

1. Title of the Practice: Bringing back the boys from the marginalized section into mainstream education.

2. Objectives of the Practice

Swami Vivekananda looked upon inequity as perhaps one of the worst social ills. This glaring defect appears in myriad forms. One such is the lack of access of the marginalized section of our society to mainstream education. This is mainly owing to the privileged class remaining indifferent to their plight. Swamiji berated such state of affairs in his fiery language ‘I hold every man a traitor who having been educated at the expense of the poor pays not the least heed to them.’

The motive force above drove Ramakrishna Mission Residential College, Narendrapur to make an all-out effort to bring back the boys from underprivileged community to mainstream education.

3. The Context

Understandably one of the first casualties of poverty is education. Driven to make ends meet by hard toil, the underprivileged section of our society cannot help looking upon formal education as luxury. This is largely owing to the expenses associated with education. This renders the possibility of the education of boys from the underprivileged class null and void. If this sorry state of affairs is left to its own devices, then the collective education of our society can only go from bad to worse. Foreseeing such degeneration, Swami Vivekananda, nearly one hundred and twenty five years ago, wrote to one society leader of India: ‘If the poor cannot come to education, education must reach them at the plough, in the factory, everywhere.’

Considering these words of Swamiji as a mandate to bring education to the poor, Narendrapur College took it upon itself to reach the marginalized section and arrange for their education.

4. The Practice

Our college being located in the district of South 24 Parganas, we deemed it imperative to focus our attention on this district in the matter of reaching out to the underprivileged. Upon our initial study, it came out that some remote Island areas (such as Jambudwip,...) in this district have almost no access to education. So we chose to bring boys from such areas and provide them education at our educational complex. Some of the efforts associated with this exercise are worth mentioning:

- **Special classes to bring the boys to a basic standard:** Owing to remaining delinked from the mainstream education, the boys from these island areas lag considerably behind others. So special classes are arranged to raise their standards to a minimum basic level. Soon enough they catch up with others.
- **Financial assistance:** Knowing that these boys are completely unable to bear the academic expenses, our college has, over the years, been arranging for various scholarships to be availed by them. Their financial worries completely taken care of by scholarship from Governmental and non-Governmental sources, such students can focus on their studies.
- **Free text books** : The library facility does away with any worry that such a boy might possibly have with regards to buying text books.

Thus with one or more of these above measures, the college has been always at the task of bringing the economically disadvantaged students back to mainstream education.

5. Evidence of Success

- They acquire the ability to compete with the mainstream students in various State level and National level examinations

- It's not uncommon to see these boys well placed in various jobs, after they complete their studies.
- These boys, after having had success in life, in turn influence others in their locality to avail of mainstream education.

Indeed this success reminds us of an amazing observation of Swamiji:

“In New York I used to observe the Irish colonists come — downtrodden, haggard-looking, destitute of all possessions at home, penniless, . Our Vedanta says that that Irishman was kept surrounded by contempt in his own country — the whole of nature was telling him with one voice, "Pat, you have no more hope, you are born a slave and will remain so." While no sooner had he landed in America than he heard the shout going up on all sides, "Pat, you are a man as we are. It is man who has done all, a man like you and me can do everything: have courage!" Pat raised his head and saw that it was so, the Brahman within woke up”

6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required

➤ Problems Encountered:

One of the challenges is to persuade the parents of these boys to allow them to come to mainstream education. As these boys already happen to do some daily labor job and earn money for their families, their parents tend to look upon their absence as non-economical.

Also, given the magnitude of financial support we are to provide to these poor students, the commensurate amount of scholarship is not forthcoming. This is well worth getting over.

➤ Resources Required: Despite limited financial resource, a motivated group of individuals has been relentlessly working to keep this noble endeavor going on. However, we surely would like more dedicated workers to join us to carry this forward.

1. Title of the Practice: Research Activities

2. Objectives of the Practice

“Shri Ramakrishna used to say, ‘As long as I live, so long do I learn.’ That man or that society which has nothing to learn is already in the jaws of death.”

These incisive words of Swami Vivekananda, starting as they do with the great Swami quoting none other than Sri Ramakrishna, supplies the motive force as to why one must not remain placidly complacent in the domain of learning. As a matter of fact the implication of this double-barreled denouncing (by Sri Ramakrishna & Vivekananda) of learning-stagnation also raises the ‘ought-ness’ of research to its ‘must-ness’.

Recognizing thus the supreme need of continual academic exploration, Ramakrishna Mission Residential College, Narendrapur pulled out all the stops to make its departmental researches a necessity - not just a choice, as it were.

3. The Context

As early as 1893, we find Swami Vivekananda encouraging Sir Jamshedji Tata to set up a research organization in the-then British dominated India. Standing at the cutting-edge of scientific researches we can well appreciate why Swamiji laid such a great emphasis on renovation and creativity. Today every domain of human knowledge is pushing out its frontiers at an unheard-of rapidity. And, anyone in the higher academic domain can remain oblivious of these advancements only at the risk of unproductivity.

