintings in its collection. The digitization of these paintings has also begun. The Committee was informed that the process of laminating manuscripts to prevent deterioration has been carried on. The following questions and answers reflect the present position :

- Q. How many manuscripts are laminated annually to prevent deterioration?  
A. In the year 2004-2005 : 54 sheets. In the year 2005-2006 : 208 sheets were laminated.  
Q. How many correspondence files are laminated annually to prevent deterioration?  
A. In the year 2004-2005 : 82 sheets. In the year 2005-2006: 25 sheets.  
Q. How many library books are laminated and bound annually to prevent deterioration?  
A. Last year 1825 pages from books have been 'tissue-repaired'. Books and periodicals bound : 45.  
Q. What is the annual budget allocation for Preservation of manuscripts, letters and books?  
A. 24,000/-  
Q. Are the personnel professionally trained for these jobs? If so, what is the number of professionally trained staff?  
A. Out of 8 staff members, 4 are trained. Three posts are lying vacant in this unit.

### *Recommendations*

#### The Uttarayana Complex Buildings

1. Given the sharp deterioration in the buildings within the *Uttarayana* Complex and outside, the Upacharya recently took up the question of their restoration with the Paridarśaka. He was advised by the Paridarśaka that in the matter of restoring historical buildings, Dr. O. P. Agarwal and INTACH could be consulted.

The HLC would urge Visva-Bharati to act quickly on the Paridarśaka's advice – which is virtually a direction – and also, at the same time, seek advice on procedures used by the Delhi University in its recent restoration, under the initiative of its former Vice-Chancellor Deepak Nayyar, of some of its heritage buildings. (That restoration has been described as “a miracle” and “done within the single term of a Vice-Chancellor while it eluded all the previous Vice-Chancellors put together”.)

Several heritage precincts around the world face a dilemma in that they have to combine ease of access to visitors with the tightest security measures. The *Uttarayana* Complex is no exception. *Vichitra*, which now houses the museum, the archives, library and audio-visual preservation department of the RB, has to be welcoming to the serious visitor *and* thwarting to the criminal intruder.

#### 2. Security

The HLC would commend the Report of the High Level Expert Committee on Security appointed after the Nobel theft in all its aspects pertaining to *Vichitra* with the following comments :

Security Committee's recommendation:

*A three-tier security system be adopted with the deployment of State Police personnel in the outer periphery of the Rabindra Bhavana campus, engagement of outsourced security agency as per government instructions at the surrounding area of the Bhavana; and manning by in-house Watch and Ward staff inside the Museum galleries.*

Comment –

The personnel handling museum and heritage security have to be trained in a way that is different from personnel in-charge of the security of, for instance, a military installation or a VIP venue. In other words, they have to be attuned to the Watch and Ward staff within the museum galleries. The nature of the arms carried should also be deliberated upon and be such as to serve *Vichitra's* purposes but not convert the outer periphery of the RB campus into a garrison.

Security Committee's Recommendation:

*Introduction of electronic surveillance system such as installation of closed circuit TV, intrusion alarm system; provision of metal detector and doorframes and also walkie-talkie and magnetic sensors for the objects kept in the high security zone.*

Comment –

The introduction of hi-tech systems at *Vichitra* is unexceptionable but can be laid low by technological malfunctioning and the absence of an equally hi-tech maintenance cell which is available round the clock for the rectification of systems failures.

Security Committee's Recommendation:

*There is a strong necessity for improved illumination of the surroundings of the Vichitra building and Uttarayana complex with a special setup of high-raised watch tower and security boxes for ensuring a strict vigil of the area. Proper lighting of the display area in the Museum with an effective control of ultra-violate ray may be worked out.*

Comment –

The high-raised watchtower proposed and security boxes for ensuring a strict vigil must harmonize with the precincts and not have any features of a concentration camp. It is important that while providing for heightened illumination for security reasons and a clear line of vision for security personnel, the trees and bushes in the *Uttarayana* Complex are not cut, pruned or defoliated.

### 3. The Tagore Heritage Institute – As A Separate Entity

The *Uttarayana* Complex, the Ashrama and RB should be developed on the lines of the Nehru Museum and Library as a heritage zone and the world's single most important Tagore Archive and Museum. For this purpose, it would require considerable funds for its development. The present levels of funding for the RB are incredibly low, in fact, embarrassingly so.