The above mentioned predicament is no less pronounced at the Under-graduate and Post-graduate courses of studies. The reason is not far to seek. Ideally these courses at their completion are supposed to segue into their respective domains of higher researches. However, when not upgraded with the latest ideas, the courses suffer the inevitability of getting delinked from the mainstream knowledge.

Indeed, the trend of our students going into higher researches acted as a great impetus for us to make research activities a common enough aspect of a number of departments. It is largely in this context that the spurt in departmental research activities can be viewed.

4. The Practice

Granted by the University of Calcutta the permission to conduct M.Phil. / Ph.D. courses from the academic session 2015-16, our Institute is a recognized research center. What follows is a brief synopsis of research infrastructures interwoven into the teaching and learning of some of the departments.

‘Zero’ gallery of Mathematics department :

Bearing in mind that ‘Zero’ was India’s singular contribution to the number system of Mathematics, the department of Mathematics chose to christen its research gallery as ‘Zero’. The gallery is a veritable repertoire of ‘Mathematics in demonstration’ – starting from the fundamental principles to the latest theories. This grand sweep of demonstrated topics has a potent impact on the students’ minds - firing their imagination to delve into the awe-inspiring world of Mathematics. In addition, the gallery regularly hosts students’ colloquium and various national/international seminars.

It is important to mention that the department of Mathematics conducts Ph.D. course under its aegis. Indeed, the quality of Ph.D. research has been steadily on the rise over the years.

Research laboratories of the departments of Physics and Chemistry:

It goes to the credit of the departments of Physics and Chemistry to have restructured their departmental labs to conform to high-end research activities. Both the departments, conducting as they do Ph.D. courses, saw to installing the state of the art machineries in their laboratories to facilitate quality researches.

These departments conduct weekly seminars and colloquiums to instill in their students the urge for scientific exploration. Indeed, under the mentorship of the accomplished teachers, the students of Physics and Chemistry departments well come across as budding scientists in their zeal for investigative researches.

‘Shakespeare Gallery’ of the department of English:

The history of English literature comes alive, as it were, in the ‘Shakespeare Gallery’ - the pride of place of the English department. The wood-paneled walls of the gallery are mounted with the oil-paintings of English litterateurs of every genre and age. One can take a tour across the gallery, with the Elizabethan dramatists, Victorian novelists, Romantic poets, et al. peering down benevolently from their mounted frames. Indeed, the students and teachers alike, who happen to amble across the gallery room, are verily transported to the literary age to which these great savants of yore belong.

The gallery regularly houses seminars, literary debates, and students’ colloquium.

Department of History :

The subject of History, quite unreasonably, is apt to be looked upon as a dry academic discipline, requiring one to memorize the names of kings, queens, their dynasties etc. The department of history turns the table on this unfounded myth by making the students participate in active researches in the shape of frequent forays into the historical sites and archeological excavations therein. Indeed, throughout the year, the department remains abuzz with such field work as opposed to remaining confined to the academics alone.

5. Evidence of Success

While the direct impact of research activities is not conventionally quantifiable except perhaps in such terms as number of Ph.D. & M.Phil. awardees, the indirect impact is indeed abiding and far-reaching. Some such aspects can be briefly touched upon:

- The teaching and learning, getting continually informed by the latest ideas, has ceased to be a static exercise of repetitive nature. Instead, the teachers and the students alike are ever on their toes to assimilate the newer ideas into the curriculum of their studies.
- The spirit of departmental research keeps percolating to students’ colloquium and departmental seminars. This is evidenced by the heightened quality of the presentations made by the students in the students’ colloquium as well as the quality participation in the departmental seminars. Indeed, some of the papers presented by our students bear the unmistakable stamp of originality.

- Those of our students who go into doing researches in the premier Institutes such as IITs, IISc, TIFR etc. have a smooth transition from their pre-research studies to the world of higher researches. Such transition is decidedly due to our students having already soaked the spirit of investigative researches during their college days.

6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required

➤ Problems Encountered:

The research infrastructures – particularly those of the Science departments – are in periodic need of maintenance as well as upgradation in certain instances. This is a huge financial overhead.

In addition, the amount of extra work is an important aspect to be taken into account. Over and above the regular classes, it is no mean thing to engage in active researches. It's idle to deny that, given our limited resources, research activity takes its toll in the form of extra work load.

➤ Resources Required:

As mentioned, the maintenance and upgradation costs for the existing research infrastructures are really not commensurate with our financial resources. So additional financial grant to overcome this shortage would give a great boost to our research activities.

Finally, we really wish all our academic departments would be augmented with more teachers so that the workload, arising out of research engagements, could be evenly balanced.