Having given thought to the future of the Tagore heritage as concentrated in the RB, the Committee recommends that the RB should be released from the bureaucratic procedures of Visva-Bharati as well as the funding constraints that go with a central university which receives subventions from the UGC. Not being a conventional teaching institution, the RB can win such a release and become a centre for the wider dissemination of arts and literature grounded in the Tagore heritage, distinct from what is being done at Visva-Bharati. The RB library, archive and museum can form a tripod for serious research on humanistic studies, re-defining humanism for our present needs in a manner that Tagore would have appreciated. Few such institutes exist anywhere.

For purposes of a 'visual correlative', the following scenario is offered : Supposing the Teen Murti Memorial and Library was part of a larger campus in which the JNU was located, would it have served the University or Teen Murti to be institutionally connected to one another and funded and staffed by the University system? The answer is obvious. In Santiniketan, the magnetic heritage core, namely, the *Uttarayana* Complex, the Ashrama and *Vichitra* are physically located on the VB campus. But they can be institutionally segregated with no loss to VB and every gain to RB. Needless to say, VB faculty and students would continue to have every access to RB subject to its liberalized and standardized rules.

Professor Swapan Majumdar, Professor of Indian Literature, Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, Kolkata and formerly Director, Culture & Cultural Relations & Adhyaksha, Rabindra Bhavana also made the point to the Committee that RB be delinked from the University and made into an autonomous research centre like the NMM&L in New Delhi, functioning as a database resource centre for worldwide Tagoreana. He lamented that currently RB's most significant activity was selling Tagore souvenirs to visitors.

Professor Sukanta Chaudhuri of the Department of English at Jadavpur University and a distinguished Tagore scholar, said in his interaction with the HLC that RB, as the holder of Tagore memorabilia and artifacts in Santiniketan, should encourage research and attract junior research fellows. In this context Professor Chaudhuri referred to the Ramakrishna Mission model where the spiritual and academic sections of study were kept distinct. At Santiniketan, the heritage (RB) and academic (VB) sections could remain distinct.

The HLC believes that the RB could be made into a state-of-the-art institution for conserving the written and art works of Tagore, and become a resource centre for those researching Tagore. Separating it from VB's routine administration will give it greater focus and enable it to acquire funds for its own development. Private donors cannot fund the University but could well fund the Rabindra Bhavana. This would also attract researchers on Tagore who would not have to go through the bureaucratic procedures of a university. Hopefully, it could also become a centre for the wider dissemination of arts and literature in addition to what is being done at present."

The HLC recommends that the Tagore Heritage Core in Santiniketan be made independent of VB and become a heritage zone to be maintained by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, in any nomenclature it may devise, our recommendation being 'Tagore Memorial Institute'. A body like a Board or Council would need to be set up to run the TMI. The HLC is clear that the TMI should be headed by the Upacharya, VB and that the post of Director Rabindra Bhavana will now carry the additional responsibility of maintaining the heritage zone. The Director will be appointed by the Upacharya for a 3 year term and will serve as Member-Secretary of the panel headed by the VC, and have experts in archiving, museology, garden-landscaping and heritage-architecture, to be appointed by the Ministry of Culture. The

Committee should also request the following distinguished persons (apart from any other the Ministry thinks of) to join the Committee's deliberations as special invitees and advisers, when convenient to them :

Professor Amartya Sen  
Dr. Charles Correa  
Professor William Radice  
Professor Tapan Raychaudhuri

The TMI should, in its day to day administration, be completely outside the purview of the VB's EC and Samsad and should be funded independently of VB. It will be necessary for the TMI to have an accounts department headed by an Accounts Officer to maintain and operate the TMI's budget. The HLC recommends that the pay structure of the personnel at the TMI should be at par with those at VB.

There will be reservations about this proposal, but in the long run, the sceptical will appreciate its rationale. The HLC refers would-be resisters to the Tagore's poem *Jete Nahi Dibo* :

*...All morning she'd been  
Following me about like a second shadow,  
Gazing with inscrutable eyes  
At the signs of impending departure. Now weary,  
On the doorstep she'd fallen quiet as a mouse.  
'Bye, sweetheart,' I said finally. Her face was doleful.  
'I'm not letting you go', she replied.  
She remained sitting, where she was.  
She did not grasp my hand, nor bar the door.  
She only claimed her right to love,  
With – 'I'm not letting you go.'  
And yet our time was up, like it or not.'  
She had to let me go.*

Concomitant changes will need to be made in the Act and Statutes wherever the role of the Adhyaksha of Rabindra Bhavana and Director of Culture and Cultural Relations is referred to, particularly in 4B of the Act. The HLC, however, suggests that the Member Secretary of the TMI be a Member on the Samsad and Karma Samiti, for the reason that he/she is also proposed to be in charge of the Indira Gandhi Centre for Visiting Scholars recommended separately.

#### 4. Museum

a) The design of the RB's new museum would be of paramount importance, both in its external and internal aspects, so as to make it an organic contemporary manifestation of Tagore's personality rather than a futuristic hi-tech implant. The 'Kar' touch must infuse its design.

b) In the 'state-of-the-art museum' that is being planned, the Committee would caution against an over-mechanisation. We would think "huge plasma screens" to "showcase digital reproductions" would be out of place. It would be far more effective to have smaller sections with audio-visual facilities catering to the individual visitor, being guided by useful printed guide-notes. A recent comment by a visitor at the hi-tech multi-media Gandhi Smriti exhibition in Tees January Marg, New Delhi, is of relevance : 'This is not technology to the aid of Gandhi but Gandhi to the aid of technology'. RB's museum should guard itself against that error. Tagore

must not become a plaything in the hands of a multimedia technology which encourages visitors – especially children – to touch a button with the image of his face, to listen to Rabindra Sangit or another, like his spectacles, to see his paintings.

c) The VC should also coordinate to the extent possible, our recommendations of the holdings of the Kala Bhavana's 'Nandan' museum with the new RB museum, in the interest of synergetic preservation and logical theme – aggregations of the holdings.

## 5. Archives and Library

If RB is to become accessible to interested scholars from all over the world, its rules for the use of RB library and archives should be modified. The historian Dr. Uma Das Gupta, and a Member of the Samsad, has made a special study of those Rules. The following paragraphs reflect our views based on her findings:

Libraries of distinction, including heritage libraries follow certain standard rules in the matter of photocopying/Xeroxing. (dictionary). The following rules of the RB Archives dated 6 September, 2003 require :

- a) No photocopying will be allowed from periodicals, newspaper clippings, pamphlets for the period up to 1941.
- b) No writings by Rabindranath to be photocopied.
- c) No reader will be allowed to make more than 20 pages of photocopies in a day, and not exceeding 50 pages in a week.

The HLC would recommend that the RB Library reconsiders the above rules for the following reasons :

a) It is unfair to restrict xeroxing of materials for the period up to 1941, and of Rabindranath's writings, in a specialised library like the Rabindra-Bhavana where people come to collect information specifically on his life and work, considering that xeroxing is a *basic* part of the library support services in *all* libraries globally.

With the advanced technology used for copying machines, "heat" and "pressure", referred to in the last section of the rules (but not quoted here), are no longer a scientific risk. Needless to add, care needs to be taken when "pressure" is applied on large-sized books. As the Xeroxing can only be done in-house, that should not be a problem.

b) It seems out of place to disallow photocopying of Rabindranath's writings when, in the same Bhavana, *one floor below*, this is permitted in the archives section. There the restriction is very legitimate which is – that *typescripts* of Rabindranath's writings can be xeroxed, but his manuscripts have to be photocopied. *This rule makes every sense.*

c) It is the standard rule nationally for *copyright* purposes that up to one-third of a book can be xeroxed, no more. Therefore 20 pages or 50 pages are arbitrary figures. They are *not* part of the *standard* law in this context. The rule should appropriately be made to conform to the common principle that only one third of a book can be xeroxed or photocopied.

The RB has a salutary role that "brittle" books and journals should not be xeroxed/photocopied. This would make it necessary that, in the interests of scholarship, such books and journals be laminated and rebound at a fast rate. The present process is very slow.

We have observed that the preservation processes of the books and journals at the RB library requires to be taken up on what the Director in-charge has herself described as “on a war footing to prevent the rapid decline in the condition of the documents”.

The Committee would also recommend that the Library goes in for an on-line catalogue quickly and that the RB’s large multimedia facility with many computer terminals and a computer expert linked to the University’s Computer Centre be placed in-charge of the on-line catalogue programme.

The Committee has noted that the readership in the library and the using of the archives has been slender. It is gathered that in the reading room, at any given time, there are not more than 3 readers. RB requires to make its rules more attractive to potential readers and scholars.

As the next Director of RB gets appointed and takes up his/her responsibilities, the HLC would suggest that the digitization and cataloguing of its documentary and archival material should be taken up on a priority alongside the preservation of original documents.

The publication of Tagore’s unpublished writings under Rabindra Charcha Prakalpa would need to be a major activity as also translations from Tagore’s original writings into various Indian languages, including English.

The Committee would recommend that one or two dwellings in the *Uttarayana* Complex could be used for accommodating senior visiting professors and researchers of international distinction doing research on Tagore and his times.

There have been recent changes in the rules for the use of the archives and the circular of rules posted presently in the Reading Room includes the following Rules For Admission:

*Scholars from outside Visva-Bharati must also give a letter of recommendation from their institutes; those not attached to any institute should be recommended by a professor from Visva-Bharati.*

*All ‘foreign’ scholars will have to apply through their Embassies/Consulates or with permission from the Ministry of External Affairs.*

Visva-Bharati should reconsider using the word ‘Foreign’, which is at once excluding and unwelcoming.

If the “outside” scholar, not attached to any institute, does not know a “professor from Visva-Bharati”, she/he should still be allowed in. Should only Visva-Bharati professors have the bona fide to recommend a reader? Other *bona fide* sources, surely, are available.

Regarding the need for ‘foreign’ scholars to get “permission” from their Embassies to read in the archives: *we* as Indian visitors do not need that kind of “permission” when we go to study in the Public Record Office or in the India Office Library and Records in the U.K., in the Library of Congress or in the Smithsonian in the USA, or in the universities abroad. We do need to fill up forms and have letters of introduction from our institutions or from a bona fide source, but permission from our Embassy is not required.

In case the ‘foreigners’ do have a letter from their Embassy on them, well and good. But in case they don’t, they should not be turned away from Rabindranath Tagore’s Santiniketan and from Visva-Bharati – “a world in one nest”? The Upacharya should have the discretion to permit access to readers and scholars.

### Readership

Again the readership in the archives is very small. On an average it is one or two a day—and *rarely*, at any given time, does the readership go up to 3 or 4.

It is in Visva-Bharati’s interests, academically and philosophically, to encourage Tagore Studies in its own country, and in the wide world. Where else would people go to seek scholarly and authentic knowledge about Rabindranath’s life and work but to come to this great repository?

Prevailing ‘Rules for Reading in the Archives’ (as included in the posted circular) require that readers will have to put in their requisition one day in advance; this may be done personally or by post or by telephone. The Strong Room will be opened only once in a day.

Such a rule, again, of making it mandatory to order documents *one day in advance*, is *uncommon, unfriendly* and *obstructive*. It is wasteful of time for people who come only for a day’s work or two. *If* it is a precautionary measure for Security reasons, what difference does it make whether the staff enter the Strong Room twice a day instead of once? What is required for safety is for the Strong Room *log-book* to be *meticulously* documented and supervised *on a daily basis*.

This rule could be substituted by establishing *timings* for requisitioning documents/manuscripts – let’s say *twice* a day, taking requisitions once within 11a.m.(since the Bhavana gets going only from about 10.30 a.m., and a second time within 2.30 pm, as is known in other similar institutions. At Teen Murti and in the National Archives, they take requisitions thrice a day. At the India Office Library and Records and Oriental Manuscripts Section of the British Library, also at Bodleian Library’s Modern Papers Section, they take requisitions four times a day, to cite a few instances. All these institutions have considerable readership on a daily basis, both local and outstation.

It is acceptable that the number of documents be restricted (if that must be the case) to 5 correspondence files and 3 manuscripts at a time. But to make that the extent of the ration per day is not fair or realistic because there is every possibility that on occasion those 5 files and 3 documents may not yield any results for the researcher’s enquiry. A second requisition in a day for the same number of documents will make it possible for the reader to do further work on the same day.

The change, if made, will mean that the concerned Staff will be required to enter the Strong Room two times in a day instead of one time.

There is another Rule to the effect that scholars will not copy any archival document, not even a few lines, without the permission of the Upacharya (though they may take notes).

It is impossible to expect readers *anywhere* not to copy “a few lines” from a document when he/she is studying a document, and is not in practice elsewhere. It is perhaps *better to copy correctly* from the document directly, rather than to try and recall it afterwards. Recalling from memory is likely to cause distortion. Publishing extracts from documents with detailed reference

to them is an integral part of the norms of research. It is a matter of astonishment that “permission to copy” has to be obtained from the Upacharya. This was never the case earlier nor is it a practice followed in other archives.

Some Essential Requirements for the Archives Reading Room:

#### A. Manuscript Conservation

1. Preservation of the manuscripts is an urgent need in the Bhavana. *The manuscripts are beginning to decline physically.* They are a national asset and irreplaceable. They must be photographed, or digitised. Once either of that method is followed, the readers could read the ms. in photographic or digital form and *spare the originals.*

Photographing has already been done, successfully, of a few manuscripts – his *Purabi*, to take one example. It is much easier to read these in their photographic state since it is very difficult to handle delicate manuscripts.

2. Digitalizing of the ms. is another viable and sophisticated alternative to give the originals a rest and by working with excellent reproductions of the originals.

3. An *on-line* catalogue of the documentation is essential. No such project exists as yet.

#### B. Face Lift for the archives Reading Room

1. The room needs removing dampness from the walls.

2. An exhaust fan could be installed to take away the stuffiness at the time of power cuts when the AC machine cannot work. There is no ventilation in the room.

3. A computer terminal should be made available for the use of the readers as is the pattern in all standard library/archival establishments.

#### C. Reference Materials for the Archives Reading Room

1. It is common practice in all Record Rooms to keep some essential books of reference for the reader’s use. The Archives Reading Room at Rabindra-Bhavana needs to be equipped with the following reference books at a minimum:

A set of the Collected Works, or *Rabindra Rachanabali* (to be added as and when further volumes are published).

A set of the Published Letters of Rabindranath Tagore called *Chitthi Patra* (to be added as and when further volumes are published).

*Rabi-Jibani* by Prasanta Kumar Paul (to be added as and when further volumes are published).

2. Continuing to publish the Catalogue-in-Progress of the Manuscript Collection, in order to bring it up-to-date with the *new acquisitions*. The last volume published was in 1990, fifteen years ago. Such a catalogue is very essential *also* as a safety measure in maintaining a regular inventory of the archives.

3. *Rabindra Chitrabali* – There are around 3,000 paintings and drawings by Tagore in Visva-Bharati's Rabindra-Bhavana archives. There is a smaller collection of them in Visva-Bharati's Kala-Bhavana archives. It is proposed that reproductions of Rabindranath Tagore's paintings from the Visva-Bharati Archives be published.

Both collections have remained mostly bound to their respective archives in all these years. There is, and has been, a great deal of insecurity over displaying them, mainly because the medium used for most of them is fragile – thin paper and the like.

Since the theft of the Nobel medal and other objects from the Rabindra-Bhavana Museum there are additional security concerns.

The Upacharya and Dr. Uma Das Gupta have suggested that it would be of great service to these works of art to publish the entire collection as a series and name the series *Rabindra Chitrabali* in parallel with his collected literary works called *Rabindra Rachanabali*. This development could form a valuable part of Tagore Studies.

However, the project would require substantial funding as reproducing art work is very expensive. In addition, these works may require special attention because of their delicate physical nature.

The reproductions will have to be state-of-the-art in quality. That should be possible given the advanced technology and expertise available these days, nationally and internationally.

One advantage to 'use' as a starting point, could be that the Rabindra-Bhavana collection was photographed as colour-transparencies in the early 80s. These transparencies might be a good source for converting them into prints – but this is only a conjecture and not founded on technical knowledge.

In his discussions on 11 September 2006, with the Paridarśaka of Visva-Bharati, the Upacharya mentioned the fact that several rare paintings of Tagore and of other eminent artistes were at risk, both in their strong room preservation at *Vichitra* as also in other places in Santiniketan such as *Malancha*.

The Paridarśaka very kindly made to the Upacharya the practical suggestion that Dr. O. P. Agarwal, Director of INTACH Council for Conservation Institutes (ICCINS), who has implemented the restoration of paintings in Rashtrapati Bhavan, should advise the University on how to go about the restoration of these paintings. The HLC would recommend that Dr. Agarwal's expertise and the instrumentality of INTACH be taken advantage of by VB in this regard and that discussions be initiated, officially, with Shri Dalip Mehta, Member Secretary, INTACH.

#### 4. Fire Safety and Seepage Prevention

Fire alarm system and fire fighting systems were not found to be adequate. While the fire alarm system was obsolete, fire fighting was contemplated to be done manually - no system of automatic spray which is essential considering the rich repository of Tagore artifacts exists.

Seepage of a cold creeping and damp kind could be detected in the 'First-edition Strong Room' in Rabindra Bhavana. It is a truism that the risks of fire and seepage can exist for decades without anyone noticing much less caring about them, but once they 'manifest' themselves, blame games start. The HLC recommends immediate action.